

FROM THE ARCHITECT'S DESK



SHORT BUT SWEET

We hear a lot these days about how golf courses are struggling. In fact, some courses are struggling but some courses are actually doing quite well. Whether a private club or a public golf course, more often than not, the courses that are doing well are the courses that have figured out what their customers want. Forced carries, holes with poorly positioned tees and courses that have let playing conditions slip are generally the ones that are struggling to attract customers. Courses that are fun and appeal to the average golfer are more often not, the ones that are most popular and most successful. One of our challenges as golf architects is to figure out how to design courses that will appeal to the avid golfer and the occasional golfer.

Short Courses. I'm concerned that many in the golf industry have put too much emphasis on building golf courses that are too long and too difficult for the average golfer to enjoy. We've conducted a number of surveys at clubs around the

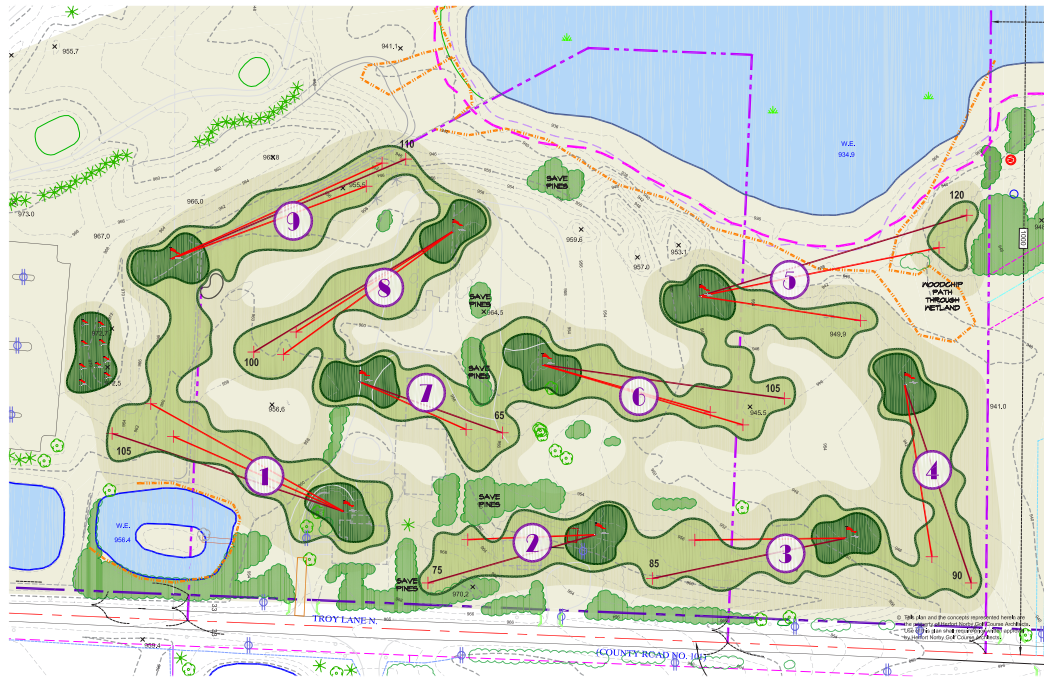
country and, almost without exception, our survey shows that on average men prefer to play a course that is about 6,100 yards and women prefer to play a course at about 4,900 yards. It seems to me that there is too much emphasis on length and not enough emphasis on accuracy. We only need so many 7,000-yard courses. So, what's interesting to me is that nobody seems to be interested in building shorter courses; par three, executive or short-regulation courses. Some of the most popular and most successful courses are shorter courses. In 2011, we completed construction of a new 9-hole par three course at Rush Creek in Maple Grove. The holes range from 65 to 120 yards with bentgrass greens, fescue roughs and white sand bunkers. Because Rush Creek already had a championship length golf course, our goal was to get more kids and families involved in the game by giving them an opportunity to experience golf before moving up to a more intimidating full-length course.

Short Holes. I wrote last month that some of my favorite golf holes are the short drivable par fours. Whenever possible, I like to include one short hole on each course routing. The reason is, like the par threes, the short par four rewards accuracy and takes the advantage away from the big hitter. These short golf holes are holes that anyone can enjoy and yet, if done right, they provide the challenge that the better golfer is looking for. Hole No. 10 at Riviera Country Club is widely regarded as one of the best golf holes in the world. At 315 yards it's a diabolical test of skill and accuracy. The green is surrounded by bunkers on the back and right, is very narrow and slopes severely from right to left. If you chose to go for the green, you need to land and hold the green or miss left to have a chance of scoring. Anything in the bunkers right is pretty much dead. If you choose to lay-up, the ideal drive is short and left to have the best chance of holding the green on your approach. It's a great hole that forces you to stand on the tee, make a decision and to then execute a precise shot to have a chance at birdie.



9-HOLE SHORT COURSE

SCORECARD			
HOLE	PAR	LONG	SHORT
1	3	105	80
2	3	75	55
3	3	85	65
4	3	90	75
5	3	120	70
6	3	105	75
7	3	65	50
8	3	100	80
9	3	110	90
OUT	27	855	640



Other short par fours I like here in Minnesota include No. 3 at the Chaska Town Course, No. 14 at Hazeltine National and No. 14 at Greystone in Sauk Centre. The first time I played No. 3 at Chaska, quite honestly, I didn't like it. I thought the big oak in the middle of the fairway was quirky. But now, the more I play it, the more I like it. Again, it's a fun hole that probably gives up as many birdies as it does double-bogeys. It forces you to stand on the tee and chose between playing right but having to carry the greenside bunkers on the approach, going left and trying to shoot the gap on your approach, laying up and pitching it down the hill and under the tree, or hitting driver and risking the greenside bunkers or the water behind the green. It's a great golf hole that frustrates a lot of golfers.

At Greystone, the par four 14th plays from 343 to 265 yards. The hole plays slightly downhill but is guarded by two large bunkers at the green and three small pot bunkers on the right about 60 yards from the green. At all cost, you want to avoid the fairway bunkers. Those are deep and leave a long recovery shot to the green. The green has a lot of slope back to front, so if your drive misses the green right, left or long, there is a good chance you'll have difficulty getting near the cup. The best strategy is to place your tee shot short of the greenside bunkers and leave a short chip to the pin. However, standing on the tee, it's tempting to simply pull driver and go for the green, particularly when the wind is helping.

CONCEPT PLAN



SHEET
1

SHORT BUT SWEET



Greystone Golf Club # 14



Chaska Town Course #3 Photo Courtesy Peter Wong Photography

Golf is a game steep in tradition. However, the golf boom of the 1990s and changes in equipment technology have changed the way we play the game and, in my opinion, have put too much emphasis on length. The USGA has announced a program called “Tee It Forward” which essentially advocates having more fun playing golf by playing shorter courses and shorter yardages. Good golf courses and good golf holes that require us to think our way around the course can be fun for both the low handicap golfer and the beginner. Don’t be afraid to move up and play a course that you can enjoy and don’t be afraid to play some shorter courses.

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To read more articles on golf course design, visit his website at www.herfortnorby.com.

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