

An Unmapped Design

By Bailey Mosier

John Fought's career path in course design has given him riches his playing career couldn't provide

It was never John Fought's intention in life to make a lot of money. Instead, he has always strived toward accumulating fortune.

Even when he won twice during his rookie season on the PGA Tour, his year-end earnings only amounted to \$100,000 in 1979. After injuries slowed his playing career and his focus turned toward starting a family, he happenstance landed himself in the terrain of golf course design.

While design, similar to his playing career, hasn't made him eligible for the cover of *Fortune*, he says he's lived the richest life he could have ever imagined.

Fought got started in golf at age seven when his grandmother used to take him to the course with her to play in the ladies league. An Oregon native, Fought attended Brigham Young University on a golf scholarship where he played four years.

He had a breakthrough rookie season on Tour in 1979, winning two events – the Buick Goodwrench Open and the Anheuser-Busch Golf Classic – in consecutive weeks. But after his first year on Tour, his ability to focus solely on golf began to wane.

“Being able to play was great but then [my wife and I] started having kids and I was gone and then I hurt myself,” Fought said.

Between 1980 and 1987, Fought battled injuries, financial

strain, family and the reality of whether all his efforts playing professionally were worth the monetary rewards. After having surgery on his neck and hand, he left the PGA Tour in 1988 to pursue a career he could map out a bit more concretely.

Fought's transition into golf course architecture was not by design; he obtained an accounting degree from BYU and had no training or education in the craft before he began studying under Bob Cupp, with whom he developed a friendship in the early 1980s.

“[Cupp] was very encouraging,” Fought recalled. “He told me I had more talent than 95 percent of the people he knew.”

More than 20 years later, Fought is hardly an intern. He's left his mark on the golf course design community, having worked on over 50 projects. Some of his award-winning designs include Pumpkin Ridge and The Reserve Vineyards & Golf Club, both in Oregon; the restoration of an original Donald Ross design at Pine Needles Golf Club in North Carolina; The Gallery North and South courses in Tucson and the Raven at Verrado in Buckeye.

“Golf course design isn't something that just appears in your brain,” Fought said. “It's very artistic and you need the kind of mind that that works with.”



John Fought's PORTFOLIO

ORIGINAL DESIGNS

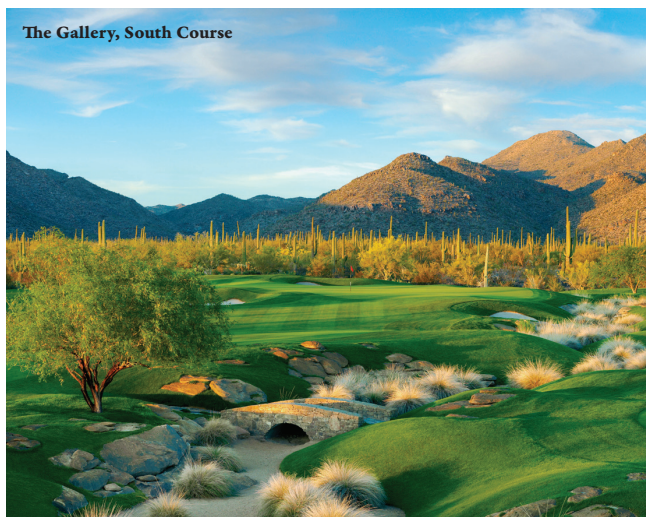
- Big Sky Golf and Country Club – Pemberton, British Columbia, Canada
- Centennial Golf Club – Medford, Ore.
- Crosswater Golf Club – Sunriver, Ore.
- The Gallery, North and South Courses – Marana, Ariz.
- Indian Wells Golf Resort, Player's Course – Indian Wells, Calif.
- Langdon Farms Golf Club – Canby, Ore.
- Pumpkin Ridge, Ghost Creek and Witch Hollow Courses – Cornelius, Ore.
- The Reserve Vineyards and Golf Club, South Course – Portland, Ore.
- The Raven at Verrado – Buckeye, Ariz.
- Ridge Creek Golf Club – Dinuba, Calif.
- Rush Creek Golf Club – Maple Grove, Minn.
- Sand Hollow Resort – Hurricane, Utah
- Somerby Golf Club – Byron, Minn.
- Trophy Lake Golf Club – Port Orchard, Wash.
- Washington National Golf Club – Seattle, Wash.
- Windsong Farm Golf Club – Minneapolis, Minn.

RENOVATIONS/RESTORATIONS

- Alpine Country Club – Highland, Utah
- Angel Park Golf Club – Las Vegas, Nev.
- Dallas Country Club – Dallas, Texas
- The Country Club at DC Ranch, Members Course – Scottsdale, Ariz.
- The Farms Golf Club at Rancho Santa Fe – Rancho Santa Fe, Calif.
- Ironwood Country Club – Palm Desert, Calif.
- The Country Club of Jackson – Jackson, Miss.
- The Legacy Golf Club – Henderson, Nev.
- Phoenix Country Club – Phoenix, Ariz.
- Pine Needles Lodge and Golf Club – Southern Pines, N.C.
- Riverside Country Club – Provo, Utah
- Rosedale Golf Club – Toronto, Ontario, Canada
- Sunriver Resort, Meadows Course – Sunriver, Ore.
- Teton Pines Golf and Country Club – Jackson Hole, Wyo.
- Wayzata Country Club – Wayzata, Minn.

