

# Harry Colt and Tom Simpson

The smart expert craftsman versus  
the eccentric creative genius

INFINITE  
VARIETY



GOLF DESIGN

FRANCIS POTT

# Harry Shapland Colt (1869-1951)



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# Tom Simpson (1877-1964)



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# Introduction Colt

- Harry S. Colt is still one of the most admired golf course architects in the history of the game of golf
- Initially trained as a solicitor, he only became active as an architect when he became secretary of Sunningdale on turning 32
- In total Colt and his partners designed more than 100 golf courses during his career, most of which are still very highly regarded (Pine Valley, Muirfield, Royal Portrush, Sunningdale, Wentworth, Swinley Forest)
- Unfortunately Colt only wrote three articles/books on Golf Course Architecture:
  - Treatment and upkeep of a Golf Course on Light Inland Soil (1906)
  - Golf Architecture (hoofdstuk in Book of the Links) (1912)
  - Some Essays on Golf Course Architecture (1920)

## Colt in France

- Harry S. Colt was very active in France
- He designed several courses of which Granville, St.Germain, St.Cloud, Chantaco, Cannes Mandelieu and Le Touquet La Mer still exist.
- A number of these courses are comparable in quality to the best of the courses Colt designed, and in several cases still are close to their original states

# Colt in France



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# Colt's principles

1. Work with the natural features of the site
2. Landscape changes should look natural
3. Apply links playing characteristics and conditions on inland courses
4. Systematically route the course, whilst presenting the player with infinite variety
5. Stimulate the player to think strategically with his (tee) shots
6. Defend the green by its location, size and surrounding hazards rather than through an extreme putting surface
7. Design severe for the scratch player, but sympathetic for the bogey player

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# Introduction Simpson

- Tom Simpson is probably one of the most underrated golf course architects in the history of the game of golf
- Initially trained as a solicitor, he only became active as an architect in his thirties
- In total Simpson designed more than 30 golf courses during his career, most of which are still very highly regarded (Morfonataine, Cruden Bay, Chantilly, Royal Spa, Fontainebleau, New Zealand)
- Simpson wrote 20+ articles and 2 books on Golf Course Architecture:
  - The Architectural Side of Golf (1930)
  - Golf Architecture (chapter in The Game Of Golf) (1931)

## Simpson in France

- Tom Simpson was very active in France
- He designed several courses of which Morfontaine, Chantilly, Fontainebleau, Club de Lys, Deauville, Chiberta and Hardelot still exist.
- Many of these courses often are some of the best courses Simpson designed, and in several cases still are close to their original states

# Simpson in France



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# Simpson's principles

1. A course must have variety
2. Good visibility is indispensable if holes are to present a strategic problem
3. There must always be an alternative route to the green
4. Golf courses should not be too long
5. There should be as much triangulation as possible
6. Every advantage should be taken of the most striking features of the site
7. There should be 2 or 3 starting points near the club house
8. Avoid parallel fairways
9. Avoid artificial looking construction work as much as possible

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## Natural design

“I firmly believe that the only means whereby an attractive piece of ground can be turned into a satisfying golf course is to work the natural features of the site in question. Develop them if necessary, but not too much; and if there are many nice features, leave them alone as far as possible, but utilise them to the their fullest extent, and eventually there will be a chance of obtaining a course with individual character of an impressive nature”

**Harry S. Colt “Some Essays on Golf-course Architecture” 1920**

“The acid test is whether it appears obvious within a glance where artificial work has been done.... An artificial hill which is pleasing and natural to the eye will cost about six times more than a hill considered purely from a scientific point of view.”

**Tom Simpson “Golf Architecture. The Game of Golf” 1931**

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# Natural design



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## Landscape changes should look natural



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## Colt on bunkers

“...it is far easier and cheaper to cut artificial bunkers on the face of a natural slope or hill than it is to construct them on flat ground. It is easy to give to such bunkers an impressive and awe-inspiring appearance, and there is far less soil to shift.”

“sand-bunkers should be cut in irregular shapes, and should be placed in the face of natural hillocks if these exist in the desired positions.... bank the sand well up to the face of a bunker cut in a hillock, so that it is visible at a considerable distance.”

“...an occasional clump of rushes, bents or heather may be planted in positions along bunker edges which favour their growth”

**Harry S. Colt “Some Essays on Golf-course Architecture” 1920**

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## Colt bunkers



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## Colt bunkers



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## Simpson on bunkers

“Bunkers should be irregular in form, and not too large. If a large bunker seems indicated, the preferable way would be to construct a comparatively small bunker but to mould the fairway in front of it and on the side as to form a “gather”. All bunkers should have a rough, broken, uneven edge which gives the effect of coastal erosion.”

