



Attention Bibliomaniacs: **Books For Your Christmas List**

By Monroe S. Miller

If you love books AND golf courses, this could be a terrific Christmas for you. In the past year there have been quite a number of golf course books put into print. Some are better than others, but any book about our business is probably worth owning.

Notice: I make a distinction between golf books and golf course books. Golf books are a dime a dozen. Although some are interesting — I tend to like the biography/autobiography books of great players — the “how to” books and lesson books leave me cold. I have no stats to back this up, but I have a sense that books of golf fiction are showing up with a little more frequency. I like a lot of these. Mysteries centered around golf and golf courses can be good reading, too. *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, as an example of fiction, was a good book from last Christmas.

Obviously, just because a book is about golf courses doesn't automatically make it a great book. With the greater frequency of golf course books comes the inevitable fact that a few are bound to be dogs, written by marginal authors looking to cash in on the current interests. And text books that have value to golf course superintendents are in a class of their own.

There are two books I feel comfortable in recommending either for purchase or for a prominent place on your Christmas list. Both of these volumes were written by golf course architects. The similarity, however, ends there.

Mike Hurdzan's book, which was new earlier in the year, is an awesome work. *GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTURE: Design, Construction & Restoration* runs to nearly 400 pages. That is made more impressive when you consider that Dr. Hurdzan distilled the book down from nearly twice that many.

Books are wonderful personal possessions to me, so I tend to look at appearance as well as content. This

books is a beauty. Printed on heavy and quality paper stock, it has a good “feel” to it. It is loaded with color photographs (as well as black and white) and color illustrations like those no one does as well as a landscape or golf course architect.

GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTURE has been in the works for ten years. Since Hurdzan had the idea in mind for so long, he did an excellent job of recording details of projects — from accounting to agronomy — and taking great photographs.

His writing style is comfortable and although I don't see this as a textbook, it has an arrangement of the information in a way that reminds me of classroom books. Each chapter builds on the previous ones so that at the end you have the details of either a new or renovated golf course. His very readable style makes this book of interest to the general golfing public, not just those with professional involvement.

Hurdzan is a golf historian. If you didn't know that before reading *GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTURE*, you will when you complete it. It is the basis for some of his discussions.

Golf course superintendents and their critical role in golf course construction and management receive a lot of support from the author, something we do not always receive. He deserves credit for that.

Not everything in this formidable work will receive full agreement with all superintendents. Methods and materials are subjects that oftentimes are dependent on individual experience and success, and therefore will always be an area of opinion. Hurdzan simply gives his opinion and experience, albeit with a lot of confidence.

I purchased my copy of *GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTURE* at the GCSAA conference in Orlando last February and waited in a long line to have it autographed. Far ahead of me in that line was Dr. Geoffrey Cornish, a major golf course architect and author himself. I thought it humble of him to take his turn — he is that kind of man — and mentioned that to Dr. Hurdzan when I finally reached the signing table. He agreed and was very flattered by Geoff's interest. In a later exchange of correspondence with him, Geoff Cornish commented to me that he had read the Hurdzan book TWICE! There could be no stronger recommendation that.

Another book that has given me a lot of pleasure this past golf season, one that was also written by a golf course architect, is *GOLF HAS NEVER FAILED ME*. Donald Ross' book is the result of the fairly recent discovery of a manuscript he composed before World War I with the

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intention of release in 1914. That publication intention never happened and the draft remained in the hands of his long time associate, J.B. McGovern, until its return to the Ross family recently. The American Society of Golf Course Architects and the Ross family recognized the importance of printing the manuscript. Ron Whitten, architectural editor of *Golf Digest* (and a luncheon speaker at the Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium a couple of years ago), clearly had a hand with presentation.

Curiously and coincidentally, the U.S. Open golf course (Oakland Hills) and the U.S. Women's Open golf course (Pine Needles) were both Donald Ross designed golf courses.

The book is about early golf course design and can in no way be compared to the Hurdzan volume. Maybe the most significant thing about both books being released in the same year is that the comparison between the two demonstrates how far golf course architecture, construction and management have come in 75 years. Ross' book is a collection of topics treated with some brevity by who is, I think, golf's all-time favorite course designer. These short essays are occasionally complemented with Ross blueprint drawings and some excellent b/w photos. The paper, ink color and font give the book an antique, priceless and dated feeling.

The book compares favorably with the 1995 winner, *THE SPIRIT OF ST. ANDREWS* by Alister MacKenzie, and I'll confess I like the rambling narrative style of the St. Andrews book better. But it is only a matter of splitting hairs — both authors were Scottish born, early golf course architects who trained under Old Tom Morris. I really don't want to choose one over the other!

The charm of this book, for golf course superintendents, comes in the subjects treated by Donald Ross. Most of the earlier architects were also very good turf men — agronomists, if you please — oftentimes learning that part of golf as thoroughly as they did design or playing strategy. The topics in this volume range from "Don't Overfertilize" to "Mowing Greens" and there isn't a single one that won't interest you.

These two books are terrific, for different reasons, and I recommend

them without reservation or qualification. Both are from Sleeping Bear Press. We owe, I think, a debt of gratitude to Brian Lewis for bringing these and a number of other golf course books to fruition.

When you are in Madison next January for the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association EXPO, do yourself a favor and visit the new Barnes and Noble Bookstore near West Towne. It is minutes from the Holiday Inn. The store is the company's second largest in the country — the largest is on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan — and fitting for a town ranked second in per capita annual book purchases. It is a great store. I was cruising through it one day and ran across a reviewer's copy of *MAKING THE GRASS GREENER ON YOUR SIDE* by Ken Melrose. Melrose was the CEO of The Toro Company at the time the book was written in 1995. Melrose is still at Toro; the office of CEO (or president?) is now a committee of three as I read recently.

The book was written for people

operating in large workplaces, not limited ones like our golf course shops. But, surprisingly, a lot of what he says can be applied to our operations. It is quite practical and full of real life examples and illustrations from Toro's operation under Melrose.

I enjoyed the unabashed references to the golf course and turfgrass industries. For example, the book is sectioned into four headings: I.) Preparing the Soil, II.) Seed Not Sod, III.) Managing and Maintaining the Turf, and IV.) The Harvest. Chapter 14 is titled "The Grass Can Be Greener on Your Side," the same as the book title.

It is only a 225 page book — I read it entirely in two nights and found it pleasant reading. I wouldn't suggest, necessarily, that you run out and buy it, but it was worth my time. It reminded me of a few years ago when I sat and ate dinner with Melrose at a GCSAA conference, due to the kindness of Dr. Jim Watson. If you'd like to read this book, you can borrow mine. 🌱

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