

On Course Online

WITH TRIPP DAVIS AND ASSOCIATES

Norman, Oklahoma

New York, New York

Fall 2015

Burning Tree Country Club (Greenwich, Connecticut)



18th Hole

The Burning Tree Country Club project started June 2015. The goal was to redesign and rebuild all 18 greens on the course, plus two practice putting greens and a few bunkers. Construction is now complete, all greens are seeded, grass has started growing and we are very eager for the Burning Tree members to enjoy the new green designs at the start of the 2016 season.

While many of the greens increased in size and a few even shrunk, the mandate was to improve the greens by increasing the variety in the putting surfaces, to significantly create more hole locations and to tie the greens more effectively into surrounding bunkers, slopes and other natural features, while constructing them to USGA specifications. The poa annua based greens were replaced with Pure Distinction bent grass.

We are very proud of the design work and the execution of the construction and believe the course is better than ever. TDA hopes the membership finds their course strengthened strategically, enhanced aesthetically, just as challenging and at the same time even more playable. We were fortunate to work with a great team including Mark Smith, project superintendent for Labar Golf Renovations, Steve Wickstrom, superintendent for Burning Tree Country Club and a very supportive and forward thinking membership. While the timeline was demanding, Labar's hard work and experience kept the project on pace and allowed me to focus on the detail work and spend the majority of my weekly site visits hand crafting the surfaces of the greens before seeding. Like everyone involved in the project, we are very excited about the work and look forward to seeing the course in the spring and ready for play.

PROJECT NEWS

Tapatio Springs (Boerne, Texas)

The Tapatio Springs project, began earlier this year as a limited tee and bunker renovation on a few holes and the driving range tee. After seeing the impact the work had on the quality of the course, the ownership decided to move forward and renovate the rest of the course, including the 1st, 8th and 11th greens, as well as a new practice putting green. Shaping is complete and we expect all work to be wrapped up in early October.

"I'm not sure I've ever seen a bunker and tee project have as big an impact on the visual and strategic interest of a golf course as what's been achieved here," said Tripp. "It's an ideal site in the Texas Hill Country near San Antonio with rolling terrain and great vistas. In the past, the resort was regarded as one of the best in Texas. I now would consider Tapatio Springs among

Special thanks to Jason Price, project superintendent for Course Crafters, who led construction of the bunkers, and Jim Lyles from Cornerstone, who did the tees, and Eric Floyd, superintendent at Tapatio Springs. TDA shaper Jason Gold was onsite for shaping and detail work.



Trilogy at Ocala Preserve (Ocala, Florida)



Other than a few clean up items, construction of the unique new golf course we worked with Tom Lehman to design is complete and growing in.

"It was a very collaborative and fun process working with Tom. Tom, Jason Gold, my shaper, and Landscapes Unlimited got very creative with details in the field and I could not be more proud of the way things turned out," said Tripp.

The golf course is what the golf industry has called out for to help the game - an alternative design that is shorter, fun, takes less time to play, and can be changed up to play quite differently from day to day. The foundation is an 18 hole par three course without defined tee boxes, just large fairway areas, so players can play vastly different angles and distances. Within this design Tripp and Tom laid out fairways, and complementing fairway bunkers, so a six hole course, with four par four holes, a par five and a par three can be played. It's a unique design you simply have to see to fully understand, but once you do both Tripp and Tom think you will fall in love with it.

In addition to Tom Lehman and Landscapes Unlimited, Andy Goulish and Tommy Jinks with Shea Homes were great to work with, as was Jim Collins with Florida Land Development, who did the Mass Earthwork and Landscape Planting. As always, EC Design did a great job with the irrigation design. Thanks to everyone involved.

