

GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTURE

*The global journal of
golf design and development*

ISSUE **57** JULY 2019



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2018 TOP 10 COURSES IN IRELAND, GOLF MONTHLY UK

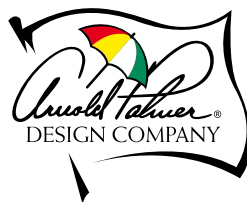


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Ranking rankling



ADAM LAWRENCE

No two golfers are ever going to agree exactly on the order of every course they have played. So, a big list and lots of golfers is bound to cause disagreement. That's why publishers like rankings; they get readers talking about your content.

I know how this works. When GCA did our own course ranking, six years ago, voted for only by golf architects, we released the results over a two-week period on our website, and our traffic numbers went through the roof.

Some of the rankings like to claim that their list is the most credible, in fact objectively created, because voters are required to rate courses by certain criteria. This is natural: there is little point doing a ranking unless it has credibility. Unfortunately, of course, the criteria are themselves subjective (as well as impenetrable – I have still never heard a good explanation of what 'shot values' means and how it can be measured).

Yet, for all their flaws, rankings are important. For a publicly-accessible course, a good performance on a major ranking can result in a lot more visitors; for private clubs, there's no doubt that memberships at top 100 courses are more desirable than elsewhere. The irony here, of course, is that for the very top courses, it is irrelevant – no-one is joining Sunningdale or Cypress Point because of its performance in any ranking. But in the middle levels, the importance is real.

There are different approaches to compiling a ranking; you can seek out lots of voters, and accept that some will not be very discerning (this is the problem with entirely customer-sourced rankings in other areas, for example Zagat in restaurants). Or you can go for a small panel of experts, and accept that a couple of votes will skew your results. The best of both worlds would be a ranking where anyone can vote, but every voter has a weighting calculated. Even then, rankings are only opinion. Enjoy them by all means. But don't take them too seriously.

Adam

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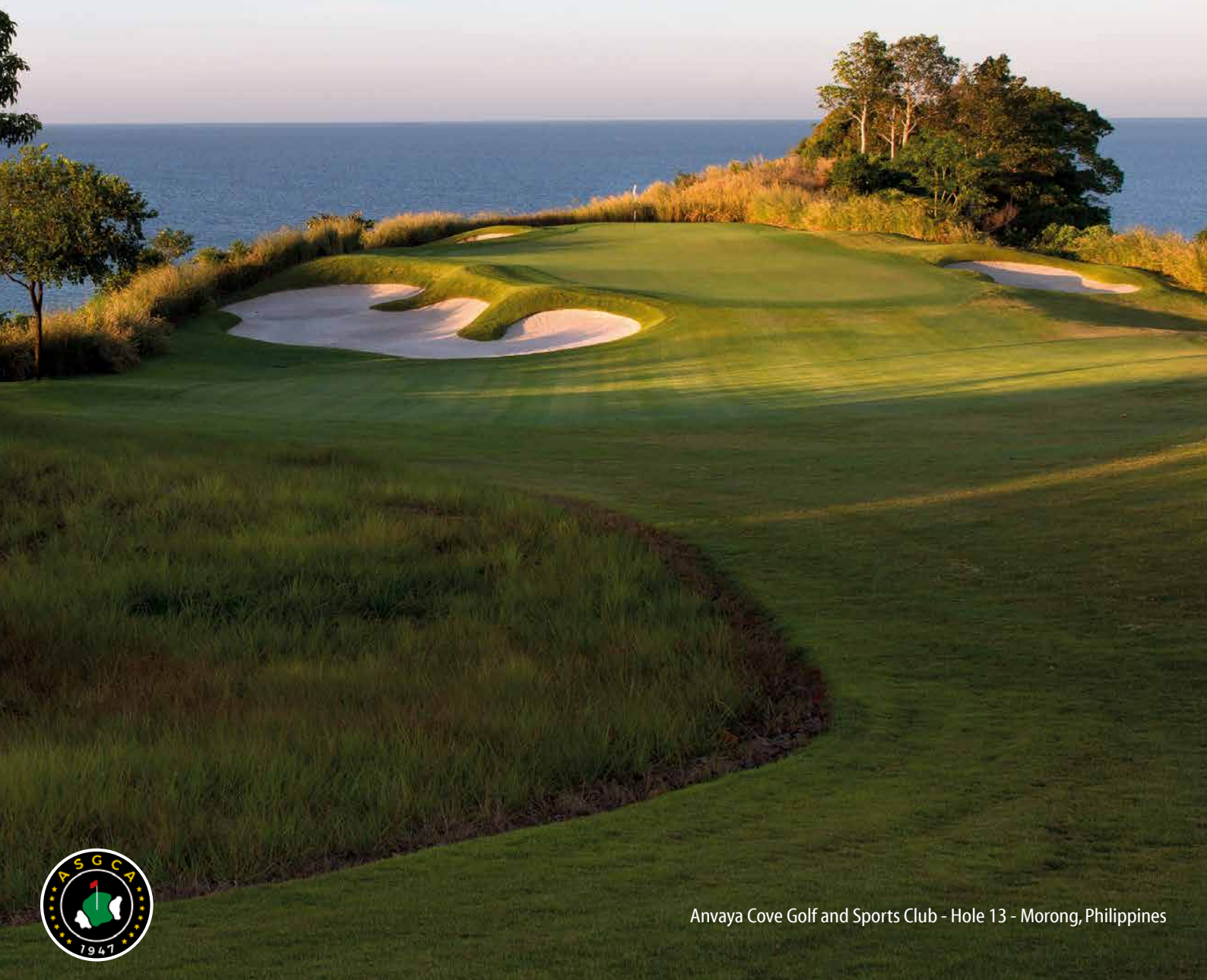
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Golf Course Architecture is published with the support and guidance of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, the European Golf Course Owners Association, the European Institute of Golf Course Architects, and GEO Foundation

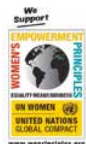
ISSN: 1745-3585. Printed in Great Britain
by Buxton Press.

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Adam Lawrence
Editor

Richard Humphreys
News Editor

Paul Chester, Thad Layton,
Sam Sakocius, Christoph Städler
Contributors

Bruce Graham, Libby Sidebotham
Design

Chris Jackson
Website Development

Mark Alexander; Ian Andrew; Arendon
Development Company; Arnold Palmer
Design Company; Ban Rakat Club; Bill Bergin;
Peter Corden; Tripp Davis; Getty Images/
David Cannon; GNGCD; Golfclub Linsberg/
Greyliner; Golfpark Zürichsee; Thomas
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A. Ingenhoven/ingenhoven-panography.
com; Harris Kalinka; Jaeger Kovich; Larry
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Robe Golf Club; Rod Whitman Golf Course
Design; Sam Sakocius; Schmidt-Curley
Design; Sigmon Taylor Photography; Kris W.
Spence; Tokyo GC; Verdura Resort; Will Watt/
Caddie Magazine

Photography

Toby Ingleton
Publisher

Benedict Pask
Publication & Sales Manager

Ritwik Bhattacharjee
Circulation

Stuart Fairbrother
Production manager

www.golfcoursearchitecture.net/subscribe
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Tudor House, 6 Friar Lane
Leicester LE1 5RA
Tel: +44 116 222 9900
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Enrique Larreta 9, 1º B. 28036 Madrid (Spain)
T: +(34) 91 063 31 67 • M: +(34) 670 82 59 59
marcomartin@smgolf.es

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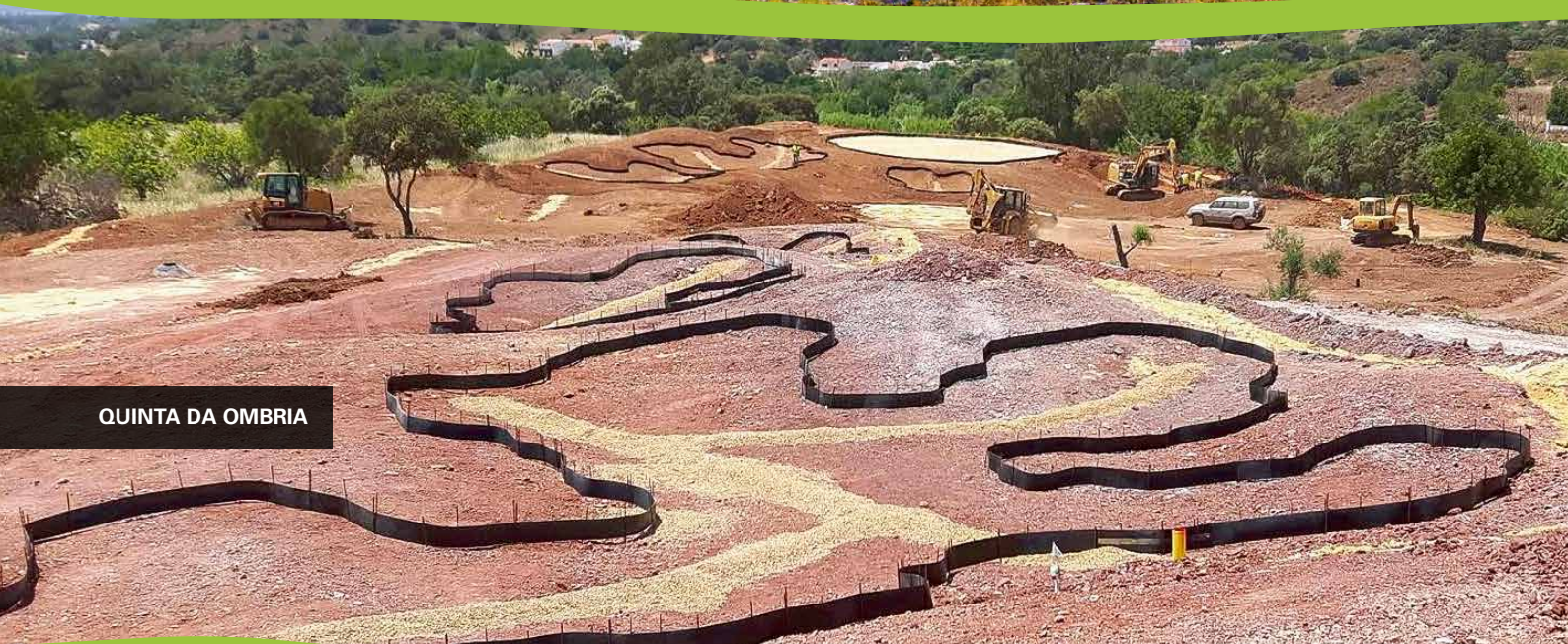
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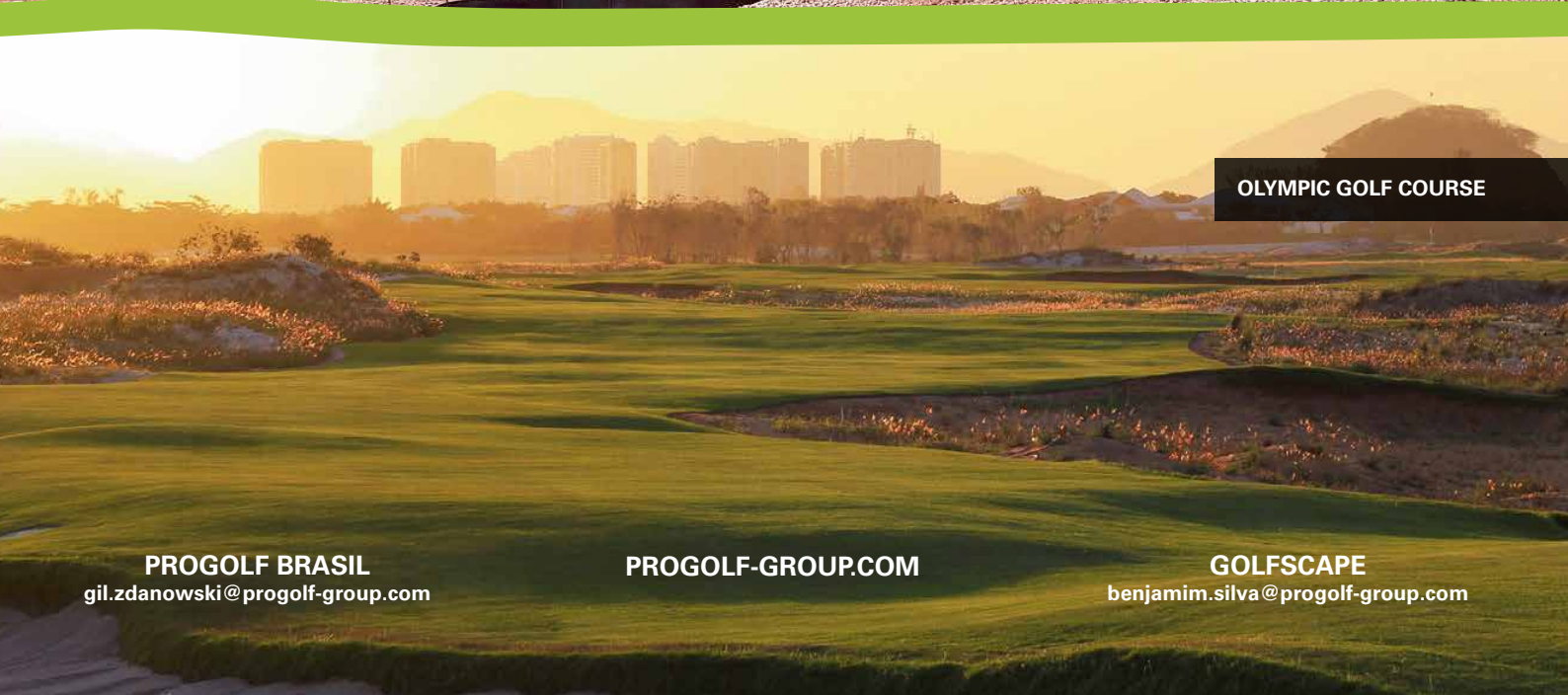
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The new eighth hole at Royal Portrush. Read more at www.golfcoursearchitecture.net

*Photographed by:
David Cannon (Getty Images)*

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MAIL BOX

Dear Editor

I spent last week at Detroit Golf Club for the PGA Tour's Rocket Mortgage Classic.

