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Movie Analogy by Paul Albanese, ASGCA

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MOVIE ANALOGY

After watching the HBO series Project Greenlight, a one hour weekly show which documents the process of a creating a real Hollywood movie, I started to ponder the strikingly similar process of making a movie and creating a golf course, which I design for a living. Golf courses and movies both stem from the creative process, and both films and movies are projects requiring the combined efforts of many people.

Films and golf courses are both mediums by which artists express their values, opinions and beliefs, as well as vehicles by which investors hope to make a profit. Both these forms of art/commercial enterprise have many similarities, such as the key players which are critical to their success, potential pitfalls that can impede progress, and other analogous factors that may cause the project to either succeed or fail. Looking at these respective artistic genres in a comparative light will show that the artistic process, no matter which medium, is often enjoyable, frustrating and rewarding.

While watching a movie that inspires me, I often wonder who was truly responsible for creating the powerful response from my emotions. While observing the credits, as hundreds of names scroll down the screen, I wonder how the movie may have changed perspective had different actors played the key roles or how the movie may have been translated differently by another director.

Similarly, after playing a golf course that truly inspires me, I again become curious as to what or who was responsible for the pleasant (or unpleasant) experience. Just as with a film, there are hundreds of people involved in the process of creating a golf course. And, just as with a film production, a golf course would have a different feel or character, depending on the people involved in its creation.

The following is a comparison of the multitude of component roles analogous to the creation of a golf course and a film.

THE PLAYERS:

Movie Studio/Bank Financing:

Most films and golf course productions require capital financing in order to become a reality, and the studios that provide funding to the movie industry, such as Paramount, Fox, and Universal are comparable to the funding giants of the golf industry, namely Textron and Wells Fargo. Without these financial conglomerates behind their respective projects, many great and inspiring movie stories and golf landscapes may never come to fruition. The monetary backing of an artistic endeavor of this scale is necessary, and often, unsung.

At the same time, there are inspiring stories about movies and golf courses that had meager financial backing, yet became internationally recognized projects by the aficionados in their field. Examples that quickly come to mind

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are The Blair Witch project, which purportedly cost a mere \$60,000 to create and won critical acclaim, as well as created a tremendous windfall profit for those who invested in a “flyer”. On the golf side, a good example is Pacific Dunes, located on the coast of Oregon, which is a stunningly awesome golf track that cost in the neighborhood of \$2,000,000 and is now considered one of the best golf courses in the world. Both of these projects required only modest financial resources, yet became great artistic pieces.

The stories of Blair Witch and Bandon Dunes aside, financing, in both film and golf is necessary, whether it be \$10,000,000 needed to create a summer blockbuster or \$1,000,000 to create a B-movie. For art to evolve and develop, there usually needs to be financial support, and both golf and film will continue to require the backing of sponsors and investors in order to sustain.

Producer/Owner:

Movie Producers and Golf Course Owners are cut from the same cloth. The Producer of a movie and the Owner of a golf course are the people that have a creative vision, and are willing to take a risk in order to make that vision a reality. The producer of a movie and owner of a golf course both understand that it takes a talented team of creative professionals to generate a well received project. Successful golf course owners and movie producers understand the key to success is entrusting in the professional team assembled to do their respective jobs well.

This is not to say that Owners and Producers cannot play dual roles in the process. Often, a producer of a movie or an owner of a golf course will wear two hats in the process of creating a movie or film. For example, Oscar winning director Steven Spielberg is often the producer as well as the director of films, such as 1993 Oscar winning film Shindlers List.

On the golf course side, award winning golf course builder Joe Niebur, owner of Niebur Golf and of many golf courses as well, such as the award winning course “Green Valley Ranch” in Denver, Colorado

The Producer/Owner of a film or golf course is the most critical role for these respective artistic endeavors. Without these visionary risk takers, there would be no project. Their vision is what drives the process, and makes the project a reality. Quality Producers and Owners both know that it requires a team effort to truly create a great film or golf course. And, to this end, the Owner/Producer will seek out the best players for each role, and give them the freedom to do what they do best.

Writer/Architect:

The producer of a movie knows the story they want to tell, but often, they do not know how to tell it. So, they look for someone that knows how to tell a story: a writer. A gifted writer can tell a story in a way that will inspire people to feel and emote. A well written story is critical to how a film will be reviewed by those who watch it. The true essence of a good story relies on how it is told – not simply the content. Identical stories may be told by different story tellers, with drastically different results. The story of the Titanic has been told at least 4 times in the past on the movie screen, yet it never evoked as much emotion as when described by James Cameron in the 1997 film version.

