

GOLF ENTERPRISE

E U R O P E



Autumn Shows Preview

How to be a good client

November/December 1994

"Great Expectations"

The golf course architect, the client and the golf course.

Successful golf course architecture, like most forms of paid activity, depends, in the long run, on satisfying the client. The architect's clients vary greatly from project to project. They may be private individuals, golf clubs, local authorities, hoteliers, builders and developers and each may have very different objectives in mind. The real clients, however, are the golfers. So we should address ourselves to them by creating user friendly courses that encourage the weak and challenge the strong.

Over the last few years there has been a considerable increase in the number of courses built in Europe. This trend has brought with it several difficulties peculiar to this rapidly expanding, televised sport.

Many projects are being promoted by people who are unaware of the long term management implications of golf course developments and of low consumer tolerance of highly personalised schemes. Many developers, be they golf clubs, private individuals or public organisations, find themselves committed to horrendous projects, having made promises to their backers that are impossible to keep. Without consulting someone capable of giving advice based on successfully completed projects, or if having done so, ignoring it completely, it is small wonder that some appalling mistakes have been made which can affect all who are involved in golf.

It is frequently assumed by participants that the client is creating a new golf course project following extensive market research proving the economic viability of the scheme. More often than not the market research consists of a wet finger held aloft.

by **Jeremy Pern**

There are good clients and bad ones, the good ones listen, the bad ones don't. Team leaders with hearing problems (Hitler, King Canute etc.) generally end up relegated.

What is the course architect's role and how far should it extend into the non-design aspects of a golf course project? The conventional wisdom is that the designer is responsible for the course route plan, the feature design (greens, tees and bunkers), the specification preparation and construction supervision. The latter ranges from a permanent presence on site, to weekly or monthly visits, or to a simple invitation to opening day; depending on the fees, commitment and/or professionalism of the architect. Providing the client has a professional team of specialists around him then the architect can stick to that conventional role. (For specialists read: market researchers, bankers, surveyors, greenkeepers, contractors, golf pros, hydrologists, agronomists, accountants, lawyers, management specialists, clubhouse architects, interior designers, landscape architects,

consulting engineers, planning consultants, marketing and advertising consultants, salesmen, hotel and catering consultants).

Usually it's just you and him – full stop.

The reputation of an architect is based on the number of successful projects he has participated in and the quality of those courses. However a successful project should not be confused with the quality of the course. There are many very well known clubs that are, from the design viewpoint, less than satisfactory but they have a reputation for other things which largely makes up for any conceptual or technical fault. Equally, many well designed courses can be found on unsuccessful projects.

The modern course architect may have to play a much wider role in his projects if he wants them to be really successful.

A well designed and constructed golf course that is poorly maintained, due to lack of funds caused by over-optimistic financial provisions, will soon become unplayable and then bankrupt – an unsuccessful project.

Experienced architects will be able to give the client advice on aspects of project development in order to avoid many of the pitfalls. This is not to say that the designer should turn himself into a jack of all trades but that he should give to his client the benefit of his experience for the good of the course and the long term satisfaction of the golfers.

The architect is generally in a position to be heard, unlike many of the other essential participants in this period up to opening; the contractors, golfers, greenkeeping staff and so on.

Golfers are more and more familiar with the architects' names. This is a natural extension of the American marketing strategy used by golf course real estate promoters to sell their housing by the incorporation of a 'name' as an 'associate designer' or 'course design consultant'. In the same way the private golf club is every bit as keen to sell its shares to members or the local authority to ensure credibility for its grant applications. The use of an architect with a track record of successful projects goes a very long way to reassure investors, viz: merchant banks or other funding bodies or indeed golfers themselves. Clearly then, the architect must be prepared to involve himself at a very early stage in the project if only to reassure himself that it is on a sound footing and that his client has the funds necessary to build, maintain and exploit his project successfully.

So much for the theory. The reality is rather different. The quality of a new golf course depends on three main factors:



18th green, Dartmouth Park Golf Club.