Detroit is booming... for some. This week, we were fortunate to help share access to the boom. In partnership with the PGA Tour, Detroit Golf Club, The Detroit Housing Commission and non-profit organisation Golf. My Future. My Game (GMFMG), we expanded a number of worlds, including ours.

It is no secret that Detroit has a history of virulent, racial, financial and housing segregation and financial strife. Things are on the upswing and there are opportunities if you know where to find them *and* how to *actively* participate. We worked with all of the above to document how opportunities can be shared with some star Detroiters.

Golf tournaments can play an important role in enhancing the lives of people in the areas surrounding them. The amazing work done at East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta, which turned a downtrodden housing-project community into a thriving one by virtue of hosting the annual Tour Championship, is the model, but it is by no means the only example.

My company, StoryLounge, is pleased to be an advisor to GMFMG. We are documenting GMFMG's partnership with the Detroit Housing Authority on a project that expands participants' life perspectives via golf and exposure to professional business experiences.

The kids aren't just learning to play golf, but also how to recognise and participate in opportunities in

engineering, architecture, media, event management and sports marketing. And, golf geeks, they even learned about Donald Ross! Detroit is an example of the need to match access with opportunity: it's hard to go to the party if you don't know where the party is. The above groups are working to make sure invites get to a wide swathe of invitees.

I was enriched and mentored by this top-notch and fun Detroit crew who observed and helped us film while simultaneously sharing their experiences in STEM/Arts and the physics of golf. With a half day of training, my interns also produced

some excellent content. Thanks to the PGA Tour and the tournament itself for supporting our documentary with access and resources. And a special thanks to Michael Doniel Jackson for connecting us with his pal Craig Kirby, CEO of Golf.My Future. My Game.

Vaughn Halyard
Milwaukee, United States

We are delighted to receive letters from readers, and the best in each issue will be rewarded with a golf shirt. Send to 6 Friar Lane, Leicester, LE1 5RA, UK, or email us at letters@golfcoursearchitecture.net

GOPHER WATCH



We were right to say that plenty of people would be able to identify last issue's *Gopher Watch* location without clues; the par-three eighth on the Old course at Sunningdale might not be one of the most famous on the course most often named as Britain's finest inland eighteen (it was a Harry Colt creation, replacing an original Willie Park hole), but it was still pretty conspicuous. Of a fair number of correct answers, Douglas Hodgson of Montreal, Canada, was first out of the hat and wins the much-coveted GCA golf shirt – we hope you enjoy wearing it, Douglas.

This time, Sandy is back on the links, his most favoured habitat. A second-tier course perhaps, but a very fine day's golf for all that, can be had at this venue, which is said to be home to the largest number of R&A members outside St Andrews itself. No more clues; get your entries in, as ever, to gopher@golfcoursearchitecture.net.

Australia's new sandbelt design opens

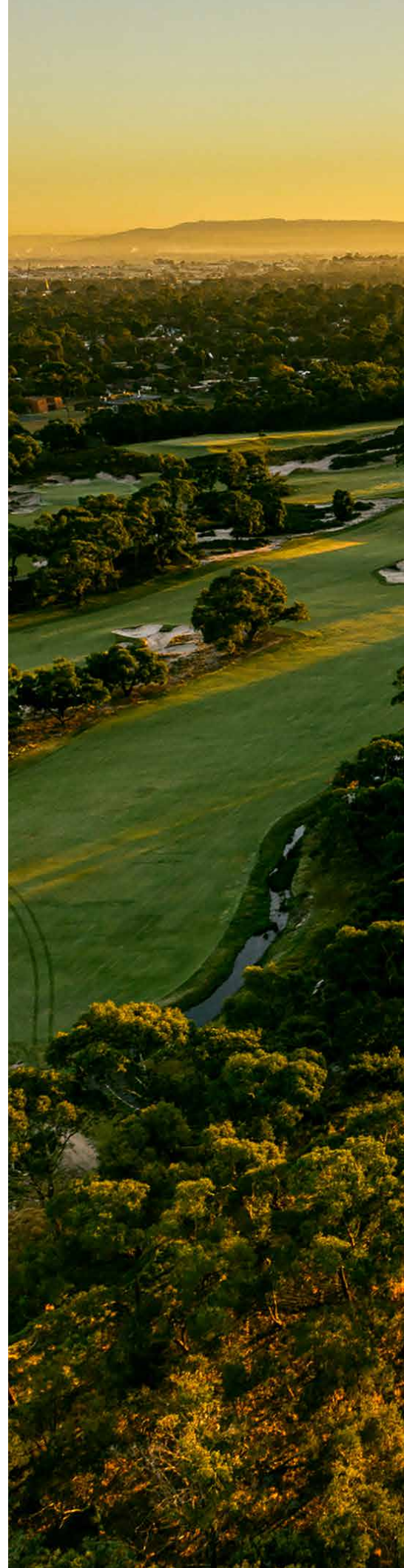
Ogilvy Clayton Cocking Mead's work on the courses at Peninsula Kingswood brings a 'true sandbelt experience' to the recently-merged Melbourne club

Peninsula Kingswood Country Golf Club in Melbourne, Australia, has officially opened its North and South courses, following a renovation by Ogilvy Clayton Cocking Mead (OCCM). The project began shortly after the 2013 merger of the former Peninsula Golf Club and Kingswood Golf Club, and the move to the Peninsula site in Frankston.

"We really haven't seen a renovation of this scale around the Melbourne courses before," said OCCM director and lead designer Mike Cocking, who has been a member of the club for over 25 years. "Every green, bunker and tee has been redesigned or rebuilt, fairways reshaped and re-grassed, creeks and water bodies added, a state-of-the-art

irrigation system installed, and cart paths, drainage and vegetation developed. What Peninsula Kingswood has achieved in the past four years is basically what every other sandbelt course has spent the last 20 or 30 years trying to accomplish."

Both courses play along the original 1960s corridors, but with new sandbelt bunkers built in a style made famous by Alistair MacKenzie and the father-and-son combination of Mick and Vern Morcom, who built all of the Scotsman's work around Melbourne. "Mackenzie was the dominant influence in Australia – designing or having an influence on most of our great courses," said Cocking. "He wasn't involved at Peninsula, but on a



The South course at Peninsula Kingswood (pictured, sixth green) has been redesigned to bring out more sandbelt characteristics

Photo: Will Watt/Caddie Magazine





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The North course (pictured, first green and par-three second hole) plays firm and fast

visit to Flinders during his 1926 trip to Australia, he would have come within a kilometre or two of the courses. He'd be kicking himself to think he missed an opportunity to work on such a fantastic site as this.

"No course on the sandbelt has undergone such a major renovation in such a short space of time. Our aim was essentially to realise the potential of the site – one that perhaps is only second to Royal Melbourne – and create a true sandbelt experience, both in design but also conditioning."

Cocking says the biggest talking point comes from the putting surfaces. "A new construction method and a variety of bentgrass in Pure Distinction has finally given the club consistently firm, fast greens which rival the best in the world, complementing the strategies set up by the new design."

Work started in March 2015. The South was completed first and six holes on the North opened for preview play in early 2018. All work was completed by October 2018, at which point OCCM moved to the practice facilities and areas around the clubhouse.

"The North, playing over sandier and more undulating ground, with perhaps the best examples of heathland

combination of sand, native grasses and heathland vegetation that the region is known for."

The South course was always regarded as the longer, more difficult test. "Greens and bunkers were rebuilt in a style and scale which closer matched its more famous neighbours, reworked bunkering and green design putting more of a premium on positioning

"Our aim was essentially to realise the potential of the site and create a true sandbelt experience, both in design but also conditioning"

vegetation of any course in Melbourne, was always intended to be a pure sandbelt experience," said Cocking. "Firm and fast, with tilted greens, expansive bunkers, wide fairways and roughs featuring that distinctive

from the tee," said Cocking. "Perhaps the most unique characteristic of the new design has been opening up the original creek lines, which proliferated the site and now form a key part of the design on at least half a dozen holes."

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Iceland's Sigló course opens for first season

A new nine-hole golf course designed by Edwin Roald and operated by Sigló Hotel in Siglufjörður, Iceland, has opened for its first full season of play.

The project began in 2009 when, in the midst of the financial crisis, Roald decided to donate 100 working hours to rural golf clubs in Iceland. The Siglufjörður Golf Club, which celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2020, contacted Roald to discuss the possibilities for improving its course.

"We developed the concept of a multifunctional recreational area, with facilities for golf, horse riding and other forms of general outdoor life," said Roald. "This got a positive reaction from the municipality, but the project didn't really take off until local investor, entrepreneur and developer Róbert Gudfinnsson, and his tourism and leisure development company Raudka, gave it wings through funding and other means of support."

Raudka has invested in improvements to the town's attractions

and infrastructure to strengthen the fishing village as a tourist destination.

Construction started in 2012 with most bulk earthworks completed in 2016. The course has been growing-in since and was opened for preview play in 2018. The par-35 layout sits partially in a gravel quarry, at the intersection of the Hólsá and Leyningsá rivers.

Roald said: "It is short and sweet, combining entertainment for golfers of all skill levels with the unparalleled sights and sounds; the mountain amphitheatre, the perfectly aligned horizon at the fjord's mouth that mirrors the midnight sun and painting the sky in bright pink, the distant roar of the waterfall, the crashing rapids of the river, and the birdies.

"Of course, only time can tell how the course will be received by players,

but the elements that I expect will stand out are holes five through eight. These include two consecutive short par threes at holes six and seven. The sixth asks you for a delicate pitch into a narrow clearing in a mature pine plantation, which is a paradise in its own right. You then arrive at the seventh after a walk, slightly downhill, through the plantation, along the crashing rapids of one of the two rivers. Once you are through, you are offered a sub-100-yard shot downhill to a large island green with Sigló's most iconic mountain, Hólshyrna, as a backdrop."

Sigló measures 2,843 yards from the back tees and includes a 3-3-5-3 finish





Image: Harris Kalinka

(re)GOLF works with RTJ II at Miklagard

Golf course architecture firms Robert Trent Jones II and (re)GOLF are working together on a renovation project at Miklagard Golf near Oslo, Norway, which includes the design of five new holes.

The course was originally designed by RTJ II and opened in 2001 and (re)GOLF has worked with the club since 2008, looking at plans for new holes, the practice range's relocation, a new practice academy as well as tweaks to the course. These projects have been held back while a hotel development was going through the planning process, but in autumn 2017 the hotel was given the green light and its construction began a year later.

"When that happened, we were given the brief to reroute the golf course and find a new position for the practice range inside the existing boundary given that the old practice range was

planned to become the new hotel site," said (re)GOLF's Christian Lundin.

"We came up with a plan together with the original architect Robert Trent Jones II, where we were appointed to lead the work, but to collaborate with RTJ II so that the course is kept in its existing style, which is very highly rated in the Norwegian and European markets."

The plan includes five brand new holes, as well as the remodelling of the opening hole.

Contractor Nelson & Vecchio began the project in August 2018 with the plan to have all golf course areas seeded by August 2019.

"The site is extremely rolling with heavy clay soil – definitely not ideal to build a golf course in, but this makes for some very interesting and dramatic holes," said Lundin. "Miklagard has always been famous for being one of

the most testing layouts around and we believe that we have added a good test. We have, more importantly, added versatility in some shorter holes that may look easy but will bite back when a shot is not accurately executed.

"The finishing stretch at Miklagard has been given a touch up and I am sure that the reachable par-four fifteenth, the tough three-shotter sixteenth, long par-three seventeenth and the very strategic and demanding eighteenth will create one of the best finishing stretches of any course in Scandinavia.

"David Nelson has been extremely clever in hiring Bob Harrington as project shaper – one of the original shapers of this site. A great move which has saved us massive time and resources, I would say."

The new practice range is expected to open in August, with the course fully reopening in spring 2020.



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THE BIG PICTURE

The fourth hole at NEWGIZA Golf Club, photographed by Kevin Murray, is a drop-shot par three with views of the Egyptian pyramids.

“It was actually the last hole grassed, even though it was one of the early holes we started earthworks on,” said architect Tim Lobb. “It really connects two parts of the site and was particularly challenging to build as it has a 26-metre drop from tee to green, and at the time it was a sheer quarry wall. The construction teams had to build a pad going down into the quarry to gain access and now it is the path that is used for golfers. It is quite remarkable!”

The course opened earlier this year and is the final design by Thomson Perrett & Lobb, the partnership between the late five-time Open champion Peter Thomson and golf course architects Ross Perrett and Tim Lobb. It is part of a 680-hectare development that includes upscale housing, sports arena, hotels, schools, universities and a community hub.

“Working on this NEWGIZA course has been an incredible journey from complex design work, challenging construction conditions to seeing the course mature into a grown-up golf experience,” said Lobb.

Ross Perrett said: “Since first walking the site in 2005 we knew we had the potential to do a unique course in this quarry setting just out of Cairo. We planned a course that would explore a lot of the site, including views of the Pyramids of Giza and give a context to the local cultural landscape.”





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Lido-inspired design set for 2020 opening

Construction is progressing with Ban Rakat Club's new Ballyshear Golf Links course near Bangkok, Thailand, designed by Gil Hanse and inspired by Long Island's famous lost course, Lido, designed by Charles Blair Macdonald and Seth Raynor.

"This is our first project in Thailand," said Hanse. "It has provided us with the opportunity to design a golf course on a very unique piece of land – deploying a philosophy that relies heavily not just on the history of this game, but its strategic history."

"The design of Ballyshear is based on the principles and philosophies espoused by two giants of vintage course architecture, Macdonald and Raynor, who made their marks by replicating in America specific golf holes from classic Scottish links – the Redan at North Berwick, for example. The Alps at Prestwick. These holes represent our inspiration and aspiration at Ban Rakat – just as they inspired Macdonald and Raynor at hallowed grounds such as The National Golf Links of America, Chicago Golf Club, and specifically Lido Golf Club."

Lido Golf Club on Long Island was designed and built by Macdonald and Raynor in 1918, before being abandoned during World War II. Dr Alister MacKenzie also contributed to the layout, having won a design contest

for its eighteenth hole.

Hanse's Ballyshear layout includes a 'Dog's Leg' par-four second, based on Raynor's design for the sixth at the Lido club. Other famous template designs – such as Cape, Biarritz, Redan

and Short holes – will also feature at the Bangkok course.

