

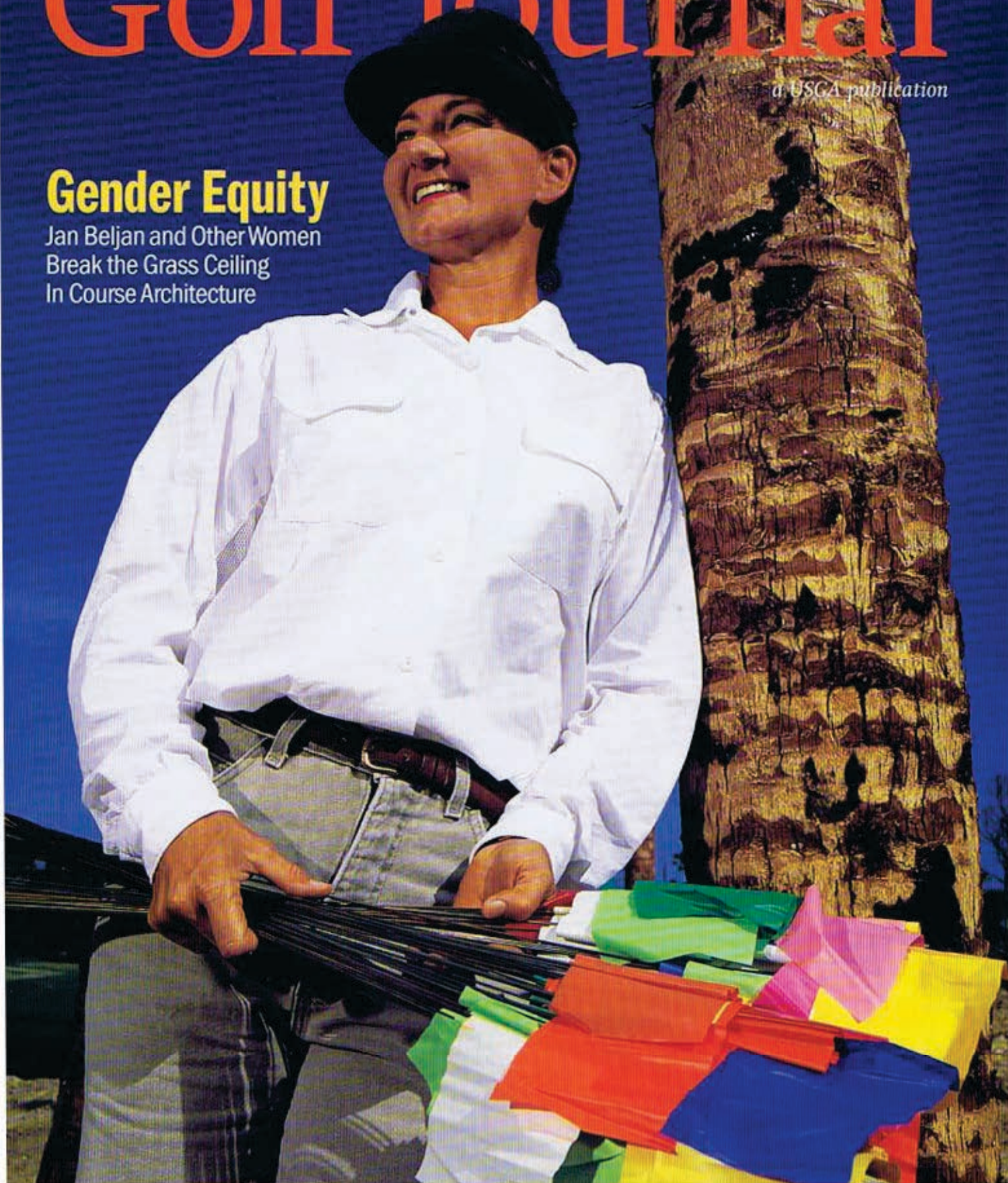
THE HIGH DESERT: A COWBOY'S KIND OF COURSE NOVEMBER | DECEMBER 2000

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Gender Equity

Jan Beljan and Other Women
Break the Grass Ceiling
In Course Architecture





DESIGNING WOMEN

As they make a growing impact on their profession, female course architects make it a point to empathize with golfers who play off every tee. **BY MICHAEL D'ANTONIO**

