

# Breaking the Glass Ceiling

BY JON SCOTT

The odds were against Italy's Beatrice Franceschi to break into the U.S. golf architecture business. *But with a little help from Nicklaus Design, she is well on her way*

## *How do you break a glass ceiling?*

*Do you climb up on a ladder and poke it with an iron bar, knowing that you will probably get hurt in the process? Or do you just stand off to the side, safe and secure, and wait for someone else to break it for you?*

If you're a young person who's aspiring to be a golf course designer who doesn't speak English and is a woman trying to enter a traditionally male-dominated profession, merely standing and waiting isn't good enough. That is the dilemma that faced Beatrice Fran-

ceschi of Pisa, Italy, when she decided to take a long shot and fax a one-page résumé to the Nicklaus Design office in North Palm Beach,

Fla., in the spring of 2007. Franceschi was about to graduate with an advanced degree from the University of Pisa's renowned school of agriculture with a degree in urban landscape design. Like all aspiring young professionals, Franceschi wanted to realize her dream to be a golf course designer.

*By faxing her resume to Nicklaus Design, she had just taken her first step in breaking the glass ceiling.*

I had just returned to work for Nicklaus Design after a nine-year stint heading up the agronomy program for the PGA Tour. I missed the golf course design business and was excited to get back. The first week at my desk found me looking at Franceschi's résumé. No one knew  
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Beatrice Franceschi consults with Chris Cochran of the Nicklaus Design team.



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what to do with it. It probably wouldn't have gotten past the human resources department's polite "thanks but no thanks" had I not been there to intercept it.

It was clear that Franceschi was not experienced enough to be hired as a production assistant, the traditional starting point for apprentice designers in our office. From there, they graduate to design coordinators in the field, and eventually, if they are good — really good — they become design associates. Most applicants come from the landscape design field of study, but the good ones also have a strong agronomic and playing background to round out their qualifications. Franceschi had the coveted landscape design degree, augmented by a specialization in agronomy and some golf course maintenance experience. She also indicated she played golf, but I sensed this was probably at a basic level. It was also clear that her knowledge of English was even more basic, and I was tempted to dismiss her inquiry with a letter saying, "Good luck with your career aspirations." But something intrigued me about this young woman. She was either incredibly naïve or completely audacious to send this fax to what is generally regarded as the most successful golf course design business in the world. That she had done so without a referral said something about her determination, and I decided to test it.

The Ohio State University's Mike O'Keeffe and I have had a long working relationship since he took over the reigns of the school's international internship program. I've lectured to his students on several occasions and had the pleasure of working with many of them in my duties as a tournament agronomist for the PGA Tour. I knew his was a top-notch program and offered the best opportunity for international students to gain exposure and experience in the United States at high-level golf courses.

While Franceschi did not technically fit the mold of the normal student intern, I felt this was the best way to help her get into the United States and potentially work in our office as a trainee. O'Keeffe was quick to offer his help and out of our discussions came a tailored program that would bring Franceschi to North Palm Beach as a design intern, the first ever for the Ohio State program. With Jack Nicklaus' close ties to Ohio State, this seemed a natural way for us to continue to support his alma mater.

The next step was up to Franceschi. She had to learn English in four short months in order to be accepted into the program. Not to my surprise, she did just that and would become the first intern from Ohio State working in the Nicklaus Design office.



Franceschi tries out an aerator at Loxahatchee Club. (Below) Franceschi helps sprig a green at The Bear's Club.



*Franceschi had just picked up a rock.*

When O'Keeffe asked me to structure a program for Franceschi, we jointly decided that her first experience should be working on the maintenance crew at The Bear's Club. This is Jack's Florida home course, designed by him, loved by him and closely watched by

him. His right-hand man to keep the course in true Nicklaus playing condition is superintendent John Katterheinrich, a long-time member of the Nicklaus fraternity of turf professionals. Katterheinrich had just begun a renovation of the fairways, bunkers and greens, and we felt this would be good experience for Franceschi to see how agronomy, construction and design work together.

There was only one minor problem. It gets brutally hot in south Florida in May; hot enough to wither the most-acclimated worker. Franceschi had a tough time adjusting the first couple of weeks, but she hung in there, trimming palmettos and hauling debris. Franceschi comes from Northern Italy, where the temperatures in May are more like Ohio than Florida and stay that way all summer. She is also of slight build and soft voice — two qualities that could lead you to think she might not be at home sweating it out on a golf course doing hard labor nine hours a day. She didn't like it, but she did her job, working with an all-male crew and holding her own. In the process she earned their respect and mine.

