Q: Is it still possible to build good quality inexpensive golf courses?

TWO WORLD-RENOWNED GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTS GIVE YOU THEIR EXPERT OPINION



The last decade has been an age of golf course design and maintenance opulence, but the current slowdown is an indication that it's not a sustainable model. I think we will soon see a return to "leaner and meaner" standards. A good golf course doesn't need 150 bunkers filled with sand trucked in from Ohio, nor a $4 million irrigation system. If a piece of property has good soils, good native vegetation and good topography, it shouldn't be too difficult to create an outstanding golf course. Fortunately, the valuation of land is not based on its suitability for golf, so some of the best courses in recent times have been built in remote locations on cheap land.

I'm in awe of some of the remote links like Machrihanish in Scotland, where the rough pretty much maintains itself, or a club like Maidstone on Long Island, NY, where great conditions are achieved without any fairway irrigation at all. To blend a new golf course into the landscape, the key is to be careful in the lines of disturbance. We like to keep the natural little features – native shrubbery and small contours – that give the course its sense of place. The 7th hole at Pacific Dunes in Oregon has natural bumps in front of the green, trees both sides, native grass on the left-hand dunes and a mound at the back of the green that we also left undisturbed. When the frame of the picture is so natural, your eye is drawn to those features, not to the re-contouring in between.

The more you spend on maintenance, the less you gain with each dollar. The money you spend on the greens and fairways is crucial; the money you spend edging cart paths is not. When golf courses start to budget more carefully, I'm not concerned that our enjoyment will suffer. We'll just get back to playing the game as it was meant to be played. ■

– Tom Doak **INTERVIEWED BY CHIP GASKINS**



The 7th hole at Tom Doak's masterpiece at Pacific Dunes in Oregon retains many of the terrain's natural features.



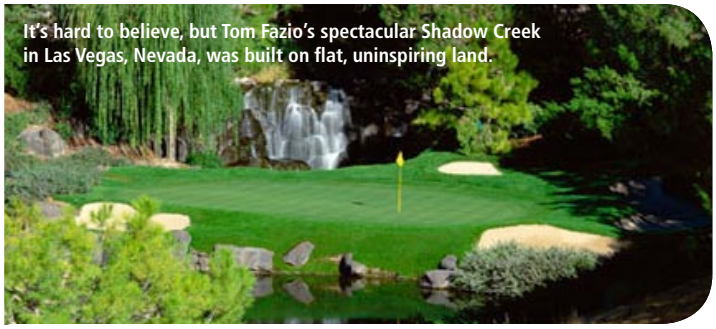
Contrary to popular belief, many modern golf courses have been built relatively inexpensively. However, the cost of building a golf course is not determined as much by the construction techniques used as it is about the location. If you want to create a good, inexpensive golf course, you need to build it on sandy soils. It's as simple as that.

In reality, though, you're not going to have the luxury of always being able to build on perfect terrain. Take Shadow Creek in Las Vegas, which I built in 1990, for example. Steve Wynn, the owner of the Mirage Hotel, called me and said he had the worst piece of land imaginable for a golf course. And he was right! There was no possible way we could have built any kind of golf course there – let alone one of the world's most spectacular layouts – without a grand vision and an even grander budget.

There are a variety of techniques you can use to make a golf course look like it has been there for ever. If you have the opportunity to plant vegetation, you plant mature vegetation. You can build a great course on rolling sand dunes without vegetation, but you can't get away with that on a flat site without any land movement or natural undulations.

At the end of the day, building a golf course is about managing expectations. It always amazes me that golfers will travel to great golf destinations outside America, like Ireland or Scotland, and return saying how fabulous the golf courses were. Yet if they played a similar course at home, they would complain that the grass was too brown, the turf was too thin, or that the ball bounced erratically! When I started out in the golf industry in the 1960s, people would say, "This course is going to be great in a few years when it matures." That meant something then, but nowadays, that's seen as failure. Today, nobody is prepared to wait. ■

– Tom Fazio **INTERVIEWED BY NICK WRIGHT**



It's hard to believe, but Tom Fazio's spectacular Shadow Creek in Las Vegas, Nevada, was built on flat, uninspiring land.