PHOTOS BY JOHN MUMMERT

VICTORIA MARTZ IS IN MINNESOTA getting a first look at her latest creation, grown-in and ready to play. She calls the Tournament Players Club of the Twin Cities a "prairie links" and it's easy to see why. The flat site has been contoured to produce swales and hillocks. Alongside many fairways, meadows have been allowed to grow wild with tall grasses and bright flowers. On this day, thousands of black-eyed susans bloom.

After watching players on every hole, Martz tallies what she has seen. The course yields to fine play but punishes poor judgment. At the same time, even weak players can find a landing area in the fairways and greens that are challenging but not unforgiving.

"I think we did it," declares Martz. "I think we've got something for everyone here."

With the opening of her new course, Martz has reached a high point in her career in the rarefied profession of course design. She would argue the fact that being female is incidental to her success. The truth is, the rise of women such as Martz is opening one of the game's remaining male bastions. The emergence of these designing women is being aided by the interest women touring pros — Nancy Lopez and Patty Sheehan, to name two — are showing in the field. And it means a huge creative resource is poised to make a contribution to the game.

"The female of our species mean to assert themselves in course architecture," muses Jeffrey Cornish, a designer and historian of course architecture. At 86, Cornish is one of the grand old men of the pro-

fession. He regards golf design as a true art form, one that benefits from a variety of influences. At his annual seminar at the Harvard University School of Design, he reports, the best student plans are invariably submitted by women.

"There's a real increase in the number of women studying landscape architecture," he notes. "And I think they will become a very strong influence in golf. In fact, several already are." Among them:

► Martz, whose works include King's North at Myrtle Beach (S.C.) National, The Legacy at Lakewood Branch in Bradenton, Fla., and Oak Valley Golf Club in Advance, N.C., works for Palmer Design.

► Jan Beljan, an associate of Tom Fazio whose courses include The Old Collier Club in Naples, Fla., the Osprey Ridge

As the face of course design changes, women such as (clockwise, top left) Victoria Martz, Alice Dye, Sandy Bigler and Jan Beljan are offering a new creative resource.

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY MARTY WALKER



VICTORIA MARTZ believes that the most challenging task in designing a course is to make it playable for everyone.

Course at Walt Disney World and Oyster Bay Golf Course on Long Island, N.Y.

► Lisa Maki, an independent designer from Canada who collaborated on Heritage Pointe in Alberta and had solo designs of Willows Run near Seattle and Stoneleigh Golf Club near Washington, D.C.

► Sandy Bigler, associate of longtime designer Ferdinand Garbin, who has worked on many of his projects, including Crossgates in Lancaster, Pa., and new facilities in that state

in Erie and Bloomsburg.

► And Alice Dye, a veteran who works closely with her husband, Pete, and is listed as an assistant on his Harbour Town on Hilton Head Island and Ocean layout at Kiawah Island, both in South Carolina, and the Stadium layout at PGA West in La Quinta, Calif.

To a person, says Cornish, these women and others like them are loyal to the triad of values that govern modern architecture: environmental concern, playability for all levels and scenic beauty.

THERE IS, PERHAPS, NO BETTER example of this triad than Maki's design of Prestancia in Sarasota, Fla. Built to present a variety of breathtaking views while protecting wildlife, the

course has hosted the Senior PGA Tour yet is enjoyed by amateurs who cannot break 100. "My mother, who is a 35-handicapper, considers it one of her favorite courses," says Maki.

