

Golf Architecture

A WORLDWIDE PERSPECTIVE

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Designing from the outside in

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Golf-course designers can be divided into two camps, which can be generally described as planners or builders.

The more commonly accepted method of design is plan-based, and that is how the profession is usually portrayed in the literature of the profession. The architect draws a complete set of plans for the course, and their design is transposed onto the ground by a team of construction professionals, using grade stakes to set grades for fairways and greens and bunkers.

Another way to describe this approach would be: from the inside out. Greens are designed by specifying certain areas for hole locations with specific gradients of, say, one or two per cent and a certain size; then a green is tied into the surrounds by placing enough fill to soften the transition from green to native ground.

This is not only the preferred form of the school-trained architect; the professional golfer-turned-designer tends to have the same approach, thinking first of how he/she wants the hole to play, and then reshaping the ground to fit those ideas.

Having trained under Pete Dye, I am firmly a member of the other school: the builder/architect approach. The builder thinks more as a sculptor would, refining the design with each pass of the cutting tool—in our case, a bulldozer or an excavator.

Instead of starting with a certain size or gradient of green in mind, we start with the natural slope of the land, and massage the contours until a portion is big enough and flat enough for hole locations. We keep reshaping until we've sculpted a green that works for play, and let the size and shape work themselves out. At every moment throughout the

process, the outside edges of the green are being worked out, so that they make natural transitions to the existing grade.

I suppose the same approach plays out in other aspects of the course as well: allowing the contours of the ground to determine the maximum length of a hole, instead of deciding on a set length and pushing up ground to make a tee at the right distance; or setting a bunker into a natural rise in the ground, instead of building a bunker at 270 yards from the back tee. But it seems to me that the construction of greens is where the two schools are most distinctly different. In both cases, form follows function. The plan-based green often sits on a little pedestal of fill, where it has to be surrounded with bunkers in order to disguise its artificial origins. The builder's green, by contrast, looks like it has been there all along.



OPPOSITE The sixth green at Cape Kidnappers, New Zealand, is one of the largest on the course, not only because it is the target of a long, dramatic par-3, but because it occupies a large space between a ridge on its right side and a precipitous drop toward Hawkes Bay on its left. (Photograph by Larry Lambrecht.)