

Think Outside the Frame!

Golf's bad word — it's time to stop saying and thinking it.

BY DAVID A. OATIS

On nearly every Turf Advisory Service visit, I hear someone utter golf's bad word, and it is beginning to make my blood boil! It is high time we put an end to it. The word I refer to is *framing*. This word has crept into the American golfer vernacular to the point where it now shapes our views and limits our thinking. For many, it has quietly become a virtual tenet of golf course design, and golfers everywhere now assume that every green, landing zone, and even every golf hole must be framed by something. Usually it is mounding or bunkering or trees that do the framing, but it could be some other feature such as naturalized roughs. The discussion of framing now is so pervasive that one might assume that a framing requirement has been written in the Rules of Golf or in the rules of golf course architecture.

The truth is, greens, landing zones, fairways, and golf holes do not always require a frame of trees or mounding, bunkers, or naturalized roughs. The preoccupation with framing may be a product of television, where we usually get a view of individual golf holes and where the view is unnaturally narrowed. Perhaps it also comes from photographs of golf holes, where we see the fairway and green, but only a little rough and even less of the surrounding landscape. We certainly hear the term a lot on television — so often that it seems to be an accepted fact that every golf hole and every part of every golf hole should be framed by something. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Early golf courses were built on links because the land was so ideally suited to the game. Nature was the architect of these courses, and little was framed in these natural landscapes. If you have ever played a traditional links course, you might remember that, when standing on a tee or in a fairway, it sometimes is difficult to determine in which direction to hit the ball. In these wide-open landscapes, even the largest green will look small, and that can make the hole seem more difficult than it really is. The clear, striking definition we so often find in North America isn't found on a traditional links course. Our current rigid thinking suggests that earth should be moved, berms erected, bunkering created, or trees planted to block views, separate golf holes, define landing zones, funnel our vision, and FRAME! What a crime that would be on a wide-open, windswept landscape.

So, please, think outside the frame for a minute, and ask yourself what is wrong with seeing more of the landscape from one vantage point. Why should our eyesight be limited to seeing one claustrophobic golf hole at a time? Playing golf at many courses now is like looking at a series of tiny pictures or pieces of a puzzle. You can see each hole, but not the entire course. It is much like looking through a keyhole.

Framing closes in landscapes and hides great topography. When trees are used to frame a green and they are too close, they can block a view of the bunkers and/or the topography to the outside of the bunkers. So, is framing a

required element of design? Absolutely not! Can it be a useful tool? Yes, particularly where there are unique designs or unwanted views that are better off hidden. However, another option is to maintain perimeter plantings around the property so that interior views can be opened up. This allows golfers to see more of the landscape and the topography, and golfers are able to see it from multiple vantage points. Opening up older courses and not overplanting new ones allow golfers a rare treat: an uncluttered panoramic view of the landscape and its topography. After all, golf was originally a ground game, and it is the topography that makes great golf courses great.

Framing is not a required element for every design. It is not a rule that must be followed for every course and every hole. In fact, loads of golf holes would be better off without their frames. It is not necessary to turn every golf hole into an individual portrait. Doing so is like giving an artist a palette that is too small for the picture he is trying to paint. So, the next time you hear people talk about how the tree or bunker or whatever "frames" the golf hole or green complex, tell them to open their eyes and look at the entire landscape, not just a snapshot of one small part of it. Tell them to *think outside the frame!*

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