Construction began in January 2018 on the site of the former Kiarti Thaneey Country Club. The Ballyshear layout will be open for play in early 2020.



Image: Ban Rakat Club

Hanse completes renovation projects at Tokyo, Merion and Southern Hills



Photo: Tokyo GC

Gil Hanse has also recently completed projects at Tokyo Golf Club in Japan, Merion Golf Club in Pennsylvania and Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa.

The Tokyo course (pictured above) has two green complexes per hole, named Asaka and Chichibu after club locations before it moved to its present

site in Sayama in northwest Tokyo.

"During this project we renovated the Chichibu green complexes, rebuilt all and re-positioned some of the fairway bunkers and mounds, created new back and forward teeing grounds, and removed a significant number of trees from the golf course," said Hanse.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

Ian Andrew returns to St George's in Toronto for restoration work

Ian Andrew has returned to St George's Golf and Country Club in Toronto, Canada, for restoration work, focused on bunkering, on the club's Stanley Thompson layout.

The course, which will host the Canadian Open on the PGA Tour for the sixth time in 2020, was originally designed by Thompson in 1929. Andrew first restored the bunkers while with Carrick Design in 2001 and also completed a greens reconstruction project in 2014, alongside Tom Doak. He has referenced dozens of photos and notes from the 1920s and 30s to inform his work at the club.

"Most bunkers will only get minor 'touch ups' where lines have changed, but there will be a couple of larger modifications done to increase the accuracy of the bunkering as photos have been recently found," said Andrew. "It's nice to have the chance to restore those small details and sharpen up the lines of the bunkers. I think the returning PGA Tour players will see the difference the details have brought out."

The project will see Better Billy Bunker liners installed and is expected to be completed by late July.

Read more about the project at www.golfcoursearchitecture.net



Ian Andrew has referred to historic photography (opposite page) for renovation work at St George's including (top) the eleventh and (above) the sixth holes



Images: courtesy of Ian Andrew





Second course opens at FLC Quang Binh

The second course designed by Brian Curley at the FLC Quang Binh development on a stretch of Vietnam coastline has opened for play.

The Ocean Dunes layout is located within the 2,400-hectare development in Hanoi – just south of Dong Hoi – that runs along a six-kilometre beach. It is the second of a possible ten courses for the complex, with the first – Forest Dunes – having opened last year. “It is a very dramatic contrast of white sand, emerald green paspalum turf, dark green pines, multi-coloured wetlands, and sparkling blue waterways, all overlooking the ocean,” said Curley.

Ocean Dunes begins playing into a native forest from elevated tees that make up part of a man-made dune complex that includes the first, tenth and fifteenth tees, as well as the ninth and fourteenth greens. “This area had been the flattest portion of the site, but excavation of nearby irrigation lakes created the material to create the dune and raise the clubhouse pad,” said Curley.

“The site offered plenty of natural casuarina pine vegetation along with the white sand base. These sandy expanses were also covered with wispy showings of native bunch grasses and pine needles, creating a rugged look.

Much of the sand is incorporated not as typical formal bunkering, but as wide swathes of open sand and as up-dunes.

“Ocean Dunes plays along the natural terrain, tying into the surrounds. This pattern is broken in some instances, including the created dune complex for the large double green for the second and fifth holes and the tees for the third. The third plays from atop a high point that was expanded during construction into a large dune and features a deep gouged out low, with a prominent centreline dune slightly blinding the wide fairway.”

The par-three fourth and seventh



Photo: Schmidt-Curley Design

Brian Curley said Ocean Dunes offers “plenty of natural casuarina pine vegetation along with the white sand base,” as seen above on the eighteenth hole

each feature backdrops of the primary dune complex that was naturally created off the beachfront.

“The mid-length par-three twelfth plays into the teeth of the wind directly out to the beach, but is followed up by a short, reachable par four with the wind at your back and features a massive ridgeline dune that is largely turf. If carried, the ball is propelled towards the large undulating green,” said Curley. “If not carried, balls will likely roll back leaving a blind second shot.

“The course ends with a stretch of beachfront holes, finishing with pars of 4-3-5, including the reachable par-

five eighteenth that plays over a large waterway into a dramatic backdrop of dunes and features a bowled-out green surrounded by open sand.”

Construction was handled by Flagstick Golf Course Management and directed by Martin Moore and his team, which included site manager Joey Cagle and lead shaper Don Page.

Curley remains busy in Vietnam with additional FLC projects planned to start soon. He is also currently adding nine holes at Stone Valley Golf Resort, just south of Hanoi, as well as finishing the fourth course at Siam Country Club in Pattaya, Thailand, set for a late 2019 opening.

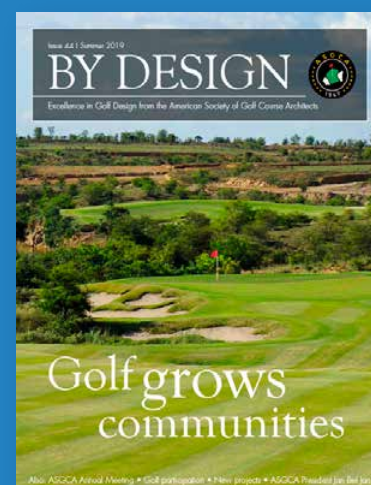
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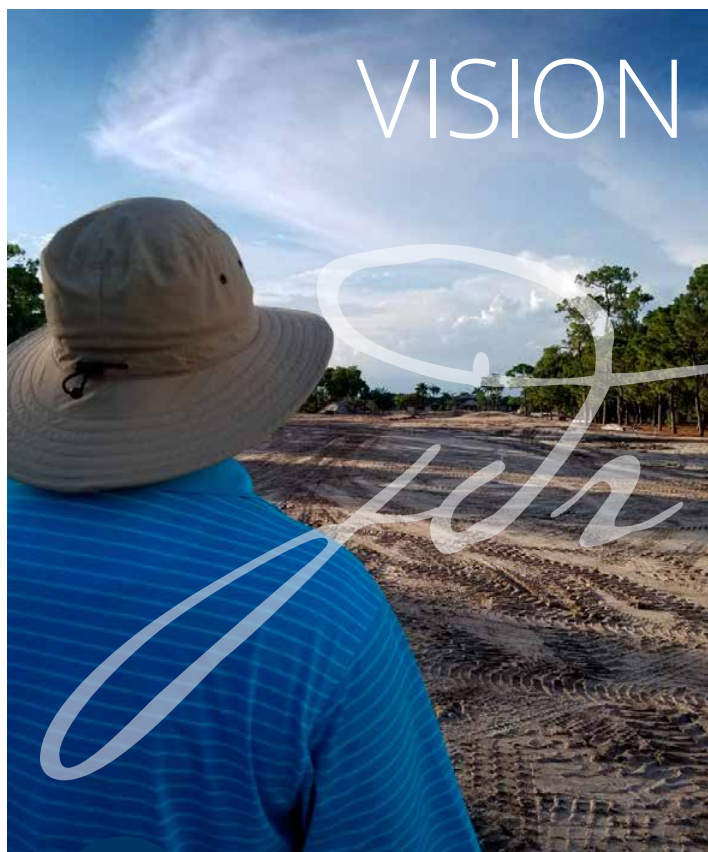
“We had no idea if a club golf market would even exist”

The summer 2019 issue of the American Society of Golf Course Architects’ *By Design* magazine, sees ASGCA members share insight into projects that they have worked on in emerging golf markets.

“The challenges were always many, because in some of our initial attempts, we had no idea if a club golf market would even exist, or if people would understand or appreciate the concept,” said Mark Hollinger of JMP Design Group, whose firm created one of the first residential golf communities in mainland China – Agile Golf & Country Club.

Download the issue and subscribe to By Design via www.asgca.org





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Rossknecht expands Zürichsee from 9 to 18 holes

Golfpark Zürichsee in Nuolen, Switzerland, has reopened as an 18-hole course following a two-year expansion project overseen by Kurt Rossknecht of Rossknecht Golfplan.

“It is not a classic nine-hole extension. Ultimately, fourteen holes were newly created or significantly changed,” said Rossknecht. “The planning goal is to create a varied and fair golf course for everyone from the recreational golfer to the skilled player.”

There was space for five new holes on a filled gravel pit at the adjacent Rütihof site. “Four holes were integrated into the existing nine-hole course,” said Rossknecht. “This was only possible because various smaller areas were previously not used for golf and some holes were extended, adapted or rebuilt.

“The five new holes on the Rütihof site are quite different,” said

Rossknecht. “Here, the landscape had to be redefined. There is an almost continuous impressive view of Lake Zurich and the surrounding mountains from these holes.

“There are many water hazards and wet meadows, some of which are protected as spawning grounds for toads and frogs. There are ball-

swallowing ponds, streams and woody plants, as well as bunkers that defend the landing areas.”

New bunkers have been constructed with the Betty Billy Bunker liner and Durabunker edges. They have already been tested, following some extreme rain events, and the club is benefitting from their performance.



The new holes all have views of Lake Zurich and the surrounding mountains

THE INTERVIEW

with John LaFoy

“Members will notice a total consistency from bunker to bunker”

GCA spoke with John LaFoy about his bunker rebuilding work at James River Country Club in Virginia, which was completed this spring



Why was this project necessary?

The project came about as the old bunkers were just getting old and worn out. The edges appeared to have crept outward and outward over the years. The slope toward the putting surfaces had gotten quite steep in many cases, and the edges were right at the top of the slope.

What was the extent of your work?

I think all of us thought we would get a better look if the top edges were rolled from 18-24 inches down the slope. Also,

over the years, the capes that at one time probably came down into the bunkers, were lost and we wanted to restore them. I was given a free hand by the club, but from our discussions I knew that they were not looking for a radical change. I sent them some conceptual sketches of the bunkers with a ‘lace edge’ or ‘dragon tooth’ effect but they did not appeal to anyone in a decision-making role.

The project consisted of renovating and or rebuilding 13 fairway and 41 greenside bunkers. We filled in one fairway bunker.





John LaFoy oversaw a project to rebuild every bunker on the course at James River Country Club

We also reduced the size of several bunkers that we felt did not need to be so large and in one case – hole five – reduced the size of the front two bunkers to allow for a more generous run-up shot onto the putting surface.

All bunkers were rebuilt to Better Billy Bunker specifications. We also wanted to eliminate the sand ‘build-up’ around the bunker edges that inevitably happens, either from sand blasted from bunker shots, wind blowing sand out, or a bunker rake going in and out of bunkers.

All bunkers required sod around the perimeters, which was done with dormant Celebration Bermuda. The project was timed so that it would not have to sit for long before it began to green up and become viable. Since it was done at the end of the winter we

had to consider the possibility of some bad weather but luckily, we were able to work almost continuously.

What do you think returning players and members will notice most?

I am excited that the members will notice a total consistency from bunker to bunker, both from an aesthetic and playability standpoint. I feel sure that for the majority of members, playability will be the most important factor. Since the bunkers have always been pleasant to look at, I am not sure there will be a ‘wow’ factor with the new bunkers, although for some I think they will like the look considerably better. From a maintenance standpoint, I think making them smaller and being able to keep sand on the slopes after heavy rains will be huge.

The sand quality and playability are fantastic – it has turned out great. The club is very pleased with the bunkers and they have been well received by the membership. I have been working at James River now for about 20 years and the continuity of the administration, grounds department, and the golf committees has ensured that the golf course and club continue to get better and better.

Who did you work with on the James River project?

Golf course superintendent Rob Wilmans was on site every day and Total Turf Golf Services was the golf course contractor for the project. I was very impressed with their ability to translate my plans from paper onto the ground.



Sustainability leads annual meeting agendas

The theme of sustainability was high on the agenda at the annual meetings of both the European Institute of Golf Course Architects and the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

Christoph Städler of Städler Golf Courses was officially appointed president of the EIGCA at the

President's Dinner during the annual meeting in Paris, France. He pledged to work with the new EIGCA Council to work for an economically sustainable future for golf and to champion the health benefits of the sport.

"As golf course architects we are fundamental to the successful future

of golf," said Städler. "Not only must we use our expertise to design tailor-made sustainable golf courses which are in line with market demands, but we must also design golf courses that are faster and more fun to play so they appeal to current golfers and attract new players. It is our creative solutions which will ensure golf is an enjoyable pastime for many years to come."

Städler succeeds Ross McMurray of European Golf Design and will serve a two-year term. Tim Lobb succeeds Städler as vice-president.

In Phoenix, Arizona, the ASGCA held its 73rd meeting and Jan Bel Jan was appointed as its president.

She said: "I want to carry on the mission of ASGCA past presidents Greg Martin, John Sanford, Jeff Blume and others. Thoughtfulness for our





Photo: Mark Alexander

clients so we may continue providing the best product, helping show a better economic way to do things and greater recognition for the work of ASGCA members.”

ASGCA members discussed practice and short-play areas, reviewing examples of architects working with the land to develop additional playing options for golfers of all skill levels, and potential revenue enhancements for course owners and operators.

One of many guest presentations saw Hunki Yun from the United States Golf Association share results of surveys conducted with golfers across the US on their experiences at golf facilities. Members learned what factors help golfers determine a good experience from bad, and impacting if and when players will return for their next round.

Lester George begins Kinloch renovation

Kinloch Golf Club in Richmond, Virginia, has closed this summer as the club implements the second phase of renovations from a 2014 master plan, created by original designers Lester George and Marvin ‘Vinny’ Giles. Construction work is being handled by Landscapes Unlimited.

Renovations were initiated by the need to update Kinloch to modern standards of maintenance technologies and sustainability as well as fortifying the structural elements of the course. “The master plan was created to improve strategy, length, bunker modifications, and all the fine details synonymous with Kinloch,” said George.

Kinloch is located in a transition zone with cool season bentgrass fairways and bluegrass/fescue roughs. Over the past 20 years, roughs have been contaminated with bermuda and bentgrass. In order to maintain turf quality, 35 acres of contaminated turf will be eradicated and replaced with new varieties of bluegrass/fescue in rough areas and the intermediate cut.

“The timing of the closure is being dictated by the most effective manner of eradicating the corrupted turf,” said Kinloch club manager Jonathan Ireland.

The club will also renovate 100,000 square feet of bunkers and install a modern bunker liner system.

