

Evolving the game

In his forthcoming year as ASGCA President, Steve Smyers will focus on ‘the evolution of the game’ and its architecture. Marc Whitney finds out more



Steve Smyers, ASGCA, has a simple message. “The game of golf is extremely healthy! There are 25 million players – 21 million are active – and nearly 16,000 golf courses in America, plus another 16,000 worldwide.”

As Smyers begins his term as ASGCA President, he will focus on ‘the evolution of the game’ and its architecture. But to see where Smyers is going, it helps to know where he has been.

It all changed for him at the 1969 U.S. Open at Champions Golf Club in Houston. Already a golfer for several years, Smyers – a high school junior – caddied for Miller Barber at the event.

“I stood on the practice range and listened to Miller and the other players talk about the golf course,” he says. “They talked about what a great course it was; that it could be attacked from all over and didn’t set up for one player better than another. Lee Trevino could play the low hook he played at that time, and Jack Nicklaus with his high fade had an equal chance.

“I had never looked at a golf course like that before, and those comments stuck in my mind.”

An interest in golf course design and architecture was sparked. That spark would turn into quite the flame, as evidenced today by Smyers’ work at such courses as: Wolf Run Golf Club, Zionsville, Indiana; Old Memorial, Tampa, Florida; Chart Hills Golf Club, Kent, England; and redesigns, including Isleworth, Orlando, Florida. He has plans to redesign Old Memorial this summer.

Along the way he continued to play the game he loves. As a teen, Smyers watched Ben Hogan hit golf balls at Champions and saw a young Trevino play before the ‘Merry Mex’ joined the PGA Tour. In college, Smyers was a member of the University of Florida golf team that won the 1973 NCAA Championship. The team included Andy Bean and Gary Koch.

His first 18-hole design, Wolf Run, included input from a famous – unpaid – consultant.

“Pete and Alice Dye were preparing Crooked Stick for the PGA Championship, and Pete would give me hell or critique me for the work I was doing at Wolf Run,” Smyers laughs. “They would invite me to play and as we talked I learned about the business.

I also learned from him what it took to get a course ready for a championship.”

Besides the Dyes – both ASGCA Past Presidents – Smyers notes the positive influence of other ASGCA members.

“I learn so much every time I hear a member speak at the Annual Meeting or elsewhere,” he says. “To sit back and listen to architects like the late Jay Morrish, Lee Schmidt, Bruce Charlton, Mike Hurdzan, Rees Jones and so many others is a joy.”

Smyers continued to play at a high level, competing in a number of USGA championships. He was later asked to serve on what is now the USGA Equipment Standards committee, which led to a six-year term on the USGA Executive Committee.

“It was the most influential learning experience I’ve had,” he says. “I brought a perspective of someone who was a designer and had played at a fairly high level. And I got to see how these smart executives went through the decision-making process; taking information, analyzing and discussing before coming to a conclusion. The goal of each decision isn’t to necessarily benefit one specific group, but all the constituencies in the entire game.”



Steve Smyers, ASGCA, is currently working on the redesign of Old Memorial GC in Tampa, Florida

Smyers also noted how it “opened my eyes tremendously” to watch Kerry Haigh from the PGA set up courses for the Ryder Cup and PGA Championships, and Mike Davis for various USGA events.

The game and industry continue to evolve. Smyers says that has always been the case, and should be embraced.

“Going back to 1900, the business has never been ‘the way it was,’” he said. “It’s always changing. Our thought process needs to evolve. The most successful and recognized architects of past generations were very forward-thinking guys.

“The founding members of ASGCA were leaders in the game because they adapted to the modern innovation of the game. At Pinehurst, when steel shafted clubs were introduced, Donald Ross redesigned the course to meet the demands for generations to come.”

Changing “technology” means more to Smyers than just equipment. He notes players, instruction and course maintenance have all changed.

“Course maintenance has been the biggest game changer,” he said. “Greens on a Donald Ross course

used to be cut at $\frac{3}{4}$ ”, and that moved lower and lower over time.”

