# GOLF COURSE A R C H I T E C T U R E

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Ph.P

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#### WELCOME

# A guessing game



ADAM LAWRENCE

am, broadly, a supporter of the idea of restoring golf courses to the state in which they were left by their original designer. But there is no doubt that 'restoration' is a much-abused word in the golf design industry.

What does it mean to restore a golf course? If the routing of the course has been changed, then restoring it is a relatively simply concept (though not necessarily a simple task).

But other elements of restoration are, almost inevitably, a more subjective matter. Nowadays, we can take GPS measurements and record the exact contours of greens, and take high quality photographs. Many architects produce and archive detailed plans of golf courses. That wasn't the case in the past. Vintage photos, where they exist, are of priceless value, but most of the time give a general impression of ground conditions, not a detailed assessment. GPS, obviously, is a modern innovation. And plans, in the Golden Age, were mostly hand-drawn, and sketches rather than fine details of actual grades.

And that is where such things exist. A lot of the time, clubs and architects that want to restore are scrambling around trying to find any hard evidence of what their course used to look like. They might have the odd photo showing what individual features were like. But it is very unlikely they will have comprehensive information.

Consequently, much restoration is inevitably guesswork. To be fair, it is informed and thought-through guesswork by highly qualified specialists, not idle finger-inthe-air stuff, but it is still guesswork.

Obviously, today's golfers hit the ball further than those of yesterday. So should a course built a century ago be restored as exactly as it can be, to what the original designer left? Or should features be moved so they have broadly the same impact on today's players as they did on those of 1920?

There is no single correct answer to this question. It is a matter of debate in every case. Move a bunker, or a mound, if you think it is for the best. But don't call it restoration.

Adam





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The two pictures are from Simon's in Denmark after having renovated all the bunkers in 2020. Updating the construction and the playing strategy of all 27 holes. The project was carried out while having 18 holes open at all times. A great team effort by the contractor and the greenkeeping staff. A huge privilege to be part of the team.

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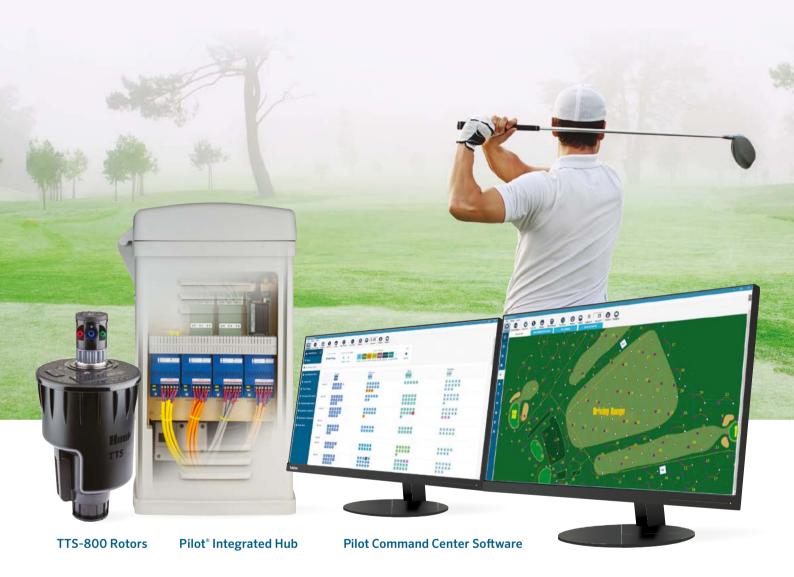
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> Photographed by: Will Watt

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#### MAIL BOX

#### **Dear Editor**

As readers will see elsewhere in this issue, Allestree Park golf course in Derby has been abandoned and closed for use since January 2021. It's a municipal layout that is being destroyed by its owners, Derby City Council.

As part of our fight to save it we created a video with Golf Mates about the issue, attracting over 140,000 views, and our e-petition has over 26,000 supporters, but there's still no change in the council's stance.

The council has made a number of errors in trying to justify the destruction of the course, the main one being their failure to mention in any advertising that it is a 1930 Harry Colt design. Surely as a council asset it is a duty to ensure 'best value' is obtained on any asset being sold or destroyed?

It is the ultimate irony that we are using the council's aerial photograph from 1932 to illustrate our findings.

Colt designed the course to complement the high value properties that surround it, like St George's Hill, Wentworth, Effingham and Ham Manor. These five designs led to the country club concept being exported and adopted around the world.

In its day, this course was famous but known as the Derbyshire Golf Club at Allestree. It had a unique water feature that included a tee box sited on an island in a lake that was reached by a footbridge before the player undertook a 'heroic' shot over water. Nowhere else in the world is this Colt feature found!

We have been able to recreate the layout through contemporary hole by hole descriptions. Fourteen of the original 18 holes are untouched since 1930. The other four, including the island tee box are still visible and capable of reinstatement. They have simply not been played since the end of the war.

We have an application pending with Historic England for the course to be recorded as a Designated Historic Landscape. If successful, it will be the first UK course to get this protection.

The clubhouse of the now defunct Allestree Park Golf Club was a grade II listed building. This building is within the top eight per cent of all listed buildings in the UK and has been sold for development as a wedding venue, with the developer having no interest in running the golf course that surrounds the Hall. It sits within Derwent Valley World Heritage Site Buffer Zone, so no other developments are likely to be allowed. We need the council to recognise what a potential asset this course could be rather than let it simply die.

We consider that it is priceless from a commercial and historical viewpoint, especially at this time of greatest demand as all local private clubs are oversubscribed and not accepting visitors. Please visit our website and register your support: *www.saveallestreegolfcourse.co.uk*.

Andrew Picken Derby

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



As hinted at in the text for January's *Gopher Watch*, for the second issue in a row, Sandy was on a Harry Colt course. In this case though, the hole, the eighth at Wentworth's West course has been significantly altered since Colt built it, with Ernie Els's team extending the fronting pond quite extensively as a part of their multiple course rebuilds over the past 10 years. Anyway, congratulations to Robin Lawson, who spotted the hole, and whose entry was first out of the hat. A priceless *GCA* shirt is on the way.

This time, Sandy is back on his most regular haunt, the links. Pretty close to the water, in fact, on a well-known course in Scotland. Which is all the clue you're going to get: a prize as precious as the GCA shirt deserves a bit of work. Entries, as ever, to gopher@golfcoursearchitecture.net.

# TEE BOX

# New links planned for Scottish Highlands

TRANSFERRE

'Major international designer' lined up for site next to Cromarty Firth. Adam Lawrence reports



new links course is being planned for a duneland site next to the Cromarty Firth, about fifteen miles south of Dornoch. Landowner Robert Mackenzie has recently submitted a request for a Scoping Opinion (a precursor to submitting a full planning application) to the local authority, Highland Council.

The Mackenzie family has farmed the land around the site for 150 years, producing, among other things, Britain's most northerly cold pressed rapeseed oil, which it markets under the Cullisse brand, but only bought the site in question two years ago. It is located next to the Port of Nigg, which is an important facility for servicing Scotland's offshore North Sea oil industry and also next to the northern terminal of the historic Cromarty-Nigg ferry, which, until the building of the Cromarty Bridge in the mid-seventies, was the main route for accessing the far north of Scotland.

Critically, and unlike the recent Scottish links developments at Machrihanish Dunes and Trump Golf International (and the rejected



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Contact Altman Real Estate today at +1 (246) 432-0840/537-0840 or realestate@altmanbarbados.com Visit altman.realestate Coul Links project near Dornoch), the site, although virgin duneland, is not classified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It additionally used to be home to a golf course, founded in 1890 and known successively as the Nigg, Cromarty and Castlecraig Golf Club. This should, in theory, make planning permission easier to come by, though only time and the actual filing of an application will say for sure.

Mackenzie told GCA: "Our home farm is about five miles away from this site, which is known as Calzean Farm. I bought the land in March 2019, basically with a view to extending our family business. The purchase wasn't straightforward, because the site is zoned for industry – for expansion of the port - but eventually we worked it out. We've ended up getting a farm that is pretty good agriculturally, but what excites me more is that it gives us a chance to diversify – there are a number of derelict houses on the land that I thought could be turned into holiday homes. I was aware that there'd been a golf course there - the locals still refer to that land as 'the golf course', and I thought, 'that could be something that would help make the tourism work'. My dad is a golfer, and I play a little, and I have a few contacts in the golf world, so I got a few of them to come and take a look. I began to realise it was a pretty special site."

It was a visit to Barnbougle Dunes in Tasmania that cemented Mackenzie's thinking. "I have a god-daughter in Tasmania, so when I was out there I visited Barnbougle, and that galvanised me even more to get it done," he said. "My friend Michael Goldstein



The site is located next to the Port of Nigg and the northern terminal of the historic Cromarty-Nigg ferry

from New Zealand mentioned it to a number of people he knows in the industry, and we started to get some quite serious interest."

The dunes on the site are no longer mobile: the sand that fed them was subsumed in the industrial site when it was built in the 1970s. The site has been viewed by a number of major international golf course architects, all of whom felt the site had the potential to yield world-class links golf. It is understood that, should the project proceed, the design will be entrusted to a world-class architect.

Sources close to the architect in question said: "Robert Mackenzie's land has the potential to produce a golf course that would be a compliment to Scotland and to golf. Both will benefit if his dream comes true."

Founded in 1890 as a nine-hole course, Castlecraig was extended to 18 holes in 1907. The course became popular because of regular visits by the Royal Navy's Home Fleet to the nearby port of Invergordon. It ceased to exist in the early 1960s, but it is believed that, should this project go ahead, some of the old green sites will be reused in the new course.

Mackenzie said: "I'm a local born and bred, and I love this area. For fifty years, that land has been zoned for industry, but nothing has happened, and it has resulted in the area going really downhill. I don't see the industry bringing anything tangible to the table, and I have an opportunity to do something that will transform Nigg, diversify the local economy beyond farming and industry, and build a sustainable economy. After 50 years of industrial ownership, the land is back in the hands of a local who doesn't have aspirations to develop more industry, but to redevelop it in a way that will really support the area."