The architect of a golf course is also telling a story, but through the landscape. As a golfer traverses over a golf course, they are being proscribed a perspective of that landscape -- a story in effect--- created by the golf course architect. This story may have been told in different ways by different people (i.e different routings of the golf holes), but the golf course architect, by routing the golf course over the land the way they see fit, creates a specific path/storyline for the golfer to follow.

The raw land of a golf course is analogous to the plot of a movie. A 250 acre piece of land with rolling terrain, woods, streams and trees is akin to a good story with twists, turns, suspense, action and good characters. Both are great starting points. Taking these respective elements and putting them together coherently and creatively is the charge given to the writer of a movie and the architect of a golf architect.

Sometimes, there is only so much a writer or an architect can accomplish, given certain constraints. A boring story (or bad piece of land), whether being told on the screen or on the landscape, will often cause disappointment. Conversely, a well written story or interesting golf routing can be the key the ingredient to accolades. In fact, it takes more talent for a writer to create an interesting plotline from an inherently boring story, just as it takes more talent for an architect to create an interesting routing from a boring piece of land.

In both cases, in order to create the requisite amount of zest, the writer/architect needs embellish the story or the land through other means. The writer will rely upon character development to make a boring story interesting, just as the golf course architect will rely on bunkers and interesting green contours to make up for the lack of natural interest in the land.

Even though a well written story and well crafted routing are key elements to their respective art forms, it must be recognized that a non-talented writer or architect may have a strong enough supporting team to make up for their lack of creativity. As much as I would like to think that only a great architect can create a great golf course, I know that in many cases, the pure value of the story itself (i.e the site) will more than suffice to create a well received product.

For example, the banal story told in regarding a boring movie that did well anyway at the box office due to great special effects.....
Armageddon or Independence Day ----was made up for by the special effects created on screen, and therefore box office receipts did not suffer, and the movie was generally well received. The economic success of this movie was not due to the talent of the writing, but to the talent of other supporting factors, such as special effects, good acting, or inspiring music. Comparably, there are many golf courses, especially in resort locations, that command grossly high greens fees, simply due to the "special effects" created on the landscape, such as towering waterfalls, 50 foot high mounding or overly buxom beverage personnel.

The different styles of screenwriters and golf architects are also comparable. The writer and architect are responsible for expressing the vision of the Producer/Owner. Many storywriters enjoy a simplistic and formulaic plotline. We have all heard of the movie story which was modified, against the writer's wishes, in order to achieve the "Happy Hollywood Ending". These stories are often predictable, and rarely achieve critical acclaim, yet they usually satisfy the majority of movie goers and ensure the essential box office receipts – i.e they make money.

In a similar way, many golf course architects also employ the simplistic and formulaic routing, which is the equivalent to the "Happy Hollywood" plotline of a movie. These routings often follow tried and true rules of thumb, such as dramatic downhill par threes, valley fairways, and leaving the toughest holes for the end (the equivalent to the "Happy Hollywood Ending"). Similar to the formulaic movie plot, these formulaic type golf routings are needed to create palatable golf courses that will satisfy the majority of the golfing public, and ensure the indispensable rounds for financial stability.

Pushing the envelope for a golf architect or movie writer is exciting, but often comes with more risk. Movies with non-formulaic plotlines, such as *American Beauty* or *The Crying Game*, where the hero does not necessarily prevail, often claim critical praise, but do not always reap the financial success of their cohorts. Golf courses that have unusual routings, such as ending the course with a par 3 or incorporating blind shots, may be considered innovative, yet too out of the ordinary for the regular golfer.

The writer and architect are the key people in the creative process; they lay the creative foundation through the development of the plot line or routing. The writer embellishes the plot through subplot and character development – the architect embellishes the routing through strategy and feature development, such as green design and bunker placement.

This detailed development of the plot or routing is critical to the quality of the final product. Similar to movies which fall short of a four star rating due to lack of character development, golf courses that simply rely on a well conceived routing are often deemed less than exemplary. In both situations, there needs to be a continued and detailed development of both the plot of a movie and refinement of the routing for either of these works to be considered truly great.

There are situations where a movie or a golf course may be created without retaining a professional writer or architect designated specifically for that task. But, in these cases, the manifestation of the Owner's visions is a great risk. Good writers, like good architects, often have the essential combination of talent and training needed to take a vision and translate it to others. A movie producer or golf course owner that chooses to develop their project without an experienced writer or architect will rely heavily on their supporting cast for success.

Director/Builder:

The director of a movie is analogous to the builder of a golf course. Both professions are required to take a story, described by the writer, or the design depicted by the architect, and transform it from paper to reality, either on the screen or on the earth. Directors and builders are responsible for the manifestation of the vision laid out by the Owner/Producer and Writer/Architect. The director of a movie is responsible for how everything is put together in order to make that movie fulfill the vision. Everything from how the actors perform, to how the sound works, to the angle of lighting, fall under the supervision of the director. In comparison, a golf course builder is responsible for everything from how the greens are shaped, to how the water gets to the grass, to making sure the lights work, too.

