

4C *Bunker* *A Dominant Landscape Component*

An early description of bunkers appeared in Sir Walter Scott's (1771-1832) writings: “. . . *what you might call a bunker, a little sand pit, dry and snug, surrounded by its banks and whins.*” (C1) Wind erosion shaped the bunkers that covered downs and links areas. These were the only type of bunkers, where they stood and what they looked like, until courses began to be built by man. Bunkers changed markedly and with such changes bunkers became an intense golf topic. Without logic they continue to be nurtured on aesthetics and game skill/challenge assumptions.

Early designers cited the enormity of arguments relative to the subject of bunkers. One designer exclaimed, “*When one comes to qualities of bunkers. . . we pass into the realm of dispute and argument. Whether this or that bunker is well placed has caused more intensely heated arguments than outside of the realms of religion.*”(C2)

By the latter part of the 19th century, bunkers, the most unaesthetic looking things on early inland courses, figured prominently in many discussions of the scenic movement to improve looks of the so-called dismal looking golf courses. Following this time, Fowler and Braid were soon discussing improvements of the asymmetry and the looks of bunkers at Walton Heath. Within the next decades, progressive designers were striving for unique, beautiful, harmonious natural effects with their bunker designs. By the mid-1900s bunkers, with the benefit of new earth-moving technology providing the ability to move vast quantities of earth, became a dominant landscape effect. Bunkers afforded much versatility with unlimited creative expression in a variety of forms, sizes, shapes, and patterns complemented with various structural accessories.

Frank Lloyd Wright, (1867-1959) famous architect, faulted architects for confused choices of contrived, decorative materials that they applied over their architectural designs. Wright's tort was “*When in doubt plant,*” a phrase that aptly applies to course designers who feel compelled to apply some form of decoration to their work but are indecisive or confused by the many choices available to achieve a decorative landscape effect. The guideline for course designers with such fuzzy reasoning has been: “*When in doubt bunker.*”

There are millions of possible combinations of aesthetic landscape effects reviewed in Chapter 1. Bunkers are the most versatile, adaptable to all land conditions and rationales. Following are two examples of the power of beauty and its influence upon decision making relative to bunker design decisions that occurred at two different areas of the country, The Golf Club, Ohio, and Bandon Dunes, Oregon.

F. W. Hawtree first observed Herbert Fowler and James Braid who were devising alternate positions for bunkers on Walton Heath, not for the purpose of playability but for a pleasing aesthetic look, which he termed “landscape effect.” Six decades later, Pete Dye, in a similar situation searching for a decision on what to do, asked Jack Nicklaus for a critique of one of his holes he was building at The Golf Club. Nicklaus told Dye that the hole was dull,

whereupon Dye rebuilt the bunkers in a pattern of three tiers with 450 batters made of rail road ties. (C3) It is without doubt a beautiful, visual aesthetic, revered by many fans and copied by many designers across America. However, it is but a landscape effect, another obstacle; ah art.

A debate took place at Bandon Dunes concerning the choice of a landscape effect for the Old Macdonald 17th hole among Mike Keiser (1958), owner, Tom Doak and Jim Urbina, co-designers, and a hand-picked group of golf writers and advisors. The emotional discussion came down to whether or not it would be nice to create a Scottish burn in the fairway. The story goes that Urbina, one of the designers was on his knees pleading for the burn. Doak said he would sleep on it. Next day, his choice having been made, he said, “*I got rid of the big hill on the left side of the seventeenth fairway and replaced the burn with a nest of bunkers.*” (C4) The moral of Dye's and Doak's stories? “*When in doubt, bunker.*”

Bethpage Black Cse., No. 4 Farmingdale, NY

Many of the bunkers on the Bethpage Black Course, hole after hole, are exceptional for their harmonious rhythmic patterns. Most are challenging and fair, a few not so. The fourth hole, shown, is a fine set of bunkers—without equal anywhere. Upon arriving at the fourth tee one is captivated by the scene's look, before a thought of any kind is given of the shot. The bunkers appear brutal with high walls. It is an illusion. Their side hill construction gives an illusion of exaggerated depth because more sand area is exposed to the eye. There are only two sets of bunkers at Bethpage Black that I would consider a landscape effect: bunker sets at Nos. 10/11, and No.17. Once in them, a good recovery shot attempt if knocked into another bunker should not be penalized. Their beauty does not justify license for such severity.

The painting of No. 4 was enhanced by means of two technical painting devices that I employed. One was the Claudian device with placement of a dark element in the foreground. The other device was my invention, time multi viewpoint (TMV). Four different TMVs were used, one from the tee, the second from the fairway, the third from above and right of the tee, and the fourth from in front of the green. These devices were discussed in detail in Chapter 1.

The dark backdrop of dense woods stops the eye and contains one's attention. The dominant component of the scene is the bunkers with their curved lines repeated in the fairways. The side hill areas in which the bunkers are built expose more of the bunker lines than if they were built on flat ground. The great English designer, H.S. Colt preferred side hill locations for his bunkers, even though some were outside the hole routings. The pleasurable excitement of play, the fairness of the landscape component, and the visual pleasure make No. 4 one of the finest holes ever built.



Bethpage Black Cse., No. 4

Bethpage Black Cse., No. 17
Farmingdale, NY

A scene with interesting bunkers and a contrived degree of lovely landscape effect is the 17th hole. The C/S balance is too high for 95 percent of all golfers. The same aesthetic effect could be achieved with more collection areas, which would improve play for those of all levels of skill. The bunker and grass tongue patterns are not as strongly or harmoniously stated on No. 17 as on No. 4, but No. 17 is still a delightful visual experience. The use of TMV was employed to avoid breaking the continuity of the bunker lines and show them from an elevated viewpoint, as if you were up close and viewing them.

Since Tillinghast's creations are so expressive of rhythmic themes, so different from the work of other designers of his own time, I suggest that his design work was influenced by a personality trait called synesthesia. A synesthetic is able to sense experiences thru a secondary cognitive pathway. When in the process of visualizing a design that may consist of a repetitive pattern, a synesthetic may simultaneously sense rhythmic sound associated with such creations. In such cases, expression of strong rhythmic landscape patterns on the course will exclusively be expressed in a series of bunkers since they are the most plastic and easily adapted to land sites.

As did most of America's famous first generation course designers, Albert W. Tillinghast, at the age of 22, in 1896, visited St Andrews, Scotland. Fascinated by golf, he took lessons from Old Tom Morris. He was enthralled and became obsessed with the scenic beauty of the abundant and powerful sand dunes located along the courses. Tillinghast's association with golf would lead to two careers, one as a brilliant course designer, and the other as a golf writer. Tillinghast would later write about the attributes of golf as they reflected upon his own salvation from his wild, troubled youth. He reformed. With his youthful, spirited ways adjusted, he applied his hail fellow spirit to Roaring 20s golf and what would become a legendary pair of careers.



