The value of architecture

An extract from 'Designs on a Better Golf Course' by ASGCA Past President Jeff Brauer, an essential resource for golf course decision makers.



ASGCA Past President Jeff Brauer

'Designs on a Better Golf Course' is a collection of articles conceived and edited by ASGCA Past President Jeff Brauer, with the goal of giving committee members, superintendents, and others in charge of a golf course a broad overview of the thinking, philosophy, and some practical specifics of designing golf course renovations. "Anyone involved with a renovation program strives to help their club make good decisions," says Brauer. "This book should help them head in the right direction."

The book includes information on more than 50 topics raised by committee members as they consider improvements at their golf courses. "Given the cost of construction, especially post-Covid, we hope to help them rebuild better and avoid costly mistakes," says Brauer.

Some people fail to recognize just how important golf course architecture is to their daily golf enjoyment. Golf course architecture is the arrangement of landscape elements that facilitate the human activity of golf. It follows that without good architecture, there is no good golf, and without great architecture, there is no great golf. It also follows that bad architecture results in... well, you can guess.

When you think of your course (or church) you really think of the experiences you have there. In both cases, the architecture is there to facilitate the religious experience (the comparison is apt for many golfers). Good golf course architecture is more than providing tees and greens, it is about creating satisfying shared experiences every time you decide to play.

Golf course architecture stands along with other fine arts of architecture, landscape architecture, fine dining, theatre, etc., in being considered important enough to warrant its own critics, lists, rankings, and even coffee table books and monthly magazines. It may be even more important than others. If you love literature, you can read voraciously, but never read Danielle Steel. Moviegoers can avoid any genre they don't like, simply by not buying tickets. TV watchers can easily change channels. But, as a golfer, you can't skip a hole.

It inspires nearly endless debates about what style, which architects and which courses are better than others. It makes us question whether less is more, more is more, or if more is a bore. It creates both shouts of joy and cries of despair, creating the drama that makes us all love golf.

The real value in golf course architecture isn't obtaining rankings or stunning photographs. It lies in creating something pleasing for you every time you golf, and avoiding anything less. Golf can range from deadly dull to inspiring.

While everyone prefers the latter, they often preclude even the chance for inspiration by treating golf course architecture as less important than it truly is.



Golf course architecture is about creating satisfying experiences, says ASGCA Past President Jeffrey Brauer, whose recent projects include the redesign of Tempest Golf Club in Gladewater, Texas

One bad feature can ruin a hole, and every bad hole reduces your golf enjoyment by at least 1/18th and possibly your entire round, or day. Who needs that from golf?

Everything on your course is designed, either well or badly. If you start with the idea of building something merely functional, "functional" is the most you will get. "Functional" results are hard to justify when almost any change to a golf hole is an opportunity for a talented designer to create something that is "inspirational" and satisfying for very little extra up-front cost.

A bad design costs just as much – or more – to build than a good one. That's why every feature on your golf course should be designed, not just built.

If a green dies, you might think you are simply rebuilding an "object." Golf course architects think in terms of "creating a space" to maximize enjoyment.

Yes, golf course architecture is a pretty big deal; without it, there is no golf.

Golf course architecture starts by organizing nature sufficiently to allow golf, but that function is just the first task. The architect simultaneously weaves artistic expression with that function. Every green, tee, bunker and even cart path is an opportunity to create naturalistic beauty and inspire emotions, including delight, serenity, joy, as well as doubt, despair and anger.

Yes, architects really do think this way.

While golfers do intuitively know good golf course architecture by being inspired or bored, they are rarely versed in the principles of the art. Only golf course architects know how to make every piece of ground the best golf experience inherently possible. The fact is, if you want to create something of beauty that inspires golfers and is better than merely functional, you need a golf course architect.

When you have a chance, don't shortchange your course when it comes to maximizing its long-term prospects. As mom probably told you (more than once), "if it's worth doing, it's worth doing right." While she probably never mentioned it, this also applies to golf courses and golf course architecture. ●

To read more, order 'Designs on a Better Golf Course,' produced by the ASGCA Foundation, from Amazon

