



from **the designer's desk**

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fiddling with great architecture

Musicians riff on standard tunes, transforming them into something both recognizable and new. Golf courses, too, can be fiddled with, most notably to prepare them for the most important championships, such as the US Open at Oakmont or the British Open at Carnoustie. Deepened bunkers, bolstered rough, and lengthened tees are the typical leitmotifs of these modified courses. If the weather is calm, players will regard these alterations as fair, but in wet and windy conditions the riffs may seem dissonant, with the underlying melody lost.

It is all a matter of attitude. These courses play very long (7,500 yards from the back tees in the case of Oakmont), in order to challenge the modern player. The deepened bunkers are penal, and the fast, deeply contoured greens can intimidate the best players of the game. Fiddling on the wonderful old courses from the so-called "Golden Era" of golf course architecture - that is, the 1920s - hasn't always produced harmonious results. Stanley Thompson's Canadian courses, for example, lost much of the flamboyant shaping that earmarked his style and influenced my father, who worked with and for Thompson in the 1930s, when the golf business was in decline and the number of courses actually shrunk.

Courses from other eras have also endured the effects of fiddling, whether by thoughtful and deliberate riffing or from ignorance and neglect. Rather than keeping to the essential harmonic elements, too often the fiddlers have eliminated the very features that provided strategy to the courses and conferred an aesthetic dimension on them. The average member wants to play a course he enjoys and can play every day, and doesn't care about total length. He wants strategic choices: hit a good shot and you're rewarded, duff it and you're punished. He wants a course where chipping and putting are important, since players of all ages can compete equally around the greens. Multiple tees are another equalizer. Prominent professional golfers these days often enter the design business, but more in the manner of an "as-told-to" autobiography-the ghost written version of golf design. There may be a hidden cost to this approach, given that players tend to "design" long courses according to a strategic approach that suits their own games, not that of the average player.

The best classic golf courses lie lightly on the land, using the features the designers "found". They emphasize strategy more than the brute challenge of a forced carry, and provide variety in length, orientation, and appeal. On a classic course, every golfer gets to improvise according to his own game. ■

architecture et musique

Les musiciens reprennent des airs connus pour leur donner un goût nouveau. Il en va de même avec le golf, surtout quand il accueille un tournoi majeur. Bunkers plus profonds, rough renforcé, greens de glace, parcours allongés sont typiques. S'il fait beau, pas de plainte. Dans le cas contraire, la ligne mélodique est perdue.

Jouer ainsi avec un grand vieux parcours ne produit pas toujours de résultats harmonieux. Au lieu de garder l'essentiel, le "compositeur" a rayé les notes qui lui conféraient esthétique et stratégie quand le golfeur lambda veut un parcours-plaisir et voir de bons coups récompensés, de mauvais punis. Un parcours où chips et putts sont importants, parce que les golfeurs sont plus ou moins égaux près des greens.

Le bon parcours classique repose sur un terrain dont l'architecte a gardé les caractéristiques naturelles (longueur, orientation, beauté) pour mettre en avant une stratégie plutôt que des artifices. Sur ces parcours-là, le golfeur peut alors improviser à l'envi.