Maki, born and raised in Kitchener, Ontario, was introduced to golf by her father. But she didn't fall in love with course design until she spent a college summer working on a course maintenance crew. She switched her major from fine art to landscape architecture and began to view course sites as "the largest canvases you could imagine." For her undergraduate thesis she traveled to Great Britain to write about the elements that make classic courses great. "I realized that the climate, the winds and landscape of individual holes confronted the player with different feelings throughout a round. Valleys could feel secluded and peaceful while a wide open hole heading into the prevailing wind can present a feeling of struggle."

The struggle shouldn't be overwhelming. "The first purpose of a course is to give people pleasure," she says. "Courses should offer a positive experience no matter what the player's abilities. A short, par-4 dogleg right is a nice beginning hole for almost everyone. After all, we don't want to make the situation hopeless."

But as a round progresses, Maki's courses will challenge skilled players with different lengths and hazards that require they use every club. "From the 15th hole on, I try to create a strategic and emotional crescendo," she says. "If the match is close, they will find opportunities for birdies if they take a chance. But if they fail, they could also suffer some consequences."

NONE OF THE WOMEN DESIGNERS have trouble imagining ways to challenge an avid golfer because each of them plays the game. But not one of them has more playing experience than Dye, who might be considered the grande dame of modern architecture. At age 73, she has played for 62 years, winning about 50 amateur tournaments, including two USGA Senior Women's Amateur titles.

"I come at the process of design as a very good player," says Dye. "It really doesn't have anything to do with being a woman, except that I am aware of the needs of a player who is not going to start from the very back tees. For a long time most courses were designed from the back tees and the forward tees were an afterthought. I think I helped change that."

Dye and her husband developed their style in the 1960s, after studying courses in Scotland. They incorporated pot bunkers, deep rough and links-like rolling fairways at places such as Harbour Town, which opened in 1969. At the time, she was probably the only woman designer in the U.S., but she was not the first. That honor belongs to May Dunn Hupfel, daughter of Tom Dunn, who claimed to have himself designed nearly 140 courses. May came to the U.S. in 1916 and laid out two courses in Nevada. She married soon after, and her career was over.