# Short course opens at Barnbougle

A new 14-hole short course designed by Bill Coore has opened for play at Barnbougle Golf Links in Tasmania, Australia.

The 'Bougle Run' layout joins two highly ranked courses at the resort; the original Dunes layout by architects Tom Doak and Mike Clayton, and Coore & Crenshaw's 20-hole Lost Farm course. Barnbougle owner Richard Sattler identified an area of land on a ridge that surrounds holes eight to eleven on the Lost Farm course and asked Coore to create a design for the new layout. He delivered a 14-hole course that comprises 12 par threes and two par fours. Riley Johns and John Hawker were brought in to handle construction but ended up – due to the onset of the pandemic – working on and refining the original concept and finishing the course.

"Richard challenged us to create a collection of inspiring, yet fun to play holes that would complement the existing courses at Barnbougle," said Coore. "Given the freedom to allow the dramatic landscape to guide the routing, it wasn't until John and I had







*Riley Johns says the Bougle Run routing "plays up to the top of a giant dune ridge where it meanders in-and-out of peaks and valleys"* 

flagged our chosen holes in the field that we counted and realised there were 14.

"I'm sure Bougle Run will be compared to The Preserve and the Sandbox because all three sites are sand based with dunes and beautiful native vegetation; but the dunes at Bougle Run are larger and more visually dramatic and the site is more linear, much like Shepherd's Crook."

The golf course has been built on a site with dramatic elevation change. "The different landforms led us to lay out a course with a potential four-hole loop where golfers could enjoy their golf without it becoming too demanding, while holes three to twelve in the more dramatic dunes, might appeal to more seasoned players," said Coore. "The 14-hole routing essentially plays up to the top of a giant dune ridge where it meanders in-and-out of peaks and valleys," said Johns. "There are short holes that require only a well struck putt, and then there are others that require a full driver. The dune ridge also affords spectacular views of the entire property and the ocean coastline beyond."



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# New Stirling & Martin course takes shape in Madrid

Seeding is under way on a new Stirling & Martin golf course at La Finca Golf in Madrid, Spain.

The architects initially began the project in 1999 and, over the years, have drawn up 84 potential routings. Since 2016, the pair have worked with Susana García-Cereceda, the owner of La Finca, on an 18-hole golf course routing that will form part of the 550-hectare La Finca development, which also includes luxury houses, a three-storey apartment building and a commercial centre.

"La Finca is a perfect study of how golf evolves over time and how

golf course architects are always open to adjust their design to any environmental or master plan restriction to create the best product for the client," said Marco Martin.

"This layout could be described as an auditorium-type golf course: we analysed every hole to produce the most beautiful views from any home facing the golf course."

The project has included moving more than a million cubic metres of earth to create gentle slopes as well as to accommodate visitors as the resort hopes to host international golf tournaments.

A Rain Bird IC system has been installed. "We are compacting the entire clay soil to collect all the runoff water for irrigation," said Blake Stirling. "We have also added 15 centimetres of pure silica sand in all the grassed areas to grow quality grass."

Martin said: "Fairways are 36 to 48 metres wide, giving a spectacular manicured look. Shaping on fairways is gentle, integrated with more severe shaping on rough and around bunkers." The pair have integrated existing arroyo Meaques into the layout and have preserved 96 per cent of trees found on the site. More than 1,200 pine trees have already been planted, while dry areas have been covered in pine barks and needles.

"Landscaping plays a very important role in the final design," said Stirling. "Thousands of new trees will be planted to add dramatic, vertical dimensions to the golfer's experience."

GTM Golf is carrying out construction work and has seeded four holes and the driving range. The plan is to complete the first nine by September 2021.

> Stirling & Martin's routing includes an island green at the par-three fifteenth

#### THE BIG PICTURE

The recreated 'Sahara' bunker complex on the seventeenth hole of the Lower course at Baltrusol, photographed by Evan Schiller, and part of a year-long project by Gil Hanse at the New Jersey club. The bunker complex is now more in play for the longer hitters, while allowing shorter hitters to lay up. A narrow opening to the green has also been restored.

Baltusrol hired Hanse to bring the original AW Tillinghast style back to the Lower course, which has hosted multiple major championships since opening in 1922 and is set to host its third PGA Championship in 2029.

Hanse's restoration has focused on widening and twisting fairways, tree removal and returning greens to their original scale and size. Fairway bunkers that had been removed over the years have been reinstated, while others were eliminated to restore the ground game.

According to Hanse, the biggest change has been the lowering of the course's features, which has made greens the high point, and focus, of the holes.

"Over the years, bunkers and green surrounds were raised for framing," said Hanse. "And it was our belief that the golf course would present itself more authentically if we removed these raised features. Now the course better fits the ground and our perception of how Tillinghast presented it."

The Lower course will reopen in May, and work on Hanse's plans for the Upper course will begin in 2024.





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# Mackenzie & Ebert renovates six more holes at Hillside

Mackenzie & Ebert has recently completed the second phase of renovations of the links at Hillside Golf Club in Southport, England.

The latest work has focused on the fourth, fifth and eighth holes with other changes being made on the second, third and sixth.

A master plan for golf course renovations was developed in 2018 following a Historic Research Report. The first phase was completed in winter 2019/20, which involved dune construction between the first and ninth holes and along the entire right side of the eighteenth. This phase also included adjustments to fairway bunkers on the first and eighteenth holes, the doubling in size of the practice tee, the reconfiguration of the second tees and the introduction of a new grass path system.

"The second phase has continued the theme of developing dunes between holes to give the front nine more drama, a feature that is so memorable on the back nine," said Mike Howard, design associate at Mackenzie & Ebert. "The fourth has seen the entire area, apart from the green, reshaped. The tees have been reconfigured with a shorter tee introduced on a friendlier angle and the back tee extended slightly stretching the hole to 203 yards. Dunes have been added right and left with pockets of open sand within them. The green surrounds have been completely reshaped with the lefthand bunkers removed and converted to a tightly mown runoff, another theme that is common across both phases of work with well shaped green surrounds being produced where possible."

une ridge has been built along the entire right side of the eighteenth

Also part of the second phase has been the removal of two left-hand bunkers on the eighth hole, with new ones added to the right that are set into new dunes. The fairway short of the bunkers has been widened to give golfers more options from the tee, however, it narrows between the second bunker and the large dune to the left to challenge longer hitters.

The club hopes to open the holes and reshaped areas later this month.



Golf Course Architects



Hole #13, Par 3 | Photo: Courtesy of Princeville Makai Golf Club

## EXCELLENCE THAT ENDURES THE SANDS OF TIME

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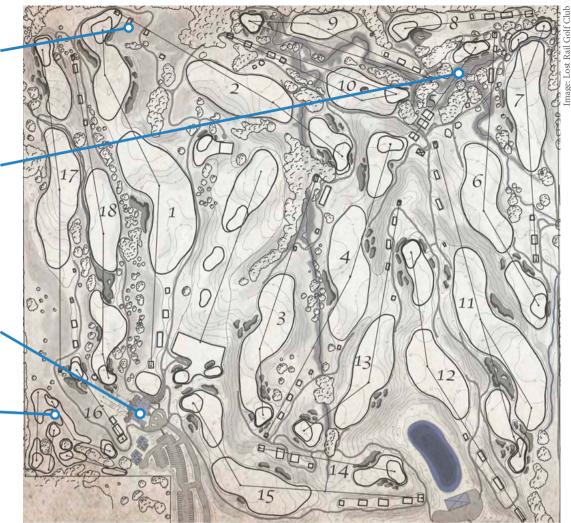
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Hoffman's routing has been designed to be walkable, with short connections between greens and tees

The par-three fifth plays over a 40-foot canyon through a gap where a 10-foot railbed collapsed, and the eighth green sits in the exact spot where the railbed disappeared into the ground in 1926

*Three of the final four greens are located within 100 yards of the clubhouse* 

Hoffman has also designed a short layout, with holes between 50 and 120 yards



#### COURSE BLUEPRINT

# Construction resumes on new Lost Rail golf course

Landscapes Unlimited has resumed construction on the new Lost Rail golf course designed by Scott Hoffman in Omaha, Nebraska.

The project is the first new private course in the city for 25 years and was kickstarted by architect Hoffman, who wanted to create a golf-only club with a small membership.

"The property is special with its variety," said Hoffman. "From the ridge where the clubhouse sits, you can see 20 miles to the west. Almost half the site is rolling pasture dotted with mature trees. A quarter is open farmland with long views, and the remainder is dense trees and deep ravines with a unique feature – an abandoned century-old railbed."

"The layout resembles the classic clubs of Long Island or Chicago," said Bill Kubly, owner of Landscape Unlimited. "Our connections will be some of the tightest in American golf – Scott is a stickler for walkability. The routing has tremendous flexibility, with several little loops around the clubhouse.

"Most notable is the arrangement of 15 to 18. It's hard to find a course anywhere

with three of the final four greens within 100 yards of the clubhouse."

According to Hoffman, the par three holes will be memorable. The fifth plays over a 40-foot canyon, through the gap where a 10-foot railbed collapsed; the eighth green sits on the exact spot that the railbed disappeared into the ground in 1926; and the sixteenth plays from just off the clubhouse deck out to a "little knob" overlooking the rivers.

The course is expected to open in June 2022.

# THE INTERVIEW with Peter Flory



# "I was amazed that anyone would want to pursue something so pure and non-commercial"

*GCA* spoke with Chicago-based consultant Peter Flory about how a virtual golf course design hobby led to a role in Tom Doak's Lido project in Wisconsin

## How did you get involved in virtual course design?

I've always had an urge to design golf courses even though I never went into that field, professionally. Before I was in high school, I was designing golf courses in Jack Nicklaus' Unlimited Golf & Course Design software, which may have been the first video game with a course design element. After entering the world of work, I took a long break from this hobby even though I was still an avid golfer and fan of all things relating to golf history and architecture. The thing that got me back into it was that we built a house and I decided to design the basement around a golf simulator installation. When I saw that the software allowed for course design, I realised that I could do things



A digital representation of the Lido's par-three Redan sixteenth hole

like design a short course for my kids to play or recreate the course where I learned the game.