“I am strongly opposed to the frequent raking of sand bunkers”

“Keep a rough, uneven lace edge to a bunker, especially on the side near the green. The face should look as if it had been eaten away by wind and rain rather than having been the direct work of man, giving the general appearance of having been subject to coast erosion.”

**Tom Simpson “Golf Architecture. The Game of Golf” 1931**

## Simpson bunkers



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## Simpson bunkers



ATTRACTIVE 'LACE-EDGED' ARTIFICIAL BUNKERS—NEW ZEALAND, WEST BYFLEET

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## Simpson bunkers



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## Colt bunkers: Sunningdale New hole 5 then and now



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## Simpson bunkers: Spa hole 6 then and now



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## Apply links playing characteristics and conditions on inland courses



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# Triangulation



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## Colt & Simpson on green approaches

”The even handed justice which an approach shot receives when it falls is one of the hallmarks of a first rate course....

On some excellent courses the approach merges so gradually into the green that it is not altogether easy to say where one begins and the other ends.”

**Harry S. Colt “Some Essays on Golf-course Architecture” 1920**

“It should be impossible to detect where the fairway ends and the green begins; on really well-kept courses the one melts imperceptibly into the other.”

**Tom Simpson “Golf Architecture. The Game of Golf” 1931**

## Green approaches



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## Colt on approach shots

“As regards to the green approach it may be suggested speaking broadly, that a hollow or ravine, a bank or collection of banks, or a small hill, are the natural features which add interest to the play.....”

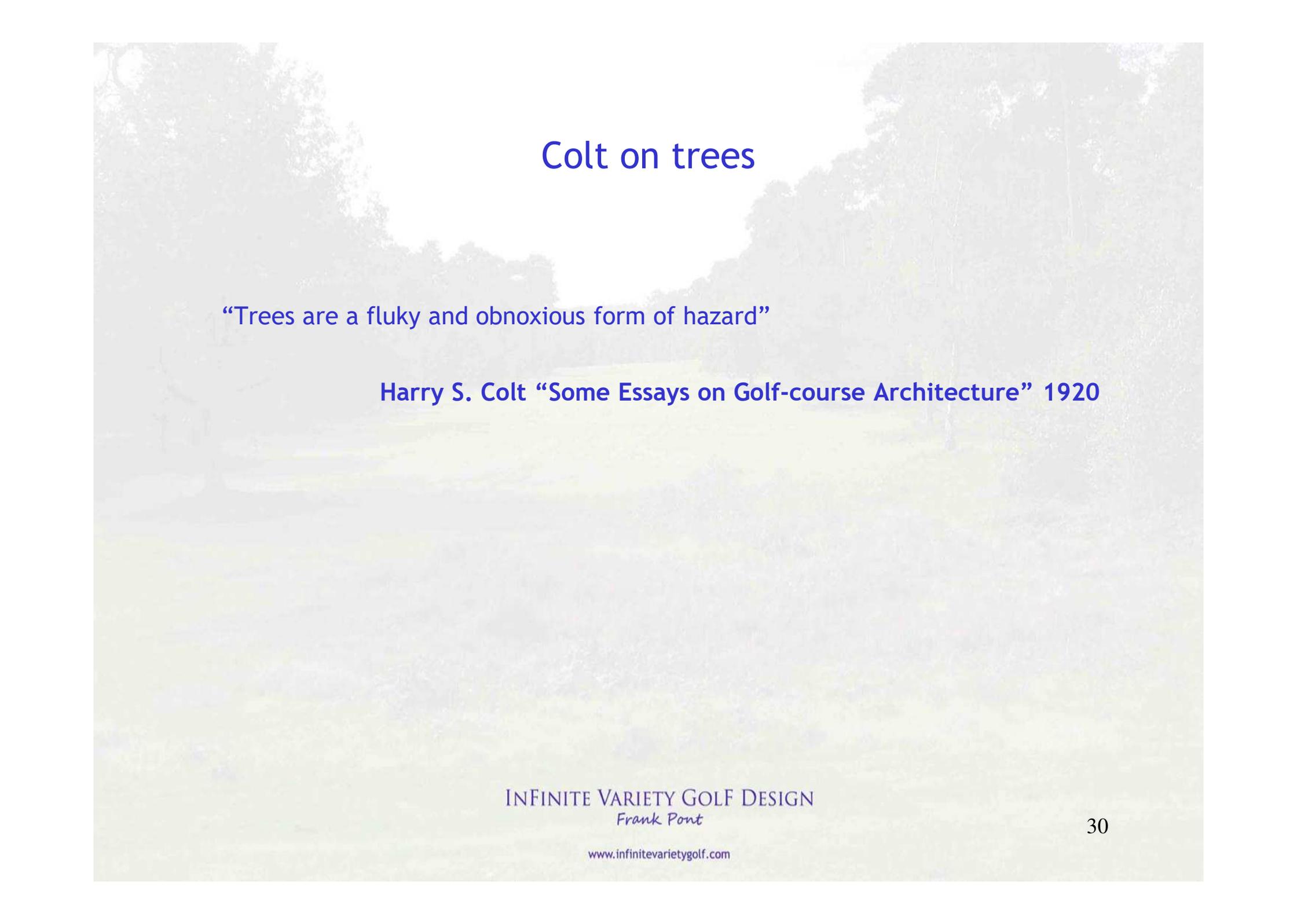
**Harry S. Colt “Some Essays on Golf-course Architecture” 1920**