As ASGCA president, Smyers will continue to strengthen ASGCA’s relationship with allied golf associations to spread the word of architects as problem solvers ready to design and implement new plans.

Smyers calls on architects to understand the game’s history and traditions, while looking ahead.

“Some of the courses I designed early in my career are modernizing for the next generation of players, with new sand or bunker liners, improved irrigation and introduction of new turf grasses.

“Forward-thinking clubs will look to reduce irrigation and turf maintenance, which opens the door for the next generation of architects, where there are opportunities to reposition bunkers and re-strategize golf holes.

“As architects, we need to go in and build a more stimulating golf course to inspire golfers to play 10 percent more golf each year. We still want to do something that gives the player a ‘wow’ moment. Give them that stimulating feeling when they stand over a shot, whether they can achieve it or not.” ●



“ The most successful and recognized architects of past generations were very forward-thinking guys

Sewailo Golf Club | Toby Ingleton

Honoring nature's gifts

When the Pascua Yaqui Tribe decided to build a golf course, they wanted it to work with the land and reflect their cultural beliefs

In the language of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe of Arizona, 'Sewailo' means 'flower world.' The tribe's belief is that they emerged from Sewailo, before traveling through the desert to reach their present homeland.

This journey was to be the inspiration for the design of a new golf course for tribal families and visitors to the tribe's Casino Del Sol resort in Tucson, Arizona. They turned to fellow Native American and former PGA Tour player Notah Begay III, who worked in collaboration with California-based golf course architect Ty Butler, ASGCA, to bring this vision to reality.

The resort is one of the few in the Tucson market to earn the *Forbes* Four Star and AAA Four Diamond awards, so the golf experience would need to be of the highest quality to meet guests' expectations – but also to help transform the property to a destination, with golf becoming a primary draw for visitors.

A key challenge for the designers would be to successfully incorporate water into the desert environment. "Water is an integral part of the Yaqui's belief system and, for this reason, the tribe wanted water to be a big part of the design. It also meant the golfing experience would be like no other in the Tucson market," says Butler. He and Begay developed the

concept of a 'desert oasis'-style course, which features lakes, flowing streams, waterfalls and lush landscaping.

However, the existing site was flat and featureless, so a degree of engineering would be required to create the fall needed for the stream system, and to give the holes shape and visual interest. "Like at Shadow Creek in Las Vegas, the approach involved sinking areas of the course below existing grade and raising others, in order to create the flowing creek system," explains Butler. "To reflect the Pascua Yaqui journey, the course transitions from desert to oasis, while taking full advantage of the surrounding mountain views to create an exciting and unique setting. The course finishes with a waterfall backdrop to the final green, signifying the Yaqui's hope of returning to Sewailo one day."

The tribe has water rights that enable them to service the stream system and provide the irrigation source for the course. But the area also has to cope with a tremendous amount of runoff/flooding during the monsoon season. The property is in the path of this runoff and the designers saw an opportunity to use the course to capture this water and direct it to the Black Wash area north of the course. "We constructed a series of retention areas to capture

runoff before it could spread to other areas where flooding occurred. From these retention areas we created desert washes which run through the golf course to carry the runoff in a controlled manner to the neighboring Black Wash. The washes added another visual element and became a key strategic element for the holes that play along them."

Begay and Butler worked closely with Ken Alperstein of Pinnacle Design, who was responsible for landscaping of the course. The plant





A waterfall provides the backdrop to the final hole on the new course, which was designed to reflect the Pascua Yaqui's hope of returning to 'Sewailo'



Images: Tom Breazeale

palette they selected helps to provide a seamless transition between the desert and oasis environments.

The property had an abundance of quality plant material, so a key element of construction was to salvage all this material and transplant it back to the finished course. "We transplanted over 20,000 native plants back to the course, along with thousands of additional imported plants. Over the next five-to-ten years, the course will really transform and take on a different ambiance once the plant material

matures and starts to fill in," says Butler.