As my skills grew, I eventually started to apply the technology to revive lost golf courses, experience them and understand them in a way that no living person could. I then started to get involved with some real course restoration projects on the side. So, while I never expected a course like the Lido to become a reality, I was already getting used to the idea of integrating digital renderings into actual projects.

#### How did it feel to get the call about being involved in the recreation of Long Island's famous lost Lido course in Wisconsin?

I was first approached by Tom Doak in early 2018 about the idea of providing rendering services for future design work. It wasn't until late 2019 that he told me about the Keiser family's interest in recreating the Lido at Sand Valley and their desire to utilise the



Peter Flory's recreation of the Alps tenth hole of the famed Lido course

research and digital modelling that I had done.

I spoke with Michael Keiser Jr on the phone and then met him in Madison. I was amazed that anyone would pursue something so pure and noncommercial... it's the way that you'd want the world to work, but rarely does. It did also occur to me how strange it was that something that I did on my laptop each night after tucking my kids to bed was going to be going in the ground at one of the best golf resorts in the country and under the direction of a world-famous architect. That part just didn't seem real.

## What will your ongoing role be in that project?

Since realising that this would become a real golf course, I have been sharpening

the accuracy of the digital model in every way possible. I have uncovered some new photo evidence and have been incorporating the new details. Going forward, the most helpful thing that I can do is to take the mountain of information that I've assembled and break it up into hole-by-hole reference reports for Tom and his team. I want to make sure that every relevant piece of information is at their disposal in an organised way. Aside from that, I'll basically be attending golf architecture fantasy camp as Tom, Brian Schneider and all the other talented individuals work their magic.

## What other virtual courses are you working on?

I have worked on some historical restoration projects. The allure of those

is similar to the lost courses because the original version has gone, and the transformations can be dramatic. I enjoy the challenge of putting together pieces of the puzzle and using technology to uncover details. It can sometimes feel like archaeology. I'm nearly done with Overhills, the Ross masterpiece in North Carolina at the former Rockefeller Estate. I'm also at various stages of completion on several others, including Ocean Links, Mill Road Farm, the Illinois Golf Club, and the lost Olympia Fields courses.

Peter Flory's recreation of the Lido is available to play on the PGA Tour 2K21 video game and you can read more about Tom Doak's recreation of the Lido in Wisconsin at www.golfcoursearchitecture.net



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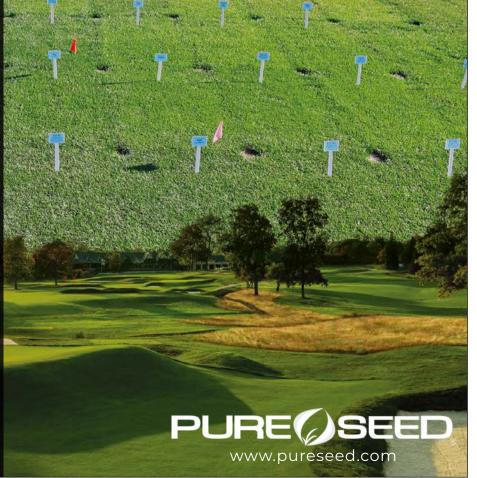
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Three lakes bring water into play on nine holes of Harradine's new Kazan layout, including the par-three twelfth, which plays from an island teeing area to an island green

### Construction begins on new Harradine course in Russia

Construction of a new golf course designed by Harradine Golf has started in Kazan, Russia.

"The land is flat and low, which causes 40 per cent of the site to flood during the winter period," said Peter Harradine. "The required material will be dredged from the Volga, Europe's longest river, to raise the level and create rolling hills between fairways for safety, aesthetic and strategic reasons.

"The main attraction is the Volga,

which is why we're trying to exploit it as much as possible by designing at least one hole playing along this iconic and famous feature. We'll also try to achieve panoramic views from as many holes as possible."

Harradine's initial design included a canal from the Volga to a water body at the northern end of the site. "The new canal would have meandered along and across various holes, thus, adding a lot of interest to the layout," he said.



"However, when the owner realised that the fluctuations of the Volga could exceed five metres, it was decided to create lakes instead." This would give the client the desired constant water level, although with the high water table limiting lake depth, an extensive air release system under the liner is required to avoid future air pockets pushing the liner up.

Most existing trees are being kept and many native species will be planted, which Harradine says will enhance strategy and safety.

"The proximity of the town of Kazan will be a major factor in guaranteeing the success of the course," said Harradine. "And the generous and ample practice facilities will satisfy many beginners and good players alike." It is expected that nine holes will open by autumn 2022 and a full 18 during spring 2023.

## Apes Hill revival emphasises beauty of Barbados

The golf course at Apes Hill Club in Barbados is undergoing a renovation by golf course architect Ron Kirby, with nine holes expected to open this year and the full eighteen in early 2022.

The golf course first opened in 2008, part of a development by Landmark Land Company on an old sugar plantation close to the island's highest point. It closed in 2017 before the club and residential community was bought in 2019 by Glenn Chamandy, founder of Montreal-based clothing firm Gildan Activewear. A reported \$60 million investment followed, half of which would be spent on the golf course, and renovation work began in late 2019.

Roddy Carr, who is coordinating the golf project, said: "The key focus is to make golf at Apes Hill the most enjoyable golfing experience in the Caribbean. This means softening the golf course considerably by reducing the slopes on greens, eliminating unplayable bunkers and accentuating all the natural assets of the 450-acre site. This includes spectacular unique vistas over Barbados's wild Atlantic east coast; deep, winding gullies that wind

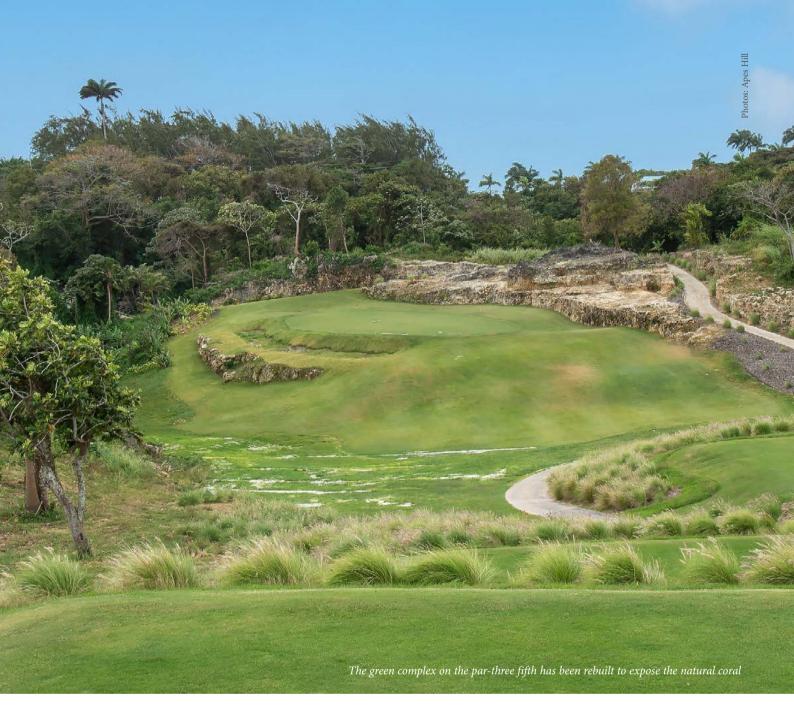


The green on the par-three sixteenth sits on the edge of a lake



their way through the golf course that are filled with monkeys and tropical wildlife and plants; beautiful natural coral rock formations; and being able to see both the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea on several holes.

"The goal was to get a minimum of 10 'wow' holes from the finished product, which I believe we will accomplish. There will also be over 15 acres of farm produce growing in 'out of play pockets' around the golf course. This fits with our farm-totable agenda and supports the 50-acre farm which we shall also be adding."



Apes Hill's redesigned par three holes – the fifth, eighth, twelfth and sixteenth – are expected to make a big impact. There has been substantial clearance of vegetation on the fifth, with a green site set among ledges of exposed rock, and the twelfth, which now has clear views of both the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean.

"We were very careful with the design to focus on reducing the footprint of the grasses that need full maintenance, water and fertilisers," said Kirby. "Using the latest technology for irrigation, we have been able to reduce the number of sprinkler heads on the course by 56 per cent and the new Zoysia Zorro grass we planted needs less water. These factors have helped us to significantly reduce the overall volume of water and chemicals that will be required in the maintenance of the course."

There has also been a substantial decrease in the number of bunkers on the course, from over 100 before work began to fewer than 50.

Agronomist and superintendent Ed Paskins, who has been on the island for the past 20 years, has assisted Kirby along with a local team of contractors, and shapers Justin Carlton and Gary Shapiro. The irrigation team includes contractor Aqua Turf International and consultant Rain Bird.

The project will also introduce a new nineteenth hole in front of the clubhouse, inspired by the islandgreen seventeenth at TPC Sawgrass. There will also be a new par-three course, a Titleist Performance Institute, a golf performance and teaching centre and a swing biomechanics analysis bay.

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### New Fazio layout takes shape at Driftwood

Construction of a Tom Fazio-designed golf course is progressing at Driftwood Golf and Ranch Club, a new residential community near Austin, Texas.

The golf course is part of a \$250million development project that will see Driftwood become a Discovery Land Company destination. "It continues the theme of an ultraexclusive service centred around an 18-hole Tom Fazio golf course," said Eric Puls, director of agronomy at Driftwood. "The project is two 400acre parcels: one parcel is for the golf course and the other for Discovery's outdoor pursuits programmes."

Construction on the golf course, which is set among rolling hills, oak trees and natural limestone rock, began in January 2019. The entire site was sandcapped and a Rain Bird irrigation system has been installed. Seven holes on the back nine include water features, from winding natural creeks to large lakes. Natural wetlands and wildlife habitat corridors have also been integrated into the site.

