

Newfound Minimalists

Have you heard the plaintive wail emanating from the mass production golf design outfits? The ones where the phone has stopped ringing, and where they have realized the old way of doing business won't work in the future? The press releases have been flying off the send buttons. One firm, whose well-intentioned associates are trying to take the helm of a wayward ship captained by a known enervator of earth, used the election of Barack Obama to announce that it was time for golf architects to "move earth more efficiently" and focus on courses that "create minimal disturbance" to create "maximum enhancement of natural ecosystems."

Oh, and they were just the members of the firm that would lead this newfound way of doing things.

Another bling-wearing desk jockey/archie sent out some propaganda announcing that he too was going GREEN. Would he be melting those gold chains for a charitable donation in the name of greenhouse gas emissions? Reducing his carbon footprint (whatever that is!)? No, he's ending production of his firm's printed newsletter that annually used up a couple of sycamore branches in favor of a digital-only house organ. What these masters won't do for the environment!

They've even taken to the airwaves. Well, the digital airwaves. You can find a few of them stationed on www.GolfClubAtlas.com where some of the all-time leaders in clunky mounding, over-wrought design, bloated budgets and rolls of blueprints

BEFORE, THEY NEVER SOUGHT WAYS TO DESIGN AROUND THE NATIVE FAUNA. NOW, THEY'RE PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF MOVING LESS DIRT

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



are touting their affinity for lay-of-the-land architecture, multi-hued landscapes and, of course, the strategic, old-style golf courses of the gods. You know, works of architecture reminiscent of ones they used to never build but always mocked before everything came crashing down.

It's breathtaking to listen to the newfound minimalist in all of these reforming architects who rearranged earth like children at the beach trying to build a bigger castle. Yes, many of the same walking, snobbish "brands" who allowed contractors to run up the change orders (while blatantly taking a percentage of the construction budget in lieu of a fee) are now preaching their homespun, golly-gee approach.

These rejuvenating, rebranded deadheads of design are no longer the same folks who looked the other way as irrigation designers threw in unnecessary heads that only created headaches.

These light-seeing, VW bus-driving, all-things-organic aficionados who never walked a property to think of clever ways to design around the native fauna that they now idolize are preaching the gospel of the minimalist. Their old and destructive practices, driven by a desire to feed their coffers, led to

hundreds of thousands of unnecessary irrigated turf and many damaged or destroyed natural landscapes.

And did I mention they are courses that aren't a whole lot of fun to play, either!

Yet, suddenly, the old way doesn't look so sexy as energy costs and sensibility kick in. The list of crimes against the best interests of golf is too long to tabulate, and a "Most Wanted" list of perpetrators might be fun, but it won't get us anywhere if the game is to survive or even thrive in the future.

So let them bellow on. The urgent effort to take turf out of play, to promote environmentally sensitive landscapes and to re-imagine a game rooted in the natural beauty of links golf is the best possible road for our industry. Sure, maybe some people who were selling more widgets than we needed will make less money than they did or go out of business altogether. While I hate to see anyone lose a job or a living, it's hard to sympathize when many of those very same people were the ones driving up cost at the expense of golf.

Sometimes the truth hurts.

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