

BACKGROUND

Born in Colorado Springs. Attended Iowa State University, where he received both Bachelors and Masters degrees in Landscape Architecture. Then formed a course design partnership with engineer Donald Rippel in Iowa. In 1966, joined the land planning firm of Brauer and Associates in Minneapolis, served as its chief golf architect. A year later moved to Denver and established a branch office.

In 1973, formed his own firm with a young design associate, Brad Benz. In 1981 Mike Poellot joined them, but Benz and Poellot soon moved to California to operate their own company. Son Rick filled the void as a design associate.

In 1980, was elected President of the American Society of Golf Course Architects. In the 1990s, worked in partnership with three-time U.S. Open champion Hale Irwin on selected designs.

DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

Having worked for many years on public-sector courses, Phelps' early layouts emphasized playability for average and below-average golfers. He limited water hazards and bunkers and made big tees and greens to spread out wear and tear. Often working with limited budgets, his early designs were appreciated only after reaching maturity in turf and vegetation. His later designs integrate beautiful golf holes into the rugged terrain of Colorado and the Southwest, and often feature native roughs and dramatic vistas.

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS

Very little earth moved in laying out fairways. Large green complexes, normally with flanking bunkers rather than frontal ones so average players can bounce shots onto the greens. Often builds one spectacularly-elevated tee box high over a valley hole.