“The length people are hitting the ball now has rendered some of the original bunkers less strategic,” said Giles. “So, Lester and I will be adding several bunkers and removing others to modify and enhance the strategy of certain holes. The greens are better than ever right now and will remain untouched during this renovation. This phase was part of the master plan all along, but it’s great that it happens to coincide with the 2020 USGA Mid-Amateur Championship.”



Photo: Monty Aerials/Ryan Montgomery

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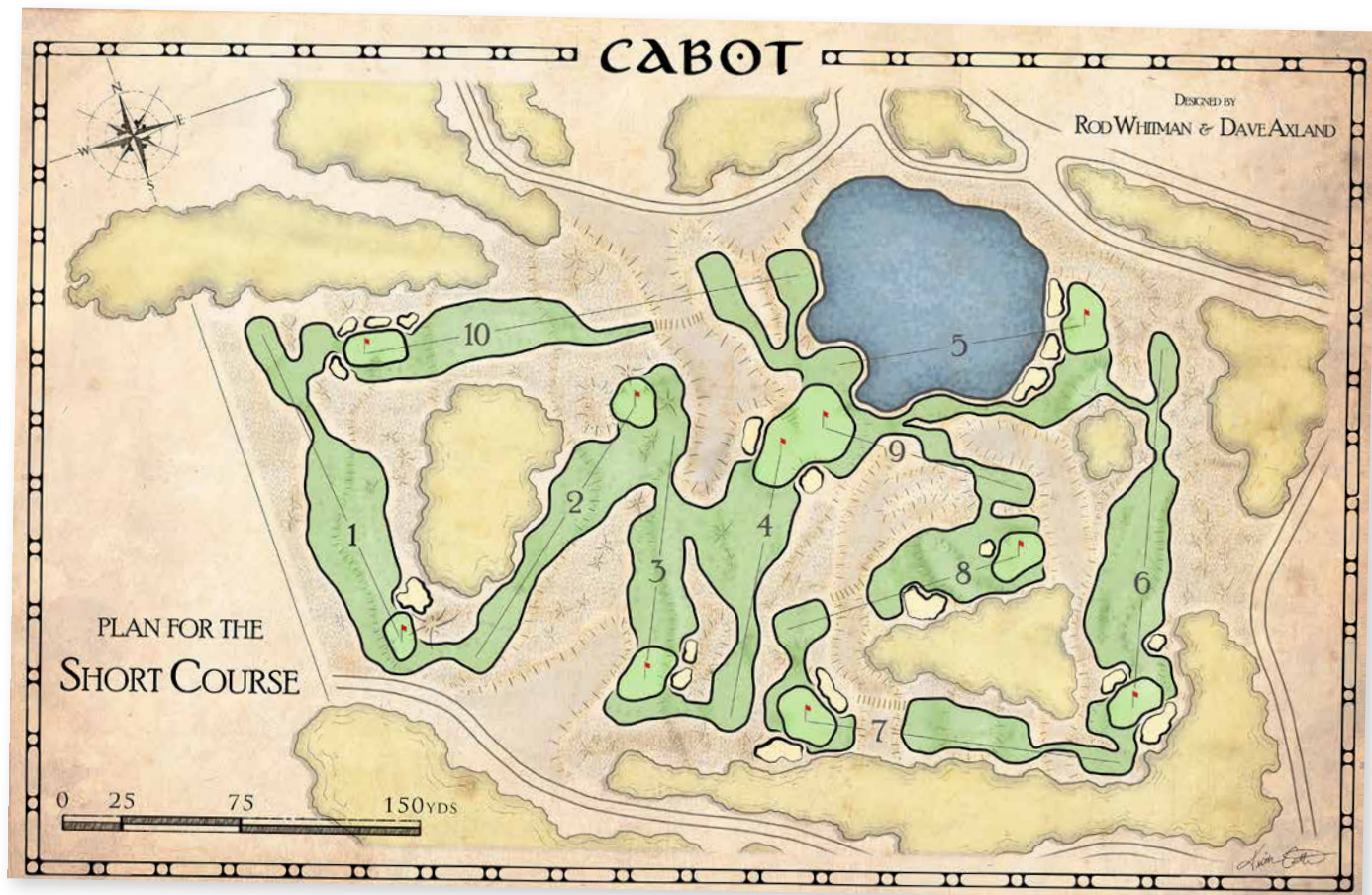


Photo: Rod Whitman Golf Course Design

Cabot Links short course

Golf course architects Rod Whitman and Dave Axland are collaborating on a ten-hole short course at Cabot Links Golf Resort in Inverness, Canada.

The short course will join the resort's two 18-hole golf courses – Cabot Links, designed by Whitman in 2012, and Cabot Cliffs, designed by Coore and Crenshaw in 2016.

“The project came about as the ownership was doing some master planning to include real estate and other site usage options,” said Whitman. “The idea for a par-three

course has always been a part of this overall plan. Ben Cowan-Dewar [co-founder and managing director of the resort] invited Dave and I to be the designers of the short layout.”

The ten-hole course is being built on land the resort already owns, just inland and uphill from Cabot Cliffs. “Ben spent quite a bit of time working with us to identify the property best suited for the course,” said Whitman. “We decided on a piece of rolling ground overlooking the final eight holes of the Cabot Cliffs course.

The course was routed to allow for maximum variety in length and shot values. Right now, we have ten holes, but that could be expanded.

“The natural ground contour and the angle of the holes allows for interesting, fun and varied golf. The ground has rolls, dips and ridges. It will have a Scottish feel and look to it and there will be spectacular views of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence.”

The seeding of the course is expected to be complete by late August ahead of a 2020 opening.



Progolf completes Letsche redesign at Pfalz

Progolf Construction, a Portuguese company, has completed construction work on Greg Letsche's redesign of Golf Club Pfalz in the south-west German town of Neustadt.

Benjamim da Silva, Progolf's partner, with Antonio and Marco Miranda oversaw construction, which began in August 2018, and included the building of new green complexes; new tees, fairways and bunkers; and the extension of water features. Director of golf Neil Lubbock brought Progolf in after meeting them at West Cliffs in

Portugal. "He has a long relationship with the club and his vision was to turn Pfalz into one of the best golf courses in Germany," said da Silva.

The project has seen 62 new bunkers and 90 new tees, while some bunkers have been removed. Letsche has also designed 18 entirely new green complexes. "I am excited for players to see the new greens and bunker design, which turns holes and gives movement to the course," said da Silva. "The main layout change is the tenth, now an interesting and challenging par

four instead of a par five. The eleventh and twelfth have been opened up with interesting water and green concepts. It is now a great course, with new tees playable for all ages and standards."

Work also includes the shaping of 18 new fairways and a full seeding program for fairways, tees, surrounds, approaches and greens.

Drainage has been renovated or added in existing low-lying areas, bunkers and green complexes. All water features, including the wooden walls on existing and new burns and the three lakes, have either been extended or built.

"The main challenges were the drainage problems on the back nine," said da Silva. "We had to excavate lakes with the groundwater one metre below ground level, build wooden walls, take out and rebuild 18 green complexes with drainage, and seeding all in four months. We overcame that with great teamwork between the project manager, our team, the club superintendent, his team and finally the club's committee."



High Meadows work prompted by storms

Bill Bergin is overseeing the construction of new forward tees and all new bunkers at High Meadows Golf & Country Club in Roaring Gap, in the mountains of North Carolina at an elevation of almost 3,000 feet above sea level.

“I was contacted by the golf course superintendent Nathan Biggs in the summer of 2018 following severe and damaging rain events,” said Bergin. “Their 1962 George Cobb golf course had been pretty beat up with constant rain events on bunkers ill-designed to handle the conditions. In fact, the bunkers were well past their prime and it was time for a major redo.

“As we were reviewing the current conditions of the course, the club also indicated a desire to resurface all of their tees as well. I explained our work with the Longleaf Tee System, and it was well received, leading to an overall analysis of tees and positioning.”

Construction began in late March and includes the addition, rebuilding or resurfacing of 85 tee boxes. “The tees are generally rectangular in shape and offer the membership six distinct distance options.”

All bunkers were rebuilt, with many relocated. Also, six new bunkers have been added to take the total to 25. “We

have chosen a traditional design style of grass-faced bunkers with sand in the base and have focused strongly on water diversion around the new bunkers,” said Bergin. Sandtrapper II has been used to line the bunkers.

“Shaping is nearly complete, and we have finished work on the front nine,” said Bergin. “We expect the project to wrap up in early July.”

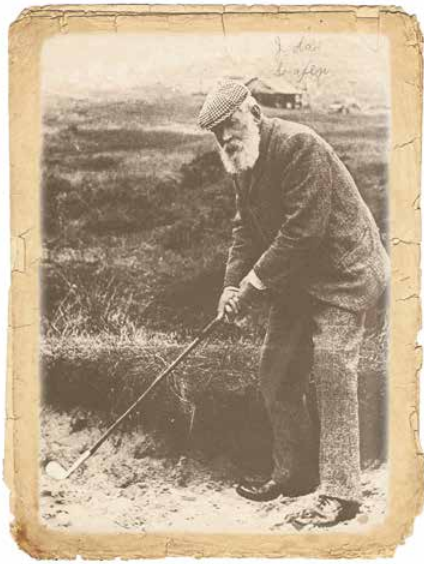
Bergin has also recently completed a major renovation at McLemore Club in Rising Fawn, Georgia, working alongside Rees Jones. The course reopened in June.



Photos: Bill Bergin



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Advanced irrigation for Oaks Prague

Construction is progressing on the Kyle-Phillips-designed Oaks PGA National golf course in Prague, Czech Republic.

The course, which measures 7,500 yards from the back tees, is expected to fully open in summer 2020.

The golf course features a sophisticated irrigation system from Toro, working with Profigrass, its irrigation distributor for the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

“We installed a Lynx GDC control system with Grundfos pump station and Campbell scientific weather station integration,” said Marco Capelli of Toro. “And there will be approximately 700 Infinity heads with integrated

decoder and T7 sprinklers on tees.”

A fully lined irrigation reservoir is located on site at the golf facility.

“The pump stations are in an underground concrete building to use the maximum capacity of the irrigation reservoir and allow the regular check of the pumps,” said Václav Grézl of Profigrass. “The two pump stations each works with different output pressure to save energy costs in the long term.

“Infinity sprinklers on the greens and fairways are operated individually to allow the best control and save water. Sprinklers for greens irrigation have Trjectory adjustment to allow a perfect adaptation of the trajectory to

the course. Fairways have double or triple row irrigation spacing, usually triangular.”

Some bunkers are irrigated with Toro Precision nozzles to avoid the water run-off from the bunker slopes.

The wider development includes a master-planned living community of 250 smart technology homes set among 140 hectares of private land around the restored Chateau Nebrenice. It will also feature a hotel, spa, forest trails, tennis academy and horse-riding centre.

“A safe, beautiful and energising connection to nature constantly maintained by Oaks Prague ensures a truly refined country experience at all levels,” said Grézl.



Photo: Arendon Development Company



Sustainability drives work at The Saticoy Club

Thad Layton, architect and vice president at Arnold Palmer Design Company, is overseeing the second phase of a renovation project at The Saticoy Club in Somis, California.

The first phase included sodding the front nine fairways to Santa Ana bermuda. “Fairway areas were expanded to get as much warm season grass out there as possible,” said Robert Nagelberg, general manager at The Saticoy Club. “We also renovated all the bunkers to improve playability and ease of maintenance – combining or eliminating where unnecessary, and installing Capillary Concrete to prevent washouts.”

Phase two has now started and focuses on sodding the back nine fairways to Santa Ana bermuda,

as well as collars and approaches throughout the course. “All short grass surfaces, with the exception of the greens, will be 100 per cent warm season grass,” said golf course superintendent, Tim Paulson. “This is so key to reducing our dependence on water.

“The main driving force for the current work has been sustainability. Water is never going to be available to us as it was in the past. Furthermore, our water quality is poor – even more reason to convert to relatively bulletproof bermuda.

“Going from winter grasses to summer grasses allows the course to be in its best shape during the busier months that see the most sunlight, increasing member enjoyment and

access. Some of the drought-tolerant projects allow us to put monies in other areas down the road to continue making Saticoy special.

“We are also working to reduce our irrigation footprint in other areas by converting to woodchips or native grasses. We are currently testing several native grass mixes that require no supplemental irrigation – aside from establishment. For long-term benefits, we also began to incorporate tall fescue in the roughs, which should help make those areas more drought tolerant as well.”

Layton said: “The most impactful part of the master plan was the aggressive clearing of conifers. Aside from the obvious benefits of increased playability and better turf conditions,



Photo: Arnold Palmer Design Company

removing the trees opened up distant views of the mountains and avocado groves, lending context and restoring the identity of The Saticoy Club. On a clear day, the Channel Islands are visible from a number of vantage points on the back nine.”

The design firm, led by Layton, has developed and executed the master plans, as well as assembling the team of shaping specialists to implement the fine details of the project, including Brett Hochstein and Jeff Bradley. The project team also includes contractor Heritage Links, construction superintendent John Bolasky and West Coast Turf providing the sod. Hochstein was also involved with many of the design decisions.

Construction nears completion at rebranded Florida Club

Construction work is almost complete on the Greg Norman redesign of the former Diplomat Golf & Tennis Club in Hallandale Beach, Florida. The club will be rebranded as The Shark Club by SLS Hotels.

Work began in November 2018 on the south of the site. Phase two, the seven holes on the north side, is approaching completion.

“The golf course has been rerouted to accommodate two new building tower pads marked for future development,” said Norman’s lead designer Jeff Danner. “Most of the existing golf hole corridors will remain intact. However, many holes around the perimeter will play in reverse with the slice side internal, to try and reduce the chances of golf balls leaving the property.

“The style of the golf course will have a classic feel, reminiscent of courses designed by Seth Raynor. Greens, tees, and bunkers will have a hint of geometric character to create more defined golf features for better strategy and decision-making visual cues, while seamlessly tying into the natural surrounds.”

Significant grading work and lake expansion are helping to create a no-net-loss of water storage for the entire site.

“The new layout, with its reduced footprint, will have plenty of risk-reward opportunities,” said Danner. “Where we lost length, we’ve made up for in creating a layout that has plenty of strategy and challenge, while providing safer avenues to the hole for the novice golfer. The existing second hole, which is the iconic island green in front of the clubhouse, will be repurposed and modified to play as the par-four eighteenth.”

