

(by Tom Dunne, Oct. 2014)

*"One of the reasons garages have become such an emblem of the innovator's workspace is precisely because they exist outside the traditional spaces of work or research. They are not office cubicles or university labs; they're places away from work and school, places where our peripheral interests have the room to grow and evolve. Experts head off to their corner offices and lecture halls. The garage is the space for the hacker, the tinkerer, the maker. The garage is not defined by a single field or industry; instead, it is defined by the eclectic interests of its inhabitants. It is a space where intellectual networks converge." --Steven Johnson, "How We Got to Now"*

A couple of weeks ago, I enjoyed a great afternoon of golf with the writer Steven Johnson at the Rockaway Hunting Club, a fine old links-like design on Long Island's South Shore that has recently been rejuvenated by Gil Hanse and Jim Wagner. Before the round, Steven passed me a copy of his new book, "How We Got to Now", which made for excellent airplane reading on my way to and from the Brambles fall meeting. (The book is also accompanied by a PBS TV series of the same name, which debuted last week.) As is always the case with Johnson's multi-disciplinary work, "How We Got to Now" proved to be a great means of sparking new connections between the subjects that matter to me in regard to Brambles.

After our visit to Colorado Golf Club and Ballyneal, I continued on to Seattle. While in the Emerald City, I made a point of paying a visit to John DeForest and Brett Smith of DeForest Architects, Brambles' collaborators on the design of the clubhouse and related buildings. Situated in a storefront on a busy thoroughfare of the city's Fremont section (motto: "*De*

*Libertas Quirkas*"), DA's studio is a bright space that's bursting at the seams with visual inspiration. The walls behind each work station feature pinboards covered with brainstorming images related to the project at hand, whether it be a residence, a business, or a place of worship. "Pinboards help to develop a common language," DeForest said. "They are a way to talk to people about what's important to them in a project." Brambles keeps its own pinboard on the club website, and we'll be looking at ways to extend its appeal and utility in the months ahead.

DeForest likes to describe the company's philosophy as responding to projects from the standpoint of "expert beginners." Like Marcus Aurelius's exhortation to "make haste slowly", this is one of those oxymorons that, by forcing one to hold both an idea and its opposite in mind simultaneously, can reveal much over time. The expert beginner, it could be said, occupies the garage described by Johnson above. The final pages of "How We Got to Now" also featured a great couple of lines from Steve Jobs, describing the feeling he had when he was forced out of his position at Apple in 1985: "The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything. It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods of my life." During the interregnum at Apple, Jobs-as-expert-beginner launched NeXT Computer (which featured a graphical interface and operating system that are still in use today, ) and acquired a small company that would come to be known as Pixar.

Brett Smith articulated the expert beginner's mindset well in our meeting. "Our office doesn't have a signature style," he said. "Our commitment is to process—it's about their [a client's] values and style. Besides, the style of the moment is getting

harder to identify." Smith then drew an analogy to the way we consume music today. "Thirty years ago, an architect was a name in a phone book. Now, people have access to so much architectural imagery, and people are free to find things they connect with."

Brambles would not be moving in the right direction (or any direction, really) if it were not for a certain clarity of vision. The principles of low-key, walking golf and a private Club guiding a facility that shares its pleasures with visitors are mutually understood and valued. But it will also be great to have collaborators like DeForest who operate with fewer preconceived notions about the game. "We're enjoying learning how to see this through a golfer's eyes," Smith said. Indeed, conversation with Smith and DeForest regularly yields perceptive insights that seem to come from left field. For example, John DeForest commented on the drive up Mt. St. Helena: "How many people view that as a drawback? It can also be seen as a plus, for the feeling of separation it provides." This prompted me to think about the very name "Middletown." Brambles stands at a crossroads of sorts, with the glamor and creature comforts of the Napa Valley on one side and the true backcountry of Clear Lake and Mt. Konocti—a California of bygone days, one that many never see—on the other. One hopes that Brambles will derive inspiration from both sides of the gateway.

DeForest also spoke engagingly about the property itself. "It's fascinating because this is a project type with a specific sequence," he said. "There's a ritual to the course of the day. We find ourselves asking: Where will the golfer be at 8 AM? At noon? At sunset?" And it's true: The deep feeling of satisfaction

that comes from a day of golf bears some relationship to that of a well-ordered ritual, or the smooth carrying out of familiar routines. Sometimes it takes an outsider to phrase it that way, though, and it will be interesting to see how DeForest responds to the elements of ritual (as well as other goals) through its design. Like a good routing plan on a golf course, thoughtful design gently instructs people how to use or move through a property or structure. At its best, it's so intuitive that it even recedes from view.

Getting this stuff right isn't about giving nerds like me something to write home about—I would argue that great design will be a key driver of Brambles' future success. No one has come out and promised a World Top Whatever golf course, though we can sleep soundly knowing that the C&C gang will create something "fun and interesting." No one is making Trumpian claims of cutting-edge amenities and service to embarrass the most jaded clubman. Rather, Brambles has a chance to offer a quiet counterpoint to the grandiose statements set forth by so many modern clubs. After two decades worth of excess, most golfers will likely find this approach to be refreshing. There is a reason why some places allow you to relax and have fun from the moment you pass through the gate while others do not, and it often has less to do with the club's "culture" and more to do with how the spaces have been delineated or organized, even if we can't always put our finger on what's not right.

Yet again, John DeForest's remarks (on another subject) shed some light on the issue. In Seattle, Craftsman homes are some of the most desirable on the market. According to *Seattle Magazine*, they began appearing in the early 20th century as a response to mass production, and "emphasized design simplicity over the

ornate Victorian homes of the era." The Craftsman style is intimate. The floor plans flow, "encouraging conversation and connection." The problem to DeForest, though, is that, "the scale of these spaces challenge people. We [as 21st century Americans] aren't accustomed to 11 x 12 foot bedrooms. Lots of new buildings try to replicate the style adjusted to modern expectations, but they just wind up feeling bloated." Brambles will almost certainly encounter some version of this challenge—capturing the magic of the Golden Age golf while meeting the demands of modern life—in the years ahead. It is heartening to know that in DeForest, we have collaborators who are already thinking along these lines.

DeForest Architects came to the Brambles project, the story goes, when James encountered images of another of their recent projects—Yum Yum Farm, in southeastern Iowa—in a Dwell magazine. The way John DeForest speaks about Yum Yum makes it easy to draw parallels. Both Brambles and Yum Yum, he said, "...respect and appreciate the vernacular, whether it be in Iowa or Northern California. The goal is then to give simple, beautiful forms a modern twist, but you don't want to make it too slick, too "now", so there's a process of synthesis involved." Buildings can be thought of metaphorically, and Yum Yum had a great one—the communal table. Golf has some great communal tables of its own—try to imagine a day at Muirfield without the boisterous lunch. It's worth pondering what metaphoric images might capture different aspects of Brambles, whether it be the clubhouse, the golf course itself, or even the caddie shack. Maybe Steven Johnson's "innovator's garage" isn't such a bad place to start.