

APDC's

Top 10 Design Tenets



INTRODUCTION

The Arnold Palmer Design Company has been creating golf courses of distinction for more than four decades. These courses, over 300 across the world, fulfill a wide variety of purposes – from serving the needs of elite private-club members in Japan to providing accessible daily-fee courses in South America to hosting PGA Tour events and the Ryder Cup in America and Europe.

While each layout is a distinct creation, as unique as the site on which it is crafted, APDC's architects are often asked: "What sets an Arnold Palmer design apart?" In other words, what is the Arnold Palmer Design Company's philosophy of golf-course design? APDC's two senior architects, Thad Layton and Brandon Johnson, reply: "Although we implement many different design ideas on our courses, there are a few that show up in everything we do. These principles, time-honored and tested, are a direct reflection of the man from which they flow, Arnold Palmer."

In this document, Layton and Johnson illustrate 10 key design tenets that drive APDC courses and describe the golf holes that exemplify each of these principles.

They have worked extensively on hundreds of projects, but have never lost sight of the need to create and nurture works of beauty. They also stress the importance of strategy when setting up a course and outline the techniques involved in constructing risk-reward holes that can make or break a round.

Apart from emphasizing a course should be fun to play whilst ensuring it remains fully sustainable and all its natural features are preserved to protect its integrity, they also explain how a designer should exercise both sound and sensitive environmental stewardship over a property, ensure a variety of shots and views across each layout, and observe the legacies of the game's history and traditions.





BEAUTY

A golf course by its very nature is a thing of beauty. An oasis of green grass, tall trees and silence set apart from the noise and visual chaos of urban areas. It can also be said that some courses are more beautiful than others and the perennial favorites among the various Top 100 lists bear this out.

For who could walk around the grounds of Pine Valley or Pebble Beach and not be inspired by their inherent beauty? But, how do you define beauty? Furthermore, how do you create it?

APDC believes that golf courses should strike a balance between function and form. In order to do this effectively, the architect must be intimately familiar with the natural features of the site and strive to incorporate these elements into the golf course in a strategically meaningful way.

Over the years, APDC has been privileged to work on hundreds of natural canvases, each one beautiful and different from the rest. One such course is Tralee (below) in southwest Ireland. From the heaving sand dunes covered with wind-whipped Marram grasses to the sheer rock cliffs that defy the oft-angry sea, a trip here will bring out the poet in the saltiest of characters. The golf links at Tralee embrace these dynamic characteristics at every turn, drawing golfers into a journey they will never forget and to which they will always wish to return.

STRATEGY

This is the essence of good golf and the soul of the game. Without it you might as well go to the driving range. Sound strategic design separates average courses from the great ones. It's more than just where the bunkers go—it's every element of the golf course, and how these elements aggregate to create a meaningful experience.

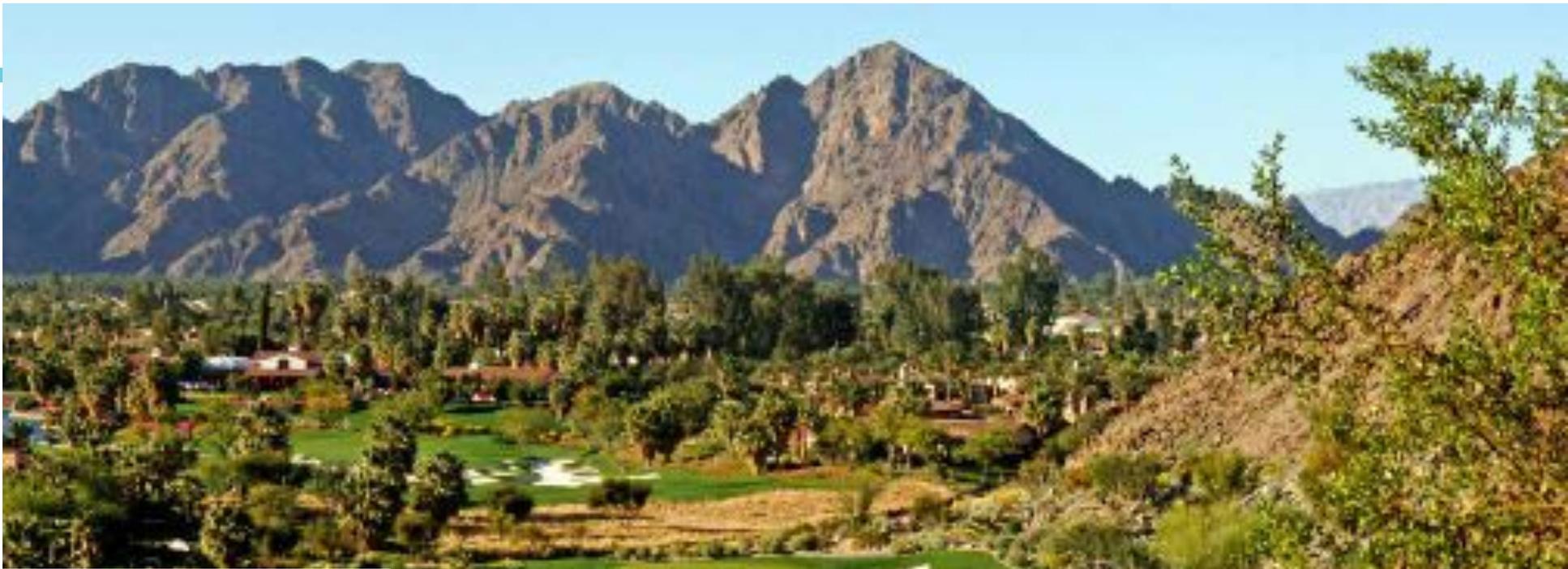
A good litmus test of whether your course is strategic in nature can be found in your answers to the following questions: Does the course in question grow more interesting the more you play it? Would it suit you if you had to play this course for the rest of your life? If the answers are “yes,” you most likely have a strong strategic course on your hands.

