

For a sport played and controlled by so many self-described, lean-living, old-fashioned conservatives, it is amazing how many have been infatuated with ostentatious maintenance values and over-the-top design.

Even more amazing is that for all of the talk that Hollywood is nothing more than a swampland of monumental egos and bloated budgets, nothing used to excite many of golf's old-school types like a big-name celebrity designer and a swollen construction tab.

"They got (fill in big name) and he spent \$35 million!" they'll say with a gleam in their eyes.

But thanks to the more accepted view of golf architecture's "minimalist" movement, more sensible values are returning to the game.

Those tightwads in love with the big names and big budgets? Why, they are even helping to spearhead golf's move back to more sensible values. While a fringe element continues to celebrate the latest, biggest, gaudiest and most expensive course to come down the pike, the majority of golfers from all backgrounds are embracing the minimalist design movement.

What turned the tide? When some began to realize that minimalism in golf actually means maximalism.

Minimalism is the art of maximizing what the Big Guy upstairs bequeathed to us. From the tiniest natural bump to the native grasses thriving on the worst soil, the minimalist looks for ways to maximize his canvas to provide a rewarding, sensible golf experience.

And that's why the minimalist movement of low-profile, old-style and rugged-looking golf courses will always have a place, even as financiers line up to loan millions for the next Donald J. Trump Signature Design (yes, The Donald is now an architect).

While some golfers still view the minimalists as a bunch of VW van-driving tree huggers who don't bathe (they clearly haven't spent time around a certain famous architect), the success of Bandon Dunes and other minimalist designs has convinced even the most materialistic that great golf isn't necessarily the most expensive to build or the most perfectly manicured.

Minimalism /s Maximalism

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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A growing legion of golfers love design features that are found and saved during construction, and they appreciate the use of existing plant material to create a natural look that enhances beauty, saves money and preserves wildlife habitats.

Committees are embracing native trees at the suggestion of these minimalists while superintendents — longtime "maximalists" themselves who have always been willing to solve problems with their own site-specific remedies — have clearly been inspired by the movement.

Just consider how far the "look" of the bunker has come in the last 10 years. In an industry where once superintendents and committees believed a successful bunker was manicured and clean, the rough-edged, ragged and imposing look often advocated by minimalists has become a transformation tool for a course looking to go from mundane to lively.

In the not-so-distant past, the refrain was always the same: Those rugged bunkers are too much maintenance. Yet those fringy, thick-lipped pits have become accepted thanks in part to innovative superintendents who embraced the maximalist concept and developed their own creative maintenance solutions.

Not only has this trend delivered a more inspired and timeless look to courses, it has quietly introduced maximalist concepts to many course maintenance programs.

Whether golfers will ever give up their love of green grass, white bunkers and Augusta blue ponds is another story. But if the recent embrace of minimalist values is any indication, we're going to be hearing a lot about "fast and firm and lean."

Because there is no better way to maximize the design value of your course.

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