



Speaker profile Tom Doak

Every great golf architect has taken the time to study the great links of the British Isles, upon which the game evolved. Thanks to a scholarship from Cornell University, I got to live on the links -- caddying at St. Andrews the summer after my graduation, then spending the next seven months playing and studying every course of note.

In that year abroad, I discovered a challenging, natural outdoor sport played by all ages, on exciting courses which had cost nothing to build and which were affordable for all to play. Ever since, I've felt a responsibility to build courses that reflect the ideals of the game as the Scots still play it.

My ideas on design are shaped by having seen nearly every great course in the world -- more than 1,000 in all. It still fascinates me how different good courses can be from one another. Sometimes a stretch of ground will remind me of a golf hole I saw in Britain twenty years ago, but the best designs of all are organic, evolving from the subtleties of the ground they inhabit. The chance to create an interesting golf hole which is a bit different than anything I've seen before is what makes all the travel worthwhile.

I spent three years working on construction projects for Pete Dye and his sons, learning how golf courses are built at the highest level. Along the way I discovered that I love the work, too -- being out in the field, refining design ideas while the course is coming together. My first solo design opportunity came at the age of 26, and I haven't looked back; we continue to improve at the craft of building golf courses.

I've been called a lot more names than most golf course architects: iconoclastic, cerebral, a traditionalist, and a radical. I love to be considered a radical, but it's ironic that we're also trusted consultants to some of the most conservative golf clubs in America. Most of all, I've been labeled as *controversial*. But so, too, were my heroes in the business, Alister MacKenzie and Pete Dye.

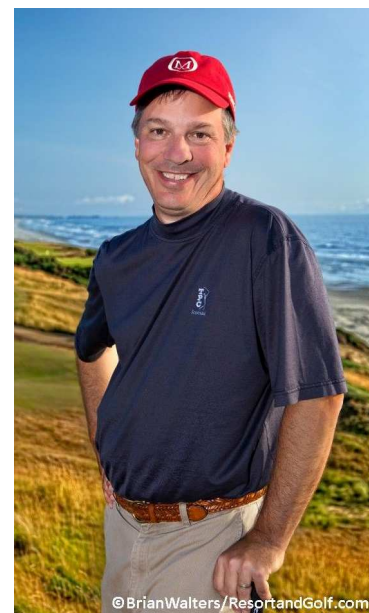
Today, our design commissions give us the chance to lead by example. And I'm excited to finally be getting the opportunity to show what I've learned.

Lessons from my Mentors

Back when I started learning about golf architecture, the profession wasn't nearly as visible as it was (past tense makes no sense here) today, and there weren't many other students my age. As a result, the people with an interest in the subject went out of their way to help me. It's still hard for me to believe I had this much help before I was 22.

When I was in design school at Cornell, the curriculum was Landscape Architecture; mostly, it was up to me to figure out how to apply it to golf course design. Probably the best lesson I had was from my faculty advisor, Tom Johnson, who taught me that sometimes it is easier to make a good design solution by thinking in negative space. Most designers imagine a golf hole is all rough, and only put the fairway where they want the golfer to go; I imagine a golf hole is all fairway, and just put bunkers and rough where they will make it more interesting.

I owe whatever I have achieved in the business to Pete and Alice Dye. The opportunity they gave me to participate in the construction of great golf courses was my graduate school in golf design, and the most important thing I learned was that outstanding courses were the product of hard work and a talented crew, and not just good ideas. That first summer I worked at Long Cove, Pete was reminiscing about building Harbour Town, and he told me that up until then his main influence had been Robert Trent Jones. Mr. Jones was building Palmetto Dunes just down the road, and the more



Pete looked at it, the more he realized that golf needed something different. I still admire Pete's work, but I'm trying to do something different, too.

I took to heart P.B. Dye's advice to learn how to run a bulldozer. It taught me to think in three dimensions -- so today I can figure out what sort of design can be built easily with the material available at any given green site, and then explain to the shapers how to build what I want.

At almost the same time I went to work for the Dyes, I got to know Ben Crenshaw, who was already establishing himself as a fan of classic architecture. Today, I'm a great admirer of his design work, too. Of all the design topics we've talked about, the one that has stuck in my memory was his advice about giving people room to play. Ben grew up on the windy plains of Texas, and believes devoutly that courses should be designed to remain playable no matter how the wind is you do that, he said, you'll also give the bogey golfer all the room he needs to get around without quitting the game. In the windy environment of the British Isles, Ben's lesson made perfect sense.

Much of what I know about course maintenance came from the links manager of St. Andrews, Walter Woods. On my first day in Scotland, he took me out to look at the mixture of fescue and bentgrass and poa annua which made up the second green of The Old Course, and I told Walter that the average American would probably complain that it wasn't uniform. He replied that a good player would see the difference, and allow for it. In a nutshell, that's the Scots attitude toward any obstacle on a golf course. Wherever I've traveled, I've been fortunate to meet people who truly love the game of golf, and who taught me to respect the nature of the game above all else.