

JACK NICKLAUS

(1940 -)

BACKGROUND

No longer much argument that he ranks as the greatest golfer of all time, winning an unprecedented 20 major championships: six Masters, five PGAs, four U.S. Opens, three British Opens and two U.S. Amateurs. Took an interest in golf course design early in his professional career, worked first with designer Pete Dye on several projects and later with Desmond Muirhead.

In 1974, formed his own golf architecture practice, hiring unknowns Bob Cupp and Jay Morrish as full-time designers. Would assign assistants the task of preparing plans, then reviewed them in detail and made suggestions on changes to enhance playability and strategy. Continued to play the PGA Tour (and later the Senior Tour) while personally inspecting his course projects before, during and after construction.

Brought aboard new talent after Cupp and Morrish left. Over the years, his design staff included his eldest son, Jack Nicklaus, Jr., as well as Bruce Borland, Rick Jacobson, Ron Kirby, Jim Lipe, Scott Miller, Tom Pearson, Andy Raugast, Rick Robbins, Mike Riley and Lee Schmidt.

Was a stickler for high standards in both design and maintenance. Sometimes criticized for catering mainly to big-budget layouts. His works, however expensive, have been recognized as championship tests and have hosted such events as the PGA Championship, the Ryder Cup, the Canadian Open and the U.S. Amateur.

DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

Insists that he designs to the clientele. His private courses are often very difficult, on the theory that local knowledge can be expected. His public courses are intended to be more forgiving. His resort courses are the most spectacular, often containing unusual holes, even gimmicks (such as steep mounds along fairways and island greens) that justify the high admission price. Early in his career, Nicklaus was criticized for designing too much to his own game (most greens accessible mainly to high faded approach shots, for example) and for ignoring high handicappers and women. Whether or not he heeded the critics, his designs of the 1990s are a distinct departure from those he did in the 1980s, and are considered far more playable.

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS

His earliest works reflected the influence of Desmond Muirhead, with graceful, rather shallow bunkers and sweeping contours on fairways and greens. In the 1980s, his work tended to rival that of his other old partner, Pete Dye: Deep bunkers with flat bottoms of sand and steep banks of turf. Multi-level greens that provide small targets for scratch players. Numerous hazards so positioned to extract severe penalties for errant shots. His 1990s courses feature much flatter greens, shallower bunkering and wider avenues around hazards. One consistent theme throughout his career - the alternate shot hole, with dual fairways that pose varying degrees of risk and reward.