
From duckling to swan

Thomas Hoffmann Jepsen describes his experience training to be a golf architect on the EIGCA's diploma programme



Most are familiar with Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale *The Ugly Duckling*. Even though written in 1843, the story is still very much relevant today. My version involves 16 hopefuls studying for the EIGCA professional diploma in golf course design and my belief is that we have spent the last two years scraping the inside of our own little egg before finally hatching in 2009. And maybe one or two of us will transform into a beautiful swan and will go on to create memorable golf courses.

It all started in Portmarnock, Ireland, during the spring of 2007 at the EIGCA annual meeting, when the institute's Education Board held interviews with candidates for the 2007-2009 diploma course. Those of us chosen represented ten different nations from four continents, yet harmonised quickly, despite our very different cultures. Maybe this was because of our common goal or maybe the world just isn't that big any more! Certainly, one of the best parts of the diploma course was getting to know such a delightful group of people. Our working backgrounds were also very different: some moving from professional golf, others from landscape architecture, golf course construction and even accountancy!

During the course of two years we have been introduced to a wide range of experiences and various types of golf courses. The diploma course is taught through five two-week seminars held in different locations selected to provide different learning experiences. Our first seminar was held in the majestic Surrey heathlands, providing an introduction to the brilliant and historically important golf courses in the area. The second was based close to Düsseldorf in Germany and was a more hands-on experience in bunker construction. The third seminar was held in Dublin and featured a combination of links courses as well as high-end golf estates. During the next event we got some sunshine and warm weather in Portugal's Algarve, and the final seminar was held at the home of golf, St Andrews, focusing on the environment – and of course our final examinations.

Besides the lectures the diploma is very much an independent study programme. All students are encouraged to learn as much as they can about becoming a golf course architect through reading, writing essays,

completing design assignments and of course, if the opportunity is there, to get experience in a real practice. I was very lucky and was presented with the chance to work at Hawtree only three weeks after our introductory seminar. I was more than happy to accept the offer even though it meant relocating from Denmark, leaving girlfriend, family and friends behind. Two years on I have not regretted this choice; I would urge all future students to seek out every opportunity to get experience from a practice.

The assignments reflected the lectures and covered a wide range of topics, all necessary

course, having a family and wanting to see friends with only 24 hours available each day is hard to juggle, and probably a good reminder of how life will be as a busy golf architect. Being used to studying and working at the same time I thought that I was well prepared – but I completely underestimated the effort needed. This is something all future students must be aware of.

The single most rewarding part of the course has been meeting a great number of people sharing the same passion for golf courses. Starting out I had only a small network but after these two years it has

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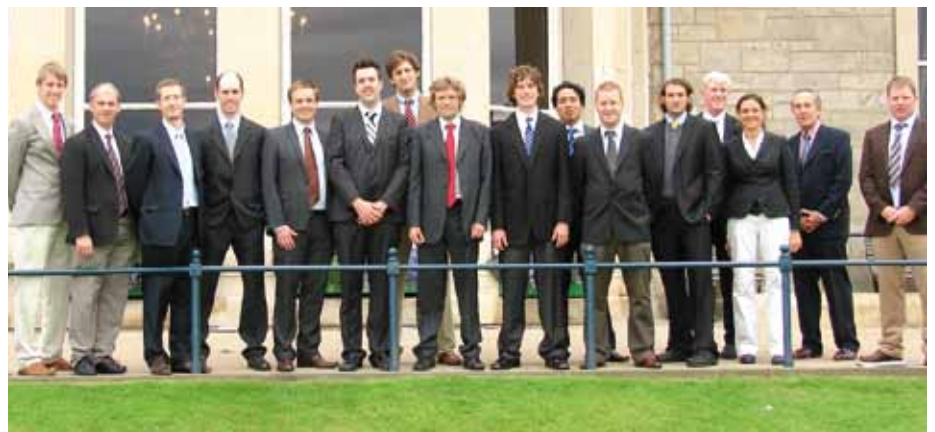
to be familiar with for success as a golf course architect – history, ecology, maintenance, construction methods, hazard positioning and design, detailed design, construction drawings, layout and routing design, site analysis, feasibility studies, contract documents and management. In all we completed eleven assignments, the last two being our dissertation and main design project.

The course has taught me some of the essentials of golf design but the main lesson was definitely time management. Working full time, attending a demanding diploma

expanded dramatically and I now know who to call when I need information. Thanks to Martyn Jones, our course manager, for a fantastic job. Thanks to the members of the EIGCA and related organisations for taking part in our education and making it good value for money.

Swan or not, working as a golf course architect is a fantastic experience and living in a barnyard is only part of the magic. **GCA**

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Participants on the 2007-2009 EIGCA diploma course