The director of a movie and the builder of a golf course are extremely critical to the final product. These two roles have the power to make a movie or a golf course great or horrible. There are many instances where great, well told stories, funded by a lot of money, have come out poorly, due to poor direction. Similarly, there are also illustrations where great golf routings, on great pieces of land, funded by gobs of cash, have come out less than exemplary, due to poor construction.

In both movie direction and golf course building, there are different and distinct styles. Everyone in Hollywood knows Clint Eastwood is a "one take" kind of director. He shoots scenes only once, and very quickly. And, most people are aware of the directors that demand everything be perfect before they shoot, and it will often take many hours or days before they "get it right". The same styles can be compared to golf course builders. Some can whip out a golf hole in no time, and others need to take more time to "get it right", often

reshaping or tweaking areas of the hole that just do not seem to work.

The director of a movie is maybe the most critical piece to the movie making puzzle, because they truly have the most creative control in the process, much to the dismay of the writers. The builder of a golf course is also the most critical piece to the golf course making process, again, to the dismay of many golf course architects. Good golf course builders, like good movie directors, will work closely with the writer or architect, to ensure the final product meets the overall objective of the vision. But, in the end, the Owner or Producer will have to either choose who's vision he truly wants, that of the writer/architect or that of the director/builder.

Leading Actor/Shaper:

Movie actors and golf course shapers are very interesting and similar members of these respective artistic processes. The lead actor of a movie is critical to the overall feel of a movie, and a lead shaper on a golf course project is equally critical to the overall feel of a golf course. In both professions, the intrinsic creative ability of the individual artist, be they an actor or shaper, is what truly makes a creative difference in the final product.

An actor is supposed to listen to the director's ideas and follow the writer's dialogue lines, just as a golf course shaper is supposed to follow the direction of the builder and the architect's topographic lines. But, no matter how close an actor or shaper follow direction, they will still incorporate their own interpretation into the final product. Given the same five lines of dialogue, and the same direction of Steven Spielberg, it is obvious that Anthony Hopkins would evoke a different feeling from a scene than Alec Guinness or Peter O'Toole. Similarly, given the same golf green design, with the same guidance of Tom Fazio, every golf course shaper would create a golf green that has a different feeling.

As a golf course architect myself, I have seen this occur on almost every project. I understand that to be an architect, one needs to understand not only design, but how to harness the talents of the shapers that are needed to fulfill the vision. Actors and shapers are creative people with different styles and personalities. And, as any creative person knows, working as part of a creative team can be difficult, especially if egos clash. Learning the style and understanding the shapers creative side has allowed me to better utilize shapers to create the golf features I envision.

Most people have heard the stories of difficult actors being prima donnas on the set of a movie. Since actors are usually being paid extraordinary dollars, they may assume their creative vision is being paid for, when in reality, they are simply supposed to follow the vision of the writer, producer and director. And, of course, there are the great actors of the world that, despite their large paycheck, give due credence to the true creative vision of the director and writer.

Golf course shapers have a tendency to act in a parallel way to lead actors. In the golf world, some shapers will ignore the vision of the Owner and Architect and simply incorporate their own preconceived notion of form onto the project. These type shapers do not grasp how to work as part of a creative team. Shapers of this ilk remind me of actors that essentially give the same performance in every movie, never trying to develop a different kind of character.

One dimensional actors and shapers usually sustain to due to a simple concept ----"it worked on the last project, so it will probably work on this project." And, many times, doing what worked on the last project is enough, at least to make a profit. There is a reason Steven Siegel films continue to be

produced.

Golf course shapers are synonymous with lead actors, except they are not nearly as well known as lead actors. But, their essential role is the same --- they bring the creative process to fruition. Both the lead actor and golf course shaper are the final human touch before the creative process takes on a physical form – either on film or on the ground. Both processes, movie making and golf course creating, lead up to one critical point – when the actor acts and the shaper shapes.

Supporting Actors/Finish Shapers:

There are so many contributors to great golf courses and great films, many of which go unnoticed. In film, there are supporting actors, many of which steal the show, and can make a movie rise to the level of award status. In golf course creation, there are “finish shapers” that put the final touches on the forms and contours of the landscape, which can transform a golf course from simply “good” to great. These people, supporting actors and finish shapers, are the unsung members of the creative team that are critical to creating greatness.

A supporting actor in a film will often know how to make the other performances seem better. They never dominate a movie, rather they embellish. Great supporting actor performances can take an average movie, and make it great.