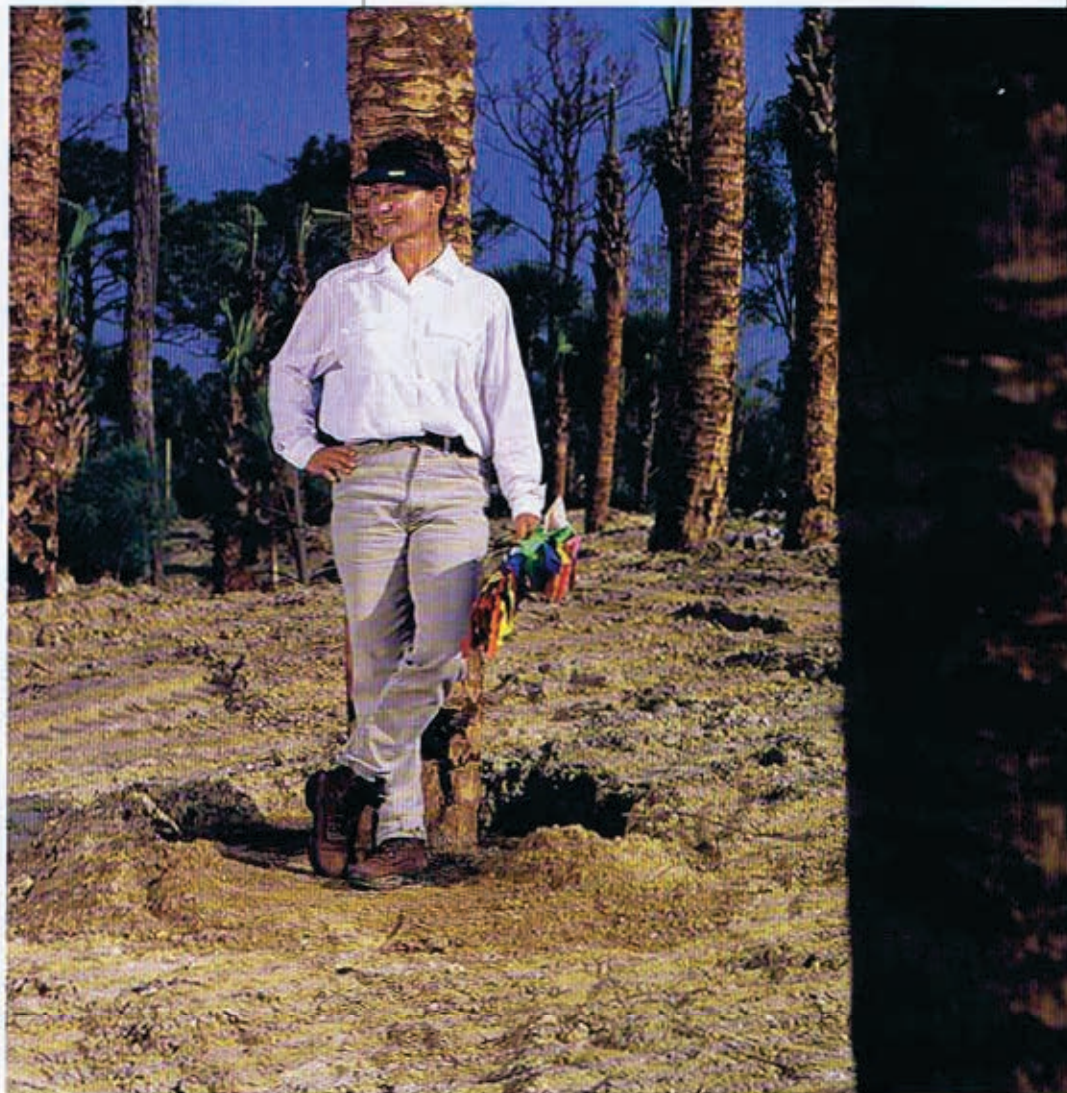
While marriage ended May Dunn Hupfel's influence, Dye built a large body of work through four decades of collaboration with her husband, during which sons Perry and Paul Burke joined the family firm. She became the first woman member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects in

1982. Interestingly, the society's stringent standards may have slowed the rise of women; to be considered for full membership, an applicant must have designed and built five courses. In a business where the customer's tastes, and finances, can fluctuate, this is much more difficult than it may seem. But with her guidance, several women have joined the ASGCA.

Another barrier women are overcoming is the job's physical nature. "It's not just sitting in the office," says Dye. "You work in the dust and dirt and there's a lot of hiking around rough terrain. But that doesn't mean women can't do it."

THE FIRST WOMAN TO FOLLOW DYE into full membership in the ASGCA was Jan Beljan. Her father, George, was a club pro in Pennsylvania who eventually designed and built a course. She studied landscape architecture at the University of West Virginia. Tom Fazio provided her a job in course design, and she gradually moved from drafting plans to senior designer. Whenever possible,

JAN BELJAN considers herself a "defender of par" and designs with a firm commitment to protect the environment.



her work yields to a site's natural elements. She enjoys the challenge of protecting the environment, whether it means providing habitat for tortoises or limiting the amount of earth she will move to preserve the ambiance of a landscape.

Like many architects, Beljan considers herself a "defender of par." She will design a course that presents obstacles to longer hitters, denying

those who play from the back tees the chance to overpower the layout. A bunker placed at 270 yards from the back tee might be part of this plan.

Beljan might also offer a bit more opportunity to golfers playing from the middle or forward tees. He or she will hit a drive that cannot reach the bunker at 270 yards. And Beljan will help their second shot, if she can, by supplying a little downhill roll. In thinking through her concepts, Beljan is gender and age neutral. "I think about the clubhead speed a player generates," she says.