UNDER DEVELOPMENT

- Black Butte Ranch-Glaze Meadow Golf Club – Sisters, Ore.
- Miches Resort – Miches, Dominican Republic
- Sundoon Golf Club – Dallesport, Wash.
- Woodhill Country Club – Wayzata, Minn.



According to Fought, passion for design is what most people lack who give it a go at it. Unfortunately, people assume because they have a passion for golf and understand how to play, that they can design courses.

"You can take Tour players and just because they're Tour players, it gives them an experience level," Fought said. "It doesn't mean you're going to be able to design courses."

It wasn't until about 10 years into his training and immersion into golf course architecture that Fought really began to understand the process of taking a project from start to finish. More than 60 years since the Golden Age architects – Donald Ross, Alister MacKenzie and A.W. Tillinghast – crafted what we still, to this day, hold as some of the greatest layouts, Fought says we've digressed in concept and execution. Today, designers do more when they should be doing less.



"Let's face it – the good Lord has done a better job than any of us could ever do with land features," Fought said, referring to the amount of land most course architects move to create the look they want. "The earth is an incredibly cool place."

"Moving dirt, in some ways I think is a bit arrogant. It doesn't look better when it's done. It looks worse."

The best designs in Fought's mind are those completed by Ross. Each day, Fought marvels over the vision and pure talent Ross must have had to accomplish the projects he did. He often wonders what a conversation with Ross would entail.

"I would love to learn why he did things," Fought said. "Strategically, what he was thinking. It would be fun to understand the things he did and how he did them. How did he do those things only visiting once or twice?"

Fought can't stand to be away from a site he's working on for more than a week; it drives him crazy. Which is why he's on the road more than he's home – also, what he attributes as the reason why his wife, Mary, has been able to tolerate him all these years.



"I love doing design more than anything. More than playing. It's the greatest job in the world."

"I've been married for 35 years but I've only been home for five," he joked.

Fought works six days a week and logs nearly 80 hours over six days if you include his travel time. On the occasion he is home, he spends his moments with his wife, children and grandkids. He rarely tees it up anymore because, believe it or not, he says he tires of the sport.

"I do golf every day," Fought said. "When I'm home I want to do something different."

As for critique or praise for his courses, Fought said he doesn't need documented acknowledgement. He simply hopes that when people play his courses, they have a memorable experience.

"I just want people to be able to look at the work I've done and say 'Wow, that guy got it,'" he said.

Fought's courses aren't hard, they're interesting – a feat he says is far more difficult to pull off.

"Hard is the easiest thing in the world to do," Fought explained. "You can do it with length, slope on greens, put tons of bunkers out there and make it impossible. Making things interesting and thought-provoking, that takes more talent."



While he's been using his talents in design for more than 20 years now, Fought looks back on his playing career and wishes he had accomplished more. Like winning more or achieving more in golf.

Truth be told, he got to experience some pretty magical moments in golf, playing with some of the game's greatest such as Sam Snead, Ben Hogan, Jack Nicklaus, Tom Watson and Arnold Palmer.

Fought won 29 individual titles in college, helped his BYU Cougars win four times at the Cougar Classic and four Western Athletic Conference Championships. He won the 1977 U.S. Amateur, played on the 1976 Eisenhower Trophy and 1977 Walker Cup teams. He played full-time on the PGA Tour from 1979-1985, earning a dozen top-10 finishes including his two wins in 1979, the same year he was named Rookie of the Year. His best finish at a major was a solo fifth at the PGA Championship in 1983.

"I have no regrets," Fought said. "I consider myself so fortunate. I have a neat family. I got a chance to experience golf all around the world."

Turns out, despite his success in golf, his heart truly aligns with design.

"I love my job," Fought said. "I love doing design more than anything. More than playing. It's the greatest job in the world."

Fought finished renovations on Dallas Country Club in Texas last year and is currently working on Black Butte Ranch-Glaze Meadow Golf Club in central Oregon. Several other projects he was in the middle of have been halted due to the economy.

When Fought looks ahead, he foresees himself building sites in Europe, an ocean course, and envisions the potential his hands could do for a site like Augusta National and other courses in the United States where Tour events are still played.

The fortunes of John Fought don't sit in a bank account, accumulating interest. His good graces lie in his family and in doing work that he feels so innately passionate about.

"If I died tomorrow, I probably would have had one of the fullest lives anyone could possibly imagine," he said. "I'm very lucky; very fortunate."