

The best resort

Unlike a typical members club with a base of regular customers, resort golf courses cater primarily for occasional visitors. Does this necessitate a different approach to design? Toby Ingleton spoke with ASGCA members to find out.

What exactly do we mean when we use the term 'resort course'? Yes, it's a golf course located at a resort. But we're usually inferring something else: a golf experience that is appropriate for those in vacation mode.

And by that, read 'easy.' After all, if your days are spent lounging by the pool, why would you want anything other than pure relaxation on the golf course?

But that's not how golf course architects think.

"We reject the notion that a resort course has to be gentler or 'dumbed down,'" says Chad Goetz, ASGCA, a

design associate at Nicklaus Design.

"While no one wants to get beat up on the course on vacation, the golf needs to be interesting, strategic and fun.

"What golfer would want to return to a resort where the golf was watered down or boring? Therefore, like all of our work, we strive to incorporate good variety, shot values and interest."

Brandon Johnson, ASGCA Associate, of Arnold Palmer Design Company, agrees. "Players today are much more sophisticated, interested in and appreciative of fun, creative and inspiring architecture, independent of whether it's a resort, private club or public access setting," he says.



Photo: Joann Dost

The dramatic seventeenth hole at TPC Danzante Bay in Loreto, Mexico



“While resort courses may typically get one-time visitors, should that be a determining design factor?”

“No owner or architect in their right mind would change the complexity, quirks and nuances of the Old course at St Andrews that make it an iconic piece of architecture, because the majority of its players only get a once-in-a-lifetime chance to play it.

“In fact, it’s just the opposite. All those rarely-experienced mind-warping features are the reason people flock from all over the globe for their one opportunity to experience such a design.”

Johnson says that exceptional architecture is universal. “It can and should exist in the various operational models such as resorts, private clubs, public and/or municipal facilities. Our design decisions will always be in response to the site, incorporating unique features to create a golf course that

is in context with its surrounding environment while focusing on features, strategies and choices that excite, engage and intrigue players. We hope this is the type of experience that will convert the one-time guest or occasional customer into a recurring one.”

private club or daily fee course that caters to an established local base in a specific area. That wider appeal places a premium on memorability and the intangible fun factor.”

“If golf is an integral part of the resort’s amenities, we feel the golf needs to stand out and be a true

“// The golf needs to stand out and be a true attraction in order to lure people to travel there

Making memories

While there are universal principles that apply to every golf course design, some are more pronounced when laying out a resort golf course.

“The core tenets of design are the same,” says Nathan Crace, ASGCA. “But some facets of a resort course require a different approach than a

attraction in order to lure people to travel there,” says Goetz. “Golfers are willing to spend a lot of money to play golf courses all over the world, but to go through the expense of traveling long distances, they expect a quality experience and not something ordinary. Resort golf should be an experience, not simply



Photos: West Cliffs

At the new West Cliffs course in Portugal, Cynthia Dye McGarey, ASGCA, provided tees that allow golfers of all abilities to enjoy the experience

another activity to check off the list during the trip.”

“The goal with a resort golf design is to strike a balance between the thoughts ‘I need to go there’ versus ‘I want to come back’, both of which are exceedingly important,” says Forrest Richardson, ASGCA.

“Fun is essential,” he says. “If there is one thing I have learned from my resort clients, it’s that room nights are paramount to everything else. We want people to extend their stay, go home and talk it up to their friends, and come back next season.”

A fun challenge

“People come to resorts for relaxation and to unwind. The last thing we need is a knock-down, drag-out course that causes them to cancel their tee time the following day,” says Richardson. “Let the course appear intimidating but provide a solution to get to the green that is fun—not just penal.”

“While a person on vacation at a resort does not want to get beat up all day on the golf course, the challenge should be fun, beautiful and inspiring,” says Johnson.

“‘Meaningful width’ is a phrase we use often on site and in the office. The ideal lines unlock different advantages while errant shots or conservative plays aren’t overly penalized but rather provide an opportunity to recover from less-than-ideal positions or angles by using slopes, a clever imagination or the well-executed shot.