The completed par-72 course has a variety of strategic holes that provide a full range of shot values and aesthetics. Multiple tee areas and generous fairways have been incorporated to increase playability. Highly crafted bunkering helps to define the strategic options, as well as visually enhancing the course. The result is a course that is great fun to play, but can also challenge the highest caliber of golfer. It hosted a U.S. Open qualifier in 2014 and is the

new home to the University of Arizona Men's and Women's Golf Teams.

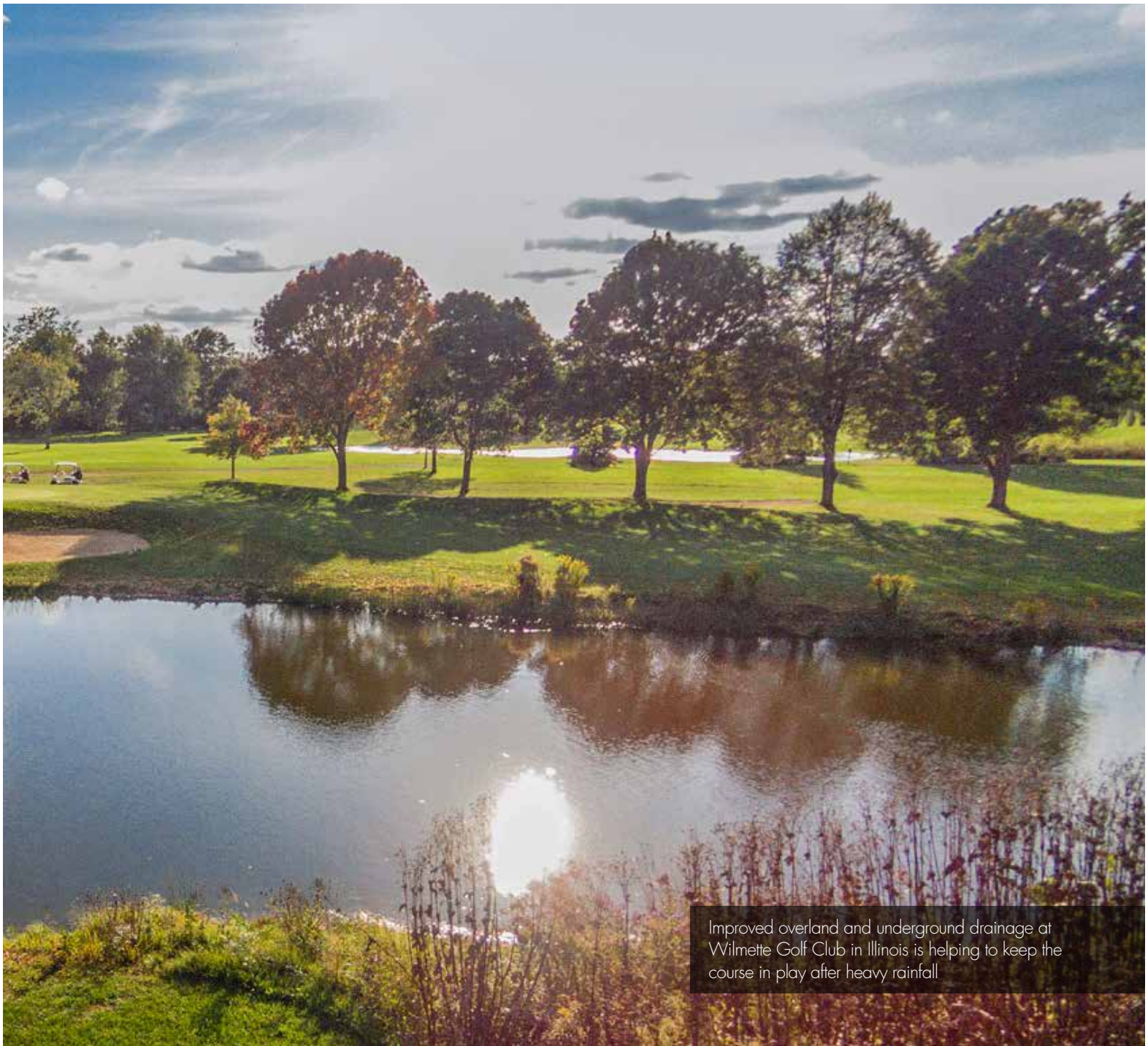
Sewailo Golf Club has now completed its first full year and the Troon Golf-managed property is enjoying its early success. "They met all their goals in terms of rounds and reports are that everyone who plays the course has great things to say. Notah and I could not be happier with the results and the Pascua Yaqui have a great course for their tribal families to use, as well as for guests of the resort to enjoy," concludes Butler. ●

