


Goofy Golf

Today's course designers are changing the nature of the game by resorting to all kinds of gimmicks

by TOM DOAK
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Depending how you look at it, the item pictured below is either a fish out of water or, given that it's a bunker, a fish out of sand. But either way, this concoction from the new Aberdeen course in Boynton Beach, Florida, is noteworthy not because of its strange piscatorial shape, but because it's a good example of what's bad in modern golf course architecture.

A boom in course construction in recent years, combined with the inherent competition among designers and real estate developers, has made it downright rare to find a

course that hasn't resorted to some form of bizarre trickery, be it 20-foot-deep bunkers, huge boulders, mammoth mounds or vast beds of flowers.

Or take island greens—please. They're one of the hottest items in architecture ever since the island green Pete Dye built at the 17th hole at the TPC at Sawgrass garnered so much publicity as the centerpiece for the PGA Tour's controversial championship layout. Never mind that Dye didn't invent the concept: Previous attempts at the Ponte Vedra Club, also at Sawgrass, the Golden

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The new age of golf course design: Desmond Muirhead's outrageous fish-shaped bunker at Aberdeen in Florida.



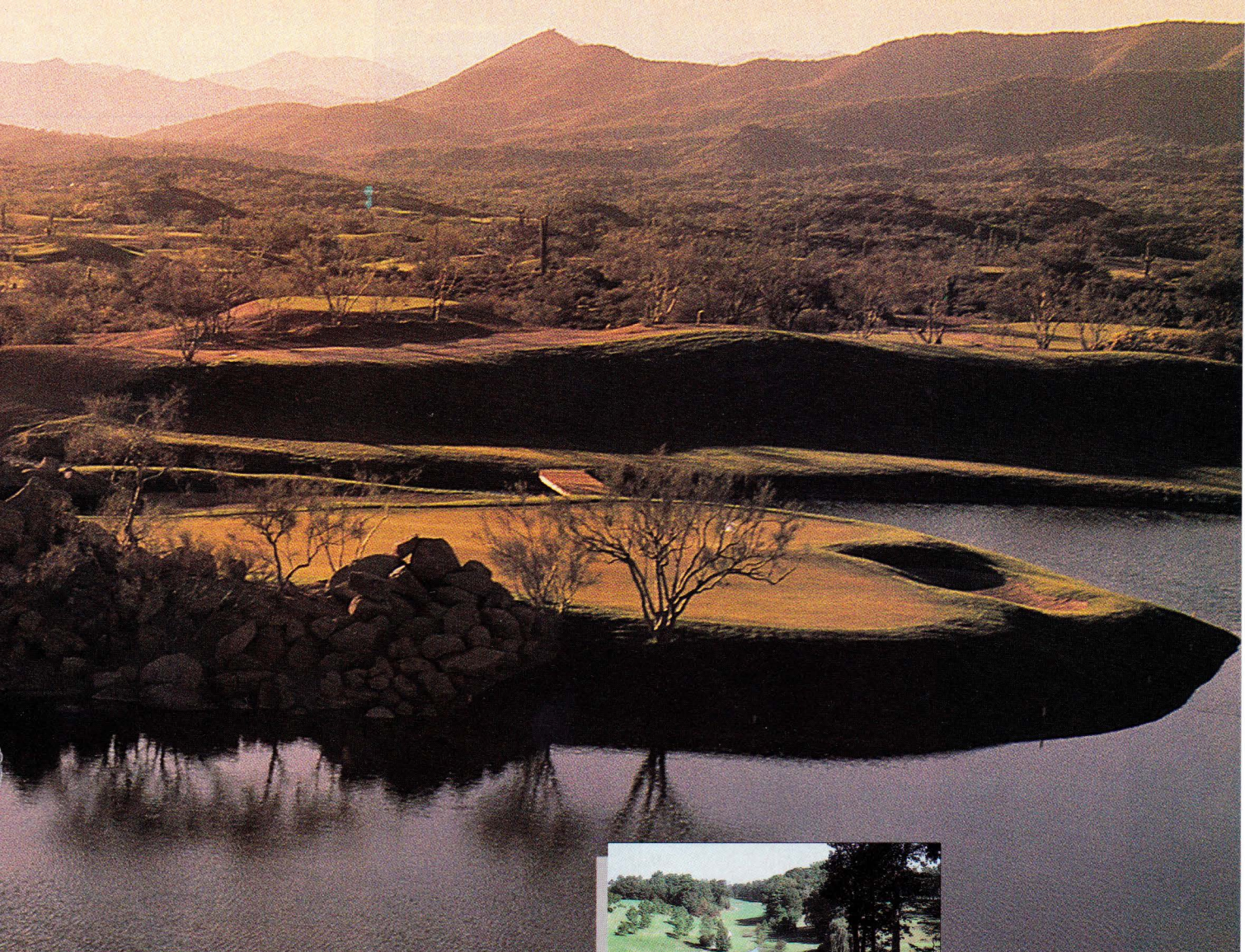
Horseshoe in Williamsburg, Virginia, and The Woodlands, in Houston, didn't catch on. But it was Dye's island that set off a wave of imitations. "About half of our clients ask for an island green or some other special feature," says Tom Pearson, the senior designer for Golden Bear, Inc., Jack Nicklaus' firm. There seems no end to the fad: Nicklaus' recently-completed Cochise course at Desert Mountain, outside Scottsdale, Arizona, features an island with a double green, while a developer up in Lake Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, is searching for an architect to build the first *floating* island green. Let's hope that baby sinks in dry dock.

