

ACADEMY BUILDINGS

More Creative, More Competitive

Trends in the Teaching-Building Business

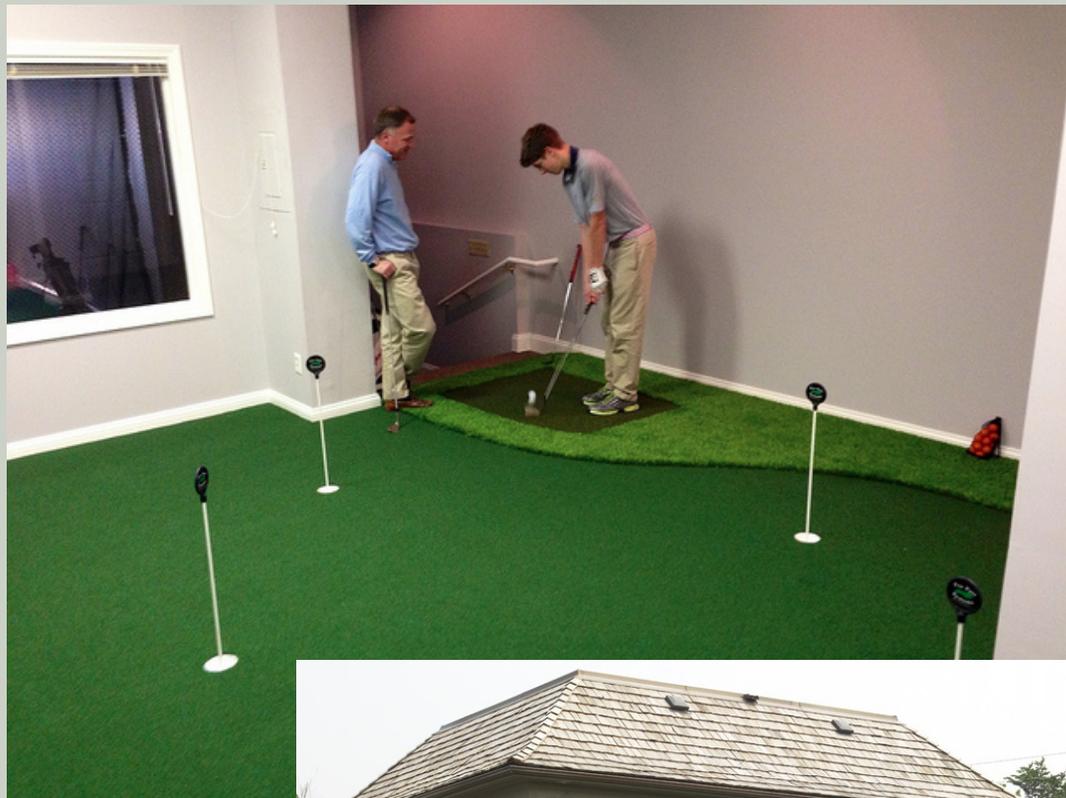
By Tim Cutshall

I'll start by saying it's a true pleasure for me to be connected with Proponent Group instructors. One aspect of the professionalism shown by Proponent coaches, in my experience, is the care you take in planning out your teaching buildings. I've seen situations where someone designed their own building and then tried to outfit it for teaching once it's finished—not a happy ending. There are buildings out there with \$20,000 video systems that nobody wants to teach in because the systems really don't function properly.

Then there are stories on the other end of the spectrum—perfectly fine academy buildings that right now are being bulldozed. And that's a good thing. I can explain why.

An example would be a large, prestigious club in the Southwest that has other big-name clubs nearby, competing with them. This club I'm thinking of is doing a big renovation and could have left its teaching building alone. However, they decided they wanted something bigger and better. The building they tore down was there for 10 years and has generated tons of revenue. It's paid for itself many times over. So, the club wants to take a very good thing and upgrade it. Can't argue with that.

Something fairly new in academy building design these days is dual 55-inch monitors mounted on the wall of the bay. It's an improvement over the normal computer system with two 24-inch computer screens, feeding one big screen on the wall. What we're doing is displaying the images you would see on the small screens up on those two 55-inch monitors. The big advantage is in how much of the software you can present. If the first monitor had the V1 software display and the second one had a Trackman dis-



Here are a few samples from our Proponent Group Teaching Building gallery which you may view at any time on the members website in the Business Guides section. Top: The indoor putting studio at Bulls Bridge G.C. in Connecticut. Bottom: The very efficient two-bay building at Eagles Nest in Maple, Ontario.

play, you would have to interface them, which means the 55-inch monitor can't show very much. This way, they can just run on their individual platforms. All you have to do is synchronize impact, which isn't hard. Now you are seeing V1 and Trackman in their own environments. Same thing if you are running Swing Catalyst along with Trackman—or whatever platforms you are using. You get more looks and more data up there to show.