From the initial routing to tilling the last sprig of grass, APDC is constantly on the lookout for ways to incorporate the natural features of the site or to create new ones to add strategic interest to our courses. Some folks call this minimalism but this really doesn't get to the heart of the matter because there are times when the architect must adapt the landscape in a significant way to accommodate golf.

The trick is to make these bold strokes in a way that blurs the line between the natural and the man-made. Our latest creation in China, the Pure Scene

Golf Club in Kunming (below), is a testament to this balanced approach.





RISK—REWARD

Arnold Palmer has always been identified by his “go for broke” style. When Palmer successfully drove the green on the 1st hole at Cherry Hills Country Club in the fourth round of the 1960 U.S. Open, he kick-started a final round of 65 that propelled him to victory.

From short par-5s to drivable 4s, we have been designing golf holes for four decades that tempt golfers to swing for the fences, just like the King.

The 17th hole at The Tradition Golf Club (above) in La Quinta, California, will prompt even the most timid of golfers to reach for the driver. The stage is set by the elevated tees perched over 100ft above the fairway, providing a bird’s-eye view of the challenge that lies ahead: 354 yards from tee to green with a putting surface sloped from back to front, protected by water left and desert right with the option of a layup to a wide, sloping fairway that leaves a full wedge to the green. A range of scores from 1 to 8 are possible on this dynamic par-4.





FUN

This is the whole point, isn't it? Spending the better part of a Saturday afternoon chasing a little white ball around the links should be an exercise in enjoyment, not futility. Arnold Palmer Design Company believes that fun is the most important ingredient in a great golf experience. There is an undeniable move back to the design principles employed during the game's "Golden Age." These principles not only deliver golf that is more fun to play but courses that are less costly to maintain, bring people back to the game and increase the number of rounds played.

APDC's overriding goal for all of our designs is to deliver a fun golf course, and its work at Wexford Plantation (below) in Hilton Head, S.C., offers it up in spades. From super-wide fairways guarded by strategic bunkers to a set of greens inspired by the classic template holes from the past, there are as many different ways to get the ball in the cup as there are golfers. The second shot on the par-5 fifteenth typifies this approach.

After a good tee shot, the golfer has a decision to make: go for the green by utilizing the ridgeline short and left of the putting surface that funnels shots onto the green or lay up to a comfortable distance to attack the array of distinct pin positions. Once near or on the green, there are a myriad ways to get the ball close to the hole. Golfers of all skill levels will have a ball as they navigate the many permutations that the 15th at Wexford presents.

PRESERVATION

It's not often a living legend is entrusted to curate a national treasure, but that is exactly what happened back in 2006 when Mr. Palmer rolled out the plans for the world famous Pebble Beach on California's Monterey Peninsula prior to the 2010 U.S. Open. Needless to say, APDC was very excited about the challenge but its excitement was tempered with the responsibility that comes with working on something that many golfers would contend is sacred and incapable of being improved upon.

If this was going to be received well, the architects had to justify their decisions on the basis of a sound strategic rationale and placing their emphasis on restoring some of the iconic features at Pebble Beach that had been erased over time.

Fortunately, APDC had a thorough photographic archive and a committed team of experts who cared deeply about the project. Chris Dalhammer and R.J. Harper from Pebble Beach, Mike Davis at the USGA, and Arnold Palmer all gave their own unique and valuable insights.

In the case of the 6th hole at Pebble Beach (above) APDC had one of the largest natural hazards in the world (the Pacific Ocean) that wasn't being utilized. Old photographs show fairways right up to the cliff edge and an absence of trees that had sprouted up and matured over the years before being taken out by recent winter storms. APDC's effort was to restore this hole's strategic reliance on the water by shifting the bunkers to the right and adding fairway all the way to the edge of the cliff. This effectively pushed the centerline closer to the edge and now gives golfers of all calibers a decision to make off the tee.





SUSTAINABILITY

APDC prides itself on integrating, as seamlessly as possible, one of the largest playing fields in sport into the natural environment. Working with the land by harnessing its inherent natural features is step one in creating a golf course that is economically and financially sustainable. But the complete architect will continue to push for sustainability long past these initial steps, wringing every grain of efficiency from each aspect of the project.

