

The Partnership

Alice Dye's input and influence went far beyond the forward tees.

It's difficult to design and build a great golf course on your own. Many of our famous designers owe a lot of their success to associates you've never heard of, but some of them gave public credit to their partners: C. B. Macdonald had Seth Raynor. Alister MacKenzie had Perry Maxwell in the eastern U.S., Robert Hunter in California, and Alex Russell in Melbourne. George C. Thomas had Billy Bell. And, in more recent times, Bill Coore has Ben Crenshaw, while Tom Weiskopf had Jay Morrish.

I may be biased, but the best partnership of all was one that everyone knows about but nobody thought of in the same way: Pete and Alice Dye.

Mrs. Dye passed away in February, at the age of 90. She was a full participant in Pete's design career from their very first course in 1959 until he couldn't build them anymore. Most of the tributes to her long and noteworthy life focused on three elements: the fact that Alice was a great player who won nine Indiana Amateur Championships and two U.S. Senior Women's Amateurs; that she was the first woman elected to the American Society of Golf Course Architects; and that her consistent advocacy on the need for more playable forward tees, starting in the 1980s, changed the thinking of most of her peers.

But aside from all that, I don't think many have understood how much Alice contributed to Pete's success. I was only on the job at Long Cove for a week or two when I heard one of the crew (their son P.B.'s roommate Steve Lucciola) say, "Nothing is finished until Miss Allie says it's okay."

There were lots of people on site who could express an opinion—six of us have designed courses on our own now—but Alice's opinion always meant the most to Pete. She was his sounding board over whether to make the course harder or gentler or whether he had it right, which is hard to keep in focus when you're in the midst of a construction project.

There would be a lot more great architects if only they had someone they could rely on for that hand on their shoulder telling them to ease off a bit.

Not many of those other partnerships I mentioned worked like Pete and Alice's, where the second person was a trusted opinion on the design of the course, rather than just the person in charge of getting it built. Certainly Ben Crenshaw has the same role with Bill Coore, but I don't think Seth Raynor would have dared to tell C.B. Macdonald he was making the greens too big!

Pete was always quick to remember the times when Alice suggested an important idea: He gave Alice credit for suggesting the board-faced bunker on the 13th at Harbour Town, and for recommending that the 17th at the TPC at Sawgrass be a full-on island green, instead of a peninsula as he'd started to build it.

So in some ways it does Mrs. Dye a disservice for everyone to comment only on her influence regarding the placement of forward tees. Yes, her leading role in that should always be acknowledged. But focusing on it too much makes it seem she stuck to commenting on designing for women, when she was concerned about the playability of the course for everyone. It was at her insistence that Pete almost never built a hole with a forced carry from the fairway to the green. That was essential to keeping Pete's designs at a level where the average golfer could enjoy them, even as they challenged the best players in the world. If you can't enjoy a Pete Dye course, you're just playing it from too far back.

Last but not least, Mrs. Dye helped run the business, keeping track of everything for Pete (who was likely to lose your phone number) and weighing in on whether she liked a potential client. If she hadn't bothered to answer my letters when I was in college, there's no way I would be doing what I'm doing today. And the same is true for many others in our business, including all of those who worked for me.

I was between 20 and 24 years old when I worked for Mr. and Mrs. Dye, and a bit naïve in understanding their relationship. When I was working on the plans for the Stadium Course at PGA West, they would come into the office for an hour or two before lunch and make their edits to one hole at a time, so I could finish that drawing while they went and played golf.

Not being one to know my place, on two consecutive days I disagreed with Alice about some feature or another, and on the second day she came around to agree with me. As they were going out the door to lunch, Pete excused himself for a minute and came back to say this to me:

"You are now one for two in arguments with my wife, which is the all-time record. But maybe you should quit while you're ahead."

And so I did. Mrs. Dye was usually right, anyway. ■