## Colt on approach shots



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## Colt on trees

“Trees are a fluky and obnoxious form of hazard”

Harry S. Colt “Some Essays on Golf-course Architecture” 1920

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## Simpson and Trees



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## Simpson on fairway quality

“Fairways can be too good. It does not make for good golf for the the turf to “support the ball”..... Within reason, the closer the ball lies to the ground the better will be the golf.... As a general principle the less is done to the fairways so far as top-dressing is concerned, the better.... In fact, the application of dressings or fertilizers to fairways is undesirable.”

“There should never be a line of demarcation which divides the fairway from the rough. It can serve no possible purpose; it is inartistic and reflects no credit on the work of the staff. The eye ought to be unable to detect where the fairway ends and the rough begins, even if the fairway consists of grass and the rough of heather. It is quite simple to obtain this result, although it may take a little more time.”

**Tom Simpson “Golf Architecture. The Game of Golf” 1931**

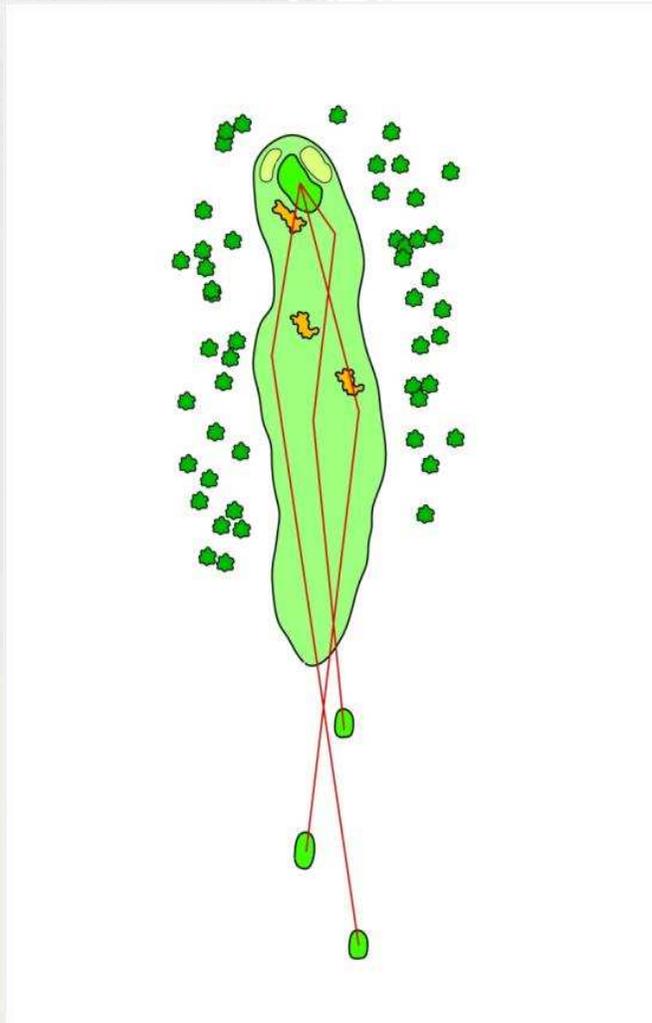
## Similarities between Pan 15 and Sunningdale 8



