

Designs on Golf

■ ARCHITECTURE

Square tees. We lovers of natural-looking golf courses find great beauty in a box-shaped tee, a rectangular and square form not found in nature.

Go to some of our world's most revered courses, and you'll find a design in harmony with its native surrounds. Local flora and fauna abound. Grass covers the same contours that existed long before golf was some Dutch sailor's idea of fun. But offsetting this rugged, native lay-of-the-land course? Tee "boxes."

What's the deal?

To resolve the issue, I got on the phone. My first call was to Skip Loater, vagabond shaper to architects and designer of two courses, both award-winning and costing under \$2 million to build. He's presently looking for work.

"Hell if I know why they look better," Skip said from Oklahoma where he currently has the 'bago parked while he reads the complete works of John Steinbeck. "Square tees just look simpler," he says. "They make a course look old. Those stupid whirly-wheely free form tees look like something out of Tee Building 101 that an overeducated landscape architect would think looks great. Maybe it does on his drafting table, but it sure doesn't on the ground."

I found Skip's answer enlightening. But I wasn't satisfied so I phoned Dr. Heimlich Penalbunker at Orlando's Center for the Preservation of Par. Dr. Penalbunker was not very helpful.

"Vee feel that square tees bring necessary precision to golf. If vee could streamline our fairway bunkering schemes in a linear manner similar to tee-box designs, vee would be on the cusp of more consistently protecting zee integrity of par."

I thanked the doctor and made a note to call him around U.S. Open time to see if he'd made any progress in his noble effort to locate par's integrity.

Next call was to architect Lawrence Lloyd Stevens, aka Larry Stevens. Larry changed his name at the height of the Robert Trent Jones triple-name fad. Larry's currently spending \$16 million of taxpayer money to "refresh" two Ohio public courses.

Hip to be Square, With Tees That Is

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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"We will build what the client wants. Square tees, triangle tees, whirly-hurly lined things soaring 20 feet into the air, whatever," Larry said from Hilton Head. "Heck, if the client wants us to jump around like Jack La Lanne while we build the tee, consider it done. As long as the check comes on time. You should call Dr. Sigfried Roy about this. That's pronounced "Wah," like the goalie. He'll know why square tees look better."

From his SoHo office in New York City, Dr. Roy asked, "Are you having dreams about square tees? This may be a sign that golf is conflicting with your inner anxieties. You should come soon so we can interpret these visions. Linear hallucinations require treatment immediately."

I thanked Dr. Roy but decided to go back to Skip Loater since he was the only one that proved helpful.

"Since you called, I've been thinking," Skip said. "The more we try to make something look natural, the more trouble we get into. Flat pads for teeing off a little ball are never going to be something you find in nature, so why try to emulate nature for tees?"

"Good point," I said. "But still, wouldn't just a little irregularity in the shape help?"

"Maybe if you are fitting it around a tree or at the base of a hill. But anytime you try too hard to create irregularity, people notice and that's no good," Skip said. "Here's the real problem. We prop tees up in the air so the golfers can supposedly see the hole better. But that only makes the tees stand out more no matter what the shape. That may be your answer there. Keep 'em simple, low to the ground, and you'll be fine."

Glad we got that squared away.

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