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From Dye to Brazil: Dan Blankenship taking his game to a higher level

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By [William K. Wolfrum](#),
Staff Writer

As a student at South Dakota State University, Dan Blankenship was about as far removed from the South American golf scene as a human can get.

"You know, I never imagined I'd live outside of the U.S. and I never imagined I'd be a golf-course architect," said Blankenship, who now calls [Bahia](#), Brazil home.

Now, as the busiest golf-course architect in [Brazil](#), Blankenship is looking to take his skills throughout South America and beyond.

The journey from South Dakota to Brazil, as one could surmise, is an interesting tale. Originally from [Colorado](#), Blankenship honed his early design skills alongside Perry Dye, as the pair designed courses in Asia under the Pete Dye banner.

"I worked for Perry's company," Blankenship said. "Everything we worked with had Pat Dye's name on it, though, because he was the bigger name."

It was the late 1980s, and Blankenship was working on projects such as Glenmoor Country Club in Narita City, Japan, and Bagna Country Club in [Bangkok](#), Thailand. The call came for Dye Designs to do some work in Brazil, and Blankenship headed south.

It was 1988 when Blankenship started on the Buzios Golf Club in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Unfortunately, Brazil was in a financial crisis, and then-president of Brazil Fernando Affonso Collor de Mello froze the majority of bank accounts throughout the nation, causing construction of the course to be halted.

"Collor started to freeze accounts because of hyper inflation," said Blankenship, who graduated from South Dakota State University with a degree in landscape architecture. "In 1989, I went back to Asia to work for Dye."

After more course work in Bangkok and [Taiwan](#), Blankenship left [Dye Designs](#) in 1991 to go it alone and created [Gold Tee Golf](#) International. After working with one of the masters at a young age, Blankenship has nothing but praise for his time at Dye Designs.

"A big influence on my designs is Pete Dye," said Blankenship. "It was a great learning experience. They were doing so much, that they'd sent us young guys out to Asia to go do a course. You learn how to do things that way."

A couple of his early solo projects included Wing-On Golf Club in Chayi, Taiwan and [Broadland Creek](#) Golf Course in [Huron, South Dakota](#). Then, Brazil came calling again.

Blankenship returned to finish the Buzios project, which culminated in 1996. From there, Blankenship knew where he wanted to stay.

"I fell in love with Buzios and I saw potential in Brazil," Blankenship said. "I could move back to the U.S. and just be an architect or stay in Brazil and be involved in some [interesting](#) projects."

Since then, Blankenship has worked on nearly a dozen other projects, chief among them the Comandatuba Ocean Course and the [Terravista](#) Golf Club and Resort, both in the state of Bahia. While Blankenship has thrived as a course designer in Brazil, he still can feel stymied by the slow progress golf is making in the country known best for samba and soccer.

"Like with Buzios, you build it for them then they don't maintain it," said Blankenship. "The problem is there are only [25,000 golfers](#) in the country. They are working to improve on that, but there still just aren't many golfers."

Blankenship, who has been married and separated in Brazil, and has a young son, said he considers Brazil home "at least until the work dries up." Having just turned 45, however, Blankenship seems ready to start stretching his legs once again.

"I've really been invisible down here," Blankenship said. "It's good and bad, depending on how you look at it. But I've



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Dan Blankenship (right) has worked with Brazilian Cláudio Ivantes on several projects throughout Brazil. (Courtesy Golf Tee Golf)

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gotten a lot of experience."

Blankenship, who has gained valuable experience working on oceanfront courses throughout Brazil, said his main interest for the future doesn't involve any specific country as much as being able to create courses in areas where people will play them.

"My idea is to have my golf course is full everyday," Blankenship said. "I'm tired of seeing my golf courses empty during week days because there aren't enough golfers here. It's changing, but it'll take time."

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March 1, 2006



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Projects in Rio Grande do Sul
Enore Bondan Filho wrote on: May 18, 2009

Great article!

I hope to see a project from Dan Blankenship in Rio Grande do Sul as soon as possible. I love the 6 par 3, 6 par 4 and 6 par 5 in Alphaville Graciosa!

Best Regards,
Enore

[Reply](#)

Opportunity
Eirik Heikes, RLA wrote on: Mar 16, 2009

Dan- I am hoping to get in contact with you about a potential project in South Dakota. Please call 605.342.9470 or email.

[Reply](#)

Course Design
Frank Cazabon wrote on: Oct 24, 2008

Hey Dan,

I am currently the owner of the Driving Range at Santa Monica in Curitiba Brazil.

We are in the process of changing the 9 hole layout and adding another 9 at this course. The money is almost nonexistent but with some effort and a vision, it can and will be done.

I have designed the new layout and am looking forward to you playing there in about 3-4 years when everything is complete.

I have played Alphaville Graciosa course many times and think #1 is one of the best starter holes that I have ever played.

Just wanted to touch base with you because I have a passion for golf and like you am a GRINGO living in Brazil.

Cheers,

Frank Cazabon

[Reply](#)

Dan Blankenship
Peter Lima wrote on: Mar 12, 2008

Dan, The article on you was enlightening. I'd like to touch base with you regarding course design. Continue with much success.

[Reply](#)

Hey Dan
Dean Glorso wrote on: Feb 7, 2008

Hey Dan, nice write up. Hope to be in touch with you soon.

Dean Glorso, Aurora, Colorado

[Reply](#)

Dan Blankenship
Tim Iversen wrote on: Oct 18, 2007

I came across this link as well, after seeing Dan in a TV ad. We were college friends, but lost touch after he worked on the course in Huron, SD. I am glad to see he is doing so well- golf was always his passion.

[Reply](#)

Dan Blankenship

John Beck wrote on: Oct 16, 2007

I was watching the news tonight, and while walking away from the TV there was an SDSU commercial about Dan, His voice got my attention more than his name...I went to college with him at SDSU also in the landscape design department. My question is: when did SDSU start to offer a degree in landscape architecture. (as listed in your article) When I graduated from SDSU in 1981 the degree was a BS in landscape design.

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