

Old Town

Winston-Salem, North Carolina, U.S.A.

For the sustained period of roughly 1950 to 1995, the discussion of golf course architecture ranged from non-existent to muted at best. Thus, who was likely to step forward at a club and help steer the course in a proper direction?

With the dawn of the internet and a slew of reprints on classic architecture, knowledge disseminated to a greater number of people. Across America, articulate people helped drive the restoration of fundamental design principles to their Golden Age courses. Overstating the importance of this movement is impossible as these Golden Age courses are located where it matters the most: in population centers where they are enjoyed on a regular basis, making them integral to people's lives. Such courses set the standard for what constitutes good golf in the region as well.

One of the most spectacular examples of a transformation, of re-establishing a benchmark design, occurred in 2013 at Old Town Club in Winston-Salem. Always held in high esteem because one of the all-time greats Perry Maxwell designed it, the course fell prey to the usual during the decades that followed WWII: Over-tree planting with the resultant narrowing of playing corridors and the cooing of the golfer within individual holes, a focus on green, and a desire to make the bunkers as maintenance friendly as possible (and if we need to remove some, fine!).

The end result? The Old Town that I played in 1987 was only of modest interest. A 5 on the Doak Scale. I left underwhelmed - and puzzled. The parkland site clearly was of exception with tumbling topography, a lengthy creek, and specimen hardwoods. How could a Perry Maxwell course with its original playing corridors and green locations fail to stir more emotions?

Move the clock forward 25 years and we have our answer. Thanks largely to the polite, though persistent, efforts of a particular member, the club eventually acknowledged that the course had strayed too far from its Maxwell routes. Old Town hired Coore & Crenshaw, both of whom are ardent fans of Maxwell's work.

Rather than mask the appeal of the site under strands of trees, vistas were opened up as trees came down and voilà, a new found appreciation for the site's unique qualities was re-discovered. Two dimensional and lifeless oval bunkers were transformed into hazards that fit the re-claimed scale of the property. Width was returned to sloping fairways such as those at the seventh, twelfth and seventeenth, with golfers now free to seek the correct portion of the fairway from which to approach the green.

Additionally, putting surfaces were pulled back out to the corners of their green pads and a slew of the best hole locations were



The double green of the 8th [red flag] and 17th [yellow flag] is terraced into a hillside.

restored for daily play. Famously, the double green that is shared between the holes eight and seventeen was returned to its full 16,700 square foot glory.

To complete the picture, native fescues, which are easier and more cost effective to maintain than consistently mowed grasses, were reinstituted. Along with the bunkers, they lent the course a handsome texture and contrast that had been lost in a sea of green.

And the member who was the driving force in this instance - what gave him his insight to push for such a sensitive and ultimately successful restoration? Only an unending love and curiosity for the subject. He is an avid reader of classic architecture books, has served on several committees both at his club

and for other golf organizations and participates on web sites frequented by architecture aficionados.

His counterparts in the 1960s and 1970s didn't have similar opportunities - and it shows in the rash of bad decisions made across the country during that period. Far fewer excuses today. The member is a true friend to his course. Are you? - RM

SCORECARD

1. 420	7. 377 !	13. 427
2. 166 !	8. 380	14. 335 !
3. 417	9. 406	15. 210
4. 522	10. 401	16. 365
5. 388 !	11. 196	17. 604 !!
6. 186 !	12. 424 !	18. 437

6661 Yards - Par 71