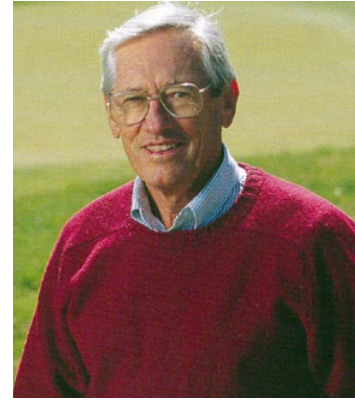


# A constant improver



ASGCA Past President Arthur Hills passed away in May 2021. *By Design* hears about the qualities he possessed as a designer and a person.

Arthur Hills – who served as ASGCA President from 1992-93 – passed away in May 2021, aged 91.

During his career as a golf course architect, which began in the 1960s, Hills designed more than 200 new golf courses and renovated more than 150 others.

His new designs include The Golf Club of Georgia in Atlanta, Bighorn Golf Club in California, and Hyatt Hill Country Resort in Texas. Hills' career saw him work on many private courses in Florida, leading Pete Dye, a Past President and Fellow of the ASGCA, to dub him "the Mayor of Naples".

afforded me the chance to pursue my dream of becoming a golf course architect and to work on projects of varied complexities and challenges all over the world," says Rogers. "I don't think there were many others who were willing to take that chance on me!"

ASGCA Past President Steve Forrest says: "He started the business by placing an ad in the Toledo Yellow Pages under 'Golf Course Architect' while operating a landscape contracting business. I had the great privilege of learning all aspects of golf course architecture from a distinguished professional practitioner and

while always trying to improve his own skills and increase his personal knowledge every day."

Continual improvement was a key asset to Hills' career in the golf industry, says Shawn Smith, ASGCA. "Maybe more than anybody I've ever known, Arthur was always trying to improve," he says. "He was always trying to get better, and he encouraged those around him to do the same.

"One of my favorite memories was in 2004 when he took the entire office to Scotland to visit the home of golf. For a week, 14 of us traveled across Scotland on an unforgettable boondoggle, soaking up everything in an effort to make us better architects. In the evenings, we would sit around having dinner and a few pints and talk about the day's experiences. For many of us, it was our first time there, and I remember all of us hanging on Art's every word to get his perspective.

"However, he was more interested in hearing from us! Even with all his experience designing golf courses,

**"One of our favorite Arthur-isms was, 'take the worst hole and make it the best'"**

Drew Rogers, ASGCA, worked with Hills for near 20 years, including on projects such as Oitavos Dunes in Portugal. "He

humble gentleman over 42 years. Arthur became a father-like figure to me who was a mentor, an instructor, exhorter and admonisher



*ASGCA Past President Arthur Hills oversaw over 150 renovations, including a transformation project at Oakland Hills North. Pictured right with Jack Nicklaus, ASGCA Fellow*

he was still picking the brains of a bunch of young kids because he wanted to learn and get better. Art was a passionate man and he pushed those around him to be better and I'll forever be thankful for his mentorship and friendship."

Hills' desire to improve was evident in his designs. "One of our favorite Arthur-isms was, 'take the worst hole and make it the best,'" says Forrest. "Examples of such transformations include the fifteenth at Oakland Hills North, the ninth at Naperville Country Club and the seventeenth at Miami Beach Golf





## REMEMBRANCE



Photos: Hills Forrest Smith



*The seventeenth at Miami Beach GC and the ninth at Naperville CC (top right). Hills took his team of golf course architects on trips to experience different types of design, including to Scotland in 2004 (right)*

Club. Even while designing new courses, he would review the routing and say, ‘OK, which hole is the weakest? Let’s get to work on it!’”

Building and maintaining relationships was very important to Hills. He developed a long-lasting friendship with Brent Wadsworth of Wadsworth Golf Construction, who built Hills’ first golf course near Toledo. “Brent taught Arthur many important aspects of the construction business and their friendship continued for over 50 years,” says Forrest.

Following his parents’ move to Fort Myers Beach and an introduction to Herb Graffis, founder of the National Golf Foundation, Hills began building “an incredible portfolio” of golf courses in southwest Florida.

Forrest says: “In the early 1980s, Arthur would come back home from a construction visit at Pelican Bay,

for example, and announce, ‘I had dinner with land planner Bill Vines last night. He’s got a 27-hole project for us’. That pattern continued with communities such as Quail Creek, Bonita Bay and several others.”

Chris Wilczynski, ASGCA, recalls many fond memories of his 20 years working with Hills. “The thing that struck me the most was his work ethic,” he says. “Arthur was very passionate about what he did and that was evident from the first time I met him.

“During construction visits at the height of his celebrity status, there would always be a big group of people and Arthur said his strategy was to walk as fast as he could because eventually, they would fade off. He only wanted to be with the contractor and a couple of others: this focus on servicing the client will stay with me.”

“The most important relationships that Arthur fostered were with his clients,” says Forrest. “He always wanted to create value for them. He must have succeeded since US Home and Lennar Corporation had Arthur design 20 residential courses.

“However, he wasn’t limited to residential settings. At Bay Harbor Resort in northern Michigan and Half Moon Bay Resort on the Pacific coast, he was able to get the most out of very dramatic sites. While ‘Best New Course’ recognition and Top 100 rankings became part of the story, Arthur’s commitment to the success of the client was always at the forefront.

“Continual improvement and life-long relationships. Arthur Hills was a master at both. His remarkable career is certainly evidence of that.” ●