The project is expected to be completed in August ahead of a possible soft opening in November.



Photo: Greg Norman Golf Course Design

Tripp Davis restores Emmet bunker style at Powelton

Tripp Davis has completed a bunker restoration project at the Devereux Emmet-designed Powelton Club in Balmville, New York.

Davis was hired to rebuild the bunkers in Emmet's slender style with steep grass faces and strategic positioning, while reducing the overall square footage of bunkers to make them more manageable.

The project began in September 2018, with Frank O'Dowd overseeing construction.

"The bunkers at Powelton had three main issues," said Davis. "Strategically, most of them needed to be tweaked for the modern game. This meant pushing

fairway bunkers down the fairway a little – on holes where we had no room to add length – and we brought them a little more into play as well.

"The greenside bunkers were expanded or restored in places to better protect angles into greens. We expanded fairways to enhance the element of the course's width. One of our strengths is understanding the strategic side of design, which is one of my primary focuses – not to make a course more challenging, but more interesting.

"The bunkers had stylistically lost their Emmet identity in a previous renovation effort," continued Davis. "They became more like bowls,

instead of being flat-bottomed; they developed higher sand lines, instead of being grass-faced bunkers; and some just got too rounded, instead of being more rectangular.

"Functionally, the sand in the bunkers was very coarse and played soft, with a lot of little rocks coming up from the soil below. We brought in the best bunker sand in the area and we used a fabric to line the bunkers, so we eliminated the small rocks. The bunkers will now be a lot easier to maintain in a way that plays much better."

Construction was largely complete by early May, with the finishing touches made in June.

Photo: Tripp Davis



The approach to the restored par-five fourth hole at Powelton Club



Photo: Jeff Howes

Jeff Howes design at Golfclub Linsberg opens

A new 18-hole Golfclub Linsberg course designed by Jeff Howes has opened for play in Lanzenkirchen, Austria.

“The routing was quite a challenge as it is on a relatively small piece of land and there are two major power lines running through the property,” said Howes. “Fortunately, the desire of all involved was to create a course which had no intention of hosting the Austrian Open – it has been designed to be user-friendly for all levels of golfers.”

Austrian contractor Pittel+Brausewetter started construction in July 2017 and it was completed a year later.

“With the land more-or-less flat, imagination was needed,” said Howes. “There was only three metres of elevation change from one end of the site to the other with no features – including trees – to incorporate into the routing.”

Some trees have been planted, with most located on holes four to eight, the fifteenth and sixteenth. “The overall result should give the effect of three distinct characters throughout the round – links, lakes and woodland,” said Howes.

“There are three man-made lakes which come into play on four of the holes. Holes ten through fourteen are designed and landscaped as links holes to add variety to the golf. With the ground being gravel and the grass species that we specified, there should be no problem maintaining them to play like a links.”

The links holes feature revetted bunkers, built using the Ecobunker system. Howes first used the Ecobunker system at St Anne’s Links in Dublin, Ireland, where he recognised the full potential for the product, and soon after specified its use at Linsberg.

The course had been growing in for nearly a year before it opened for play in May.



Photo: Golfclub Linsberg/Greyliner

Global round-up

Second nine of Nicklaus Design course takes shape at Da Nang

Construction continues on the second nine of the Nicklaus Design course at BRG Da Nang Golf Resort in Ngũ Hành Sơn, Vietnam.

Nicklaus Design associate Sean Quinn is leading the project, working with contractor Martin Moore of Flagstick Golf Construction.

The first nine holes (pictured) were chosen for their proximity to the clubhouse. “The remaining nine holes are away from the clubhouse, with three adjacent to the Coco River,” said Quinn. “Most of the golf property is low lying and part of a floodplain so it was important to elevate the course above minimum flood levels.”

The new nine is expected to be completed by October 2020.



Photo: Nicklaus Design

Prince's progresses with renovation of Shore and Dunes nines

Prince's Golf Club in Kent, United Kingdom, is progressing with a renovation of its Shore and Dunes nines, with the project being overseen by golf architecture firm Mackenzie & Ebert.

Bunkers on several holes have been reconfigured, new tees added, and some holes have been lengthened to bring the fairway bunkers back into play for elite golfers.

“In terms of new features, the fifth hole on the Shore nine stands out,” said Martin Ebert. “The carry over bare sand areas and the view towards the sea makes for a stunning hole, and it also provides a welcome change in angle for the course.”

Work is expected to be complete by spring 2020 with both nines fully in play.



Photo: Mackenzie & Ebert

Leitershofen reopens following renovation

The nine-hole Golf Club Leitershofen near Augsburg, Germany, reopened in June following renovation work by Thomas Himmel.

“The brief was to renovate the old and unsatisfying greens in order to enhance the variety and strategy, which led to a complete redesign,” said Himmel. “An important point for this project was to create nine visually different and strategic green complexes, as all greens are played twice during a round of 18.”

The project has also seen the addition of a new lake alongside the first and sixth greens and the rethinking of all bunkers – some have been removed, some relocated, and some new ones have been added.

Photo: Thomas Himmel



Photo: Robe Golf Club



Robe Golf Club extends course with six new holes

Robe Golf Club in South Australia has added six new holes to extend its course to a full eighteen.

The club collaborated with golf course design firm Crafter + Mogford Golf Strategies and the District Council of Robe on the expansion project.

The course originally consisted of fourteen holes. To help fund the expansion, two holes were closed so the land could be rezoned for residential development, topped up with funding from the Federal Government.

The new holes – the seventh through to the twelfth – are routed within an area which follows the natural contouring of the dunes, along the coast.

Construction of the new holes was completed in December 2018, with the new holes opening for play in November 2019.

Photo: Verdura Resort



Kyle Phillips returns to Verdura following 2018 storm damage

Kyle Phillips Golf Course Design has returned to Verdura Resort in Sicily, Italy, where 14 of its 36 holes were damaged by significant storm events in autumn 2018.

“Within the context of the existing golf course, we are working in concert with what nature has given us to make the two courses even better than before,” said Phillips.

Eighteen holes remain open for play, with the restored holes scheduled to reopen in 2020.



THAD LAYTON

The art of practice

Thad Layton outlines his eight essentials for a short game area

Golfers have largely embraced the importance of the short game's role in scoring. Stats confirm the most important real estate is the last 100 yards of any golf hole; approximately two-thirds of one's overall strokes occur within this zone. It's no wonder that the popularity of short game practice areas is on the rise, catapulting from afterthought to must-have amenity.

While it's hard to quantify the financial returns of a dedicated space for short game improvement, it's increasingly challenging to compete in the golf industry without one. I've seen first-hand how the addition of a proper short game facility can be leveraged as a recruitment tool for collegiate golf programmes and club managers competing for new members. These

'alternative' golf offerings are attractive to our time-strapped culture and provide a casual setting to learn the game's finer points.

While the demand is undoubtedly there, not all short game areas are created equal. If your course is debating the addition of such a facility, there are more than a few important things to consider before putting a shovel in the ground. As a golf course architect, here are my eight essentials for a successful short game area.

1. Safety – It doesn't matter how great your practice area is if someone working on using their wedge's bounce gets beamed by an errant shot. Ample space should be provided to allow a margin of error for less-than-perfect shots from less-than-perfect golfers.



Photo: Arnold Palmer Design Company

At Balsam Mountain Preserve in North Carolina, the driving range doubles as a par-three course

One thing to avoid like the plague is shallow bunkers. A good rule of thumb is to build bunkers at least three feet deep to contain the dreaded but altogether common thinned or shanked ball.

Another thing to avoid is bunkers facing each other on opposite sides of a green. I learned this lesson recently where I conceded to a last-minute request from the club to build an additional bunker to practice long irons toward the body of the range. I cringed on opening day when I witnessed what I can only describe as the golf equivalent of a food fight with golfers in each bunker blading shots towards one another. The bunker was quickly filled in – lesson learned!

2. Variety – All great golf courses have a variety of looks and shot requirements. Why should a short game area be any different? At a

minimum, a practice complex should replicate shots one might expect to hit with regularity on the neighbouring course. If space and budget allow, add design features that cater to the needs of different types of players.

For example, at Bay Hill we built an elevated ledge adjacent to one of the bunkers with our resident Tour players in mind. This exacting shot gives better players the unequivocal feedback they're looking for – anything less than the perfect shot won't hold the mercilessly narrow ledge. Alternatively, we made sure to include a few generous upslopes to hold shots and create confidence for new golfers. In total we built four greens and seven bunkers, every one of them unique in size, shape, and style.

3. Beauty – Form should follow function... to a point. While there are many technical aspects that can and probably should be incorporated into

any short game area, don't lose sight of the overall feel of the finished product. Features should all relate to one another and tie together a cohesive and believable landscape. A good architect will ensure the contours flow naturally through the entire frame to complete the composition.

Additionally, if there are native trees within the envelope of the subject property, save them to anchor the short game area and give it the appearance of age. Golfers will appreciate that shade come summertime!

4. Maintenance – For consistency, the short game area should be maintained in the same condition as the rest of the golf course. Green speeds, turf firmness, sand types, and rough heights should all match the conditioning of the main course.

Also, make sure to provide enough flat areas on the greens so holes can be



Photo: Arnold Palmer Design Company

Arnold Palmer Design Company created the new practice facility at Bay Hill

rotated regularly to spread traffic and provide different setup options. Gentle slopes are also important around the greens to stave off the concentration of divots. Firm greens are recommended to prevent pitch marks and closing the short game area for a day of rest will speed turf recovery.

5. Location – A conveniently-located practice area that is visible and walkable from the clubhouse is paramount to attract golfers. Remote practice areas won't be used nearly as much by junior golfers who typically can't drive carts. Even for those who have access to a cart, the long drive disconnects the experience and puts the facility out of the view and control of the pro shop.

We considered several sites at Bay Hill but, in the end, opted for shortening one of our golf holes to keep our short game area close to the

clubhouse; and we couldn't be more pleased with the results.

6. Flexibility – Explore opportunities to build-in flexibility for alternative uses. On our recent project at Balsam Mountain Preserve, we created a driving range that also functions as a par three course. We utilised synthetic turf on the target greens to guard against pitch marks that might compromise the true roll of the greens needed for putting.

7. Space – The best short game areas I've seen measure somewhere between two to five acres. A facility with this much space affords the opportunity to safely host short game clinics, wedge fitting sessions, and private lessons without closing off access to other players. Within the two-acre practice area at Bay Hill, we built greens and

bunkers of varying sizes and styles, and there's always room to have a private practice session.

8. Fun – Last but certainly not least is the fun factor. The finest short game areas encourage you to use your imagination and get lost in the improvement process. The best advice I can give to make it fun is this: Don't be afraid to break some rules. There are things you can build in this setting that you'd never be able to get away with on a regulation golf course. A postage-stamp style green? A massive green with boiling contours? Perhaps an impossibly deep bunker requiring a staircase and a periscope? If you have fun building it there's a strong chance people will enjoy playing it! **GCA**

Thad Layton is a senior golf architect at Arnold Palmer Design Company



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PAUL CHESTER

Water-aware course design

Paul Chester provides an insight into how golf facilities are boosting profits while reducing water consumption

The protection of water supplies is critical. The UK Environment Agency speaks of a ‘25-year water bomb’, highlighting that, unless proactive action is taken, the country will simply run out of water by 2045. Periods of drought and flash flooding are also expected to rise in frequency.

All of this will increasingly have a major impact on the businesses, like golf courses, that depend on a seamless water supply to operate successfully. So, what can golf course managers and architects do to balance water conservation without spoiling everyone’s fun?

According to the Alliance for Water Efficiency in the US, a typical golf course requires 100,000 to 1,000,000

gallons of water per week in summer to maintain healthy vegetation – most courses use up to 50 per cent more water than is necessary. It may be an under-analysed line on the club’s profit ledger, but this water misuse adds up, so designing a course to reduce the amount of water required for irrigation is the best place to start.

Many clubs and courses are already realising the benefits of strategically incorporating Huxley Golf’s all-weather surfaces – which require no irrigation and virtually no maintenance – into designs for new or replacement facilities.

Bearwood Lakes Golf Club in Berkshire, England, for example, used the company’s premium exclusive



The all-weather practice tee at Trump International Golf Links in Aberdeen

Premier Tee Turf and Premier Leisure Turf when they created a new outdoor driving area. Carl Rutherford, managing director at Bearwood, said: “We pride ourselves on providing world-class playing surfaces, maintained with exceptional craftsmanship and unparalleled attention to detail. That’s why we chose to work with Huxley Golf on our stunning new purpose-built all-weather practice facility. This was an important project for us as it would not only increase the distance of the range, but also bring our practice facilities into line with standards across the rest of the club. We are delighted with the result.”

Another example is a large all-weather practice tee at the Trump International Golf Links in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. Ten bay tees were created using Huxley Golf Premier Tee Turf 2. Course manager Steve Wilson commented: “We strive to be the ultimate golf destination and that means being the best in all that we do. In line with the rest of the course, it was expertly designed and installed – it looks fantastic and it plays exceptionally well. The impact of this work has been most encouraging

and the feedback that I have received from our valued members has been incredibly positive.”

Time and again, customers tell us at Huxley that their revenue is up because their members are staying longer and visiting more frequently because they can play and practice year-round thanks to the addition of high-quality all-weather surfaces. With frequent occurrences of extreme weather conditions becoming the norm rather than the exception and an increasingly obvious need for water conservation, they are fast becoming business-critical for many clubs and courses.

Of course, many of the UK’s most prestigious courses don’t have the practice facilities that they need because they were designed and built decades, even a century, ago when people simply didn’t practise as they do now. When purchasing additional land is neither desirable from a planning nor commercial perspective, the only solution is to survey the existing course facilities and creatively design for the future. No matter whether it’s a few well-trodden holes, a practice area or a whole all-weather course, working

artificial surfaces into development plans is proven to attract and retain members while protecting revenue – and water supplies.

Water re-use is a great opportunity to take this work one step further. If you have a clubhouse with a large roof area, rainwater harvesting – collecting rainwater for use in irrigation systems and for other non-potable uses like toilet flushing and air conditioning – could also pay dividends. There are also some great systems for greywater recycling whereby used water is filtered for re-use. Many of these can be retrofitted but, if new facilities are planned, it’s the perfect time to build these concepts into plans.