“If every tee shot or approach went unchallenged or was without strategic purpose, while extremely playable to some, interest levels would plummet. So, variety across the board is key. The endless combinations of fairway widths, degree of challenge, severity of hazards, the plethora of decisions to make, the variety of different shots required, sizes and placement of features or even the contrast of flat

PROJECT PROFILE

FLC Quang Binh Dong Hoi, Vietnam



Photos: Brian Curley

Brian Curley, ASGCA, has completed the first two courses at the FLC Quang Binh development on the coast of the East Vietnam Sea, on a site that is entirely white sand.

“I have described it as Pine Valley by the beach,” says Curley. “The project has six kilometres of coastline and the main interior dunes rise up to 40 meters tall.

“The first course promises to be the most natural in Vietnam, and maybe all of Asia.”

“The desire is to create a playground of golf course design variety that offers golfers a different experience from day to day and makes the entire project a true golf destination that stirs the soul of the avid golfer who must normally tour the world for all these different experiences. Here, you get that all,” he says.

Read more about this project in the July 2018 issue of Golf Course Architecture magazine.



Photo: Jim Mandeville/Nicklaus Design

Nicklaus Design seeks to embrace the natural surroundings, like the rugged coastline of the Cabo Del Sol Ocean Course in Mexico, in its resort designs

surfaces to highly contoured ones will make a resort course fun, memorable and worth spending one's hard-earned cash to play."

Different priorities

"The emphasis does tend to change when looking at courses played mainly by the resort golfer," says Steve Weisser, ASGCA, of Rees Jones, Inc.

"Our recently completed TPC Danzante Bay course in Loreto, Mexico, is a good example. Desert golf, due to the limited amount of turf, can be inherently difficult for infrequent golfers. At Danzante Bay, we were encouraged to design a course that was different from others in the Baja—one that was dramatic but not overly penal.

"We were fortunate to be given free rein to choose the land that best suited the holes topographically. Because of this, we were able to create angles that were challenging from the back tees while nearly eliminating forced carries as the tees move forward. Additionally, the turf areas are wide, particularly in landing zones.

"Each tee shot has turf bail-out areas on the high sides of holes where the ground contours create natural containment and turf swales with

pockets on the low side. By doing so, we feel the resort golfer will encounter a course that offers variety and playability which gives each player a one-of-a kind experience through the course's dramatic landscapes. Each player will enjoy what they find initially and will want to play the course again to discover the options that present themselves with each round."

Cynthia Dye McGarey, ASGCA, of Dye Designs, adopted a similar approach at West Cliffs in Portugal, where environmental restrictions limited the turf area that could be used. This emphasized the importance of tee placement.

"For resort play I like a lot of teeing options," she says. "At West Cliffs the tees are designated by handicap. If players tee off from the appropriate tee they have a good experience. Also, since this is a coastal golf course it is important that it is flexible."

Dye McGarey also made intelligent use of angled fairways to provide width where it was needed. "I like landing areas wide," she says. "I prefer no blind shots on a resort course." The result is a golf experience that makes the most of its spectacular setting, and isn't quite as difficult as it looks.

PROJECT PROFILE

SilverRock Resort La Quinta, California

Arnold Palmer Design Company recently made changes to PGA Tour host course SilverRock Resort in La Quinta, California. The fourteenth, originally a long demanding par four nestled against a penal canal, was converted into a reachable par five to help make room for the resort hotel. Brandon Johnson, ASGCA Associate, says: "We shifted and realigned the green to allow for more width on the second shot and help reduce the penal nature and influence of the adjacent canal.

This allowed for the combination of pin location, contour and width to profoundly influence the second shot decision-making process while serving double duty to make the hole more strategic and receptive for players." On the eleventh, the team sited the new green to take advantage of a helping side slope to the green and a pre-existing water feature. Johnson says: "A carry over water is balanced by ample room short and to the right with the grand reward of helping contours that funnel shots played off right bank down towards green."



The eleventh (top) and fourteenth holes at SilverRock Resort

Photos: Arnold Palmer Design Company — Brandon Johnson

PROJECT PROFILE

The Refuge Flowood, Mississippi

Not all resort golf courses begin life as resort courses. Nathan Crace, ASGCA, is redesigning The Refuge in Flowood, Mississippi, following the decision to construct a \$50 million resort hotel/conference center adjacent to the course. “To give the course a resort feel, we’re widening playing corridors and adding tees to stretch the course, in addition to new TifEagle greens and bunkers, tees, irrigation and cart paths. The course will be more inviting by eliminating hidden water hazards and framing holes better and will play from 4,500 to 7,045 yards, with three new holes to create returning nines and give the option to play five, nine or 18 holes.”