The true essence of the finish shaper on a golf course is to create the final contours around the green complexes and other features, which truly give the golf course its character. A golf course with all the right ingredients, but lack the final detailed contouring, will often not be considered great.

Pete Dye, often considered the best in the world at creating golf courses, has maybe the best finish shaper in the business named Keith Sparkman. Those who truly appreciate and admire Pete Dye golf courses understand that much of the greatness comes from the intricacy and beauty of the finish shaping, especially around green complexes.

Although Dye himself has much input into the overall green concept, he is largely not responsible for the subtle and elegant beauty his greens are known to embody. His best supporting actor, Keith, is truly skilled at using smaller pieces of equipment, which are necessary to create the dynamic forms and shapes that are now associated with Pete Dye. (By the way, Pete himself would be considered the writer, director and lead actor being that he routes the golf course, builds the golf course, and often shapes the golf course himself).

The supporting cast in a movie and the finish shapers on a golf course are truly unsung and often overlooked components of a project. Artistic projects of this scale will always need a strong supporting cast in order to succeed, and the supporting actors and finish shapers are those that will fill that role.

Lighting and Sound/Drainage and Irrigation:

The lighting and sound of a movie and the drainage and irrigation of a golf course are similar since they are the technical parts of their respective projects. Lighting and sound is essential to a movie being seen and heard well.

Unfortunately, for both these professions, the only time their craft seems to be noticed is when it is not done well. It is rare to hear someone leave a movie and applaud the great sound or lighting, but we have all lamented scenes in movies where the action could not be seen because it was too dark.

Similarly, the drainage and irrigation of a golf course make a golf course function well, so the story can be told. There are many very nice golf holes that have been essentially ruined due to poor drainage or irrigation. Again, it is a rare occurrence for a golfer to go into the proshop after a round and laud compliments upon the drainage or the irrigation.

Cinematography/Landscaping: The cinematography of a movie can be compared to the landscaping of the golf course. The cinematography of a movie will create a “feel” to a movie, using different techniques, just as the landscape of a golf course will create a different “feel” as well.

Cinematography will utilize different angles, film type, and styles to create an atmosphere that will best suit the story being told. Whether trying to create an old world atmosphere by using black and white film or creating suspense with camera angles coming out of the floorboard, the cinematography will enhance the mood to make the story more believable, enjoyable and interesting.

The landscape of a golf course will also enhance the entire experience. Utilizing the appropriate grass and plant types can give a golf course a unique and special feel. It is imperative for a golf course trying to have a “linksland” flavor, to utilize the correct grass types that will emulate this look. The landscaping of a golf course is the background that the entire story will play out upon. Although it may seem less than important, this aspect is critical how a golf course will feel by the users.

Special Effects/Special Features:

The special effects in a movie may sometimes be the most memorable part of the film. The special features built on a golf course too, are sometimes the most notable part of the experience. After leaving many of the StarWars films, I find myself thinking about the special effects more than the story line. Many golf courses built in the desert have careening waterfalls and extravagant flower beds, which will often leave a larger impression on the golf than the golf hole routing or the green complexes.

Special effects, although fun and exciting, are rarely the key component to a great movie or great golf course. Many times, the special effects of a movie and golf course, overshadow a high quality project. Classic movies, such as Casablanca, and classic golf courses, such as Crystal Downs, rely much less on special effects than modern movie, even modern classics. Almost every movie today, whether good or bad, seems to have a least one scene where the unbelievable comes to fruition. Modern golf courses too, seem to have a least one hole where the special features dominate the experience. The technology to create the wondrous is available, and both movies and golf courses are using it to make people say “wow!”.

Obviously, the comparisons between the movie and golf course making process can be made for every component, up to and including the popcorn served at the theatre and the beer served from the beverage cart. The more I pondered these two processes, the more pieces I compared. The team creative process is very powerful and exhilarating.

Getting multiple minds to think on the same creative wavelength is not an easy chore, and true kudos should be given to those people that accomplish greatness in these respective fields. Fortunately for those in the movie business, recognition is given each year at the Academy Awards for most allied professions making up the ranks. Unfortunately for the golf business, there is no parallel that recognizes the efforts of some of lesser known professions involved in making great golf venues. Maybe there will be in the future. Nonetheless, movies and golf courses will continue to be formed by creative teams of people, all of whom have ideas, egos, and opinions that will

need to be melded, translated and massaged in order to create a truly great art piece that people will want to see or play upon.

One last point of comparison between the production of a golf course and of a movie is to analyze the different patrons-----the moviegoer and the golfer. I have noticed that matter how good a movie or how great a golf course --- if the moviegoer did not like their date or the golfer did not have their swing that day --- they probably thought the movie or the golf course stunk.

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