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Tripp Davis, ASGCA

In the first of a new regular item to close *By Design*, we ask a member architect five quick questions

Having grown up around the game of golf in Atlanta, Tripp Davis, ASGCA was a three-time American Junior Golf Association All-American, before accepting a scholarship to play golf at the University of Oklahoma. There he became an All-Big Eight selection, an NCAA All-American selection, and played on the Oklahoma team that won the 1989 National Championship. He has played in 15 USGA Championships, including being the medalist at the 2003 US Mid Am and reaching the quarter finals in 2005 and 2009.

With a Masters in Landscape Architecture and experience working in golf construction and as a designer, Davis formed his own golf course architecture firm in the 1990s and has an impressive portfolio of original designs—from Oklahoma and Texas to Mexico and China. He has established a reputation as a restoration specialist, having worked on many historic designs, recent examples including A.W. Tillinghast's Spring Lake course in New Jersey and Herbert Strong's Engineers Country Club in New York.

How is your game?

“My game comes and goes. I don't practice or play very much—once a week on average, but I still play three-to-four amateur events a year. It's hard to be sharp physically or mentally playing tournament golf sporadically. But, I still work at it—my goals are a little more modest.”

Which three people would make up your dream fourball?

“Bobby Jones, Arnold Palmer and Ben Crenshaw, at Augusta National. They are three people I really admire and I think that would make for a really fun round of golf.”

What is your favorite hole in golf?

“I like quite a few, but the thirteenth at Pine Valley comes to mind the quickest—the best par four in the world in my opinion. I also really like the new fourth hole we did at Preston Trail in Dallas—a par three that varies as much day to day as any par three I have seen.”

If you could change or add one rule, what would it be?

“I would like to see the rules simplified in general. One rule I

think is a bit much, especially for the average player, is the grounding rule in bunkers. I would rather them all play through the green. It would remove any issues we have with design of ‘waste’ vs ‘formal’ bunkers, as well.”

What project are you currently working on?

“We are quite busy with major renovations under construction at Tapatio Springs outside San Antonio and the University of Oklahoma Golf Club, the construction of a unique new course in Ocala, Florida, and a greens redesign at Burning Tree in Greenwich, Connecticut, which will finish in September. We are in the design phase for a complete bunker renovation/restoration at Wichita Country Club and a new practice facility at Whippoorwill in New York this fall, while starting design for a complete course renovation at Northwood in Dallas, that we expect to start construction in October 2016. Things will slow down a little this fall—maybe I can play some golf!” ●

Getting to Know: Tripp Davis, Golf Course Architect

American Golfer (AG): When did you start playing golf?

Tripp Davis: My great uncle was an avid player and he took me to play when I was 9 at my mom's request - to give her a break. I was hooked.

AG: How did you become a golf course designer?

TD: It's something I dreamt about as a kid, and I never let go of the dream. After playing college golf at the University of Oklahoma I went back to school and got my Masters in Landscape Architecture. From there I have simply worked hard and tried to learn something new every day.

AG: Why did you choose a career in golf course design?

TD: It sort of chose me. I wake up every day excited to do what I do.

AG: In your opinion, have any design trends hurt the game?

TD: The extreme lengthening of golf courses. Relative to the best players in the game, you don't challenge the longest players by making courses extremely long - that plays to their advantage. Design should allow all players in a "field" of players the ability to compete on scoring ability and good design and setup should test the longest players ability to show other skills at times. Devaluing the length of the longest players in balance with letting length be a big advantage through design is okay and we need to do more of it. We have great examples - Pine Valley, Harbor Town, Oak Tree and really a lot of courses inherently are better at shorter length than stretched out.

This has pulled the length of the other tees back and it has pulled golfers back as well. The male ego sometimes has a hard time passing by too many tee markers. The Ladies course has always been designed too long and I would like to see multiple tee markers or options for Ladies. Men have as many as four tees to choose from, why should Ladies play one tee most of the time?

AG: How can we grow the game of golf?

