



Shades of restoration

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Golf courses change over time, and this can occur through redesign, normal play stresses, maintenance or because of changes in the natural environment. Sometimes, these changes are for the better. Classic courses, such as Shinnecock Hills, Merion and St Andrews Old, all differ significantly from their original designs. But, not all courses get better as they get older. As a result, more and more clubs are looking to restoration to bring back what has been lost.

Notwithstanding, restoring a course in its entirety is not always the best option. In many cases, there may be more potential in opting for a partial restoration, or a total redesign—a works program that preserves only a few key elements of the original course. There are many shades of restoration from which to choose.

Restoration

The first hurdle to cross in a true restoration is having enough information. This means lining up a substantial collection of original pho-

tographs and/or detailed plans. Ideally, this would include access to accurate maps or aerial photographs to help determine the original location and size of key features, as well as a range of perspective photographs to guide the three-dimensional shaping of those features. Mostly, the record is not this complete. Without at least some solid evidence regarding every hole, a golf course cannot be truly restored.

Beyond the issue of information lies the issue of intent. Capturing the exact characteristics of a feature may be counter-productive. Suppose, for instance, that course photographs and sketches reveal a green too severely tilted to hold a ball at contemporary green speeds. Some would argue that, for a course to be truly restored, these severe features should be recreated exactly. If greens become unplayable, then, it is the green speeds that should be adjusted rather than the design.

Restoration, though, is ultimately about successfully capturing the original architect's

intent. If a great pin placement is totally unusable because of its steepness, and the club is clearly not willing to dial its green speeds back down to 1930s levels, then it is within the boundaries of a true restoration to adjust the tilt of an area without changing the concept. Restoring intent is harder than restoring a particular shape; regardless, it has to be a part of the equation.

One of the finest restorations I've seen is the completed work at Alister Mackenzie's Pasatiempo. With Mackenzie fresh from his famous design at Cypress Point, and the involvement of developer Marion Hollins, Pasatiempo enjoyed a great deal of early buzz. Bobby Jones even played in the opening round. There was, as a result, an abundance of both perspective and aerial photographs from the course's earliest days. These allowed Tom Doak, consultant course architect, to restore the location, size and three-dimensional aspects of the bunkering as closely as possible to the originals.

OPPOSITE
The third hole at the California Golf Club, USA, represents a clever combination of restoration and redesign. This new hole was built to recapture the spirit of an original that was lost to an adjacent road project. Photograph by George Waters.

This image from 1940, and others, were used to restore Alister Mackenzie's dramatic bunkering around the eighteenth green at the California Golf Club. Photographs from the target time-period are essential to performing a successful restoration. Photograph courtesy of the California Golf Club.

OPPOSITE
The recently restored bunkering around the eighteenth green at the California Golf Club closely approximates Mackenzie's original work. Achieving such a good result required good historical images and a great deal of patience in the execution. Photograph by George Waters.



Where perspective photographs were lacking, high-quality aerials were available; and the unchanged routing made it that much easier to piece things together. But, no matter how accurately Pasatiempo has been restored, it will never be an exact replica of the original. Changes in vegetation and the demands of modern play have altered the course permanently. This is the nature of restoration and, for some, a limiting factor: it can never be 100 per cent perfect. Nevertheless, golfers prepar-

ing to play Pasatiempo can rest assured that they are playing the closest possible course to the Mackenzie original.

Component restoration

Somewhere between restoration and redesign is component restoration. There is a strong element of restoration in this process, but total restoration is either impossible or undesirable. Key portions of the property may have been lost to land sales or coastal erosion. Some-

times, the information regarding the original course is too limited for a full restoration. In other cases, the original holes may not be worth restoring. After all, and with no disrespect to the sentimentalists, not all old golf courses can be classified as good golf courses. In such cases, substantial improvements can often be made by restoring select portions of the original course.

Component restoration can range from entire golf holes to individual features. It can en-



hance the strategy of the course and also give the holes a unique aesthetic. While it may not be a total restoration, it has, in many cases, the potential to create a better golf course.

The California Golf Club of San Francisco completed work a few years ago that nicely illustrates the value of component restoration.

Before the project, the course was a scramble of different designs. The original routing had been substantially altered by land sales and highway projects. Some very interesting holes playing along a creek had been lost forever. Although Alister Mackenzie had performed a complete redesign of the course's bunkering

early in the club's history, years of wear and tear, tinkering and redesign had stolen nearly all of the character from his work. Newly constructed ponds and other impromptu features further detracted from what is arguably the best golfing ground held by any of the courses in San Francisco. The club wanted to make



While much has changed at Lahinch over the years, the infamous *Dell* hole remains well-preserved. Indeed, the 'blind' par-3 is an Irish golfing institution, offering little more than a white aiming stone to guide golfers as they play to a green nestled beneath high dunes. Photograph by George Waters.

better use of the property and reconnect with the past designs—particularly the Mackenzie bunkering. This is a perfect scenario for component restoration.