*Franceschi was taking dead aim at the glass ceiling.*

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We gave Franceschi a break and sent her to Muirfield Village Golf Club in Dublin, Ohio, to work a week at the Memorial Tournament in May. She spent time with the bunker crews and ultimately was partnered with Certified Superintendent Russ Myers of Southern Hills Country Club to do the Stimpmeter readings. In the afternoon, she spent time on the cleanup crew, getting home late and up early with little sleep in between. She absolutely loved the experience and said it changed her whole outlook on golf course design and agronomy.

When Franceschi returned to south Florida, she was even more determined to reach her goal and asked if she could get more golf course maintenance experience. The Bear's Club was essentially shut down for a regrassing, so I asked Jim Sprankle III, certified superintendent of The Loxahatchee Club in nearby Jupiter, if he would allow Franceschi to work on his crew for the remainder of the first phase of her internship. He graciously agreed, and involved Franceschi in all phases of golf course maintenance, including mowing, fertilizing, spraying and irrigation.

*Franceschi had started her windup.*

At the end of June, the time came for Franceschi to move into the Nicklaus Design office in Golden Bear Plaza. She



Franceschi impressed many people at Nicklaus Design.

already met Jack while working at The Bear's Club and got a personal lesson in greens and bunker design in the process. She also spent time with Chris Cochran, a senior design associate, and Jerame Miller, one of the best golf course shapers in the world, learning how to check elevations and float green contours. Miller also took Franceschi on a walking tour of the Links Course at Bear Lakes Country Club, a recently completed renovation of a Nicklaus Signature Course in West Palm Beach that virtually blew up the old layout to create a new one. Since he had personally shaped the course, Jerame explained the philosophy of the design as well as the techniques on how to create what the designer wants. After that lesson, I brought Franceschi back to Bear Lakes to talk about agronomy, and we also looked at North Palm Beach Country Club, a Seth Raynor design from the 1920s that Jack redesigned two years ago to much acclaim. She was beginning to understand how it all fits together. But her biggest challenge was now at hand — learning how to design a golf course.

There are many ways to learn the mechanics of golf course design. Old hands will tell you the best way is to come up from the bottom, working on a golf course as a greenskeeper and eventually a superintendent and then graduating into construction and later design. Some evolve out of the ranks of golf's teaching and playing professionals. Others prefer a more scholastic approach, studying the masters and getting classroom instruction on the more technical points of design, followed by an apprenticeship and hopefully a promotion to course designer.

We took a more hybrid approach with Franceschi knowing that her training will not be over when she returns to Italy. She has a very strong background in landscape design principles. She could probably even now go to work in an urban landscape design company and be successful. We felt there was no point in her spending more time in golf course maintenance training, the traditional role of the Ohio State Internship Program.

Since Franceschi already had a basic knowledge of agronomy, we decided to concentrate her remaining time on a crash course in design. Someone once told me the best way to learn something is to just do it. From experience, I know one either

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sinks or swims. Franceschi showed us she not only swims, she has an Olympian's determination to get the gold. We gave her an old topography map from a stalled project in the country of Macedonia, and told her to simply design the golf course. In other words, she was going to design a golf course from start to finish. She would have at her disposal a great deal of help, but this was her project, and she could do it any way she wanted to. Franceschi was undaunted.

*The rock was far back in her hand and poised to be unleashed with a deadly force.*

Franceschi began designing her first golf course last summer. She started with the routing and got some personal attention from Jack Nicklaus in the process. She also received plenty of assistance from others at the firm. I worked with her on the agronomy side and tried to treat her as if she was a full-fledged design associate. We looked at drainage, irrigation, grasses and flow — all in concert with assistance she received from the Nicklaus Design team.

*The rock was rapidly being pulled forward now, her eyes directly on the target.*

Today, Franceschi is back home in Italy. Her design is complete with contours and grading plans. She was told by her peers before she left that if the design was the real deal, it would have made a great Nicklaus-designed golf course.