Zeon Zoysia grass, supplied by Bladerunner, is being used on tees, fairways, rough and green surrounds, while the green surfaces are 007 bentgrass. "The benefits of Zeon Zoysia are its low maintenance requirements," said David Doguet of Bladerunner Farms. "Less water, less chemicals, less fertiliser and less mowing, while still providing a premium playing surface.

"Big rolls of Zeon Zoysia are rolled out like carpet. There is immediate coverage, so no erosion. Every time the earthworks is finished on a hole, the big rolls of Zeon Zoysia are installed. The grow-in is immediate." Fazio has also designed a short game area, with a stream running between its three greens. "The top players may never leave the practice facilities because they're the best they'll ever see," said Fazio. "When they play the course, they'll never want to leave. That's not hype, that's just the fact of the place we're creating here."

The course is expected to open in autumn 2021.



#### FROM THE ARCHIVE

### Jay Smith research points to Thompson as Hyde Park's original architect

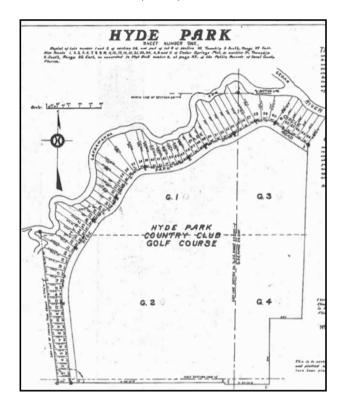
Research by Jay Smith of JW Smith Golf for the forthcoming renovation of Hyde Park Golf Club in Jacksonville, Florida, has revealed that the course may not, as previously thought, be a Donald Ross design.

Smith noticed that a 1926 plan of

residential plots from The Jacksonville Historical Society labelled the club as Hyde Park Country Club Golf Course. "Once I revised my search term, an article appeared from *The Miami News* from May 1926, stating that Frank Thompson, Stanley's brother and business partner, was 'designing and building the Hyde Park Country Club Links', which by any account meant his brother Stanley doing the actual routing and feature designs," said Smith. Golf journalist Ron Whitten and golf

course architects Ian Andrew and Jeff

Jay Smith has used an array of historic material for his research into the origins of Florida's Hyde Park golf course, including an aerial from 1943 (left), a 1926 plan of residential plots (below) and an article in the Jacksonville Journal that announced the opening of the course in December 1926 (bottom)



#### OURNAL PHONE 5-7604 JACKSONVILLE JOURNAL, JACKSONVILLE, FLA., THURSDAY AFTERNOON, DECEMBER 2, 1926. FIFTEEN HYDE PARK COUNTRY CLUB TO OPEN ON SATURDA INGRAM PRAISES TWO MORE GOLF TAMPA TERRIERS Newest Jax Golf Course NEW YORK INSTALLS MICKEY WALKER AS FAVORITE IN BOUT RUNNER VERSATILE NAVY GRID TEAM CLUBS PLANNED GET STATE HIGH Is Complete: 4 Club Pros Mere Stripling holds 2-mile national cham-Irvin Nelson, Omaha Athlete, Stars in 13 sports. Meet in Opening Feature ON YEAR'S WORK FOR PINEHURST FOOTBALL HONOR pionship. Four Team Matches for Jacksonville Club Champion-ship Announced for Play in Morning, Starting at 10 O'Clock; Jack Cawsey Is Club Professional; Links Is Eight Miles From City; Built by Thompson. Character, Courage ar Spirit Brought Middies Victories. Donald J. Ross, Famous Architect, Already Work-ing Upon One. Award of High School Championship Announced by Cassels. The formal opening of the Hyde Park Country club, sconville's latest golf links, will take place Saturday at club, team matches at 10 o'clock in the morning being opening events, according to announcement of plans by ub, team matches bening events, acco lls in charge today. MERCER MAY GET opening evenies, asconang, constraints, and constraints, and constraints and constraints of 400, Jack Cawsey as club pro-formal and a corps of high class officials, the newest golf for Jacksonville gives promise of being one of the best he entire state. The club is located on the Subput ings road, about 8 miles from the city and adjoins the a Rhore property. The course is over the 15-hole char-GENEVA CONTEST for Jacksonvine gives promise of being the entire state. The club is located or ags road, about 8 miles from the city a 8. Shore property. The course is over the ship distance and was built by the far HERE NEW YEAR'S

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Mingay sourced additional materials for Smith. "One ad from March 1925 states that Stanley was laying out three courses in Florida, and Hyde Park was one of the three named," said Smith. "Another ad from December 1926 states the course opened on the fourth and was built by Stanley. All the evidence points to Stanley. I'm still piecing together the history of the club, but this latest find fills a large void in that timeline."

Renovation work will be completed six holes at a time over three years. The project will focus on greens and bunkers, and will also involve minor fairway and tee work, and adding some native areas.

Read more about the Hyde Park renovation project at www.golfcoursearchitecture.net

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TEE BO

## Miklagard Golf poised to reopen

Miklagard Golf near Oslo, Norway, will reopen in spring following a reconfiguration of its golf course and the construction of new practice facilities.

A new hotel is being built on the original practice ground adjacent to the eighteenth hole of the Robert Trent Jones IIdesigned golf course, which opened in 2001. The RTJ II design team has worked with (re)GOLF's Christian Lundin and contractor Nelson & Vecchio to create five new holes required as a knock-on effect of the hotel construction.

"The new holes are designed to blend seamlessly into the theme and balance of the original holes, while providing players with skilful options for recovery shots around the green complexes," said Bruce Charlton, president of RTJ II, who also credits course superintendent Stefan Schon as playing a hugely instrumental role in the success of the redesign. "He knows every inch of the land," said Charlton.



Three of the new holes, the ninth, fifteenth and seventeenth, are par threes. The new fourteenth is a 288-yard par four that will entice players to go for the green, while the course now opens with a 375-yard par four with a large bunker in front of the green.

The closing hole has two teeing areas allowing it to be played as a par four or five. A stream cuts through the fairway about 100 yards from the green, then runs alongside the right edge of the green, setting up a grandstand finish to the round in view of the new hotel.

A new practice area has been built behind the clubhouse, with a driving range, short game and putting areas. The new range is home to Miklagard's academy and professional services, which include a PGA-trained coaching team, a custom fitting centre and a swing studio with Swing Catalyst and TrackMan Golf technology.

"Golfers will immediately appreciate the new practice facilities, coupled with an emphasis on learning and instruction for all levels of player," said Charlton. "All target greens and surrounds are constructed with synthetic turf, to allow players to practice shots during inclement weather and shoulder seasons without causing damage to the turf."



The University of Illinois is working alongside Drew Rogers on plans for a spring 2021 renovation of the course at Atkins Golf Club.

The club was previously known as Stone Creek Golf Club but was renamed in 2020 after developer The Atkins Group gifted the course to the university.

"We have been consulting with Drew to transition the course with increased distance and properly repositioned fairway bunkers to accurately and fairly challenge the modern collegiate players," said Mike Small, the men's head golf coach.

Rogers said: "We'll be varying the fairway widths to place a greater premium on tee shots and the overall approach to the bunkering will be to reduce their numbers, while making their specific placements more impacting to shot values and strategic shotmaking options."

Read the full interview with the project team at www.golfcoursearchitecture.net

### Nicklaus course takes shape

The first nine holes of a new Jack Nicklaus II golf course at Royal Golf Club near Hanoi, Vietnam, are complete and now growing in.

The design of the front nine on the new Queen's course has embraced the rocky nature of the site. "We took advantage of the natural rock's presence as much as possible," said Jim Wagner of Nicklaus Design.

Tees, fairways and rough are being grassed with Zeon Zoysia, while greens

have Primo Zoysia.

"We chose Zoysia for its regional adaptability and for its flexibility to a wide variety of weather conditions," said agronomist Cameron Thompson.

Work has now turned to the back nine, with completion expected by autumn 2021.

Read an interview with Wagner about the project at www.golfcoursearchitecture.net



GOOD READ

#### "My original intention was to create another National Golf Links"

The cover story of the latest issue of *By Design* magazine – produced for the American Society of Golf Course Architects by the team responsible for *GCA* – profiles six clubs highlighted by the latest ASGCA Design Excellence Recognition Program.

"My original intention was to create another National Golf Links, similar to the great Charles Blair Macdonald's layout," said Tom Clark on his Cutalong golf course, one of the six projects recognised by the annual ASGCA awards programme. Over 20 years in the making, the course finally opened in late 2020 with holes inspired by the work of Harry Colt, Old Tom Morris, Alister MacKenzie and others.

Also in the Spring issue, Agustin Pizá talks about his approach to projects with a small footprint, Jon Last of Sports & Leisure Research Group discusses the factors that are driving decision-making at golf facilities, and Troy Vincent provides insight into a bunker sketch he created for a renovation project at

The Reserve at Lake Keowee in South Carolina.

To download the latest issue and subscribe to By Design, visit www.asgca.org



## Global round-up

#### Work to start on new CDP course at Tasmania's Seven Mile Beach

Tree clearance work is expected to begin in April in preparation for a new golf course designed by the Clayton, DeVries & Pont firm at Seven Mile Beach in Hobart, Australia. Partners Mike Clayton and Mike DeVries are leading the design for a group led by Hobart native and tour pro Mathew Goggin. "The first time I walked the land at Seven Mile Beach with Mat I could not believe it," said Clayton. "Here was a beautiful tract of sandy dune land on the edge of the beach, ideal for making a course to match the standards set by the very best in Australia. "It's Pine Valley by the sea. It's incredible – an amazing site."



#### Gary Player Design completes new layout for Kigali GC

Gary Player Design has completed a project at Kigali Golf Club in Rwanda to replace the existing nine-hole course with a new 18.

New land was acquired to allow the design firm to extend and reroute the course – the only one in Rwanda's capital.