More or less

Whether there is too much or too little water, its proper management is critical to the ongoing success of golf. *By Design* considers two contrasting projects where design enhancements have delivered improvements in water management

For almost 100 years, Wilmette Golf Club in Illinois has enjoyed substantial play. But drainage issues have increasingly plagued this great public venue. The north branch of the Chicago River often breaches its banks, leaving this flat golf course, with little stormwater management capacity, indefensible.

With a relatively modest budget, the club hired Martin Design, led by ASGCA Treasurer Greg Martin, to develop an improvement program. This would see the water



Improved overland and underground drainage at Wilmette Golf Club in Illinois is helping to keep the course in play after heavy rainfall

management infrastructure overhauled, while also unifying and modernizing the features of the course.

“Even following typical rainfall events, play would grind to a halt due to slow moving surface drainage and saturated turf,” says Martin. “In addition to these water issues, complications for maintenance, operations and golfer enjoyment arose from disjointed circulation, overgrown vegetation, and course elements that had been built in various decades. These factors contributed to limit the amount and

quality of play, with golfer satisfaction beginning to suffer as a result.”

Martin expanded the site’s stormwater management capacity by improving both the overland and underground drainage systems. Greens were also reconstructed in line with USGA recommendations. As a result, water quality has improved and, with expanded wetlands, the natural habitat has increased. The environmental benefit is matched by an improvement in the quality of golf, with the program also incorporating

expanded teeing areas, better located hazards, and reduced bunker square footages. Together the changes improve playability, provide more strategy and reduce maintenance requirements.

Mike Matchen, director of golf at Wilmette, is delighted with the results: “The Wilmette Park District could not have asked for anything more. The final result for our investment is amazing. Not only have we gone a long way to solving our infrastructure issues, but have a brand new golf course in the process.

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Proposed turf reduction (inset) at the Roadrunner course at Hogan Park Golf Club in Midland, Texas will reduce the amount of water required for irrigation

It is a golf course that the community will enjoy for generations to come.”

In Midland, Texas, the challenge comes from too little, rather than too much, water. The city’s average rainfall is approximately 15 inches per year, less than half of the national average. This has made it very difficult for David Byrd, superintendent of Hogan Park Golf Club, to maintain a high quality playing surface, especially given that the available water has a very high salinity.

The Roadrunner course at Hogan Park was originally designed in the 1970s, with nine holes added in the late 90s, and has proved extremely popular with the local population. But the impact of 50,000 rounds of play per year, combined with the limited availability of good quality water, has led to a degradation of turf conditions.

The city contacted Houston-based architect Jeff Blume, ASGCA, to ask for his suggestions for an overhaul of the of the course. He delivered a proposal that combined a reduced water requirement with improved strategy, and measures to make the two nines more complementary.

“We created and executed a plan to reduce the amount of maintainable turf by nearly 20 acres, soften much of the most drastic contouring on the course, and redesign the course’s bunkers to allow them to be maintained by hand. All of this was done to improve the playing conditions of the course, while at the same time making their golf course maintenance more efficient and thereby stretching their maintenance budget,” explains Blume. “The areas where turf was eliminated were turned back into the arid/desert type of landscape that still allows players to find and play shots. Instead of watering, fertilizing, and mowing these rough areas, the maintenance staff simply smooth them out periodically.”

As a result, the club has been able to eliminate some of the course’s sprinkler heads completely, while others have been turned off for the foreseeable future. This helps keep nuisance plant material away from the native areas. Blume adds that this turf reduction work also helps to speed play, as it is easier to find and

play balls that come to rest on the hardpan lie of a native area than the previous thick rough.

