

Recipe for Repair



Minimalist design, maximal reward—Doak's Pacific Dunes #13.

Tom Doak preaches minimalism to help cure some ills in the game

ARCHITECT TOM DOAK once composed a “Minimalist Manifesto” to explain his perceptions of the differences between modern and classic golf design. It is interesting that philosophical positions from the past seem to resonate so loudly today. Could it be that it’s time for golf to rediscover its roots in the face of present-day challenges?

Let me share a bit of Doak’s thinking, edited from his “Manifesto.” I believe you will find it thought provoking . . . and I believe it strikes at the very heart of why people are leaving the game today.

“It’s actually Rule 13-1, but it’s the most fundamental tenet of golf: we play the ball as it lies,” Tom begins. “It’s also the reason many see golf as a game which builds character. For it’s good practice in life to have to accept responsibility for one’s previous actions. You can blame anything you want for your errors—a bird chirping in your backswing, bad karma from a previous life or just a bad lie—but then you have to go play the next shot from wherever you hit it.

“Those running for President would have us believe that the spirit of golf is the American ideal, that we all have to negotiate

the same course and we get what we hit. It all sounds very good. But American golfers are suckers for unrealistic promises, just as voters are. We’ll buy any new piece of equipment that promises another 20 yards. Our country clubs spend gratuitously to keep their courses in near-perfect condition. And in recent years, our architects have spent millions to enclose and define every shot with mounds, while smoothing down every bump in the fairways, attempting to eliminate blind shots and bad bounces from the game.

“The result? Instead of building character, we’re raising a generation of cod-

PHOTO BY WOOD SARBOLD

dled champions who can't even shrug off a bad lie and dig themselves out of a divot.

"We see the evidence in major championships and the Ryder Cup, against foreign golfers who grew up on imperfect courses, and learned to deal with them. That's the way the game was invented—[and] the original American ideal, that you can change your own destiny if you'll only work hard enough.

"Since the 1950's, American golf design has gone away from that ideal. We seem to expect the course itself to mete out justice, with water hazards and bunkers placed in tough but fair positions; but then, we groom the bunkers to permit easy recoveries. Modern American golf design is modeled on the same principles as our ailing criminal justice system—we build more water hazards (prisons), but they only house the disadvantaged while the elite receive suspended sentences.

"But there are now a handful of American designers who see things differently—called minimalists—but the essence of the movement is not the limited use of earthmoving, so much as a return to golf's original values.

"Gradually, many of the things which can make a golf hole interesting have been removed from modern designers' palettes. Today, even our best designers seldom produce a great golf hole because they apply so many standards of fairness that all their holes begin to look and play alike.

"The minimalist's objective is to route as many holes as possible whose main features already exist in the landscape, and accent their strategies without over-killing the number of hazards. Sometimes, though, the best solution for the course as a whole may require major earthmoving on a handful of holes to connect the others. That's minimalism, too. And the key to success in those instances is to move enough earth to make the artificial work appear natural, not to move as little as possible." ■

Interesting, don't you think? You can find the whole essay, and more, at "DoakGolf.com." Enjoy.