



By José Martínez

PHOTOS BY EDDIE HON

Back to Nature

If there's any conclusion to be drawn from Charlie Davison's history of playing golf, it's this: His nearly six decades of playing the game have instilled in him a remarkable respect for the game and the courses it is played on.

That's not as abstract as it sounds. Davison is both the chief executive and chief financial officer for Todd Eckenrode - Origins Golf Design, an Irvine-based architecture firm that designs golf courses. To hear Davison tell it, though, the designers get their inspiration from the land itself.

"We like to impact the land as little as we possibly can," he said. "The newer golf course should look like they've been there forever – not a contrived result of man's interference with nature."

Davison, who recently joined the SCGA's Board of Directors, spends plenty of time in nature to know a space

that's "not contrived" when he sees one. The 71-year-old surfer frequently enjoys paddling out to line-up with his son and grandsons. When he isn't working, playing golf, surfing, gardening, cooking or fly fishing, he finds time to sit down with his trumpet, piano or ukulele in between. ("For my own enjoyment, not for other's amusement," he adds quickly, laughing.)

On the job, Davison says he "gets involved in very little of the design work" at Origins – he's responsible for the day-to-day operations of the firm. But it's clear that his love of shaping where golfers play is immense.

Born in Glendale, Calif., he started playing golf around the time he was 12. He hasn't stopped since. Davison played high school golf, although he doesn't want to be "misleading" about what that meant: "I was actually alternate sixth man on my high school golf team," he laughed. But he's remained committed to the game, and his circle of friends has always been largely comprised of golfers.

Which is why it makes sense that the game found its way into his professional life. Davison majored in marketing at California State University, Northridge. After a stint in the insurance business, he joined his father, helping grow their international marketing firm. The way he refers to that post-college period will resonate all too well with contemporary recent grads.

"I'm not sure I really had a vision for my career," said Davison.

But he did have a family, which made his primary goal clear: "keeping food on the table."

After the dust settled, Davison "fell into golf course architecture." In 1999, he and Todd Eckenrode co-founded Todd Eckenrode – Origins Golf Design, with Eckenrode having the responsibility of the firm's design and construction activities. Although their responsibilities are starkly different, Davison now has no trouble outlining that vision he says he once lacked. Besides the "classic, natural" style he and his colleagues champion in their work, Origins also keeps the player as well as the environment in mind.



"A golf course should be very playable and enjoyable for golfers of all skill levels," he said. "If we are successful in our efforts, our golf courses will stand the test of time, that benchmark by which all great golf courses are judged."

And with Davison, it always comes back to nature:

"We like golf courses that follow the topography and lay gently on the land," he said. "Unnatural water features, vegetation and contrived movement of the basic landforms are not consistent

with great golf design. We like to see features that create the opportunity to think about your next shot, that give you options so when you stand on the tee, you're not just contemplating hitting the ball down the fairway, but are forced to consider the strategies that were designed into the golf course."

Davison's vision goes beyond the course, too – and into the game itself. He said he agrees with those in the golf community who believe that "play is way too slow."

"Slow play is really one of the major problems in golf today, because you lose all sense of rhythm and tempo," he said. That's bad from both a business and pleasure standpoint, Davison added.

Players walk away at the end of the day "with a bad feeling," and that doesn't reflect well on course owners or the game itself.

"Golf plays its best when it's played without undue delay," he said. The SCGA has been very innovative with its Pace of Play Pledge initiative, involving both everyday golfers and mandatory pace of play rules in SCGA

tournament play.

Then there's the problem of recruiting new players into the sport and bringing players back that have dropped golf for one reason or another.

"There is a need to welcome new players to our wonderful world of golf," said Davison. "Golfers who have not taken the sport up or have stopped playing because it's too time-consuming, expensive or intimidating. We need to have facilities and characteristics of the game that will allow participants to feel

more comfortable and either start playing or return."

All difficult problems, to say the least. But that's part of why Davison says he's happy to be on SCGA's board – "to give back to a sport that has meant so much to my life and the life of my family." It's a time-consuming endeavor, he says, but a worthy one, especially given that the golf industry is at the core of his livelihood.

Ultimately, while Davison's love for golf is really rooted in three simple aspects:

"The nature of the sport is competitive and social and the spirit of the game, unlike any other sport, is steeped in the tradition of integrity. All of these elements are important lessons in life for our children and for as many potential junior golfers as we can reach," said Davison.

It doesn't hurt that Davison carried that tradition forward with his own offspring. Not long ago, Davison's father was in his eighties and they both enjoyed the special experience of playing golf with four Davison generations. In addition to the Davison boys, Davison's favorite partner is his wife Maureen, who just happens to love golf as much as he does.

"The Davison Family has been able to enjoy the sport both on the course and as spectators," he said. "It has been quite a ride." Sharing a very special family golf adventure, Davison told the story of Father's Day in 2000, when he was able to take his father, son and grandson to Pebble Beach for the U.S. Open. They were there watching when Tiger Woods delivered what might be called the greatest performance in golf history – a 12-under par, 15-stroke victory to win the U.S. Open.

Maybe Davison did have a vision all along. If you ask him why he took up the game in the first place, he uses the same word he uses to describe one of his firm's core values.

"It was just a very natural thing for me," he said. ■