Since the UK is the first country in the world to declare a climate emergency, forward-thinking, environmentally aware golf course architects are in a unique position to demonstrate global leadership on addressing the water issue and potentially realise commercial benefits for their clients as a result.

Paul Chester is general manager at Huxley Golf

Renovation on a shoestring

OPTIMISING VALUE

Written by Adam Lawrence

A renovation is made easier if a club can afford a multi-million pound project. But for most, these projects that see almost all course features dug up and rebuilt are no more than pie in the sky, says Adam Lawrence

The storied Merion club in Philadelphia has just reopened its East course, regarded for many years as one of the ten best in the United States, after a two-year renovation led by Gil Hanse. The project has been one of the quietest major course redos I can remember – neither club nor architect has shown any interest in PR throughout the project. So we do not know for certain what it has cost; but the numbers that have been rumoured are quite vast – one suggestion I heard was a budget of US\$18 million.

Merion, doubtless, can well afford such a sum, and it is by no means the only high-end American club to sign up for an extremely expensive course refresh. But for the overwhelming

majority of golf clubs the world over, seven or eight figure projects are no more than pie in the sky. Sensible club managers well know the dangers of loading a balance sheet with debt, and members, in the current super-competitive club market, are less likely than they have ever been to sign up to large assessments for capital expenditure like course works.

Architect Colton Craig, who only formed his own practice this year, with the idea of targeting this lower cost renovation market, puts it well. “Over the last five to ten years we have seen a massive overall and renovation boom of the ‘blue blood’ clubs and high-end country clubs across America,” he explains. “It is my belief that in the coming years many of the mid-level

country clubs and municipal golf courses will also reinvest into their golf courses, but with much lower access to funding. This is a large reason why I decided to start my own firm back in February. Many of today’s established architects will not be interested in a US\$400,000 renovation budget when they have been making that amount in a design fee. I am calling it ‘Blue-Collar Golf Architecture’. Nothing overly fancy or elaborate, but solving real problems for the clients and their customers. This will create a market entry opportunity for architects like myself.

“Many courses were built from the 70s to the 90s and are desperate for a blue-collar renovation. Far too many of these clubs have 120,000 square feet of bunkers when the superintendent

Architect Clyde Johnson proposed a 'modest yet thoughtful refinement' for the Seacroft links in Lincolnshire, England



Photo: Clyde Johnson

has a three-man crew. The poor superintendent does not stand a chance in that situation. These courses would be more strategically interesting with 50,000 square feet of bunkers, wider fairways and added short grass around the greens.”

So the question then arises: how do you prioritise renovation work according to budgets available? The best and most effective way, golf architects agree, is to have a long-term master plan drawn up by a suitable architect that identifies potential improvements and allows the club to plan up to ten or more years into the future, executing work as finances and other priorities allow.

Although a master plan is the most organised, strategic way to plan

works, it isn't always necessary. There are times when priorities, at least the highest ones, are obvious to all concerned.

At Richmond Golf Club in Surrey, England, a few years ago, it didn't take a detailed study to realise that the course's bunkers were the top priority, so the club engaged with architect Tim Lobb to do a bunker rebuild. Together, architect and club decided that the most cost-effective way to progress the project would be to buy a suitable tilt bucket excavator, and for course manager Les Howkins to act as principal shaper on the job. As it happens, Howkins discovered a natural flair for the work, and the new bunkers were extremely well received, by members and guests alike. Not bad for

£120,000 (which included some minor works to one green).

One common reason for looking at renovation work is to change grass species in some way; from bent (and/or poa) to one of the newer dwarf bermudas, or other more advanced strain of warm season grass in transition zones, or to get a more sustainable stand of fine-leaved grasses as was the case on the Old course at Ballybunion a couple of years ago. Ballybunion was able to prepare for, and minimise, the cost of its project by growing the new fescue turf for its greens in part of the practice ground; not every course will have this opportunity. Seeds or sprigs of new, high-tech grass breeds can be expensive, and if there is a desire for

Burgdorfer GC, Germany

Christoph Städler tells the renovation story of Burgdorfer GC



Photos: Gregor A. Ingenhoven/ingenhoven-panography.com

Burgdorfer Golf Club, about 20 km north of Hannover, Germany, is a good example of the need for cost-effective renovations. The club competes with seven other 18-hole courses in the area and members tend to react quickly by switching to another club if they are confronted with a considerable cost allocation for investments.

But the club's almost 50-year-old push-up greens were very susceptible to disease and had turf of a mix of species which was no longer of a reasonable quality. Fortunately, the course lies on sandy ground, of such quality that it optimally meets requirements for drainage and rootzone layers. With the exception of a zeolite to amend the rootzone mix in order to achieve the necessary storage capacity of the irrigation water, no other construction material had to be purchased.

I suggested to the club that we also create a six-hole short course, to introduce beginners to golf and provide additional playing opportunities when the 18-hole course is occupied. It would give Burgdorfer a significant advantage over competitors. The short course was planned by rebuilding three existing holes in the vicinity of the clubhouse, which could be replaced by new holes along the north of the property.

The club approved a three-phase plan: first the three new holes were built, so 18 would be available at all times. The short course was built in the following year, and a year later, all greens, several tees and most of the bunkers were renewed. Dense forest was thinned out to provide more sunlight and wind to increase the vitality of the turf.

In each phase, only sand excavated from the property was used to build tees and greens. Several pits within the golf site today strategically come into play as natural landscape features and enrich the aesthetics of the golf course. The best quality sand came from a large pit excavated from the driving range. This was attractively remodelled with several target greens.

Construction costs for the project – around 600,000 euros, plus 100,000 euros for irrigation – were very low when considering the grand scale of construction works. The project would never have been approved if building materials had to be purchased externally. Striving for cost-effective solutions using materials available on the site is one of the most important components for an environmentally conscious, sustainable construction method.

a quick return of the course to action, leading to thoughts of sodding with bought-in turf, then the price will escalate very quickly.

Grass supplier John Holmes of Atlas Turf International says there is another, more cost-effective way to go about it. "We have been involved on multiple projects where the turf species have been changed by interseeding a new species into the old species," he says. "This is very inexpensive compared to stripping old turf out and planting new turf."

Similarly, architect Kris Spence says it is not always necessary to rebuild greens from the bottom up. "At Sara Bay CC in Sarasota, Florida, last summer we were able to address excessive crowning and restore the Ross greens by removing 12 inches of excess rootzone rather rebuilding the greens – which saved the club US\$400-500,000 in greens construction cost alone.

Phasing of work is extremely important (phasing is essentially just another form of prioritisation). Architect Jaeger Kovich cites the example of his work at Suburban Golf Club, an old Tillinghast course in New Jersey, where the club wanted to restore its architectural heritage, but wasn't flush with cash. "With no advance fundraising or planning, the club hired me to do a three-hole restoration plan as a preview to a full masterplan – getting their Tillinghast heritage is a big deal there – they are ten minutes from Baltusrol and built in the same year, 1922. The club decided it could probably scrounge up US\$100,000 to start work in October,



At Sara Bay in Florida, architect Kris Spence was able to restore the Donald Ross greens without rebuilding them, by removing 12 inches of excess rootzone

so we decided to focus on the two most impactful greens of the three holes we were looking at, the sixth and the eighth.

“For that hundred thousand, we were able to execute plans, shaping, removal of more than fifteen trees, and purchase of materials – that is to say sand and sod that couldn’t be harvested from the on-site nursery, stone and pipe. We were also able to pay for a contractor – Mottin Golf – to install drainage, do finish work on bunkers, core green expansions including installing mix and some sod work. The in-house crew did all the rest with me – moving sod, installing Capillary Concrete in bunkers, compacting greens mix, irrigation, installing sand, basically whatever was needed. The whole project took three weeks, and the results so far are looking great.”

The process of value engineering – analysing any project or system to improve the ratio of performance to cost – has a bad reputation in

some circles, as many believe that it is simply a way to drive cost out of a product or service, with little attention given to functionality. But done properly, that isn’t the case, and something very akin to value engineering can work well in the context of golf design. Scottish-based architect and shaper Clyde Johnson reports that this sort of approach has paid dividends in his work with the Seacroft links in Lincolnshire on the east coast of England. “That Seacroft maintains a fine reputation as one of England’s best links owes as much to an attitude of preservation as it does to the early architectural evolution of Willie Fernie’s original design,” he says. “Classic links features – deep pots to the flanks and centrally, quiet but subtly-diverse greens abound, and fleeting encounters with rugged terrain – dominate.

“Sensibly, the committee at Seacroft recognised that their course should reflect the playing interests of a ‘membership of mainly older

members’. It was important that my recommendations would amount to a modest yet thoughtful refinement. With plenty of ‘bang’ for very little buck, the greenkeeping team has begun by adjusting mowing lines. On fairways, the purpose is to add playing strategy and visual interest to the holes, encouraging players to play to one side off the tee for an easier line of approach. Sometimes a shorter route is offered with the compromise of impaired visibility or poorer playing line. On other occasions, shorter grass allows the creative golfer to use the natural terrain – a small fold/bump or broader slope – creatively for their benefit.

“Where there are areas at the margins flat enough, expanded greens have been mown-out to bring the wing hazards more into play – creating challenging locations for the stronger player, with the benefit of spreading heavy traffic. Significant expansions to the tenth and twelfth greens create variety in type of shot and angle

across the wind, strengthening the set of threes. A handful of necessitated irrigation-head adjustments have been made in-house.

“The short natural lifespan of a revetted bunker brings the opportunity to address accessibility, playability, maintainability... with an artistic eye! Rolling the face down to a much lower and shallower revetment – varying from say three to six stacks deep, or none at all in places, for visual diversity – reduces material and labour. Lightly reshaping the three-dimensional form, and the horizon on which they sit, is key to enhancing the existing bulbous pots.

“To make the most of the terrain’s visual drama, I’ve leant on Seacroft’s early expansive hazards for inspiration, setting a handful of naturalised scrapes into dune faces where strategically influential. Bunkers only hurting the player incapable of reaching the green in regulation, or preventing a more interesting alternative line of play, are filled in using the material in situ. Around some greens, at the tenth most notably, a broader range of recovery scenarios and shots is created by bunker removal. This reduction allows us to introduce bunkers elsewhere, where their current positioning or natural ground is largely devoid of interest, such as at the long, straightaway eleventh. Some bunkers are moved to increase their strategic impact, and only where an existing landform allows – naturally not all players will be affected, but across all 18 holes, and with varying wind strength/direction and ground firmness, no



Photos: Jaeger Kovich



For the Tillinghast-designed course at Suburban Golf Club in New Jersey, architect Jaeger Kovich has focused work on a small number of the most impactful holes

round should be devoid of interest or challenge for any class of player.

“The shaping work at Seacroft is carried out by me, so that the issues presented by each of the proposed 66 bunkers are addressed individually – for the cost of 25-30 days labour, eight-ton excavator and three-ton dump truck hire! Spread over five years, this extra time on site allows me to further understand the nuances of the property, continue to tweak mowing lines, and see how new features evolve in the exposed landscape. Under direction, Seacroft’s small but skilled five-man greenkeeping team prepare the work

areas and make a start on finishing work, as I shape, before completing over the following weeks as winter weather and time allows. Turf is sourced from the club’s existing revetting nursery.

“Working in collaboration, I have been able to lean on the greenkeeping team’s site-specific knowledge, while efficiently dealing with any of their maintenance concerns. This sense of ownership yields an even better finished product. Given the financial position of many clubs, a similar approach seems best suited to the light-handed refine and refresh of courses going forward.” **GCA**

Victoria GC, Sri Lanka

Sam Sakocius describes the renovation of Victoria GC in Sri Lanka

Victoria GC in Sri Lanka was designed by Donald Steele and Martin Ebert and had a reputation of being quite a good test. Unfortunately, the course fell into disrepair due to lack of pretty much everything. The equipment, minimal to begin with, wore out; the irrigation system that was supposed to keep at least a bit of fairway green was so under-designed that the grass, established essentially by lucky weather in the beginning, succumbed to the heat and weed competition in the hot, dry periods over years to come. There was just no money to properly maintain a golf course in the tropics.

Every hole is interesting and memorable. One of the ideas was that maybe an Asian Tour event world work. And this is how I became involved. I am a friend and business associate of the then chairman of the Asian Tour, and the logical progression was to ask me to swing out there for a look to see if it had any potential as I sometimes do for them. We started out with a US\$5 million budget to bring the course up to international standards which subsequently was cut to three million and finally the US\$1.2 million we had to work with.

I know that still sounds like a lot of money for a 'shoestring', but I believe the bang for the buck here is by far the best I have ever accomplished. When you take away new equipment, golf carts, clubhouse refurbishment, cart facility, and pump houses, we stretched US\$1.2 million amazingly far.

Consider that a typical modern automatic irrigation system in the tropics easily runs well over our entire budget and this project faced a tremendous engineering problem in drawing water from a reservoir that fluctuated over 60 metres seasonally.

It was clear we would have to prioritise, and painfully so. The grass, other than what was on the contaminated greens, was essentially non-existent. Golfers played on weeds mostly, green in the monsoon and brown in the dry season. It was clear we would have to find a way to get some reliable water on the site. The few bunkers were being inundated with water flowing directly into them from greens and surrounds. And of course the grass was gone and we would have to find something that was disease- and insect-resistant, and could survive on minimal fertiliser and water.

I went back to my early days with auto irrigation in Texas where we were building whole courses for less than two million, and resurrected all the old tricks I could remember. While maybe not the perfectly consistent coverage of today's elite; we came up with a sporty little system that allows spacious landing zones, and good greens and tees, all for a fraction of the typical venture. There was no budget to regrade the putting surfaces so the only solution was to rearrange the bunkers, sometimes splitting them in two, sometimes turning two into one, sometimes eliminating them altogether and using grading techniques to replace one challenge for another. We were able to maintain the integrity of the design while building something that would last and be maintainable.

And finally, the grass. Here we wanted the best we could get and that turned out to be zoysia. We planted a small nursery and were stunned at how fast the new zoysia strain established. We knew after a couple of months we could repropagate the nursery and have plenty of grass to complete the project.