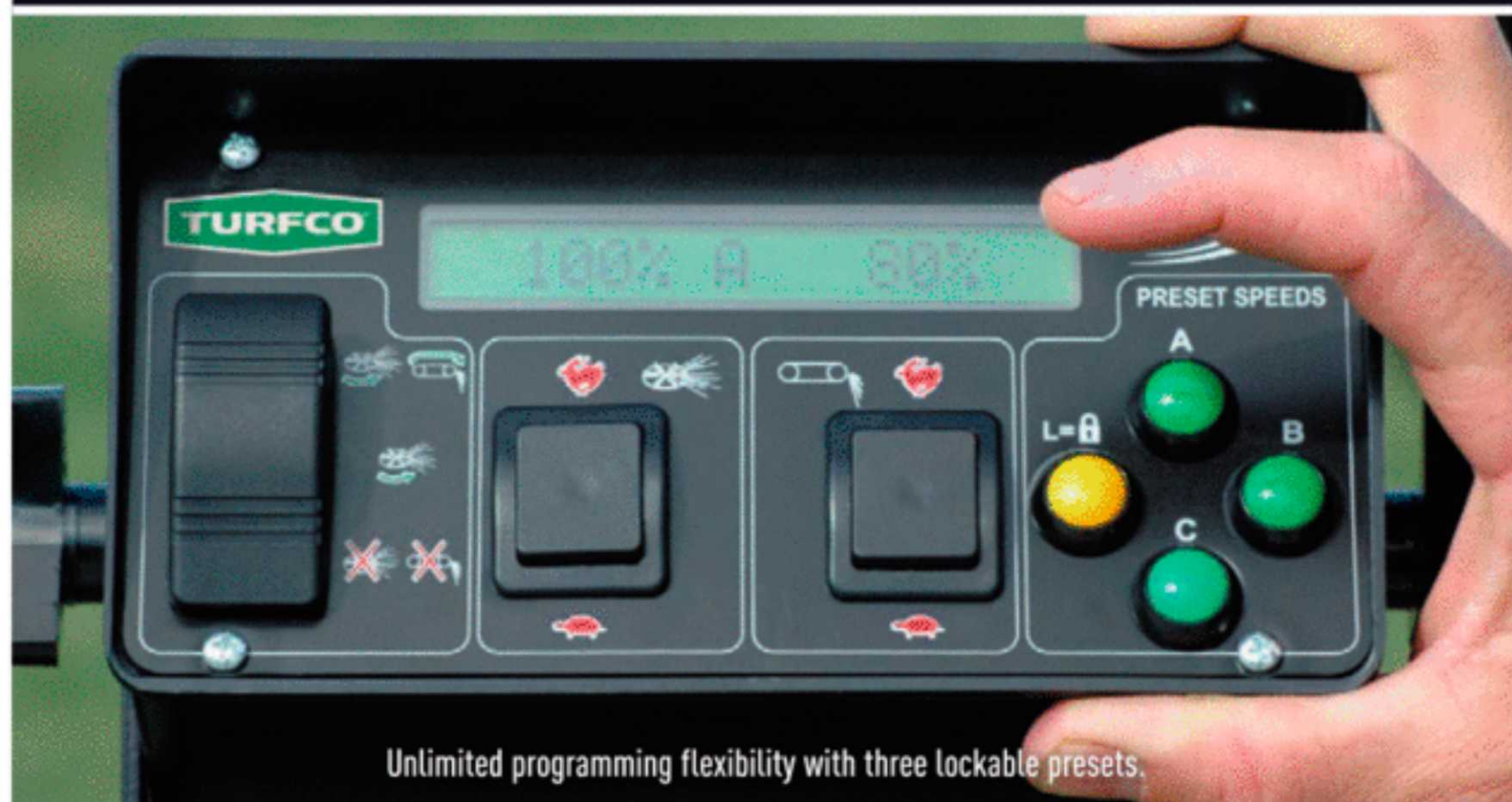
Franceschi had an experience that other students can only think about. The job picture in the United States and Europe is dismal for anyone wanting to enter the design business. It will recover, of course, but no one is hiring design apprentices right now. This has not stopped Franceschi from reaching her goal. She volunteers her time in a building architecture firm so she can stay active in design. She is completing her thesis in urban landscape design for her graduate degree and has her sights set on being a productive member of a design firm.

If she doesn't, it won't be from lack of determination. Franceschi will make it. She has looked Jack Nicklaus in the eye and said she wants to become a golf course designer. He didn't laugh. She sweated and ached from working in the hot Florida sun from morning to night, and kept coming back for more. She left her entire family and fiancée in Italy to come to North Palm Beach in her first trip abroad to learn the trade from what she believed was the best design firm in the world. She learned English in four months of study and is now conversant and literate. To say this woman is passionate about what she wants to do would be an understatement. She will be successful in her quest.

*The rock is now hurtling toward that spot on the glass and it's certain to shatter on impact. ■*

*Jon Scott is vice president of agronomic services for Nicklaus Design.*

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