The solutions provided by Martin and Blume are just two of many projects where ASGCA members have helped clubs deal effectively and sustainably with water issues on their courses. And ASGCA members and staff regularly contribute to the industry’s thought leadership around water. For example, Executive Director Chad Ritterbusch recently addressed delegates at the USGA Annual Meeting, helping them to understand how the design of a golf course can positively contribute to its use and management of water. And Forrest Richardson, ASGCA, represented the golf industry at a Western Governors Association Forum on ‘Drought in the West,’ highlighting golf’s proactivity with new technologies and architects’ efforts to reduce water consumption. ●

For more information on how ASGCA members are improving the environment through the positive use of water, download the Golf & Water flyer at www.asgca.org/free-publications

Admired by all

Jay Morrish, a Past President and Fellow of ASGCA, died on 2 March, 2015. Friends and colleagues throughout the golf industry have expressed their admiration for the man and his work

“Jay Morrish was a stalwart who was admired by everyone,” says ASGCA President Lee Schmidt. “His work was outstanding, and he was funny and smart. As an architect, he positively impacted the world of golf course design, and as ASGCA President he advanced the organization. When Jay spoke, people listened.”

Morrish received a degree in landscape and turf management from Colorado State University, then soon joined the construction team on the Robert Trent Jones-designed Spyglass Hill course in Pebble Beach, California. He continued to work as construction superintendent on Jones’ courses until joining Desmond Muirhead as a designer in 1967.

Morrish then went to work as a designer with Jack Nicklaus, ASGCA Fellow in 1972. “I first had the chance to work with Jay when I collaborated with Desmond Muirhead on Muirfield Village Golf Club in the early 1970s and he was working with Desmond,” says Nicklaus. “When I started to design courses on my own, Jay and Bob Cupp joined me and the three of

us worked together for years. Jay was Mister Outside and Bob was Mister Inside. They were a great combination. Jay did such a wonderful job in the field. He was very creative, very imaginative, and he loved the game of golf – and that showed in his work. Jay was just a tremendous guy and great fun to be with!

“Jay left our organization near the end of 1983, but before he did, he put his thumbprint on a number of great golf courses, such as Glen Abbey and Shoal Creek. He has been a mainstay and a backbone of the ASGCA, and a true champion for those in the golf course design business. We will miss Jay greatly, as will so many people – in and outside of our industry – whose lives were touched by him.”

“I’m very proud of my professional association with Jay,” says Bob Cupp, ASGCA Past President, “but even more my friendship with him over these many years. He was a grand friend and storyteller. His humor was amazing. Jay could share the history of a topic that was not only factual,



but tagged with humor, so everybody remembered. I’m just sorry I will not hear them first hand anymore.”

After ten years Morrish moved on to collaborate with PGA Tour player Tom Weiskopf. Their 12-year partnership generated some two dozen high-profile courses, including Loch Lomond in Scotland. “Jay Morrish was without a doubt one of the most talented and respected golf course architects of all time,” says ASGCA Past President Doug Carrick. “It is no accident that two of golf’s most legendary players, Jack Nicklaus and Tom Weiskopf, wanted to work alongside Jay. He had



“Golf course architecture is a very subjective field of endeavor, and that is good. The game of golf would be distressingly boring if all golf course architects embraced similar design philosophies. Long live diversity!”

Jay Morrish, ASGCA Fellow



Morrish's design work includes Loch Lomond in Scotland (above) and TPC Scottsdale in Arizona, both in collaboration with Tom Weiskopf



a deep understanding and passion for the game of golf. He was a master at creating golf courses with tremendous variety and thought provoking strategies and his designs were always sympathetic to the natural landscape on which they sat. In addition to his incredible talent and vision, Jay was simply a great guy to be around. He was a great story teller with a brilliant sense of humor."

In the mid 1990s Morrish went completely on his own and designed many new golf courses including Tehama for Clint Eastwood in Carmel, California; Stone Canyon, Tucson, Arizona and Pine Dunes, Frankston, Texas. All of these were done with the assistance of his son, Carter Morrish.

