



How to build on a limited budget

success story Tripp Davis designed a Tulsa course that only cost \$1.4 million to build

by Rebecca Luczycki

It's every golf architect's nightmare. The client lays out in detail the exact features and design elements they want on their challenging, yet aesthetically beautiful new course — and then wants it all done for \$3 million.

That's usually when the architect must have a serious heart-to-heart talk with the client and begin the nightmarish task of negotiating, cutting out elements and trimming the fat from the client's dream. But faced with a tight budget on a project in Oklahoma recently, architect Tripp Davis decided to look at it as an opportunity rather than a restriction. He designed the kind of course people talk about, and the owner built it for \$1.4 million, all because, Davis says, they took advantage of what was around them.

The course, Clary Fields, is a

daily-fee built on a former oil field southwest of Tulsa, Okla. The developer already owned the land, and also owned an excavating company — two factors Davis knew would save money. But he faced other challenges.

The site was almost perfectly flat — not the ideal, Davis says — but with its mature oak and pecan trees, he knew it had potential. The first thing he did was change his design perspective.

"We took the approach of, 'If we didn't have all this massive equipment we have today, how would we build this golf course?'" Davis said. "Basically, I tried to fit the course on the land and incorporate bunkers and subtle movement. And we moved a reasonably small amount of dirt, just 200,000 cubic yards."

Davis was also creative in

dealing with the lack of elevation.

"We put in quite a bit of sub-surface drainage, almost \$100,000, but at another site we might have put in more drainage to account for how flat the land was," he said.

Instead, Davis' design called for cutting man-made creeks through the property to help with drainage and to give the site character.

He was able to create some elevation by building rock walls to support edges of greens and tees. And he managed that cheaply, by hauling away limestone rock from a nearby highway project — rubble destined for burial had Davis not asked for it. He used the same rock for bridges.

"We were able to get expensive-looking, natural features, and we were able to do it for pennies on the dollar," Davis said.

Asphalt-tailing waste from the highway project also helped Davis build better-quality cart paths than he had expected.

"We found cheap rock to use as a base and got asphalt tailings from the highway project, and ended up with very nice cart paths for nearly nothing," he said. "We were able to build them for 30 percent of

Golf course architect Tripp Davis designed the kind of course people talk about. But Clary Fields, outside of Tulsa, Okla., only cost \$1.4 million to build. That's because, Davis says, he took advantage of what was around him.

what we would have done with concrete."

Davis says he also saved about \$1 per square foot on 110,000 square feet of greens by using the less-expensive California method, and by not incorporating any organic matter into the mix at construction. He added fertilizer and water holding agents when seeding.

Davis' design also took full advantage of the site's existing features by remodeling an early 20th century log cabin into a pro shop.

"We made some additions to it and built the routing around it, and put about \$75,000 into remodeling," he said. "And it fit right in with the theme."

The largest single expense on the course was the irrigation system — \$600,000. But Davis left a lot of native areas to save there, too.

All in all, Davis says with a little ingenuity, he was able to build a mid-level course on a rock-bottom budget. And he says others can do it, too.

"When you are working with an \$8 million to \$10 million budget, you can get lazy," he said. "You may overlook the fact that you can save some money and at the same time build some interesting features."

"But when you get challenged with a budget like we were dealing with, I don't think you necessarily have to give up the goal of building a nice golf course," he added. "You just have to get more creative about using the site, utilizing the resources the site has to offer and looking around you to see what's there."

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