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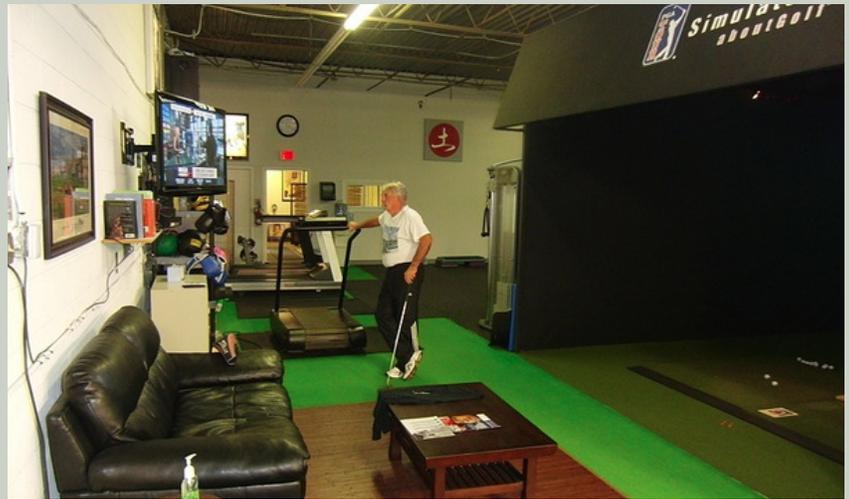
Another prevalent trend is to build a hitting bay with a full putting surface, and the cups set in place. That means the bay will convert from full-swing to a putting session without delay. This trend has come on as putting software and SAM-type systems have become standard. Coaches I work with can promote this feature of the teaching building to their board of directors or course owner as a way to economize on space. There won't be asking for additional real estate in order to have a high-tech putting studio. Having a fully separate putting studio is ideal, but at least you've got this dual-purpose approach you can also use.

These days I am doing a lot of three-camera V1 putting setups. The only trick to it is lengthening your cables—bringing more cable out of the wall and fitting the cable with quick-connects so the coaching staff can move cameras around. They will leave one camera at waist height—the normal full-swing placement—then drop a camera down to right over the target cup, and zoom that lens into the face of the putter. It's one more way to get multiple teaching applications without the expense of additional equipment.

All the details you have to work through in planning a building seem technical—and they are—but for me it's always about the golf instructor generating revenue. The coaches are making money for themselves and the facility. That's happening because golfers love this environment and they are in there getting better at golf. Golfers improve, therefore the professionals generate revenue, therefore people like me can have a livelihood serving the industry in a support role. That's how it has to work.

It's also why, at least in my case, consulting on design of the structure is no-charge. My revenue is based on sales and installation of the equipment. I want the proposal to be great. When a director of instruction is communicating with a board of directors he or she needs to give these people hard numbers, specific details and a long list of actual benefits. That's how you make your case, and there is a great case to be made. If nothing else they can think about hardware-software systems lasting 10 or 15 years indoors, whereas when they're used outdoors in a portable rig they will often end up getting cooked after two or three years. UVA destroys electronics.

Costs right now, for cameras and lighting, are running at an average of \$22,000 per bay. A two-bay building with 20-by-25-foot bay dimensions will cost about \$150,000 for the type of setup that most instructors are looking for. That varies by region, of



From top to bottom: The Mike Carbray Golf Fitness Human Performance Studio in Chicago boasts an AboutGolf Simulator; Baltusrol G.C. (NJ) has built a four bay building with a fitness room; Nantucket G.C.'s (MA) building blends in with the local architecture.

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course. When a consultation on a new building is in a part of the U.S. where I work regularly I am finding that the total investment can come in at a number within 5 percent, high or low, of the estimate. In part that's because the whole job is integrated—every detail and specification goes together. It leads to accuracy.

In the Metropolitan Section right now it is \$160 to \$250 per square foot to do a teaching building, depending on what you select from the menu. Do you need two bays, three bays, a kitchen, a bathroom an office, club repair, storage space, etc. There are hundreds of floor plans of buildings that have actually been built, with lots of variety.

I try to remind golf coaches that the investment in an academy building can be staged out. For example, a large percentage of two-bay teaching buildings will open for business with one of the two bays just “turfed out.” The conduit for lighting and electronics is where it should be, but in that particular bay there's just a table for the coach's iPad. Next door he's got the entire video installation, the putting system, launch monitors, 3D and so forth.

Budget money to rig up the second bay will come later, which makes great sense. I've been all over Texas these past two years installing hardware, software and lighting in those second bays that started out blank. Up at the Apawamis Club, outside New York City, I actually did a two-bay job where they opened the building with one blank bay and one fully-installed bay and then a month later had me back to rig the other side. That's how quickly they could see that their investment in an academy building was going to generate a very nice return.

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Sea Pines Resort in Hilton Head Island, SC wired up its second bay to outfit with future technology; Celebration G.C. in Orlando has multiple types of turf to simulate different on course conditions; and Big Horn G.C.'s (CA) building blends neatly into the local environment.