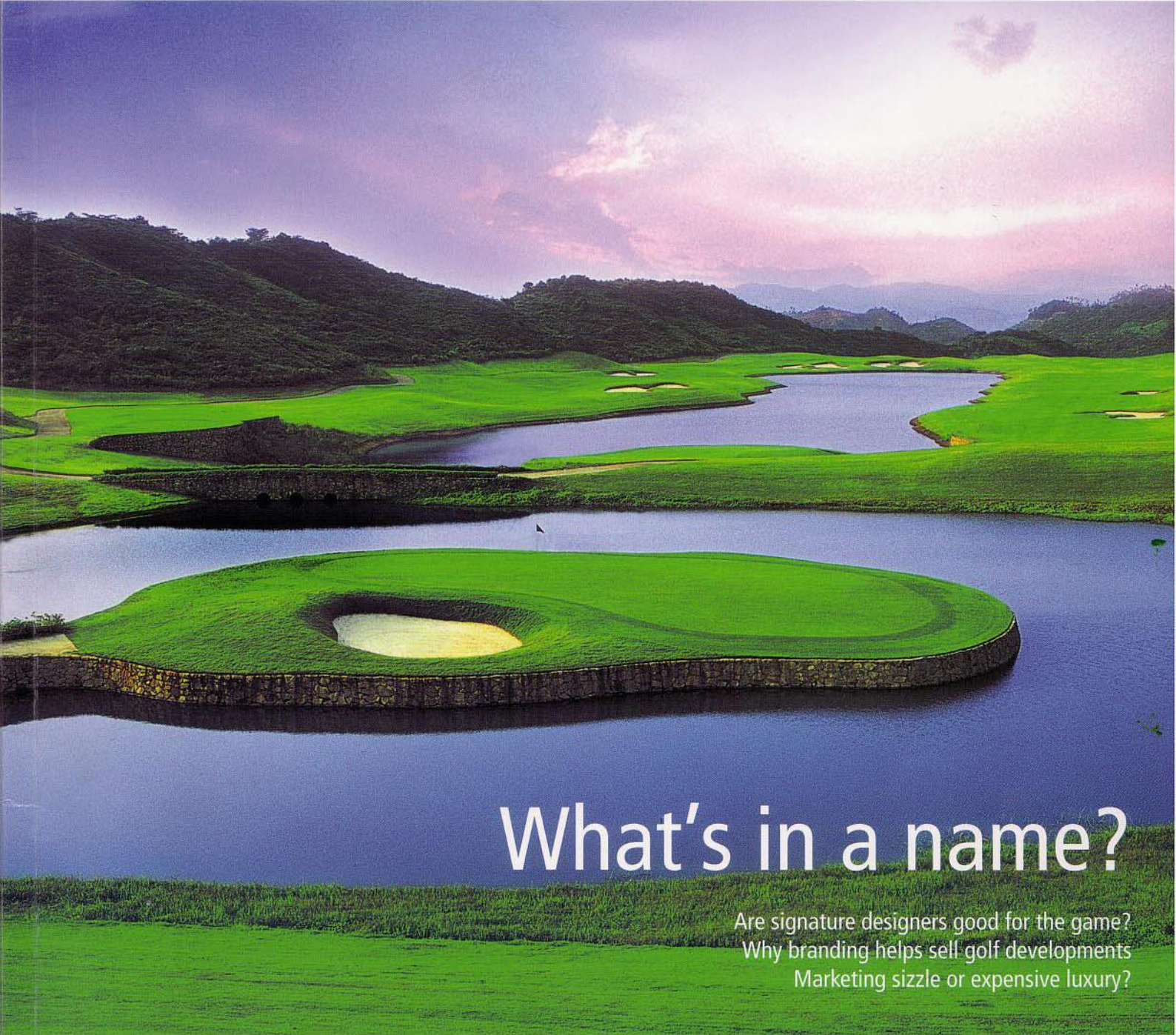




GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTURE

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF GOLF COURSE DESIGN AND MODIFICATION

April 2006
9 771745 358008
www.golfcoursearchitecture.net
£4.95
0.1



What's in a name?

Are signature designers good for the game?
Why branding helps sell golf developments
Marketing sizzle or expensive luxury?



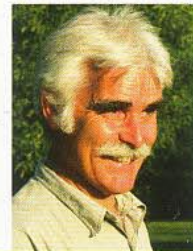
The pioneer
Jeff Mingay profiles
Canada's best-known
architect, Stanley Thompson
Page 24



Askernish
We follow Old Tom's
footsteps in the Outer
Hebrides of Scotland
Page 56



Kyle Phillips
Kingsbarns architect
chats to *GCA* about his
courses and his style
Page 48



Assessing architectural excellence

Entry into a ranking system is becoming the primary objective of golf course design. Jeremy Pern considers how the quest for the 'wow' factor is affecting design principles

The *Golf Digest* 100 Greatest Courses lists (GDG100) rank the stars of the golf course world. Anybody involved with a course ranked in a GDG100 or similar list will want to squeeze every drop of kudos out of it. Entry into a ranking system can be the primary objective of a developer who believes that economic success may depend upon it, or of a billionaire with a mission to prove that his star shines brighter than all the others.