"The design strategy was to build a playable but challenging course – which can be set up for a tournament – and is simple to maintain," said Marc Player, CEO of Black Knight International. "The greens are mainly of the push-up design style, resulting in short mowing areas around the greens, repelling poorly struck approach shots."



# New Faldo layout in Vietnam set for summer completion

A new Faldo Design golf course at Thanh Lanh Golf Club near Hanoi, Vietnam, is expected to be complete by summer 2021.

The layout has nine holes set on a lake peninsula with views out to the surrounding mountains. The design team incorporated natural streams and contour to create interest and variety in shotmaking.

"Establishing returning nines that both play out and back, and which share in the beauty of the lakeside, really set the foundation for maximising the site's surrounding assets," said Andrew Haggar, lead architect at Faldo Design.





# IMG designs new nine-hole course in Mauritius

Construction has started on a new nine-hole par-three golf course designed by IMG at Azuri Ocean and Golf Village on the northeast coast of Mauritius.

"The site offers several outstanding features including a river with dramatic tree-lined banks, rocky outcrops across gently undulating terrain and magnificent views to the Indian Ocean, located only a few hundred yards from the course," said Paul Burley, senior vice president of IMG Golf Course Services.

The course is expected to open in summer 2022.



#### Rengstorf completes bunker work at WINSTONgolf

Holger Rengstorf has completed a bunker renovation on the Open course at WINSTONgolf in northern Germany.

"A lot of bunkers had long, rolling faces," said Rengstorf. "Erosion, maintenance, plus wear and tear were taking its toll and the maintenance hours were steadily growing. Bunkers were also not visible enough." Rengstorf drew up a plan that would see bunker area reduced by a third. "The new bunker strategy focuses on playability, pace of play and placement," he said. "Some bunkers were not really in play and have been eliminated, others were brought more into play with regard to the mental side of the game."

#### INSIGHT



BRIAN CURLEY

# The story so far

Having worked in China for much of his professional life, golf course architect Brian Curley describes how the country's golfing landscape has changed over the last 30 years

hose who have followed the story of golf in China will have witnessed an endless parade of twists and turns. It was an especially difficult animal to get your hands around if you were one of the many golf designers who participated in the story, from the soft building of courses in the early 1990s and their explosion between 2000 to 2012, to the sudden and dramatic halt of construction with the emergence of the President Xi era.

In a 10-year period from the mid-2000s, much of the golf construction was done in spite of existing government moratoriums. But construct they did. I first set foot in China following the 1995 World Cup of Golf that was held on the first course at Mission Hills Golf Club in Shenzhen, across the border from Hong Kong. This coincided with what I felt was the beginning of a slowdown in a hot, domestic market in the US and the prospect of a wide open market that had an enormous appetite for the sport.

The initial courses (and most that were built after) followed a similar thread of being constructed on less-than-friendly terrain, where massive earthmoving was required to manhandle sites to create grades suitable for golf. Along with this was a strong directive from almost every owner and developer for formal, parkland golf.

Much of this work was driven by the ever-present 'golf expert', who was often one of a handful of people in the business who would influence the minds of ownership, many of whom had never held a club. As a result, just as 'same-same' is an often-used expression in Asia, it also became the directive of those who wanted a bulletproof design that was pretty and built to please the senses of golfers with a very limited knowledge of golf.

Having grown up in Pebble Beach, I would always show images of more natural designs, but these were



*Schmidt-Curley's layout at Dalu Dunes was bulldozed on the day that* GCA's *July 2014 issue – which featured the course on its cover – was published* 

immediately discarded. Upon returning from a trip to Sand Hills in 1999 that I took with Bill Coore, I showed images of the course and its wild, blowout bunkers, only to receive looks of disdain from decision makers as if I had horns protruding from my head!

As the courses grew in number, so did the players. And as these players travelled to other countries, they were exposed to new and different courses and the desire to be different took hold. Still, natural designs remained a difficult sell with most.

With the sport growing, locations away from major population bases sprang up and this led to more natural sites where less of a heavy hand was required. The combination of better sites and a changing understanding of more natural designs helped to raise the bar.

It was at this time that we were creating some new and fantastic work, including Dalu Dunes in the northern city of Ordos. The natural site was reminiscent of Sand Hills and our effort produced a similar look. The course yielded awesome photography (by our in-house associate Ryan Farrow, who had a big design input). But ironically, on the same day that the July 2014 issue of *Golf Course Architecture* was published, with the course featuring on the cover,

Dalu Dunes was bulldozed. Some 100 more courses met a similar fate when China's moratorium on golf course construction was strictly enforced.

This led to the disappearance of about a dozen of our own courses, among which were three at Stone Forest, a spectacular property of karst rock formations outside Kunming.

What happens from here will be a new chapter in the continuing saga, and I hope to participate again! **GCA** 

#### FEATURE

# Muni renaissance

A few years ago, municipal golf seemed to be in terminal decline, the victim of falling golfer numbers and local government budget cuts. Now, across the golfing world, there are signs of munis finding a new role and new life. Adam Lawrence reports

he general malaise that has affected golf participation numbers over the last 10 years or so has made for particularly tough times for the municipal sector. The very nature of municipal golf is that it tends to be an entry route to the game for many new players, who, if hooked on golf, tend to trade up over time. The result of this is that municipals need a constant flow of new players to prosper, and hence will be in the front line of any downturn in the game.

Municipal golf has a long and proud history. Obviously, the St Andrews Links, the home of golf, has been publicly owned throughout the majority of its history. The Links was confirmed as common land belonging to the citizens of St Andrews by a charter granted by King David I of Scotland as far back as 1123, long before golf was ever thought of, and has remained so ever since, with the exception of the period between 1797, when the town council went bankrupt, and the Links was sold, and 1894, when the town regained proprietorship with the establishment of the Links Trust. But when golf started to spread in the nineteenth century, it did so mostly in the form of private clubs establishing their own courses, from which the public were excluded.

The return of publicly-owned golf would start in the late part of the nineteenth century, when golf had begun its progression from Scottish curiousity to global game. Oddly, the idea seems to have evolved almost simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic. In Bournemouth, on the south coast of England, at the start of 1893, the town decided to create a new public park on land that had been gifted to it by the locally-important Meyrick family. The park was named after its benefactors, and as part of its creation, the council resolved to start the town's first golf course - this was a time when golf was exploding across England and seaside towns in particular, whose income depended so much on visitors, feared being left behind if





England's first municipal course was at Meyrick Park in Bournemouth, where Tom Dunn laid out an 18-hole course and nine-hole 'Ladies Links' in 1894

they did not cater for this new game. By the end of the year, the council had employed Tom Dunn to report on the suitability of the ground for golf, and early in 1894, Dunn was hired to lay out the new facility – the main 18-hole course, and shorter nine-hole 'Ladies Links' – which was formally opened for play on 28 November of the same year, the first, it would appear, specially created municipally-owned golf course in the world. There was water piped to every tee and green (very unusual at the time) and 95 men had been employed for three months in building the course.

To the west of the ocean, America was less than a year behind. In 1888, the city of New York had taken title to 4,000 acres of land in the Bronx. This acquisition led to the formation of Bronx, Claremont, Crotona, St Mary's, Van Cortlandt and Pelham Bay parks, and in 1895, a group of Riverdale businessmen, who had been trying, unsuccessfully, to find a site to build a private golf course, hit upon the Van Cortlandt site as their best opportunity. The group developed a nine-hole course, but the Board of Parks Commissioners concluded that it could not allow a municipally-owned asset to fall into private hands. Hence the group – by now known as the 'Mosholu Golf Club' – gained exclusive rights to use the course for two afternoons a week, but it remained publicly-owned, the first municipal golf course in the United States (with a finishing hole, the ninth, that was more than 700 yards long). Photo: Jonathon Mercer

Since then, municipal golf has spread far and wide. Many well-known golfers learned the game on munis, and they have been crucial to introducing new players to golf. Figures from the US's National Golf Federation (NGF) show that American muni numbers reached an all-time high of 2,515 courses in 2018 (out of, at the time, just under 15,000 courses, so munis represented not far from 20 per cent of all of American golf). But, around the world, local government has come under severe financial pressure in recent years - British figures, for example, show that local government's 'spending power' has declined by 18 per cent since 2010, so it is hardly surprising that municipal golf provision has come under severe pressure too. Not long ago, before the great golf building boom of the 1990s and early 2000s, municipal courses were reliable cash-cows for their local government owners. With a huge increase in supply comes far greater competition, and often it was munis that were the fiercest targets of that competiton. "We don't believe that making money is always the primary motivation that drives a municipality to offer golf as recreation for its residents," said the NGF in a 2019 report. It's a long way from Meyrick Park in 1894, when the Bournemouth town council saw golf as an essential attribute for a town that wanted to be economically successful.

Now, though, the muni downturn is showing signs of slowing. Those signs may not be visible everywhere – though the boom in golf that has been seen since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic lifts the municipal ship along with all the others – but



around the golfing world, a number of localities are looking for new ways to operate their municipal golf courses and new models for them to follow.

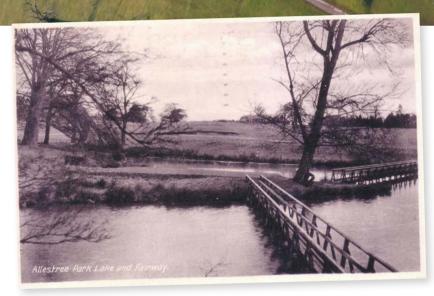
The muni revival, such as it is, cannot be said to be across the board. But what does appear to be happening is that courses with an interesting heritage, or some particular architectural notoriety, are attracting more attention – and crucially, attracting funding from sources other than hard-pressed local authorities. Take, for example, the longestablished Cleeve Hill course, located outside Cheltenham in southern England. Golf has been played on Cleeve Hill, the highest point in the Cotswolds, since 1891, when the Cheltenham Golf Club was founded, playing over a course laid out by Old Tom Morris. That club was private, though the Hill was common land, and so the place remained until 1976, when the Cotswold Hills club (successor to the Cheltenham GC) moved to a new course at Ullenwood, on the south side of the town, after which the course

Golf has been played on Cleeve Hill in the Cotswolds since 1891. Following Tewkesbury Borough Council's decision to revoke the licence for the use of Cleeve Common as a golf course, locals grouped together and are now in the process of taking over

passed into the care of Tewkesbury Borough Council.