Careful attention to turfgrass selection, irrigation, soil amendments, recycling of old materials, and unrestricted wildlife corridors are but a few of the many ways that APDC ensures its courses are successful on every level.

APDC's newest golf course, Las Piedras (above) in Punta del Este, Uruguay, is a shining example of this holistic approach. Sensitively routed over gently rolling farmland, the native trees and watercourses were preserved and integrated as strategic elements into the design. Only greens, tees and a few bunkers were built into land that already lent itself to these corresponding features. A native Bermuda grass already dominated the landscape and was simply cultivated into an delightful playing surface. Native fescues and wildflowers were preserved to frame the vast expanses of fairway necessary in a windy environment and for additional strategic interest. An existing vein of sand was discovered early on in the project and was utilized for bunker sand and greens mix. The par-3 8th enshrines all of these principles.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

The earliest golf courses occupied left-over land, “links” land between sea and town or farmable pastures. They provided a public recreational activity with low-to-minimal impact on the environment and access to sprawling open spaces for all to enjoy. By today’s standards and technological advances these creations may seem primitive. But to others they are works of genius, fashioned by the passage of time, the growth of the game’s traditions and an enduring respect for the sanctity of the land.

Golf is one of the few sports with playing fields that are dynamic, forever changing with the natural flow of the earth. Upon embarking on a new project, APDC is sensitive to these diverse environmental factors and proceeds with a sensitive, light-touch approach that promotes harmony between man’s artistic creations and development practices.

By only disturbing and enhancing what is ‘essential’ to integrating superb golf course architecture within the natural environment and ecosystem, APDC has proven that responsible growth and development can be peaceably integrated with nature.

Old Tabby Links (below) on Spring Island, S.C. exemplifies this ethical approach to design. When Old Tabby Links opened to critical acclaim in 1992, its environmental stewardship, combined with natural aesthetics and a low-density, low-impact development philosophy, truly foreshadowed the green movement of today.

Exemplary coordination and teamwork between the developer, Spring Island Trust, and more recently the Spring Island property owners has evolved into a shining example of how to integrate sustainable and responsible growth within a delicate and precious environment. This careful management and preservation of the island’s vegetation, wildlife and cultural heritage has made it possible for all concerned to learn from and enjoy its beauty.



GROWTH OF THE GAME

Mr. Palmer's heroic play, charisma, charm and kind-hearted nature have been luring millions of new participants and fans into the game since the early 1960s. His influence spanned oceans, traveled beyond international borders and crossed a multitude of cultural boundaries. He inspired even the most unlikely people to play and fall in love with this beguiling game.

As a National Trustee for The First Tee, he continues to champion precious 'growth of the game' initiatives. It is therefore no surprise that his design company has been the harbinger of many trends in the golf industry and has championed the growth of important initiatives like the design of TFT Augusta.

APDC has forged dynamic creations in over 25 countries around the world. Way before China's recent boom, the APDC flag was firmly planted at Chung Shan Hot Springs, known as the country's first "modern" golf course.

The pioneering DLF course just south of New Delhi annually hosts India's premier professional tournament while more recent explorations have spread the cause to Uruguay and Brazil, where golf is now beginning to really blossom.

As APDC consults with clients around the globe, it stresses the importance of providing participants with high-quality practice venues accompanied by fun, intriguing practice or starter playing configurations that show a fresh and sustainable alternative to the status quo.

APDC strongly believes that the game is destined to grow and prosper when access and opportunity are afforded to all willing participants. Our studies for a potential Olympic course and the proposed Romania Golf Park illustrate our continued dedication and passion for supporting the growth of the game.



Laying out the new course in Romania (see graphic) is set to be a dedicated labor of love for APDC, as it was with Newport Dunes at Port Aransas (top)



VARIETY

If variety is the spice of life, then design variety sweetens golf-course architecture. This mind-boggling game of ours has sunk its teeth into everyone—from the humblest of folk to kings and dignitaries — through its intriguing riddles, mysterious strategies and deceptive hazards. Indeed, it has created one of the most diverse yet commonly shared passions amongst sports fanatics across the globe.

The myriad possibilities within an architect's design interpretation are limitless. Each twist, turn, tweak or bold move creates a new playground for those who dare to try. Its architectural blend can feature beautiful, wide-open spaces and tight, tree-lined corridors; it can feature wild, bold contours and subtle nuances that make a green or hole location [oh so] special; and it can incorporate game-recovery options when all previous options fail. It stands the test of time but it defines the time in which we live.

In a region known for its cattle, cowboys, oil rigs and big hats, APDC has produced an unlikely links-like gem that only Texas is big enough to handle: Newport Dunes (below) at Port Aransas. As a result of APDC's utilization of unique dunes, not to mention its intriguing but playful landscape creations that were meticulously blended into the natural surrounds and the revetted bunkers dotting the landscape, each hole has its own identity and presents players with a maze of alternative routes and a plethora of strategic options and scenarios to conquer.



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