

Clubhouses

A player's golfing experience most often starts and finishes at the Clubhouse. So locating the clubhouse with the golf course is a decision that has a significant impact on the overall experience. Where therefore, should a Clubhouse be located to best enhance the golfing experience?

The most common answer to this question is, 'on the highest part of the course'. This however is not always the correct answer. Nor is 'closest to the main access road', or 'in the corner of the property'. Indeed, this is the best location to, as the American golf course architect George C. Thomas wrote, 'hamper the proper laying out of the course, and cause much discomfort to the playing membership.' The best clubhouse location varies depending on such factors as the type of course being built, size of the desired clubhouse, the steepness of the terrain, the sites area, soil type, the prevailing wind direction and ultimately routing of the course that gives 18 of the best golfing holes.

History has taught us that the primary lesson may be to have the golf course architect involved in the master planning process. So often the clubhouse is positioned on the site prior to the golf architect beginning work on the course routing, and the golf architect must then manipulate the course routing, and perhaps compromise the natural route of the starting and finishing holes, to work in with the pre-positioned clubhouse. A golf course architect understands the role and function of the clubhouse, and will position it for those requirements accordingly, but a client or master-planner who is not versed in golf course design may not position it in the location to get the best golf routing.

While locating a clubhouse at a place closest to a main road may reduce the costs of getting services to the Clubhouse (e.g. power, water, sewer, gas etc.), it may, by chance, place the building at the western side of the property forcing the first holes to play into the rising sun and the last holes to play into the setting sun. This is never ideal. Indeed, if the Clubhouse needs to be placed on a boundary, use the central part of your eastern boundary.

More imperfect than the clubhouse being located on the western boundary corner is the Clubhouse located on the highest point on the western boundary corner! Indeed the highest point on the site is, in general, not the best place for the clubhouse. While the views from the clubhouse may be stunning, and the first hole may play downhill, the last holes will be severely inflicted, because, as they say, 'what goes down, must also come back up'. Little is worse than a trudge back up a hill at the end of a round – especially if it's into the setting sun. Such a finish makes what is meant to be a fun past-time, into a boring, irritable, and exhaustive slog – and nothing drives new players away from the game more quickly!

It seems that to get the best relationship between the clubhouse and the golf course, the clubhouse should be located centrally on the property. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, it allows greater flexibility with the course routing. Holes can head in any direction– as dictated by the surrounding terrain. Also, there is a greater opportunity to get returning loops of nine holes and to have the course radiating out from the clubhouse. Secondly, it gives greater freedoms to position holes in relation to the sun and wind direction. Thirdly, services can be brought to the clubhouse from

any direction so members may enjoy the seclusion and peace at one end of the building while all necessary items required to run the clubhouse can be brought in to the at another end. And, as a fourth and fifth consideration, the access road can be woven into the course routing more naturally and with less visibility, and the clubhouse will enjoy greater privacy.

In considering clubhouse locations, the sun angles in winter and summer, and the warm and cold prevailing wind directions should also be taken into account. A location that gives protection from the cold southerlies yet maximises the winter sun should be given high priority. In New Zealand, a clubhouse site with a northerly aspect would be preferable, but the matter of proper exposure is vital everywhere on the course.

Much criticism aimed at the finishing holes is the fault of the clubhouse location rather than the golf architect. The arbitrary or deliberate placement of the clubhouse in the wrong location compromises the best routing of the course. The well conceived golf property must be designed as a whole, and this is more likely to be achieved with golf architect on the master-planning team. It just may be true that the '19th hole' is the most important on the course.