Golfing on Cleeve Hill is a grand experience. The course – though lengthened from that laid out by Tom, which measured less than 5,000 yards, with a longest hole of 330 yards (the back tees now stretch to 6,400 yards) – feels like a living connection to the past of the game. Among its more remarkable old features is the thirteenth green, still located where Tom put it, among the earthworks of an Iron Age hillfort. Last autumn, though, Cleeve was threatened with closure. In early September, the council revealed that the private company that leased the course had ended its tenancy early because it judged it to be financially unviable. After a review by an independent expert, the council echoed this view, saying that golf at Cleeve Hill "could not be financially sustainable without significant investment and an ongoing subsidy from the council". It therefore resolved to revoke the licence for the use of Cleeve Common as a golf course from 31 March 2021.

Tewkesbury's decision prompted a storm of outrage. Members of the golf club immediately started a petition, which attracted thousands of signatures, a 'Save Cleeve Hill Golf Course' Facebook group sprung up and created a lot of noise, and generally the golf community made it known that it did not believe the course should be allowed to die. It soon became clear that the council's decision might be overturned. The

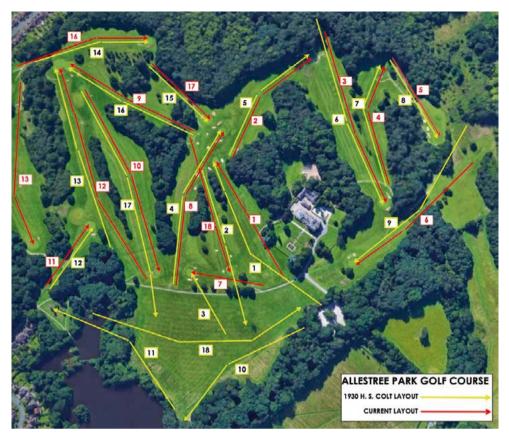


The survival of the municipal course at Allestree Park in Derbyshire, originally laid out by Harry Colt, is now under threat

group started private discussions with councillors and other local movers and shakers, and the council fairly rapidly started an about-turn, issuing a statement that it was clear there was still an appetite for golf on the Hill, and inviting new bidders to come forward to operate the golf course. In late January, the council announced that a group of local investors calling themselves the Cotswold Hub Company had been appointed and would take over the course on 1 April. The new operators are preparing (at the time of writing) to take over, and it appears that golf on Cleeve Hill has indeed been saved.

Further north, in Derby, a similar campaign is still being waged in an attempt to save the municipal Allestree Park golf course. Opened in 1930 and designed by Harry Colt, Allestree sits within the largest open space in Derby, a 130-hectare park surrounding Allestree Hall. The council, which owns both the land and the hall, is seeking to sell the latter, with a view to it becoming a wedding and event venue.

As at Cleeve, local golfers, with golf writer Andrew Picken prominent among them, have mounted a strong campaign to save the course, including a petition with almost 26,000





signatures. Despite this, the council closed the course at the end of 2020, citing a cost saving of £69,000 a year, though campaigners point out that maintaining the park is estimated to cost £32,000, with no prospect of making any compensating revenue. Campaigners say that the council's pre-closure consultation stated 75 per cent support to keep the course open, and that four bidders wanted to take it over – and that at least three more have emerged since the story broke. They also claim that opposition parties have agreed to revoke the closure if they take control of the (closely fought) council at forthcoming local election. This campaign appears still to have further to run.

Across the Atlantic too, the muni revival is gathering pace. Americans trying to revive munis have one key advantage: the sheer number of such courses with an interesting architectural heritage. While it is true that pioneer American architects such as Charles Blair Macdonald and Seth Raynor worked almost exclusively for rather elite private clubs, that isn't true of some of the great names that followed them. Donald Ross, for example (the man who, more than anyone else, brought great golf to the masses of America), designed around 400 courses through his long career - and almost fifty of them are or were munis. There are a number of projects afoot to regenerate Ross, or

*It would require little work to restore Colt's original routing at Allestree Park* 

Ross-linked munis, especially some of those located in areas that are now relatively economically disadvantaged: this is because a number of people in the golf business have realised what a powerful engine a golf course can be to regenerate an area.

The story of the Cobbs Creek municipal course in Philadelphia is well-known, but deserves to be repeated. Cobbs Creek opened in 1916, built by a lot of the same men that created American golf legends such as Pine Valley and Merion, including Hugh Wilson, principal designer of Merion East, and George Crump, founder, developer and the brains behind Pine Valley. It was viewed by many in its early years as the best public course in America. Cobbs was home to some of America's pioneering black and female golfers, including Charlie Sifford, the first black member of the PGA Tour.

Like so many old publics, Cobbs fell on hard times, but for years now a group of local golf enthusiasts have been agitating and fundraising with the aim of restoring the course. And now, they are on the verge of achieving their aim: currently in the final permitting stage, the project, to be led by Jim Wagner of Hanse Golf Course Design, could break ground as early as May of this year, starting with the restoration of the eponymous creek, by some distance the most difficult and costly partly of the project.

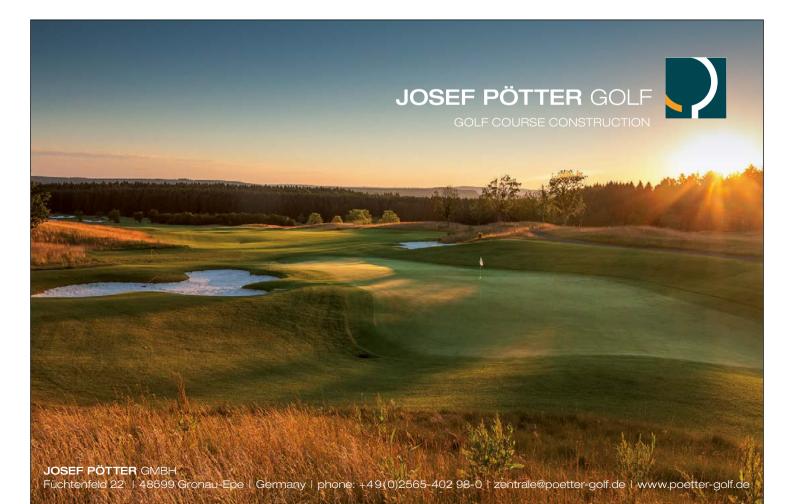
Cobbs is far from being the grand old muni tagged for restoration in the US. In Washington DC, Walter Travis's East Potomac Park, on an island in the Potomac River, is slated for a Huxley Golf All-Weather Greens

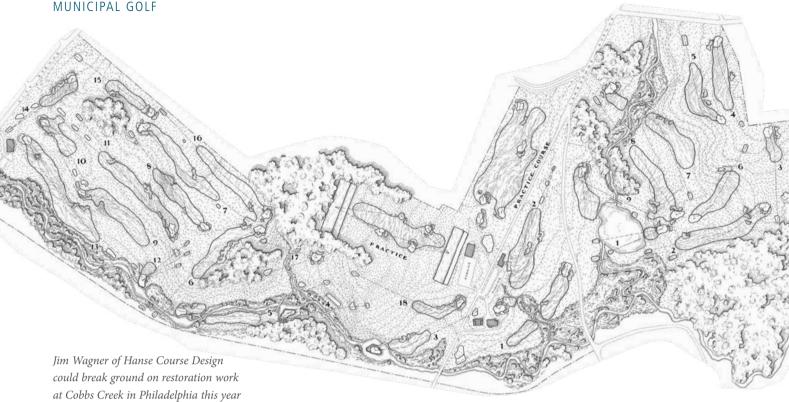
Huxley Golf

Premier All-Weather Surfaces for Golf

Private All-Weather Practice Facility, Northern Italy.







restoration: an organisation called the National Links Trust, founded by golf architect Mike McCartin, has taken on the management of the course (and two other DC munis, Langston and Rock Creek Park) and has grand, multi-million dollar plans to restore them to their former glory - but critically, still to operate as Everyman municipal golf courses, not to turn them into some kind of ritzy country club.

In San Fransisco, the scheme to restore Alister MacKenzie's Sharp Park continues apace: architects Tom Doak and Jay Blasi have already returned the tenth and eighteenth greens to something like what MacKenzie intended.

And in Orlando, what is in many ways the guiding light for many of these muni projects continues to operate happily with a full tee sheet. The Winter Park nine holer, in what is Orlando's toniest suburb, might not have quite so grand an architectural heritage as many of our other examples. But, founded in 1914, its 2016 renovation by architects Keith Rhebb and Riley Johns was so acclaimed that the course has never looked back. The Winter Park course feels like a true part of its community: there are no fences separating the course from the rest of its neighbourhood, railway lines run along one side of it, so passengers

#### "Virtually every golf course has something special about it. Find it, focus on it, and live it"

get a clear view of golfers enjoying their games. And, though the site is pancake flat, the clever design work of Johns and Rhebb, focused almost entirely on creating interest by way of contoured greens, means that Winter Park has become famous, with golf writers around the world trumpeting its values.

What links all these projects is that there is something a little bit special about the golf course, its design,

Cleeve Hill, with views for many miles over the Cotswolds and a Tom Morris heritage, Cobbs Creek, designed by Hugh Wilson of Merion fame, Sharp Park, designed by Alister MacKenzie, or Winter Park, located slap bang in the middle of the nicest part of Orlando, these are not just

heritage or location. Whether it is

workaday munis. It is, if you like, proof of something that GCA has been wittering on about throughout its lifetime: it is the golf course, its design and sense of place above all else that makes people want to play golf. That might seem to be a bleak assessment for anyone trying to revitalise a 'Joe Sixpack' muni, but the truth is that virtually every golf course has something special about it. Find it, focus on it, and live it. GCA

#### PROFILED

# A new life for the old

THE SAN ROQUE CLUB, CADIZ, SPAIN

The team behind the renovation of the Old course at The San Roque Club has focused on a sustainable future. Toby Ingleton reports

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n the fiercely competitive luxury club market on the southern tip of Spain, intuition might suggest that extravagant spending is necessary to attract wealthy members and guests. But with a peer group that includes Valderrama, Sotogrande, La Reserva and Finca Cortesin, that might not set you apart from the crowd. When a new ownership group took control of The San Roque Club, it opted for a different approach.

