

JOE FINGER

(1918 -)

BACKGROUND

A Houston native. Received a degree in Engineering from Rice University in 1939, where he had captained the golf team under coach Jimmy Demaret. Received a Master's degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1941.

Returned to Texas, worked five years in oil refining, then became president of a plastics manufacturing company.

In 1956, as 13-time club champion at Westwood Country Club in Houston, consulted with Ralph Plummer on the addition of a second nine. Impressed Plummer with his engineering skills, who referred him to a prospective client. Soon concentrated upon course architecture. Early work included 10 courses for the U.S. Air Force and a challenging resort course in New York for his old coach, Jimmy Demaret.

Was one of the first architects to publically defend the rising costs of course construction by pointing out increased demands for irrigation, drainage and sand-based greens. Wrote the first publication examining golf design as a business, **THE BUSINESS END OF BUILDING OR REBUILDING A GOLF COURSE**, distributed by the National Golf Foundation in 1973.

Teamed with legendary golfer Byron Nelson on a series of designs in the 1970s, including the re-creation of one green at Augusta National Golf Club.

Added Ken Dye as a partner in 1985, and Baxter Spann in 1987. Retired from active design work in 1990 to his home in Kerrville, TX. Then worked to establish a regular golf architecture curriculum at several universities.

DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

"Nobody ever brags about how easy their course is," was the advice Jimmy Demaret gave Joe Finger when he embarked upon his design career. But he tried to balance the normal demand for a challenging course by making it also enjoyable for high handicappers. He favored routing courses using existing terrain whenever possible, but cut no corners when building greens that drained properly and held expected approach shots.

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS

Testing placement of water hazards to encourage gambling shots. Often created a Z-shaped par-5 that involved two potential carries of water. In heavily forested terrain, a specimen tree left in play.