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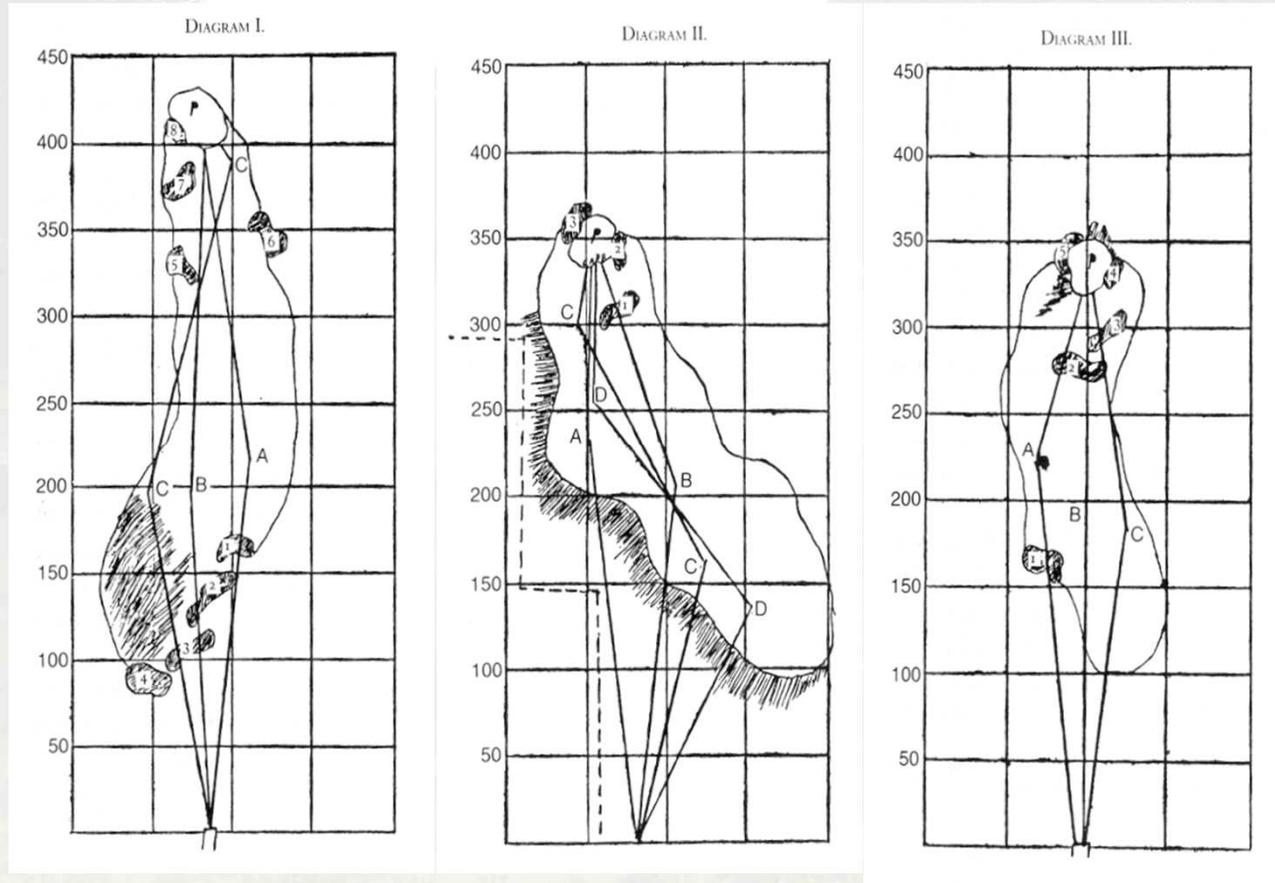
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## Stimulate the player to think strategically with his (tee) shots



- With a strategic hole there always is a preferred side of the hole to approach the green from
- A player who avoids the first hazards on the fairway by playing left has a much tougher shot into the green (route I).
- A player who takes the risk of landing in one of the hazards by playing right on the fairway has a much better angle into the green (route II).
- Finally there is a way to play the hole without risking landing in a hazard, but this will cost the player an extra stroke (route III).