Gender and age don't much matter in the business of design either, says Beljan. "If

there's an obstacle [to women entering the field], it's simply that only 400 or so courses are built each year. There are easily that many architects around, already working. When there are so few opportunities in a business, you have to have talent but you also have to be exceptionally persistent."

AND IT DOESN'T HURT TO HAVE A mentor. Sandy Bigler was not long out of high school when Garbin discovered her working on the maintenance crew at Conestoga Country Club near Lancaster, Pa. Garbin, who was redesigning nearby Meadia Heights, recruited her to be his eyes and ears when he was not on site. "We would paint what he wanted done on the ground," she recalls, "and when he left, I'd make sure it was done."

When he saw how Bigler seemed to intuit the principles of design, it seemed natural to nurture her talent. "Now when we go to a new site we'll both walk the property," says Garbin. "She goes into one corner and I go into another and when we're done we find we've drawn out several of the same holes. I'll walk to where I think there's a good location for a tee, and she'll be there."

In 15 years of collaboration, Bigler has seen the range of challenges that designers confront in an era when issues that have little to do with golf itself can dominate a project. "We've done courses where housing is a big part and we're given the land that's left over, which forces you to be very creative," she recalls. "We've had sites where work has been held up for months while archaeologists search for Indian relics. And we've dealt with our share of power lines and wetlands."

Current projects find them

ALICE DYE broke new ground as the first woman member of the ASGCA, and now sponsors up-and-coming talent.