By the mid-2010s, some 25 years after it had first been laid out, the Old course at San Roque had grown tired. Drainage was a particular problem. The area typically gets five to six major storms each year and these would render the course unplayable for days while the grounds crew repaired damage, particularly to the bunkers. At its lowest point, following a storm in 2016, flooding caused major damage to the clubhouse and some of the surrounding residences.

As the club began to falter, its members – who at that time were preparing an acquisition bid of their own – sought advice on how best to revitalise a course that had previously been fit to play regular host to the European Tour's qualifying school finals.

They called upon golf course consultant John Clarkin of the Ireland-based Turfgrass Consultancy firm for help. He made the trip to Spain, walked the course, drafted his recommendations, and waited to hear back.

In late 2018, shortly after that visit, events took a turn. Management and development



group Golf Estate swooped in and, in just a few months, a deal to purchase San Roque was done. Responsibility for the club's revival now lay with its new president Stephen Dundas.

Dundas – a former British Amateur champion who also competed in the 1993 Masters – was drawn to the proposals detailed in Clarkin's report to the members. Sensing that they shared a common vision for a golf course that would be firm and fast, enjoyable to play and sustainable, and would complement a new ethos he was developing for the club – he made contact. They agreed that the bones of the course's original routing by Dave Thomas were strong, making good use of the undulating terrain and sitting at ease with the low-density housing that lines a handful of its fairways. But time had taken its toll; tree growth was shrouding the holes and too many of the hazards had either become less relevant or were more of a hindrance to enjoyment than a strategic challenge.

Dundas says: "My first thought was to make the golf course as dry as possible – I wanted it to play firm and fast. But it also had to be sustainable. A lot of projects start off grand, but can't be maintained after three or four years."

This focus on sustainability would be a driver for many of the design decisions. A plan was drawn up to remove almost half the bunkers and 18 hectares of maintained turf would be replaced with mulch. A new stateof-the-art irrigation system from Rain Bird would contribute to a reduction in water use estimated to be somewhere between 35 and 50 percent – a massive saving given the cost of water in southern Spain.

"The length of the course would be shorter too – bucking the trend," says Dundas. "I never had the temptation to



make it longer – it's no fun and it adds more expense. At 6,500 metres from the back tees it's already more than long enough for our members and guests. And we made a conscious decision to not aim to host a tour event."

Dundas felt that by creating an enjoyable and playable golf course with a reduced maintenance burden, he could focus resources and effort on top-tier conditioning, and providing members and guests with great service.

Joining Dundas and Clarkin on the project team would be Target Ingenieros, the Spanish group led by former tour pro Manuel Piñero, to handle engineering and consult on the design, and Atlantic Golf Construction, the Ireland-based construction firm led by Anthony Bennett.

In November 2019 work began on stripping the existing course to its bare bones, removing the turf, removing three lakes and streams that were difficult to negotiate and penal, and pruning back the course's beautiful cork oak trees. "We got to see the golf course naked," says Dundas. "Once we'd cleaned up every tree on But halting work at this point would leave the bare ground exposed to washouts and presented a significant flood risk, particularly in early spring, one of the region's storm seasons. The club shared footage of previous flooding with the authorities, and it was enough to convince them of the threat to safety. Work was permitted to proceed, albeit very cautiously and with a minimal crew in those next few weeks, and subject to considerable restrictions for the entirety of the project.

#### "The main idea was to make golfers feel like they had more space from the tee. You can get your driver out and smash it"

the golf course there was space, it lifted everything up and revealed the incredible views."

"But the main idea was to make golfers feel like they had more space from the tee. You can get your driver out and smash it, which people love to do." This sets up for what would become very much a "second shot" course, he says.

With this clearance work complete, ground was broken for construction work at the start of January 2020, with an ambitious target of reopening to members at the start of November. Progress was swift. The weather was great, allowing work to continue at pace each day.

And then the pandemic hit.

On 15 March, just over two months into the project, the Guardia Civil arrived on the property and shut down construction. The resolve of the club's partners was put to the ultimate test. Atlantic is fast developing a reputation for getting things done – its work at Adare Manor and Ballybunion being cases in point. But would they be able to step up in another country?

The answer was a resounding yes. When the lockdown came, members of the construction crew were given the option to continue work or head home. Even though it would mean weeks on end without seeing their families, and with next to nothing open in the area, almost all stayed on.

Clarkin and the Turfgrass team demonstrated their commitment to the client, too. "Contractually, John was supposed to be here a few days each month, but he must have spent over 100 days on site during the project – at one point he was here for three weeks non-stop," says Dundas. "A massive



shout-out to Anthony and Atlantic, too. Their passion and dedication to getting us open in 2020 was quite incredible."

Delays were inevitable. Sprigging was initially scheduled to start around the end of April but began at the end of June. But the stakes were high. Dundas explains: "The consequences of not getting done before winter, having to come back in April, and the golf course not ready until September or October 2021... no way we would have been able to sell memberships and take fees."

The Atlantic Golf Construction team pulled out all the stops to recover the time lost to Covid-related delays. "Our focus is a willingness to get the project done for the client," says Bennett. More machinery and manpower was recruited, and club members even joined the effort to help sprig fairways.

"It was incredible to witness," says Clarkin. "The project culminated with over 40 machines and more than 80 people at work on a single hole – the eighth – to complete seeding on the last day of August." Working with Atlas Turf, Clarkin selected Latitude 36 bermudagrass for fairways and surrounds and Pure Select for greens and tees, which were carefully nurtured by grow-in superintendent Mark Doyle and Turfgrass Consultancy's on-site project manager Craig Hanney. "Thirteen weeks after seeding we sent a sample to European Turf Laboratories and they could not believe how well developed it was," says Clarkin. "The root system is phenomenal."

it helps that coverage is now substantially lower.

"We reduced the turfed area from about 55 hectares to 37," says Clarkin. Such a dramatic reduction was designed both to minimise the water and labour requirement for the golf course, and to give the layout crisp definition. Areas that were previously turfed are now covered with a bark mulch, delivering a similar effect to the pine straw at Augusta National. The mulch requires

#### "There are only four greenside bunkers from which you can actually see the putting surface"

"Tees alone will be 8.5 to 9 on the stimp," says Dundas. "Greens are somewhere around 11. There are a lot of false front areas where the bent is running at 9. Conditioning is right up there with the best courses in the area." For Dundas to achieve his goal

of outstanding playing surfaces,

almost no maintenance and provides a marked contrast with turfed areas, giving the Old course an aesthetic that is quite unique in the area. Balls that come to rest on the mulch can be easily found, removing the frustrating experience of scrambling through undergrowth, but still demand a recovery shot.



Dundas's appreciation of Augusta is apparent in the new bunkering scheme too. Thirty bunkers were removed from the original layout, leaving just 40, each of which has been strategically positioned so that the player has options to consider for each shot.

With fewer bunkers, the design team also felt comfortable increasing their severity, largely in the form of depth. "There are only four greenside bunkers from which you can actually see the putting surface," says Dundas.

The bunkers have been lined with the Better Billy Bunker system, which has already been put to the test. A storm hit the course shortly after completion of the bunkers and not one required any work. Dundas estimates that it previously required 150 hours of labour to get bunkers back in play after a storm. And with a typical year having six or seven such storms, that's over 1,000 hours of labour that can now be invested elsewhere on the course.

Dundas says the project team has succeeded in delivering a course that will require far less resource while delivering a much more enjoyable playing experience - surely the golden formula for any club embarking on work?

The emphasis on enjoyment and conditioning aligns with Dundas's broader new ethos for the club, which is to provide a relaxed environment with exceptional quality and service. And his goal is for that to be affordable quality. Many of San Roque's peers undoubtedly offer an exceptional experience for visiting golfers, but at a cost that means for most it will be a one-off. Dundas is setting a price point that will allow people to return again and again. By reducing the resource requirement of the course, more can be invested in the provision of outstanding service. "In terms of the gate-to-gate experience, we are going to be the best in the area," he says. Every detail has been considered - such as the switching of nines to improve the flow of guests from clubhouse area to course and back again. The former

tenth hole is now the first, with the tees in full view of the clubhouse area, giving more of a "sense of occasion" to the opening shot. And the round now closes on the adjacent green right in front of the clubhouse, as opposed to the former eighteenth – now the ninth - which is 50 metres away.

Even during construction, as the new vision for the club began to emerge, membership numbers were increased by a third. By the official opening this summer Dundas will be even closer to his goal of around 600 members.