Granted, golf course architects traditionally have had their own eccentricities. Going back to the turn of the century, Henry Fownes had his Church Pews bunker, a vast sandpit traversed by seven parallel grass ridges, at Oakmont, outside Pittsburgh. Charles Blair Macdonald dug a five-foot-deep swale across the ninth green at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, and George Thomas sunk a bunker in the middle of the sixth green at Riviera in Los Angeles. Even

the pond Donald Ross put on the 16th hole at Pinehurst No. 2 probably was considered daring.

But these were rare departures from a generally conservative style. Today, what were once occasional vices have become bad habits. Architects, hellbent on demonstrating "that inordinate thirst after novelty" that Macdonald decried, seem determined to throw in a double green, railroad ties or a waterfall on every hole.

Contrary to the claims of some architects, much of the gewgaws with which they adorn their courses weren't even part of golf in Macdonald's or Ross' day. Railroad ties on early Scottish courses were an occasional feature used to prevent a bunker face from blowing away; Pete Dye made them chic. Rock walls around ponds were once found only where rock was on hand; it's not uncommon today to truck rocks in from 100 miles away, as was the case at PGA West in Palm Desert, California, where they were stained red to fool golfers into thinking they were chiselled fresh from the nearby Santa Rosa Mountains. Waterfalls, first employed by Joe Lee at Bonaventure, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and popularized by



Nicklaus at The Hills of Lakeway in Austin, Texas, are created nowadays in areas with neither water nor a place for it to fall. One Ted Robinson layout in Palm Springs even has more waterfalls than holes.

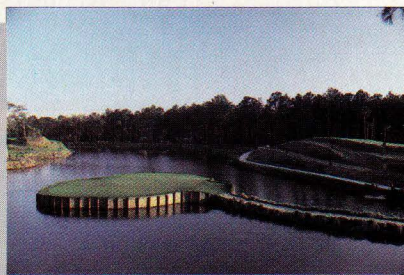
Free-standing boulders also are *de rigeur* these days, whether for 150-yard markers, such as at Boyne Mountain, Michigan, or as vast stone pom-poms atop mounds, such as those on the new Nicklaus Private Course at PGA West. Then there are the flowering plants that interfere with play, such as the pampas grass sprouting around Florida courses or the sprawling floral displays at Robert Trent Jones Jr.'s SentryWorld in Wisconsin.

Often the features of a hole are manipulated for some purpose other than originally intended. Double greens, for instance, evolved at St. Andrews in Scotland because the original outgoing and incoming holes had played to the same greens. They make no special contribution to shot values. But many architects, including Nicklaus, Bob Von Hagge and Bruce Devlin, and Jay Morrish and Tom Weiskopf, employ them because

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Jack Nicklaus double-dipped at his Cochise course in Desert Mountain, Arizona (above), combining a double green and an island green.

The island green is not new. Robert Trent Jones built one at The Golden Horseshoe in Williamsburg, Virginia (top left), in the 1960s. But when Pete Dye unveiled the 17th at Sawgrass (middle left) in Florida in 1980, the idea took off. Dye built another at PGA West in Palm Desert, California.