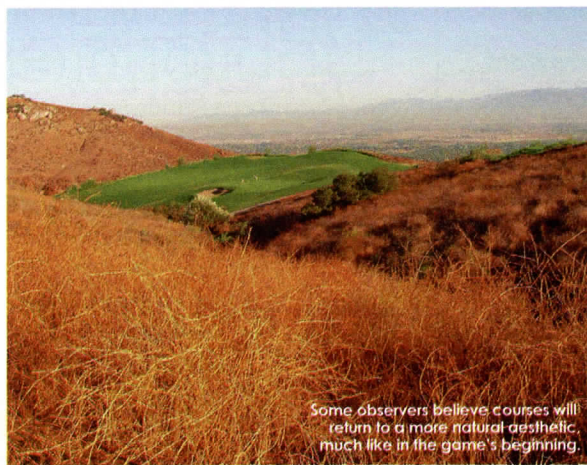


The Evolution of Architecture



Keeping your course firm, fast and brown might be the only economically viable way to remain open in these rough economic times, but according to one of golf's premier architects, it also puts you on the cutting edge of a trend that's leading the game back to its roots.

Bill Coore, who along with his design partner Ben Crenshaw has created some of the most talked-about new courses of the last two

decades (including a recent renovation of Pinehurst No. 2), believes that minimizing maintenance would be in vogue today regardless of the economy.

"Trends swing back and forth like a pendulum," Coore says. "The natural presentation with native grasses and a less-manicured look goes back to the founda-

tion of the game. The oldest courses were simply mowed out of the terrain that was there, and for at least the first 400 years of golf, highly manicured courses, botanical garden-type courses, were not just the exception, they were frowned upon."

The transition to the highly manicured courses of today occurred in the middle of the 20th century and coincided with the invention and advancement of television. Like vain socialites trying to outdo one

another on the party circuit, golf operators—and, to a degree, architects—tried to keep up with the courses they saw on television.

"Those sorts of highly maintained and, quite frankly, highly artificial courses were considered to be the best, and, certainly, a few of them have been wonderful for golf," Coore says. "But the pendulum is swinging back. Soon, the perfectly manicured, botanical garden-type course will be the exception instead of the rule."

Once again, television—particularly high-definition TV—is the catalyst for this evolution. Old television coverage of the links courses of England and Scotland made the places look grim and barren. Nobody watched the 1973 British Open and said, "I want my course to look like Royal Troon."

But in high-definition, the beauty of Troon, St. Andrews, Royal St. George's and Turnberry comes through with every bristling gorse thorn and waving blade of heather.









"Golf architecture, as with any form of art, evolves and is cyclical over time," Coore explains. "I think you're seeing a return to the more natural courses, regardless of the economics, because of the influence of courses like Bandon Dunes and Whistling Straits and the popularity of the British Open. To say this move toward more minimalistic practices is totally due to economics isn't totally correct, but there's definitely a trend in that direction."

And that trend is great for today's operator. Not only does going brown and natural (or fast and firm) put an existing course on the cutting edge of an artistic trend, it might be the tonic needed to weather today's rough business conditions.

"The trend toward maintaining less turf is an economic necessity," says Coore, "but it's also good for golf." —Steve Eubanks

Pro Shop Sales June

On-course retail sales. Taken from June 2011 Retail Market Share Report compared to June 2010 Retail Market Share Report.

PRODUCT	RETAIL		UNITS SOLD		AVG. PRICE	
		YTD		YTD		YTD
 Footwear	9.8%	6.9%	8.0%	4.9%	1.6%	1.9%
 Gloves	0.6%	0.9%	-0.3%	-0.4%	0.8%	1.4%
 Golf Bags	-2.7%	2.7%	-4.2%	-0.7%	1.5%	3.4%
 Golf Balls	-2.2%	-0.3%	-1.7%	-1.2%	-0.5%	0.9%
 Irons	5.5%	9.8%	4.2%	7.4%	1.3%	2.2%
 Putters	-8.0%	-4.6%	-7.4%	-5.1%	-0.6%	0.5%
 Wedges	-45.0%	-21.1%	-43.5%	-20.4%	-2.7%	-0.9%
 Woods	20.4%	26.3%	8.4%	12.1%	11.1%	12.7%

Source: Golf Datatech