His choice of architect will be influenced by his desire to be ranked, and the design of the course will in turn be affected by the architect's obligation to conform to the client's directives, in addition to gaining his own ranking. Where a primary function of a course's design is inclusion in a ranking system, its form will be obliged to follow the norms of that system.

There are two types of ranking, both of which position golf course architecture as the primary factor determining course quality. Assorted GDG100 rankings typify the Anglo Saxon model of establishing the rank of an individual course in relation to others, creating an unambiguous hierarchy.

In creating its *Guide to Europe's Top 1,000 Golf Courses*, Peugeot followed a similar method to Michelin's star-based assessment of restaurants. By awarding each of the 1,000 courses marks out of 20, Peugeot effectively divided them into seven categories called 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19.

Intellectually, there is little to choose between relativistic hierarchies and rated categories. But from a designer's point of view the difference can be significant. Although they give virtually the same results from similar evaluation processes, as any school child will tell you, there is a difference between being awarded a mark and being given a number in a list.

To have a course included in the GDG100 or marked 18 or 19 by Peugeot is the dream of any course architect. But judges tend to look favourably on courses designed by architects whose work is already ranked, so there are few slots available. Like Oscar winners, once you've got one, your Oscar nominations will dramatically increase.

Developers will never say: "I want this

course to be number 53 in a GDG100 list." But they may well express their desire to enter a category, for example, a Peugeot 16+ golf course. This type of conversation sends designers scurrying off to scrutinise just exactly what makes a "top" or "greatest" golf course. The terms are virtually interchangeable, and criteria for assessment are also similar, although the quality of the assessors, frequency of assessments and consistency of judgement vary widely.

Golf Digest assesses its "greatest" courses through a system that marks them out of ten for ambience, resistance to scoring, design variety, memorability, aesthetics and conditioning. Bonus walking gets a score out of two. Shot value is marked out of ten, but this counts as double in the grand total.

Jargon irritates me beyond measure, and I have tried for years to find a definition of "shot values". Qualified professionals have been unable to provide a concise answer. Glossaries, indexes and lexicons do not include the term, and Google's suggestions refer to firearms and ammunition. Ron Whitten told me *Golf Digest* shot value evaluations are based on the answer to this question: "How well do the holes present a variety of risks and rewards, and test accuracy, length and finesse without overemphasising any one skill over the other two?" So now I know.

As far as new golf course developments are concerned, the owner is the most influential person on the project. He selects the architect, who rarely decides on purchase or selection of the land, site or location of the project. The owner apportions the construction budget, decides on the clubhouse appearance, interviews and appoints staff, establishes the operational budgets, and controls the maintenance of the course.

The golf course architect has total remit over shot values, resistance to scoring and design variety. However, aesthetics and memorability may depend on what lies beyond the fence. Over time, the architect holds virtually no sway over ambience or conditioning.

So, how might a rating system affect the choices made by the owner and architect? There are the non-design choices such as location, outside views, the site itself,

construction and marketing budgets, versus design choices such as length, par, "wow" factor, resistance to scoring, design variety and shot values.

An expensive and long course has no guarantee of gaining ranking. But without expenditure or length, there is very little chance of it being considered. The GDG100 US list has 60 courses over 7,000 yards long, and only 17 courses under 6,800 yards. Rich Harvest Links, the longest at 7,601 yards was designed by and named after its billionaire owner. The story is the same in Europe – ten of the 11 newest entries rated 17 and 18 in the 2006-7 *Peugeot Golf Guide* were over 7,000 yards long.

Rankings of "great" and "top" courses are therefore length related. If you want to design a great, top course, the longer the better.

According to *Golf Digest*, Tom Fazio, who has 14 courses in the US GDG100, spent \$37m to build Shadow Creek 15 years ago, and \$30m for Dallas National. Jim Fazio ate up \$35m on the Trump International in Florida. I would guess that, in terms of genuine construction costs, very few of the GDG100 courses built since 1990 cost under \$10m. The same applies to the top rated Peugeot Courses.

"Wow" factors are fashion items that change over time – inevitably, last year's "wow" becomes this year's yawn. Cascades of Disney-style concrete rocks, wall-to-wall watered desert vistas and instant mature forests have become passé. The recent minimalism of vast earthmoving projects on the seashores of the Pacific Rim and the North Sea has "wow" in spades, relying largely on the backdrop beyond. "Wow" – as hugely expensive "naturalism" – is no longer designer driven.

Cost and size have become values in themselves, but given today's environmental pressures, more and bigger is rarely better – it's usually worse. Qualities such as minimum environmental impact, cost effective construction, value for money, imagination, originality and golfer enjoyment could be added to existing design evaluation criteria, ensuring that design excellence is no longer defined by factors beyond the control of the architects. **GCA**