

BUNKERS WITH STYLE

by Bob Lohmann (Credit: *The Bull Sheet*, July, 1988)

One of golf's greatest attractions is that it is played on natural terrain, or failing that, on terrain that has been molded so it has the aspect and feel of natural terrain. It is generally agreed that the best land for golf resembles the gently rolling terrain of the British linksland on which the game slowly developed and reached its first stage of maturity.

At St. Andrews, historians say the layout is completely natural and untouched by man, transformed by evolution into its present state.

The bunkers at St. Andrews, as well as all the linkland courses, became an integral part of golf. As architect Geoff Cornish put it, "It is not surprising that a bunkerless course is seldom if ever a true test. It is comparable to playing tennis with the net set too low."

The old course's influence on generations of golf architects has been immense. It served as a model for early architects who in their days did little more than site eighteen teeing grounds and greens on the splendid golfing ground that was put at their disposal.

Nature's handiwork started the sandy depressions, which were probably enlarged by sheep sheltering from the wind. St. Andrews became and still is one long fairway with nine holes out to a distant point and nine holes back.

When golf spread inland, natural hazards did not occur with the same frequency as they did on links courses. After the routing plan for a new course was decided upon, the placing of bunkers became the next consideration. Bunkers are used for a variety of reasons. As a hazard, they are incorporated into the hole design for the purpose of penalizing a misdirected shot and for establishing strategy and shot values. Bunkers are popular hazards because they provide a reasonable chance for escape. With water, a penalty stroke must be taken. Heavy



woods or deep thick grasses force the golfer to either play laterally or to take an unplayable lie which is also a one-stroke penalty. A golfer playing from a sand bunker has a chance to recover without losing a stroke, depending upon his skill.

Bunkers are placed at the turning point of a fairway where no natural defense occurs. This forces the golfer to play the hole honestly. The closer he skirts the edge of the bunker with his tee shot while still remaining in the fairway, the better his advantage for the next shot. Golf shots played safely away from the bunkers demand a longer second shot often needed to be played over hazards adjacent to the green or second target area.

Sand bunkers are used to provide direction and definition of the target area, be it a fairway or a green. Bunkers placed on the far side of the fairway visually turn the fairway at the target area and provide a direction line for the golfer off the tee. Plac-

ing sand bunkers around the putting surface defines and highlights the target.



Bunkers are often used to catch errant shots from going out of bounds or into an unplayable situation. Using bunkers in this way will aid the golfer as well as speed up his play.

Regardless of design, bunkers are needed for aesthetics. The contrast of sand against grass and water, or the shadows provided by a deep grass bunker, add to the beauty of a golf course. The beauty of a well-maintained series of sand bunkers are remembered and talked about by the golfer. These conversations between golfers are a form of free advertising for the golf course. A course entirely devoid of bunkers lacks the visual definition which is important in developing the character of a golf course.

Bunker design and construction have many variations. Pot bunkers, pit bunkers, cross bunkers, grass-faced bunkers, and flash bunkers are some of the terms used by architects and builders today.

Pot and pit bunkers are small, rather round, deep bunkers with grass on the banks, and either sand or grass on the bottom. It is difficult to advance a shot from these types of bunkers and they should only be placed adjacent to or close to the greens. From this distance, the golfer can use a lofted iron to escape the hazard.

When using grass bunkers, thought should be given to where the golf shot is intended to land. A deep grass bunker adjacent to a narrow green with water on the far side will practically force the golfer to play laterally. Whereas sand in this same bunker would allow most golfers to control the golf shot and give them the opportunity to aim for the pin. Size of the green, topography and adjacent hazards must be considered when deciding upon the use of either sand or grass.

Cross bunkers are slender long bunkers placed across the line of play either in a fairway or in front of a green. These bunkers demand a heroic type golf shot to obtain the preferred position in the fairway or on the putting surface. At the same time, a safe and longer route is available for the conservative golfer.

The grass-faced bunkers which are common on the older courses have steep grass slopes with sand placed at the base. The steep slopes present on these bunkers were the result of minimal grading operations and inefficient equipment available at the time of their construction.

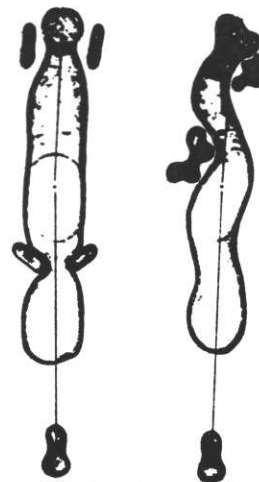
A commonly used sand bunker is the cape and bay bunker, where sand is placed on constructed mounds and grass is placed

on capes between and below the mounds. By varying the outline of the sand and modifying the heights and widths of both the sand and grass capes, the overall bunker becomes attractive. Some courses have expanded their bunkers and made the curving outlines less pronounced to allow for machine maintenance. As long as the sand is inexpensive, these bunkers are economical to maintain and still are attractive if the other features of the golf course are designed and built in the same size relationship. These bunkers are built slightly into the ground with the adjacent mounds blending into the existing topography. The fairway bunker is built to allow the golfer to exit using a mid or long iron while the bunkers on the green approach area are somewhat deeper, demanding a more lofted iron to be used.

Many of the older golf courses have some bunkers that are obsolete by today's standards, but possess character and distinction. Generally, many of the bunkers penalize the shorter hitter while not affecting the big hitter. The landing area for the tee shot of the average golfer is between 175 and 225 yards. When renovating a golf course, the bunkers short of this area should be removed and replaced with bunkers in the area just beyond a good drive of the short hitter.

The relocation of the fairway bunkers provide an interesting, challenging test for the better golfers and a fairer test for the average players. The location of the bunkers should test the ability of all golfers, the use of the draw and fade, the chance to carry a bunker for better position, or to play short to avoid a hazard and still have an open shot to the green.

The design and construction of any new bunkers on an ex-



isting course should resemble the character, if any, of the present bunkers. Character can be developed through unique bunkering design and construction. Proper bunker design will meet criteria of playability, fairness, flexibility, aesthetics, and practicality.

When modernizing the bunker locations on an existing golf course, each golf hole needs to be studied and compared. Similar to new course construction, each hole is designed with variety, but has some unique features that unifies the total golf course.

In any and all bunker design and construction, whether it is new or remodeling work, the ideal solution is taking natural design concepts that were suggested over 200 years ago, and recreating them today for everyone's enjoyment.

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