Nathan Crace, ASGCA, is improving playability at The Refuge, as can be seen on the par-four sixteenth hole, before (top) and during renovation work



Photo: Aidan Bradley

The rolling hills of Monte Rei in Portugal

Know your market

“Like all of our projects, we start by closely listening to the client’s vision and trying to understand the market,” says Goetz. “Our design approach must then be tailored to meet those needs.

“For example, in a more mature market like Hawaii, we might propose a different type of golf experience unique to the island or area. In newer markets like Vietnam, Turkmenistan, Albania or Romania we might design the course and other facilities to help introduce the game of golf to the country and local travelers.”

skill level and the appetite to flirt with the interior hazards.”

“Golfers playing resort courses may be visiting from across the country or internationally and will have varying degrees of skill,” says Crace. “Additionally, they may only get to play the course once so the key is to make the course feel familiar from the start. We’ve all played courses for the first time then thought ‘If I played again tomorrow, I could shave five strokes off my score.’

“Therefore, it’s important that a resort course provides proper visual cues on each tee to show how a hole is

“It’s important that a resort course provides proper visual cues on each tee to show how a hole is played

“We may work a little harder to limit forced carries and lost ball opportunities. In one of our more recent resort designs at Banyan Cay Resort and Golf in West Palm Beach, Florida, wider fairways with bunkering and other hazards within them were used where the resort golfer has a lot of room to hit the ball and find it. In a situation like this, the real fun and challenge are found in choosing the proper line based on

played (and not played). I want each hole to welcome players—not repel them—with generous landing areas for conservative tee shots and layups, but make better players think a little by using angles and depth perception and thinking their way around. Greens are more generous, and I tend to lean toward the wider section of players, so it plays easier than it looks, and golfers walk off the last hole wanting to come back for more.”

The par-five thirteenth at Arizona Grand Resort. "In resort golf it is essential to create those wonderful photos that have the ingredients of beauty, uniqueness and wow," says Forrest Richardson, ASGCA



Photo: Lonna Tucker, courtesy of Forrest Richardson & Associates

"Most resort courses today need play from local golfers," adds Richardson. "The smart resort course design takes into account the financial equation, making sure we are creating a golf course that will appeal to the golfers that will need to fill the tee sheet, and in some cases, this is not just the guest staying in a suite overlooking the course."

The wow factor

The value of a hole like the par three seventeenth at TPC Danzante Bay (pictured on this issue's cover) can't be underestimated, says Weisser. "When we, along with developer Owen Perry, found the location to create the seventeenth hole we knew it would become the calling card for the resort. We don't believe in designing a course around a single hole and the design of the course

didn't evolve that way. Our goal from the beginning was to create a destination course that suited the resort's guests. The course has a fascinating and diverse set of holes, but it is the drama of the seventeenth that motivates golfers to decide that TPC Danzante Bay is a 'must play.'"

"From a visual standpoint, we want to make extra sure that the course is beautiful," says Goetz. "That means embracing the natural surroundings and accenting them where possible. Incorporating natural features, such as the lava flows at Hualalai Golf Club in Hawaii, the rugged coastline of Cabo del Sol in Mexico or the beautiful rolling hills of the Algarve at Monte Rei in Portugal, is critical in creating a sense of place, identity and beauty."

"We never want to create a golf course people play once and then never come back," says Richardson.

"But in resort golf it is essential to create those wonderful photos that have the ingredients of beauty, uniqueness and wow. If you fail at creating that, the marketing team will hate you forever.

"At Arizona Grand Resort, which was among my first projects, the site of the par-five thirteenth was special in so many ways. Everyone imagined the tee shot from an elevated point, and I will admit you got a great view from there. During one of many hikes around the routing I began to look at it backwards, and that's when the realization came that the drama was even better looking toward the mountains, and to an elevated green guarded by natural bunkers etched into the hillside. Drama is essential in resort golf—you need that shot that places the golfer in the game well before they check in to their room." ●