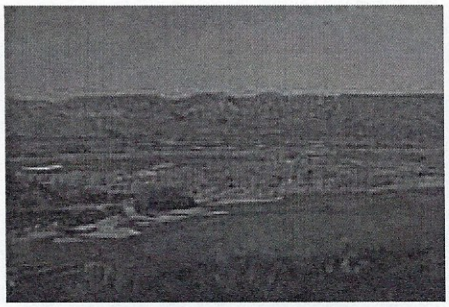
Minimalist Style

Since the opening of High Pointe in 1989, our work has been praised as the foundation of a new *minimalist movement* of golf course design. Today, it is politically correct for every designer to talk about *working with the land.*



Apache Stronghold 17th Holes

In their next breath, however, most other designers go on to dismiss minimalism as impractical, except on the most special sites. They lament that the good pieces of land are all gone, and complain about modern environmental restrictions.

For the most part, minimalism is just good common sense, a refusal to let design ideas out of thin air outweigh the realities of the site. Instead of reshaping a severe slope, we try to figure out how to use it to make a golf hole interesting. If it's just too severe, we'll try a sequence of holes which avoids it entirely. The bulldozer is our third and last option.

Restraint in earthmoving sets off a chain reaction of savings in the overall project budget. Natural areas not only add local character to a golf course, they don't have to be irrigated or seeded or maintained for the life of the course. We never create pockets which have to be artificially drained when the natural surface drainage will suffice. Every contour that can be left alone saves topsoil stripping and replacement.

We have been blessed to work on some extraordinary sites, and certainly those are ideal for minimalist designs. But Quail Crossing, Beechtree, and Riverfront might have been dismissed by other designers as dull properties, and we managed to find interest in them without moving any more earth on the fairways than we did at Pacific Dunes, simply by building a good set of greens and bunkers.

We do understand how to move earth when the need arises, whether it's to add interest to a flat site or to soften a steep one. In fact, you have to be really good at moving earth to conceal what you've done, when the surrounding landscape is untouched. Any edge of disturbance, be it a clearing line or a major earthwork, is strenuously examined and finessed until it is blurred beyond recognition. This is the key to producing a new course that looks like it's been there for 75 years.

The greatest compliment we can receive is for someone to look at our work and say, "Well, they had a great site so they didn't really have to do very much, the course was laying there already." The truest test of ability is to make the work look easy.