TD: It varies from market to market and by type of venue (public or private), but overall it's a tough task. There are a variety of things that can help, such as speeding up play, which is a very complex subject on its own that goes to course difficulty, flow of the course, the way in which slow play is "tolerated" or not (if it is tolerated at all it will persist), among other things. I think we need to design so players can play fewer holes so as to reduce time - routing to get players back near the clubhouse after 4-6 holes, and I think we should look for opportunities to do unique courses that are fun to play 6 - 12 hole courses, maybe even 3-4 hole short courses on a few acres to encourage younger players. To grow the game to new segments we need to find points of entry that are less expensive - less expensive courses to play being the primary concern, which is where courses that are just a few holes could come in.

AG: Do you have a specific design philosophy? **TD:** I constantly look to create strategic interest over making a course simply tough. I like to work with the land as closely as possible - it more easily provides unique features than trying to create unique features. When doing restoration or renovation of a great course, I give in to those things that make a course special and I try to enhance that - I don't need to leave "my mark".

AG: What's your "dream foursome" (living or dead, golfer or non-golfer)? **TD:** I recently said Bobby Jones, Arnold Palmer and Ben Crenshaw at Augusta. Still sounds good to me. I would like my Mom and Dad to walk with us.

AG: Is there a "bucket list" location in/on which to design? **TD:** I would love to work on sand right on the sea on a site with good character with little to no time constraints. Sand on land with good character is great even if not on the sea.

AG: What is the future of golf course design? **TD:** It's going to be a smaller profession, and we are going to be doing far more work on existing courses than building new courses, but I think we more than ever as golf course architects have a chance to impact the game and how it's played. We have an ability through good design to make courses more fun/more strategically interesting to play. We can make courses better deterrents to longer balls and clubs (without making courses longer). The play of the game will be a bigger part of design in subtle and more complex ways. We will also have a greater obligation through design to make courses more sustainable - primarily using less water. That does not necessarily mean thick native grass everywhere and brown fairways, but there will be a new normal.



Credit Richard Slattery

Tripp at Engineers Country Club

TDA ANNOUNCE NEW HIRE

Tripp Davis and Associates (TDA), one of the country's top golf course architectural firms, has announced the hiring of Jack Skirkanich as Design Associate. Skirkanich will establish TDA's first east coast office in NYC and will be focused on working closely with Davis on projects along the eastern seaboard.

Skirkanich was introduced to Davis at his home course at Rumson Country Club in Rumson, New Jersey, where Davis was working on a Master Plan for the restoration of the historic 1910 layout. Skirkanich sat in on several planning meetings with Davis and soon realized that he had a passion for golf course architecture.

"Golf architecture has always fascinated me," said Skirkanich. "I've always enjoyed reading books on golf architecture and studying why the great courses were considered great and stood the test of time. But it wasn't until I started working with Tripp during the Master Plan process for Rumson that my eyes were opened to the profession of a golf architect. It was then I realized this is what I was meant to do. My passion for golf course design was mentored by Tripp in the form of an internship and the pursuit of a Masters of Landscape Architecture. I feel fortunate to be able to join TDA as it is doing some of the best work in the industry and becoming one of the most sought after firms."

"One of the innate things you want a golf course architect to have is a good eye for what works visually and strategically," said Davis. "Jack is just starting out so he has a lot to learn, but starting out with this good eye for what we do is important. He knows the game well, having played college golf at Vanderbilt with Brandt Snedeker, and being one of the better amateur players in New Jersey. When we first discussed him joining TDA, I strongly encouraged him to go back to school and get his Masters in Landscape Architecture, which he will finish May 2016 at Rutgers. Jack has a great future in golf course architecture and I am excited to see him develop while he goes about making us better at what we do."

Prior to entering the world of golf course architecture, Skirkanich was co-founder of a tech start-up called PrimeScout, an online recruiting platform for high school athletes seeking college scholarships. He also spent five years working for Coleman Research Group in New York as a Research Manager for the Real Estate and Financial Services group.



Credit: Grin and Barrett Photography



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