

Few things irritate an architect more than seeing his work poorly altered by golf course committees or owners. Runner-up in the annoying category might surprise you: Architects seeing their courses emasculated by ugly fencing, loud signage and other distracting course markings.

Think about it. After preserving an existing water hazard or creating a lovely one, it's difficult to see someone come along and tag the feature with red spray paint, then drop big red stakes every six feet. Or how about the lovely tree or vegetation-dotted hill that frames a hole, only to be accented by glowing white PVC pipes every 10 feet.

Yes, hazards and boundaries must be marked, but the way in which they are marked says a lot about your course. If handled poorly, over-marking a course can impact the "natural experience" that architects often hope to create.

We've all been to the facilities where lateral hazards are encircled with enough yellow to look like a crime scene. Or the out of bounds is so aggressively designated that it almost screams, "2-Stroke Penalty If You Slice It Here, Bubba!"

This enthusiastic designation of course features is usually the result of a well-meaning but overzealous golf pro marking the course. You know, just in case the PGA Tour decides to pop in for a surprise one-day visit.

But how many times during a televised tournament have you seen hazards marked excessively by rules fanatics? Not too often. The governing bodies tend to designate hazards as discreetly as possible.

Rae's Creek lined with red stakes? Nope.

The 16th at Cypress Point demarcated by a red paint line? No way.

To emphasize golf courses as natural arenas, all signage, course markings, fencing, benching and other guidance devices should be as subtle as possible.

Many of the best facilities in the world have homemade signs or tee markers, often created out of native materials. But even the natural material trend has gone too far, especially when you see pine branches used as tee markers, with only a small colored dot designating which tees you are looking at.

On the Mark with Course Markings

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



GOLD-PLATED

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The classic blue, white and red tee marker balls still have their place in the game, as do the benches and flagsticks and signage sold by various companies. It's up to superintendents, pros and general managers to place them discreetly on your grounds to ensure proper function.

As for trying to hide some of these man-made objects — say, a drinking fountain — don't surround them with enough flowers to stock a Corleone family funeral. Paint them green and leave them undecorated.

Also, gold-plated signage should be avoided unless your course is owned by Donald Trump. And avoid bulky tee markers made of bronze, marble or items you might find in one of Saddam Hussein's old palaces.

Many of these attempts at "elegance" reek of desperation. Oh, some golfers will say they add class, but the best places in golf remind you that simplicity is often the classiest way to present a course.

As for golf car directional ropes and signs, again, green is your friend. And overuse almost encourages golfers to revolt.

Hole signs with course drawings aren't necessary with GPS monitors and yardage books, but if you must, use the ones that sit lower to the ground and avoid those featuring ads for the local massage parlor.

For OB and hazards, space the stakes out as much as possible. Use natural finishes with red, yellow or white tops. They'll blend in better while still marking your hazard.

As always, the goal is to minimize the hand of man while maximizing the feeling of a contest amidst a natural setting. Golfers might not notice, but the architect will.

Geoff Shackelford's latest book is Lines of Charm: Brilliant and Irreverent Notes, Quotes and Anecdotes from Golf's Golden Age Architects. He can be reached at geoffshac@aol.com.