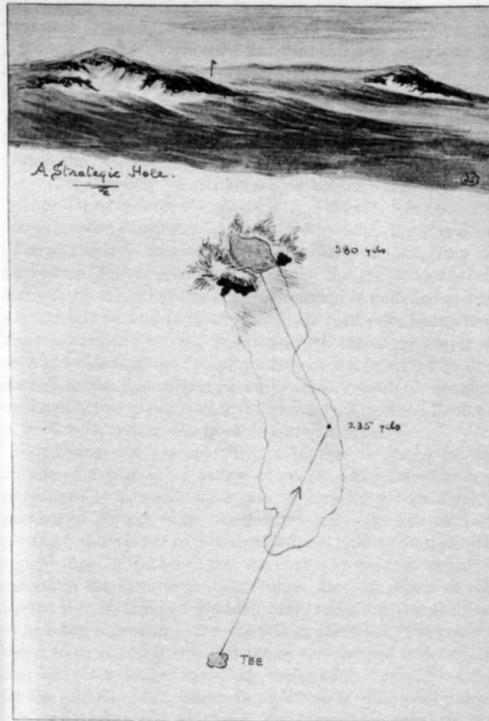
# Strategic holes according to Colt



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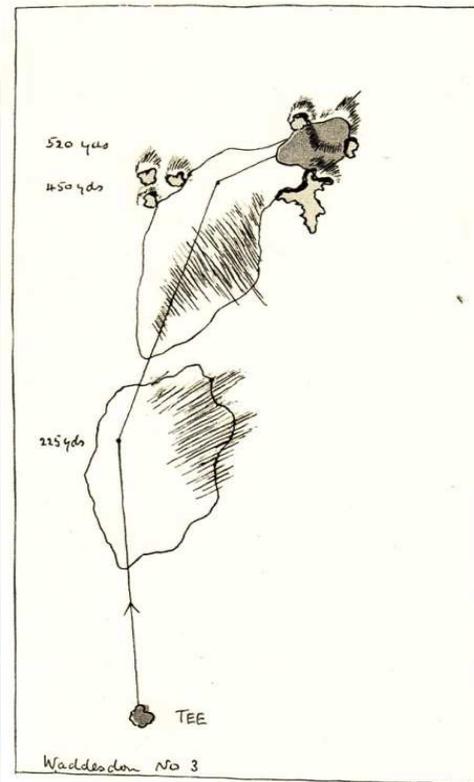
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# Strategic holes according to Simpson

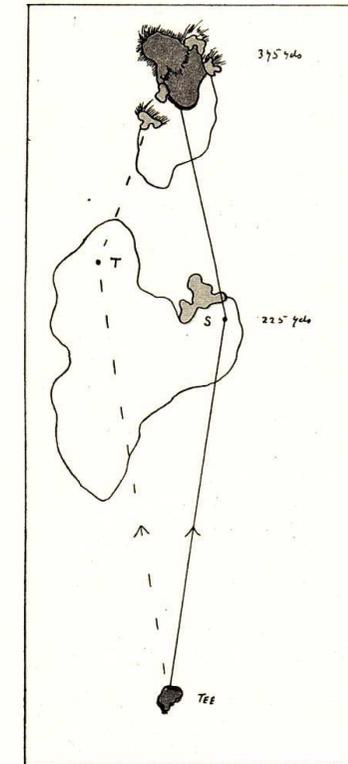


A Strategic Hole

The good player who wants to make his second easy must take an initial risk with his tee shot.  
 At a hole of this type the true line to the hole should never be the centre of the fairway.  
 The inferior player is not worried with a multiplicity of hazards.