Jay became an ASGCA member in 1989. "Jay and I were both accepted into the ASGCA in the same year," recalls ASGCA Vice President Steve Smyers. "We were classmates but more than that we were friends.

"Jay was the experienced architect and I the rookie. Jay kindly became a mentor to me. He was always there to guide and mentor me through all the situations that we as architects are confronted with.

"Jay during his career was responsible for the creation of many of most highly regarded and respected golf courses that exist in the world today. He was a great architect, a wonderful story teller, a tremendous friend, and a fabulous loving and caring husband and father."

Morrish served as ASGCA President in 2002-03. Taking over shortly after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 provided a unique set of challenges. "The United States was still in shock and we were all exploring uncharted waters as to ways

of communicating, traveling and doing business," Morrish said at the time. "Thankfully, ASGCA members were a strong group with great imagination and perseverance."

Retired ASGCA Executive Secretary Paul Fullmer says: "Looking back at his presidency, Jay was the right captain for ASGCA during a tumultuous period. The world was changing and there was great uncertainty. Jay provided the senior leadership ASGCA needed. Jay was a man who knew how to excel in everything he did, whether it was golf course design or big-game hunting."

Morrish is survived by his wife, Louise; children, Carter and Kim, son-in-law, Brian Coder; and grandchildren, Megan and Spencer Coder. ●

Turf reduction | Toby Ingleton

Less turf, more play?

Water and cost savings are usually the drivers for turf reduction programs. But they are not the only benefits, says Toby Ingleton

Local authorities have responded to the drought conditions throughout the South and West of the United States by offering rebates for golf clubs that reduce the amount of maintained turf on their courses. Less turf means less water is required, and that alone can justify such projects.

But even where rebates are not available, clubs are finding that a reduction in turf can deliver cost savings in other areas – such as power and maintenance – and a host of additional benefits, including an aesthetic that is better suited to modern tastes, fewer lost balls and a faster pace of play – all of which can contribute to increasing numbers of rounds.

The trend towards a more natural, rustic-looking golf course has been progressing steadily over the past fifteen years or so. Often inspired by an admiration of the work of Golden Age golf architects who did not necessarily have the technology to maintain a lush golf course, today's designers are increasingly less likely

to propose wall-to-wall turf, even where water is freely available.

And the golfing public's taste is following suit, evident from the popularity of more traditional golfing experiences such as those available at the Bandon Dunes resort in Oregon and the overwhelmingly positive response to the work of Bill Coore, ASGCA, and Ben Crenshaw at the No. 2 course in Pinehurst, North Carolina, the host course for last year's U.S. Open and U.S. Women's Open championships.

As more natural-looking golf courses get greater exposure, clubs may find their members and guests having a greater appreciation of a less manicured style. And even if they don't, they may well find themselves getting greater enjoyment from courses that don't punish the golfer with thick rough.

A golf course architect can help identify the most suitable turfgrass reduction program for any given course, which will be dependent on soil conditions, climate and a number of other factors. They can then recommend a step-by-step

process from the identification of areas suitable for removal to the adjustments that may need to be made to the irrigation system.

Many turf reduction programs – such as the one referenced earlier in this issue at the Roadrunner course at Hogan Park in Midland, Texas – are seeing expanses of thick rough replaced by natural waste areas. It's still a punishment for the errant golfer, as the ball may find an awkward lie among native plants or unraked bare ground. But it can be much easier to find your ball and continue your round in this barren landscape, or among woodchip or pine straw, than it is in deep rough.

For most regular golfers, the avoidance of lost balls can have a very positive impact on the enjoyment of golf, and if golfers are spending less time looking for balls, the general speed of play will increase too. Faster play equals more capacity equals increased potential revenue for the club. ●

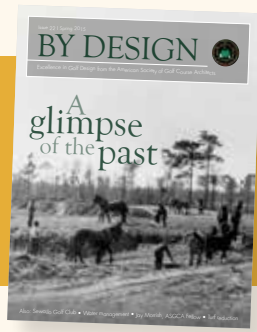


At Oakmont CC in Glendale, California, Schmidt-Curley's turf reduction work also significantly improved aesthetics



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