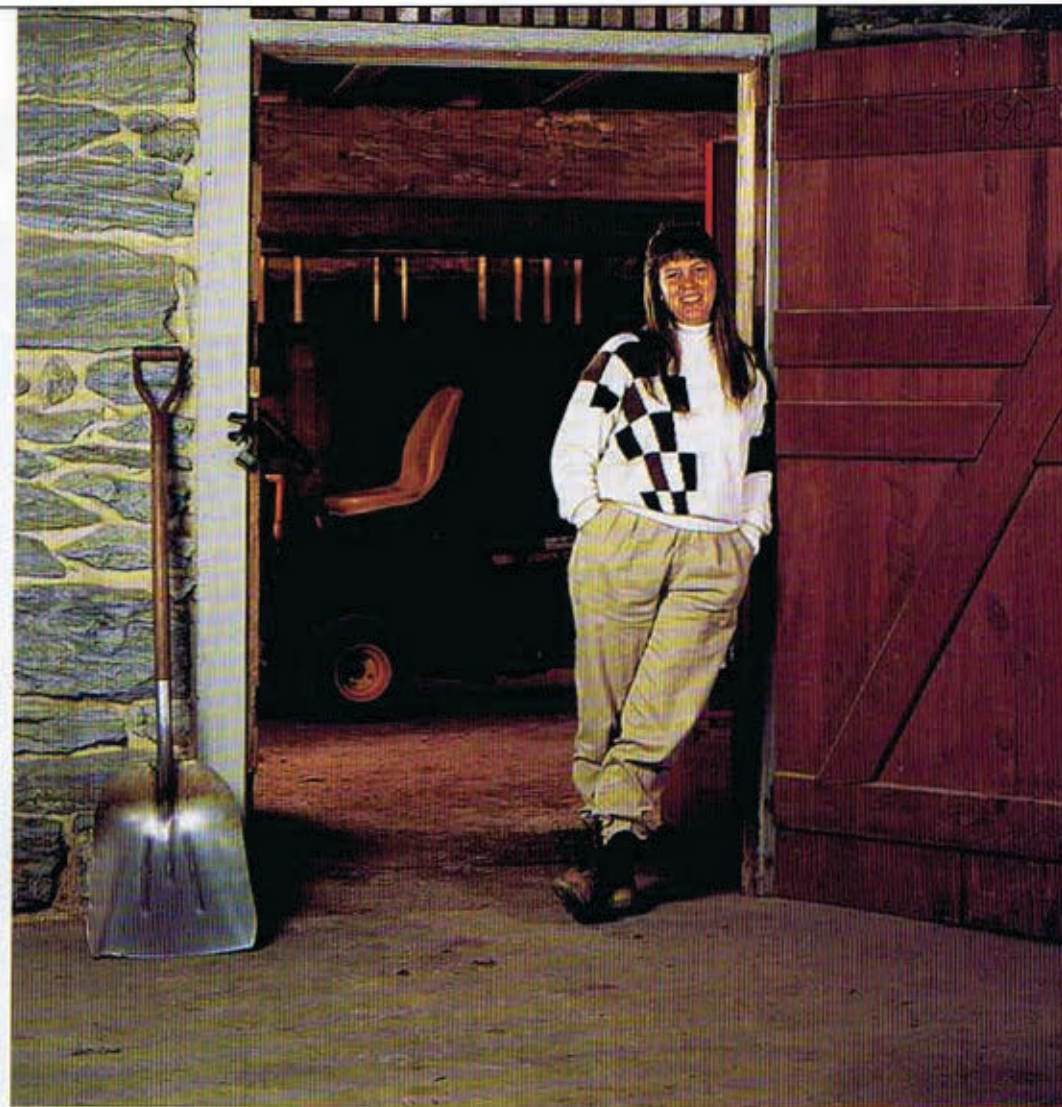


working two sites that couldn't be more different. They are turning the meadows of a low-profit dairy farm in Washington, Pa., into a layout that will provide financial security for the farmer. Bigler and Garbin also intend to remake an industrial dump, with buried drums of chemicals, into a municipal course in Erie, Pa.

"I truly enjoy meeting the different people involved in these courses and working around the demands of a site," adds Bigler. "I do consider it an art, one that requires the imagination to work within the limitations of the form. For some reason I can see the course that waits in the land, and I don't think that has anything to do with being male or female."

THOUGH GENDER CAN MAKE NO claim to the designer's creative qualities, some women do seem more attuned to the problems of players who utilize forward tees. "A lot of people complain about ladies who play slowly," notes Bigler. "But whenever we remodel a course we wind up redoing many of the forward tees because they are the cause of the problem. They are shoved off to the side, where the angle is terrible. Sometimes it will have a tree branch growing right over the front of the tee. Or there'll be a huge area of rough before the fairway. All of these things slow play."

Further impetus for sensitivity to the needs of women is coming from celebrity players such as singer Celine Dion and media mogul Oprah Winfrey. And it is just a matter of time before women pros regularly lend their names, and talents, to design. Dye reports the interest of Amy Alcott, Hollis Stacy and Jan Stevenson. Years ago Maki designed a layout



with Sally Little and Beth Daniel, but it was never built.


While they may give the average woman player better courses from every set of tees, don't expect women designers to produce layouts that are any less challenging to others.

"The real task is to make a course that is playable by everyone," explains Martz. Her Twin Cities course is an example. Despite the challenges it presents from the back tees, players of modest ability will not be frustrated if they stick to the forward tees. All the same, they will enjoy the prairie views and the blend of natural and man-made obstacles.

"We all want to be tested, no matter what our level, but not tortured," says Martz. And

SANDY BIGLER, who showed a natural skill for design, was discovered while working as part of a maintenance crew.

this is precisely how she feels about an 18-year career — tested but not tortured.

"I've gotten to participate in the development of some wonderful courses," she adds. "When you see it all has taken shape, you pinch yourself because having a job like this is like a dream come true." 

CONTRIBUTOR THE AUTHOR WROTE "TIN CUP DREAMS" THIS IS HIS FIRST CONTRIBUTION TO GOLF JOURNAL.