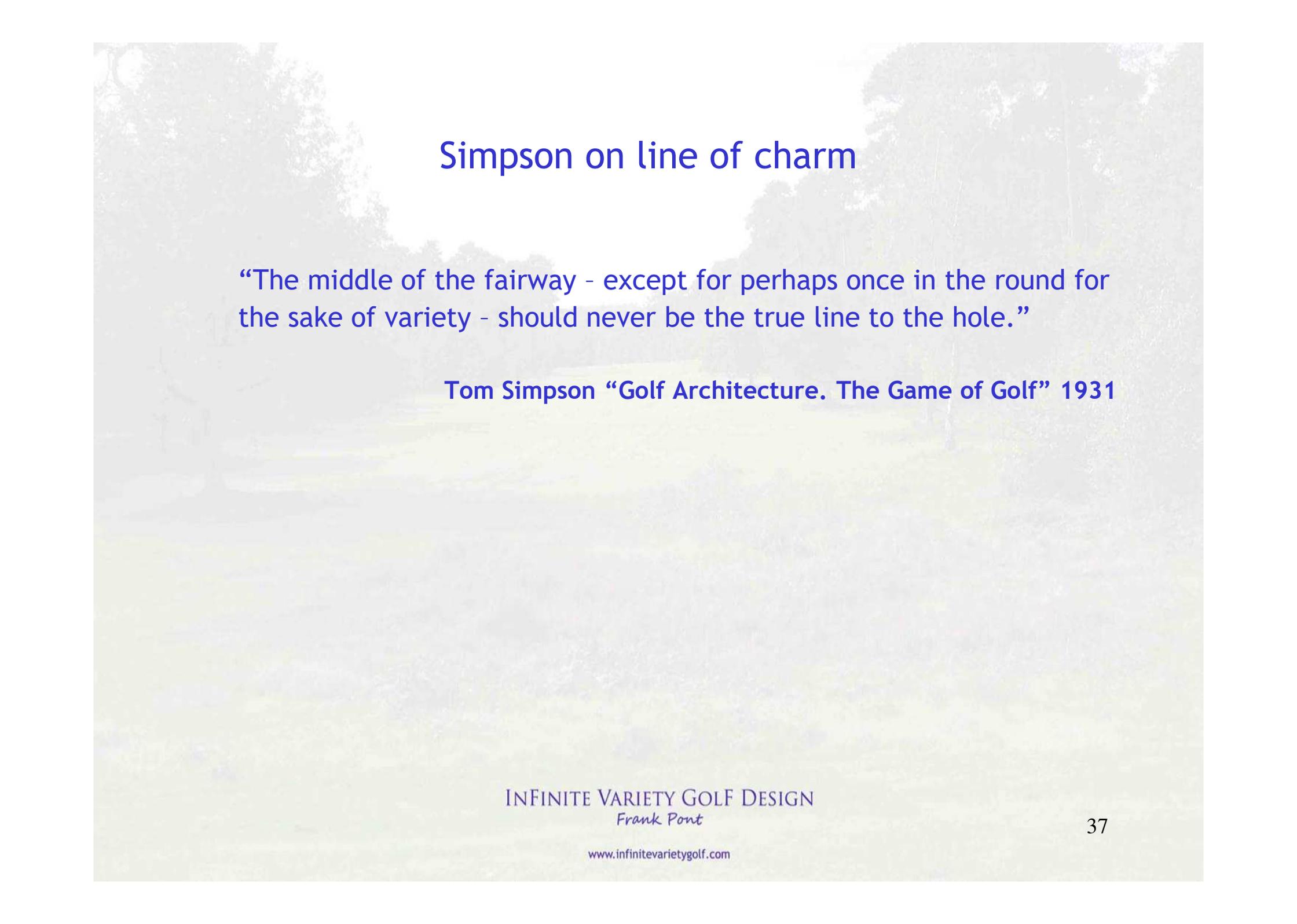
Waddesdon (Private Course) No. 3.  
 The least slice with second shot will leave a blind third.  
 Everything hangs on the orientation of green and wing hazards guarding it.



The prudent Tiger will be content to try and place his tee shot round about S, for the simple reason that it does not pay to go all out in direction of T.  
 A type of hole that defeats the ingenuity of the golf-ball manufacturer.

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## Simpson on line of charm

“The middle of the fairway - except for perhaps once in the round for the sake of variety - should never be the true line to the hole.”

Tom Simpson “Golf Architecture. The Game of Golf” 1931

## Simpson and Line of Charm



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# Colt vs Simpson (1)

- It is hard to compare their work, but easy to see the differences in style.
- Colt was much more methodological and consistent in his approach. This makes it easier to tell quickly if and where things have been removed or altered on a Colt course.
- Gras faced bunkers, trees near greens or bunkers, symmetrical bunker defense of greens, even number of bunkers round greens, all are sure signs something has happened after Colt had left.
- Simpson was just much more, well, crazy.
- With him one can expect all kinds of strange things, although even he had a number of guiding principles, which however mostly centered around the strategy of the hole.

## Colt vs Simpson (2)

- I find Colt the smart expert craftsman, Simpson the eccentric creative genius.
- Simpsons worst holes are far worse than those of Colt, but his best are in my view often even better than Colt's best.
- Simpson was definitely better in building natural looking bunkers than Colt, and he and McKenzie might have learned a few tricks from each other's work.
- However I would have Colt do the routing if my life depended on it.

## Typical Colt par 3 hole



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## Typical Simpson par 3 hole



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## Simpson on club members

“Ninety percent of criticisms made by club members are due to invincible ignorance ”

Tom Simpson “Golf Architecture. The Game of Golf” 1931