Photo: Sam Sakocius

Extreme makeover

ÖSTERÅKER GOLFKLUBB, SWEDEN

Toby Ingleton visits a Swedish club in the midst of a radical transformation

Sweden is frequently cited as that rare example of a country where golf was established from the ground up. The sport's rapid growth in popularity during the 1980s and 90s was built on a foundation of affordable facilities for locals, rather than resort and real estate developments for the wealthy.

Green fees are typically around £40 for eighteen holes, and annual membership fees at all but the very top clubs are usually less than £1,000.

It's a model that has seen golf become very well established in the country. Almost five per cent of its 10 million population are registered golfers, according to the latest figures from the KPMG Golf Advisory Practice. In Europe, only Iceland has higher participation (17,000 of its 338,000 population).

But as the popularity of golf rises, so does the demand for different types of facilities – including 'premium' offerings. The market becomes more complex and some clubs are left grappling with their identity.

Österåker Golfklubb is a prime example. Located alongside the main road into the well-heeled commuter town of Åkersberga in the Stockholm archipelago, its two original eighteen-hole courses were designed in the late 1980s by former ice hockey star Sven Tumba. In 2006 it opened another nine holes, accessible to non-members as the pay-and-play Hagby club.

At its peak, Österåker attracted almost 2,000 members. It hosted prestigious tournaments including, on three occasions at the turn of the millennium, the Compaq Open on the Ladies European Tour.



The closing hole of Österåker Golfklubb's new stadium-style course, the debut layout for Henrik Stenson Golf Design



But its courses are rarely mentioned in the conversation of Sweden's best and they were increasingly showing their age. With more than 20 other clubs within 30 minutes' reach – including close neighbour Ullna, which was recently renovated by Nicklaus Design, and the swanky 36-hole Bro Hof Slott club – Österåker was feeling the pressure of competition.

“By 2011, the value of members' shares had fallen to zero,” says general manager Andreas Ljunggren. “The facility was tired and needed a lift.”

The club's management team began to explore its options. Initially, it identified a parcel on the perimeter of the property for 40 buildings, which would provide the club with a return of £2 million. “This would have enabled us to update the irrigation and address drainage on our 45 holes,” says course manager Magnus Ljungman.

But with Stockholm one of Europe's fastest growing cities, there was scope for a grand plan that could be a win-win scenario for both the club and community. By meeting targets for

scrapped, and a new masterplan was created, with phase one alone seeing permission granted for 600 new properties, in a core residential zone, plus another area earmarked for commercial use, both on the site of the Hagby nine. Ultimately, more areas could be zoned for development, with ample space remaining for golf.

The resulting windfall meant Österåker could essentially put together a ‘wish list’ for its transformation. After evaluating proposals from several firms, the management team selected the newly-formed Henrik Stenson Golf Design for a project to recreate the two eighteen-hole courses, design extensive practice facilities and a new nine-hole par-three course.

While it will be the firm's debut project, Stenson's partner is experienced Swedish golf course architect Christian Lundin, who began his career with Jeff Howes in Ireland before setting up his own design business in Gothenburg in 2008.

“There was scope for a grand plan that could be a win-win scenario for both the club and community”

increased housing stock, the town of Åkersberga would benefit from government infrastructure investment – including the improvement of its rail link with Stockholm. And by making more land available for development, the club could raise the funds required for a more radical transformation.

The initial plan for 40 buildings was

Lundin completed a pilot project for the club in 2015 – dubbed by the team ‘Österåker version 1.5’ – which reduced the overall bunkered area of the club's Västerled course to just 10 per cent of its previous total. His revetted hazards were well-received by members and the project was something of a testing ground for its long-term plan, which



will see the Västerled course taking on the character of a “weather-beaten Scottish links.” Before that though, the club has focused on the Österled course being transformed into a stadium-like layout.

For the past two-and-a-half years, construction firm SOL Golf has been on site working on phase one: new practice facilities and the creation of the par-three and stadium courses.

Over 600,000 cubic metres of landfill – approximately 25 per cent of the total generated by construction in and around Stockholm during the project – has been imported to the site by 70,000 trucks. As well as helping cover some costs, this fill has enabled Stenson and

With the first course (right section of image) and practice facilities now complete, Österåker's attention will turn to the redesign of its Våsterled layout, which will take on the character of a "weather-beaten Scottish links"



Image: HSGD

Lundin to create a rolling landscape on the previously flat area where most of the stadium course is routed.

That area now features four large lakes, lined with wooden bulkheads, giving a similar aesthetic as stadium designs like Le Golf National or TPC Sawgrass (which Stenson listed among his favourites when interviewed for our January 2019 issue). Österåker's spectator mounding isn't as huge though, so the course doesn't feel stark and empty when there are no crowds.

Hazards have been designed to be visible – imposing, even – so golfers

can plot their hole strategy from the outset. A desire for fairness means greens are intentionally not crowned to fall away into the surrounds – “if you hit the green, your ball has a good chance of staying on it,” says Lundin.

This doesn't mean greens are devoid of interest; there is plenty of contour – most memorably on the par-five thirteenth, where the shallow but wide green has three tumbling tiers. Many who reach the green in two will still walk away with a par.

White sand bunkers, although fairly restrained in number, are deep and punishing. As with the lakes, golfers are dared to flirt with danger to achieve the best line to the green.

The designers have created a relatively gentle opening to prepare golfers for the test ahead. But the warm-up is soon over as holes three to six all have water in play, as do seven more on the round. Individual holes are dramatic and memorable. And incredibly difficult, you might think. But choose appropriate tees and it is great fun and very playable. The fairways are wide and provide multiple options of attack – you don't have to take on risk if your game is not up to it. The average



Photo: Peter Corden

The sixteenth and seventeenth (pictured) holes are routed up and along a wooded hillside

member will feel like they have had all the thrills of this style of course, while being able to sometimes record a score they can be proud of.

The course builds to a dramatic finish. The fifteenth is a long par three with an elevated back tee set into a wooded hillside. The green juts into one of the lakes, and there's a stream to the right. The target feels very small and the smart shot for most golfers is probably to bounce it onto the green, rather than trying to fly it directly at the pin.


The sixteenth is the first of the course's two consecutive woodland

holes, where the design team has used previous corridors but reversed the direction of play. A short uphill par four, the green is reachable but high risk, thanks to the stream that runs in front of the green on its way down the hillside. A high and pure drive will be required to hold the putting surface.

Lundin was a bit concerned that the placement of a storage lake on the highest point of the course – the par-four seventeenth – would seem unnatural. But the lake here has soft edges rather than bulkheads and, with large amounts of exposed rock and

lined by trees, the hole has a pleasant alpine character. Most players will try to lay up short of a stream that cuts across the fairway about 100 yards from a perched green, where anything missed right will fall a good ten feet below the putting surface.

On the hillside to the left of that green, the back tees for the eighteenth provide a dramatic elevated setting for the final tee shot. The middle set of tees, also high above the fairway, provides a similarly special view and challenge, with bunkers and lake to negotiate. The closing hole wraps



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Photo shows 3rd hole of the prestigious Hogs Head, Waterville, Co. Kerry, Ireland

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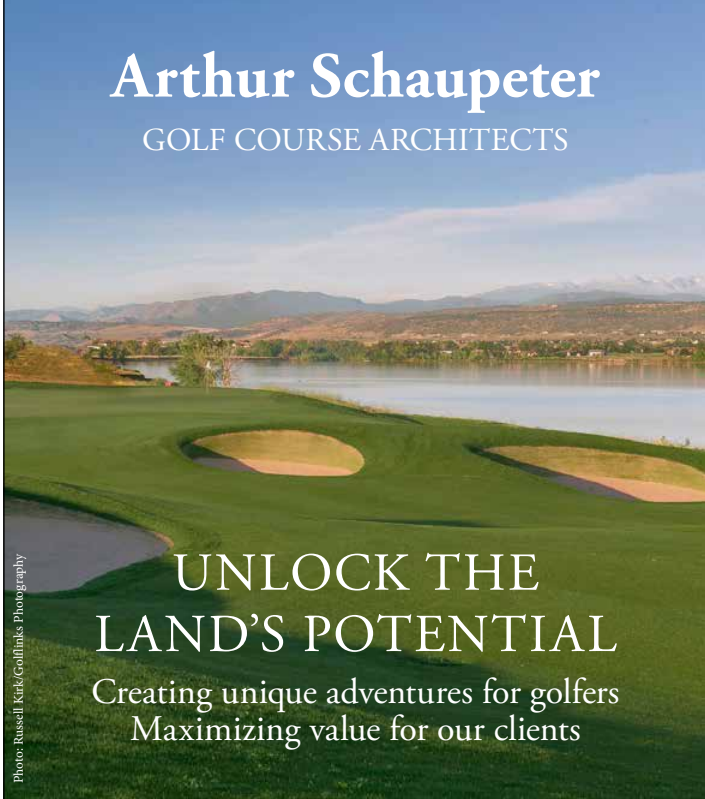
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Photo: Peter Corden

*The fifteenth hole is a long par three to a small green that juts into a lake.
The land beyond the lake is being prepared for residential development*

round the left of the lake, the opposite side to the ninth, with both greens hard against the far edge of the lake, so that each nine closes with the option of a heroic approach. If Österåker decides

effort: SOL Golf's Oliver Sutton led construction, Irish firm Turfgrass provided agronomic services and Giles Wardle of Irriplan designed a new irrigation system, supplied by Hunter.

“The hilltop beyond the eighteenth green would be an ideal spot to enjoy watching the carnage unfold”

to relocate its clubhouse, the hilltop beyond the eighteenth green would be an ideal spot to enjoy watching the carnage unfold.

The new course will open in August, and will be the result of a fine team

At the time of GCA's visit, construction was still in progress on the nine-hole par-three course – a scaled down version of the full eighteen – in the triangle of land between the eighth, ninth and tenth holes. And in 2020,

attention will turn to the renovation of the Västerled course.

The club's management team are being cautious to ensure that the funds raised from the land sale are being used wisely – and that their grand plans deliver a facility that is sustainable long into the future, even with fees at the modest rates Swedish golfers are accustomed to. With the new practice facility already drawing a significant income stream and a cross-country skiing circuit planned to bring people to the club when the golf course is under snow, Österåker is well placed to tick off every item on its wish list. Members must feel like they've hit the jackpot. **GCA**

ON SITE



Great expectations

THE BREAKERS OCEAN COURSE, FLORIDA, USA



The par-four sixth hole on the renovated Ocean course at The Breakers

Toby Ingleton follows in the footsteps of America's gilded elite to visit The Breakers in Palm Beach, Florida, where Rees Jones has just completed a renovation of the resort's Ocean course

When American industrialist Henry Flagler developed a railway along Florida's east coast in the late nineteenth century, he ushered in a period of development that would transform the state. Before his standard gauge tracks arrived, Miami was just a small settlement with a handful of inhabitants.

But Flagler hadn't originally planned to extend the railroad quite so far south. Its terminus was to be Palm Beach, where America's elite could spend their winters at his hotels, first the Royal Poinciana and, in 1896, The Palm Beach Inn, which a few years later would be renamed The Breakers, having become synonymous with the crashing waves

beneath the hotel's Atlantic-view rooms. The Royal Poinciana closed during the height of the Great Depression, but The Breakers remains a mainstay of a luxury Palm Beach lifestyle.

The original hotel was destroyed by fire in 1903 and again in 1925, after which it was rebuilt to a design by New York architects Schultze and

THE BREAKERS OCEAN COURSE



The renovation of the Ocean course at The Breakers has seen bunkering reduced to about two-thirds of the previous total, all now strategically placed

Weaver. Their vision for The Breakers was inspired by the Villa Medici in Rome, and 75 artisans were brought in from Italy to paint the astoundingly ornate ceilings in the lobby and throughout the first floor.

The opulent hotel sets an incredibly high standard that guests will expect to also be met by its two golf courses. One of those is a short drive directly west of the resort and was completely rebuilt by Rees Jones in 2004. Clearly satisfied with his work there, in 2018 the owners returned to Jones to explore

the potential for the Ocean course, where the turf was reaching the end of its lifecycle, providing a sensible opportunity to re-evaluate the design.

The Ocean course has its place in history, with an original nine holes laid out by Alexander Finlay in 1897 making it the oldest layout in Florida. But the brief for Jones and his design associate Steve Weissner was to create a modern, functional course that would make the most of its small site and provide resort guests with an experience fit for those high expectations set by the hotel.

The course's property is bisected by two roads, creating four quadrants, each comprising four or five holes. This meant there was little flexibility with the routing itself, so Jones' focus for the redesign was to maximise the golf that could be delivered.

"We wanted to show that you can "create a great golf experience on a compact site," says Jones. "And we wanted to provide the resort golfer with an enjoyable round while also being able to challenge the better golfer."

Perhaps counterintuitively – one





The greens at The Breakers have distinctive backboards, as can be seen here on the closing hole

might expect all features on a relatively small site to be scaled down – Jones has increased the total acreage of greens by almost 50 per cent.

The larger putting surfaces have sweeping undulation and give the resort the ability to set demanding pin positions if they want to raise the level of challenge. But keeping the resort golfer in mind, each is also accessible from a running shot.

Each of the greens – which are varied in depth, shape and size – has slopes which serve as a backstop, making

them unlike other Florida golf courses.

As well as giving the course a unique and memorable identity, the backstops help keep overhit shots on the putting surface while encouraging an imaginative short game from behind the greens. With some hole locations, golfers will have a compelling alternative to aiming at the flag.

Many of the changes introduced with the renovation will free up resources for the maintenance staff.