Kyle Phillips, the entrusted architect, approached the two nines differently. The routing of the back-nine was more or less intact, and there was a reasonable amount of photographic evidence regarding Mackenzie's bunkering. Phillips worked very closely with the original holes on the back-nine, deviating only slightly from a full restoration.

The front-nine was a different story. This was where large parts of the original course had been lost and where the photographic record was limited. Phillips had to devise some creative solutions on these holes to get the most out of the property. By relocating the practice facility away from the clubhouse he was able to make use of some exciting terrain that was previously unused. He also engaged in large-scale earthwork to recreate the feel and playing characteristics of the lost creekside holes. At the same time, Phillips kept the bunkering style consistent and chose to restore selected elements. This kept the front-nine consistent with the back-nine; additionally, it connected



Kyle Phillips was the architect responsible for restoring much of California Golf Club's back-nine. Two aspects aided his cause: that nine's initial routing had survived mainly intact; and because the club safeguarded its wealth of historic, photographic information. The picture is of the twelfth hole, a heavily bunkered par-3 of 200 yards, taken after the works had been completed. Photograph by George Waters.

the history of the course. The result is a design that uses the property to the best advantage, while making a strong connection with the past. The 'Cal Club' represents a highly successful component restoration.

Preservation

Even a major redesign can include meaningful ties to the past. Preserving some distinctive features or key components of the original design, within a redesigned course, enables

a golf club to move forward while respecting the past. It gives a course its singular character and historical connection without meeting the rigid standards of a restoration. These features become points of interest for the players and can provide a window into how golf course architecture has evolved over time.

Tom Doak recently performed a comprehensive redesign of the nine-hole Aetna Springs course in Napa, California. Golf has been played continuously at Aetna Springs

OPPOSITE
Pasatiempo, located in Santa Cruz, California, was Alister Mackenzie's favourite course among those that bore his design stamp. Here, in 1934 at age sixty-three, the celebrated golf architect passed away in his house that bordered the sixth fairway. Pasatiempo's restored third hole is a long and difficult par-3, which presents several strategic options from the tee. The 1930s aerial (black and white inset) was used as a reference to restore the bunkering to its original character. The third green, one of the layout's most perilous, slopes markedly from the rear. Photograph courtesy of Pasatiempo Golf Club.

since 1893, making it one of the oldest courses west of the Mississippi River. When renovations began, remnants of the original oil-sand greens—dating from the days prior to grass greens—could still be found on the site. These relics looked like little more than small asphalt squares, but they represented the long history of the course. Adjacent to the current sixth green, Doak preserved one of these old green sites to recall this rich history. The feature adds interest to play around the green, and it also gives today's golfers something interesting to talk about.

Another good example of preservation can be found at Lahinch, one of Ireland's most famous links. Well known for the severe terrain that produced dramatic 'blind' holes such as *Klondyke* and *Dell*, the club employed Martin Hawtree, of Hawtree Limited, to undertake a large-scale redesign project to address years of architectural 'tinkering'. Lahinch also needed to tackle the loss of some holes to coastal erosion. Many of the holes are entirely new, but the club and the architect made the decision to preserve some of the distinct features that helped to popularise the links in the first place. *Klondyke* and *Dell*, tellingly, remain intact.

These features force modern golfers to contend with some of the 'blind' shots that were so commonly encountered on earlier courses. They also serve to recall this inimitable course's long and famous history within the framework of a brand new design. It is not a restoration, but Lahinch is a good example of preservation on a fine layout.

Decisions, decisions

So, how do you decide between the various shades of restoration? The first question to grapple with is: do you really want to restore the golf course? A true restoration can be very expensive. In many cases, the same amount of money applied to a component restoration or a brand new design could produce a better golf course. The next question is highly relevant: is restoration of your golf course even possible? If parts of the course have been lost over time, if there is insufficient information about the original course and/or if the course has been redesigned beyond repair, then it is time to explore component restoration or redesign. A club should also consider its ability to maintain a restoration. The unusual features found on older courses ensure a distinctive

look, and they do help to create golfing situations seldom seen on modern designs. The zig-zagging fingers and sweeping faces of the bunkers at Pasatiempo are fantastic; however, a course with a modest greenkeeping budget couldn't hope to maintain them to modern standards. In fact, the difficulty in maintaining such features is probably why many of them were lost in the first place. Restoration only makes sense if it's possible to preserve what is restored.

No matter which shade of restoration seems most appropriate, it is important to remember that there are many different routes to creating an enjoyable golf course. Restoration has brought many courses back to life, so too has redesign. Golf is, and always will be, a game rooted in tradition. Therefore, it is always worth considering the opportunity to preserve, or restore, a link with the past when one exists.