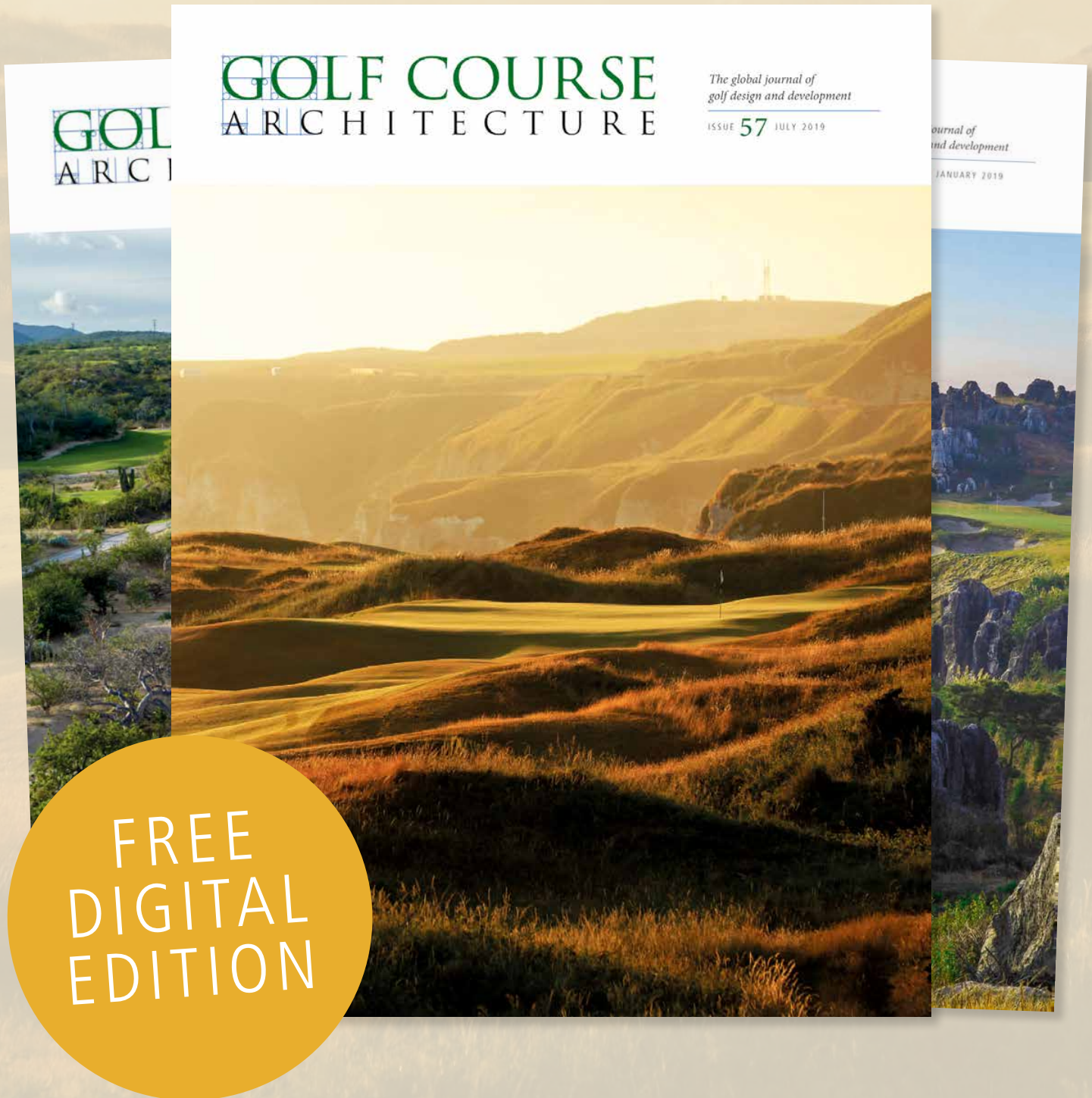
For a start, all turf on the golf course has been converted to paspalum –

except the TifEagle bermuda greens, with a collar of TifGrand to prevent cross-contamination – which means the club no longer has a resource-intensive cycle of overseeding.

Also, bunkering on the course has been reduced considerably, to about two-thirds of the previous total. Those that remain are all strategically placed; cautious golfers might opt for a long iron more often than driver.

With white sand flashed up the front faces, bunkers are all visible and quite imposing from a distance. But that is

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From left, Ocean course superintendent Justin Gille; architects Steve Weisser and Rees Jones; The Breakers' director of grounds and maintenance Mark Reid; The Breakers' Rees Jones course superintendent Eric Snell; and Eric Barnes, the project manager from Landscapes Unlimited

something of a deception – they are not as deep as they appear, making recovery fairly straightforward. They have been lined using Capillary Concrete, and Mark Reid, the resort's director of grounds and maintenance, reckons this is saving between 100 and 200 man-hours after every storm, as there has been zero washout to date.

Jones and his team have added a little extra yardage to the par-70 course, the total distance coming in just shy of 6,000 yards. There are now four sets of tees, with the most forward set a little over 4,000 yards. "You could hit driver on almost every hole," says Jones. This is true for the 99 per cent of golfers that will play the course and it is very refreshing to see a layout designed for the golfing majority.

Holes of note include the sixth, a 383-yard par four that wraps around a lake and provides the option for a heroic approach to what appears to

be a slither of green. The tenth takes golfers to a particularly tranquil corner of the course and a glimpse of the Atlantic from the raised green, and the

"With white sand flashed up the front faces, bunkers are all visible and quite imposing from a distance"

197-yard sixteenth is perhaps the most challenging par three, where right or long will find water.

But one of the highlights of the redesign is its impact on the property as a whole. The entire eastern segment of the site was raised, meaning that golfers on each side of the South County Road can see right across the course, cleverly tying the quadrants more closely together. Selective tree removal has also helped open up vistas, bringing the outside in, and inside out. Locals can now see right into the

course, while golfers can admire some of the charming buildings beyond the perimeter, like the colonial-style Royal Poinciana Chapel behind the sixth

green and the grand Flagler Museum behind the fourth green.

The quality of finish is exceptional – as has been the case on every Jones course I have seen. With credit to Reid's "wizard skills", his team – led by Justin Gille, the Ocean course superintendent – and construction firm Landscapes Unlimited, in just a few months after opening the surfaces are pristine and the detailing, from tee boxes to bulkheads, is faultless. Jones did not call in artisans from Italy, but he has delivered a golf experience worthy of a fine resort. **GCA**

ON SITE

A great Colt opportunity



The steeply-sloping green of the epic par-four twelfth



CANTERBURY GC, ENGLAND

Sitting on some great ground, and with a typically brilliant Colt design, Canterbury Golf Club in southern England is a true hidden gem, reports Adam Lawrence. Now it just needs a sympathetic hand

In these days of information – or at least data – everywhere, it isn't too often that one gets a real surprise. Head to a course you haven't seen before, and you can pretty much guarantee that some golf course writer or blogger will have been there before you, and trumpeted it for whatever it has to offer. And so, when I visited Canterbury GC in Kent, southern England, this spring, the last leg of a three day golf outing with good friends that had also included Le Touquet in France and Prince's in Sandwich, I had an inkling that there would be something good for me to look at.

Though Canterbury is way below the radar in international terms – there are plenty of golf tourists come to East Kent, but they are generally heading for the classic links of Royal St George's, Prince's and Royal Cinque Ports – I had heard gossip in golfing circles that the course was more than worth seeing. Golf course architect James Edwards, who consults at Canterbury, and who introduced me to club general manager Roger Hyder, had dropped a number of hints that I was in for a surprise.

The Canterbury course was built in the middle 1920s, though the

club itself dates back to 1892. Like so many of Colt's courses of that era, it was constructed by his preferred contractors, Franks Harris Brothers, on land leased from the War Office – the large Howe Barracks was next door until it closed in 2015, which enabled the club to buy the freehold of its site.

Colt reported that: "the first six holes appeared excellent, and the next three on rather duller land should, with bunkering, be good!" This part of Kent is generally quite undulating, so to find some good ground contour on the site was not a total surprise. But the sheer quality of the terrain must

have come as quite a shock to the great architect; it still does to the first-time visitor today.

The course begins in slightly unprepossessing fashion, with an uphill drive to the dogleg first. The climb does, though, bring golfers to the higher ground, and the second, a classic Colt par three across a valley, lets you know that you are in for a wild ride. The third hole, a par four with a blind drive over a crest, is fine, but

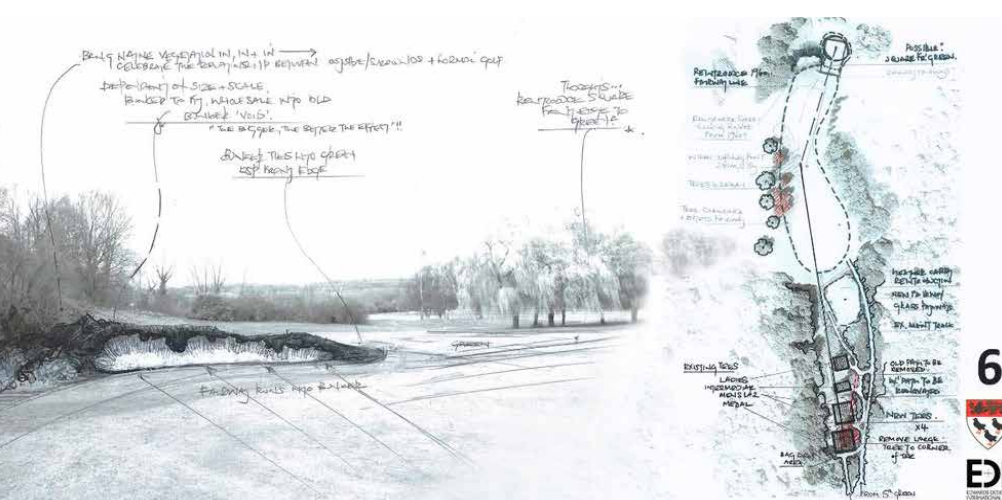
the fourth is the first hard evidence that substantial work is needed if the course is to live up to its potential. The green has been moved to the right from Colt's original location; unfortunately, several unattractive trees have been allowed to grow on that side of the approach, blocking out the view of the green from much of the fairway. Obviously, they need to go, but that won't entirely solve the hole's issues; the green itself has shrunk quite

dramatically from its original size, and generally the entire green complex is unsatisfactory.

Edwards has built some – rather attractive – new bunkers on the par-three fifth. These are welcome, as they brighten up a hole played over some less interesting ground, but I cannot help but feel that they would have been a long way down the priority list had it been my golf course! The sixth is a beautiful dogleg right par four, with a wonderful bunker (possibly an original?) at front left, but even here we see evidence of inappropriate vegetation – a small stand of weeping willows, God help us, sit behind the green.

That concludes the opening run of which Colt was so proud. Seven, eight and nine, two fives with a three in the middle, occupy less interesting ground. It is notable that Colt chose to use up this ground with two three-shotters – he did the same, for example, at Southfield in Oxford, around the same time. The uphill ninth does have a very good, very steep green.

The tenth is a long, straight par four over a ditch, while the eleventh brings us back to the great ground with a bang. A brutally tough uphill par three, it currently plays deep into the trees, though I am quite sure it was much more open when originally built. The green is not original. Colt built a punchbowl, which, in its forgiving nature is highly appropriate for such a hard hole, but it has been



6



Golf course architect James Edwards' proposed changes for the dogleg par-four sixth at Canterbury



The second hole is a classic Colt par three that plays across a valley

rebuilt, presumably for drainage. But the slope of the site is such that there should be no difficulty getting water out of a punchbowl – there is plenty of elevation for a big network of drains to carry away moisture. And the trees desperately need cutting back, partly to make the hole a little less terrifying, but primarily for turf quality reasons – I do not envy the course manager trying to keep good grass on a green with so little exposure to the sun.

Hole twelve is the best on the course, and frankly almost made me fall over with surprise when I saw it. The hole plays up a valley, with a ditch all the way up the favoured left side. But it is the terrain that astonishes: in the drive zone, the fairway pitches steeply from high right to low left, but on the approach to the green the cant is reversed and it is the left side that is

high up. The green sits in the steep upslope, and slopes – steeply. Although only 365 yards from the back tee, it is an epic par four, one of the very finest I have seen in this country. Again, it is crying out for tree clearing.

In truth by now we have seen the best of Canterbury, but the fall off in quality is not extreme. The fifteenth and sixteenth are two excellent par fours, the first a dogleg right (with two totally inappropriate and ugly later-added bunkers on the left side of the fairway – why do people insist on bunkering the outside of doglegs?), while the latter has a lovely greensite tucked in to the left of the corridor. Seventeen is a classic example of Colt's genius – a tough and beautiful par three built on ground that really gave him nothing. Excavations to the left of the putting surface gave him the fill to build up the green, and also

created an exciting vista at the front of the home tee. And the home hole itself is a shortish par five, which I suspect did not benefit from the creation of a driving range on its right. I'd be amazed if the bunker pattern is original, and it could do with some rethinking.

So that is Colt's Canterbury. It was truly the most pleasant surprise I have had on a British golf course in a long time. Let us not get carried away; the course is showing nowhere near its potential at the moment. I have read that the site was originally heath, and I would be fascinated to see the results of a trial reintroduction of heather. But general manager Hyder, who helped the club purchase its site a few years ago, has a goal to get it where it should be in time for its centenary in eight years, and, with the help of architect Edwards, will, I hope, get it there. **GCA**



Photo: Pizá Golf

Wellness golf

A new concept encourages barefoot play so golfers can connect with nature

Chablé Resort & Spa in Mérida, Mexico, wanted a special golf amenity that would have a surprise factor. Learning of his reputation for ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking, the resort invited golf course architect Agustín Pizá to visit.

During his stay Pizá developed a concept he calls ‘Wellness Golf’. “Guests are encouraged to play barefoot and connect with nature,” he says. “This will encourage them to expand beyond the mental and physical aspects of the game and connect on a spiritual, emotional and environmental level.”

His award-winning design will open in August this year, comprising nine tees, four greens – each with two or

three pins – and multiple hazards. A variety of routings can be played on the layout, with holes of up to 200 yards in length, but Pizá emphasises that golfers can play whatever format they choose. “This concept is inspired from game boards,” says Pizá. “Those on which you could play Chinese checkers, checkers or chess on the same board. At Chablé, we can play multi-model games and challenge ourselves as easy or as hard as we like.”

“The golf course can be played depending on the environment you want to generate and the mood of each player,” says Pizá. “It’s a unique space where guests can connect with the natural elements, whilst they

enjoy one of the best boutique golf complexes in the world.”

Pizá believes that his ‘Wellness Golf’ concept could be applied at resorts and facilities throughout the world, and he showcased the idea at the USGA Innovation Symposium in Japan.

“Distinct shot values and angles, in tandem with the serene environment, will create a challenging yet relaxing experience for all to enjoy,” said Pizá. “Regardless of the fixed routings, we want visitors to enter the course and unlearn what they know about traditional golf.

“It really is the first course of its kind to encourage a relaxed approach to the game of life.” **GCA**

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