Everything the new ownership group promised its members, existing and new, was delivered. "Eighty-two golfers played the Old course on 5 December," says Dundas. "A full renovation had been completed in 11 months during a global pandemic - it's a massive achievement for our partners and their businesses." The end result is a course that is "hard, dry, fun and fair," says Dundas. "As a member you could play every day of your life and not tire of it." GCA

#### PROFILED

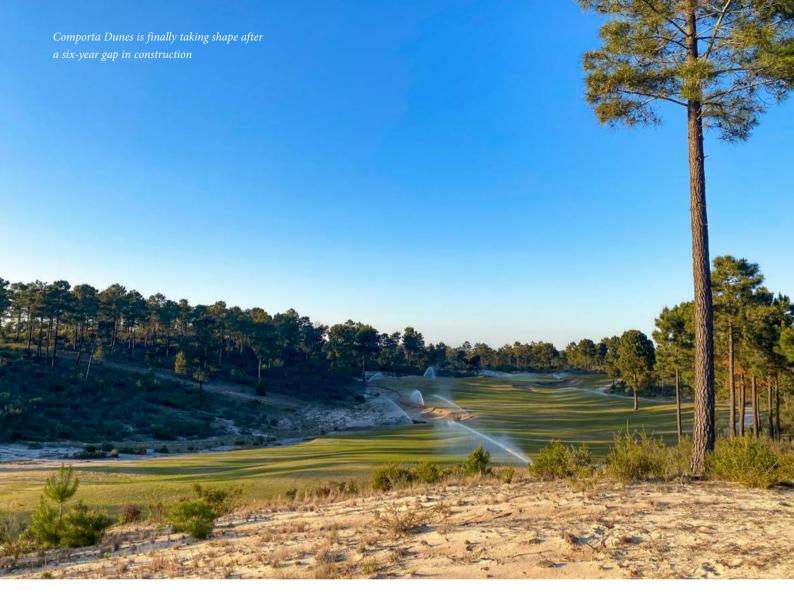
# Back from the dead

COMPORTA DUNES, PORTUGAL

Cast into limbo by the collapse of its parent company in 2014, David McLay Kidd's Comporta Dunes course in Portugal is now nearing completion under new ownership. Adam Lawrence reports



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n the years after the 2008 financial crisis, the world became accustomed to seeing previously blue-chip banks in trouble. But for anyone with any knowledge of the Portuguese economy, the collapse of the Banco Espírito Santo in July 2014, still came as a shock. Since its foundation by José Maria do Espírito Santo e Silva in the nineteenth century, the Espírito Santo dynasty had represented Portugal's most powerful banking force, and one of Europe's great family fortunes. If Espírito Santo was vulnerable, who was not?

It is not within the remit of a golf magazine to examine the ins and outs of the falling from grace of one of the great banking names. Suffice to say that, after almost 150 years, the family lost control of its empire, and though the bank itself was saved (renamed Novo Banco, 'new bank', by partition and the creation of a 'bad bank', which bore the toxic assets), the Portuguese economy took a severe hit.

One part of the Espírito Santo empire, though, does come within our ambit. At the time the bank collapsed, it was behind the development of a huge tourism complex on the Alentejo coast, about an hour south of Lisbon. Launched in 2010, the Comporta development was to include two golf complexes, Comporta Dunes, designed by David McLay Kidd, who has been involved with the project since May 2007, and Comporta Links, a 36-hole facility by Tom Fazio. The latter was proposed as Portugal's prospective host for the 2018 Ryder Cup (which eventually went to Le Golf National outside Paris).

After France won the right to hold the 2018 Ryder Cup, the construction of Comporta Links was put on hold, while Comporta Dunes went ahead, full speed. Kidd's team moved fast. When this writer visited the property in early April 2014, almost half the course was ready for seed. But two months later, the heavily indebted family company through which the Espírito Santo empire was controlled hit trouble. After intense pressure from Portuguese regulators, family patriarch Ricardo Espírito Santo Salgado, chief executive of the bank and boss of the family holding company, resigned. In early July, the holding company filed for

bankruptcy, with debts of  $\in$ 6.4 billion (\$8.4 billion), and in August the bank, which reported losses of  $\in$ 3.6 billion, was rescued by the Portuguese state. Down at Comporta, nine holes and the practice facility were seeded, while six of the back nine holes were finished and ready for seed. But they never got it, as the collapse of the parent company put a sudden and, seemingly, final halt to construction operations.

Five years on, though, in November 2019, fate threw Comporta a lifeline. A consortium composed of Vanguard Properties, a real estate developer controlled by French-Swiss investor Claude Berra and Portuguese executive José Cardoso Botelho, and luxury brand – and boutique hotel operator – Amorim, bought the development. Founded only in 2017, Vanguard has quickly become Portugal's largest real estate developer, focused on luxury residential and tourist assets – it has 19 projects currently underway, spread

Kidd therefore suggested to Vanguard that they should contract with Conor Walsh, formerly a staff shaper for the architect, but now running his own golf construction company - CJW Golf - to execute the work. Walsh was lead shaper during the original build of Comporta Dunes, and naturally has intimate knowledge of the project. "We were relatively close by, and we have experience of the original build," says Walsh. "We know where the irrigation pipes are and we are familiar with the design philosophy we know what David wants off the tee and for approach shots." Walsh and his team mobilised on site and started construction work on 20 January.

After being left to its own devices for six and a half years, the golf course had naturally run rather wild. Therefore, the turf that had established itself on the course has had to be stripped off – revealing all the original shaping and micro-contours – before being

# "It is almost a dream, being able to shape a course and then leave it for years to naturalise"

over the country. Comporta is the company's first golf project.

Clearly, to get the Comporta development back on track, it was vital first to complete the Dunes golf course. To this end, Vanguard made contact with original designer David McLay Kidd, but the travel problems caused by the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic made it difficult for the Oregon-based architect to commit his resources to the project in the short term. reseeded. All bunkers are being rebuilt. Walsh says that the grassing plan has changed, and the design has had to be adjusted to deal with that. "Previously, the entire course was going to be fescue, but now it is fescue from tee to green, but the greens are a new creeping bent variant called Pure Select. Naturally this means they will run faster, so the contours are being massaged very slightly to allow for this." The Pure Select is supplied by Pure Seed through its Portuguese distributor Jordao.



Architect Kidd told *GCA*: "Switching to creeping bent was my decision. I've concluded in the last few years that a large proportion of golfers simply don't 'get' fescue greens. Gamble Sands, for example, a course I built a few years ago in Washington state, has fescue greens. They're fantastic, and to someone with a high golf IQ, they are wonderful. But ordinary golfers don't get them. They aren't as fast as they expect, and they're not a uniform green."

Although no one in the golf industry would ideally choose to let a newly constructed course lay fallow for six years before finishing, Walsh says that, in many ways, it is a good thing, because the vegetation has had chance to grow back, helping the course naturalise and avoid the 'raw' look



so common on new courses. "It is almost a dream, being able to shape a course and then leave it for years to naturalise," he says happily. "It looks phenomenal – the transition from golf, through small plants, to big plants is fantastic. We are clearing the growth very selectively to make the best possible use of this – we have our backdrops and we're clearing where we want playable areas to be. But the landscape palette is quite wonderful."

Although architect Kidd has not yet been able to get back to the site during this phase of construction, Walsh says he is very closely involved in the process. "David is 100 per cent involved in the work," he explains. "We chat and FaceTime every day, and send sketches of particular features back and forth all the time. There's no cutting him out – this is still going to be a David McLay Kidd course."

Kidd said: "If it hadn't been for the pandemic, we would have figured out how to get our crew out to finish the course. But in the circumstances we had to find another solution, so I told the client that Conor was the best choice, given that he shaped the course originally. I knew that, with Conor's talent and the team he has around him, he would be able to get it done."

The site at Comporta is beautifully sandy, and the Portuguese climate is extremely suitable for good growth of golfing turf – Walsh says that germination is taking only four days, and fairways can be mowed within two weeks of seeding – but it isn't all plain sailing. The sand, he explains, is hydrophobic, so has needed to be amended to give the grass the best chance to prosper. Fairways are getting organic soil amendments, while zeolite is being used in the greens. Walsh says that the plan is to have the entire course seeded by the first week of June. It will then be left to grow in for more than a year, before an official opening in late summer of 2022.

As co-owner Amorim's business interests include a chain of small luxury hotels, one will naturally be built at Comporta, while the development also includes a number of substantial real estate plots. It has taken longer than expected, but the Comporta project is finally getting moving. **GCA** 



# Out of the shadows

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SHADOW WOOD CC, FLORIDA

The renovation of three courses over four years has given the Shadow Wood community in Florida a new lease of life. Richard Humphreys reports

The par-five seventh on the renovated Preserve course at Shadow Wood

imes are good for residents of the Shadow Wood community on Florida's west coast. Each of its three golf courses have been renovated, real estate is sold out, there is now a membership waiting list, and an improved practice facility is being planned.

Ten years ago, things were a little more uncertain. In the wake of the credit crunch, developer Bonita Bay Group was selling its golf clubs to fight off bankruptcy. Shadow Wood Country Club was among those, and the members agreed to take control and create their own new vision for the future.

The club has three courses, all built around the turn of the millennium. The North and South were designed by Bob Cupp at the community's main site in Estero. The Preserve course, designed by Arthur Hills, is a 15-minute drive north, located directly alongside the Estero Bay Preserve.

Anticipating some future issues in relation to the infrastructure, the club's committee consulted Cupp for guidance on an initial project on the



The Jones team has worked to ensure the Preserve course caters to golfers of all skill levels. The par-three sixth, for example, is over 200 yards from the back tees, but just 100 yards from the front, where the angle of attack provides an open entrance to the green

North course. Before he passed away in 2016, Cupp recommended long-time friend Rees Jones for the project.

Keen to preserve the essence of Cupp's original design for the North course, Jones and his associate Bryce Swanson evaluated the property with Cupp's son Bobby, and also used Cupp's hole-byhole notes to help guide their plans.

The immediate priority was to reconsider the greens. The problems were three-fold; they were not running consistently, were not very receptive to long, low approach shots that many of the members were required to hit to reach the putting surface, and they had lost some of their original size.

Jones and Swanson designed new greens with more subtle movement and added new hole locations. "We went for more open entrances and made sure the greens could hold the high percentage of low shots being hit into them," says Jones. "The transitions are more of a long, consistent slope, that really complement Bob's original design." "Given that rebuilding a green means it closes for a period of time, it made sense to evaluate the other components like playability issues, and what we found was that certain holes or situations were quite difficult," says Swanson.

As well as restoring bunker lines, some greenside bunkers were replaced with closely mown chipping areas. Fairway bunkers were re-evaluated too, with some relocated or removed entirely. "The club wanted to make it different to the North, so our bunker style is a bit of a change in character to the original – there's more movement in terms of how we shaped them," says Jones.

The greens would see a marked contrast in style from the North course, too. Jones and Swanson introduced more internal contours, with the rebuilt greens typically having a variety of levels and distinct pinnable areas.

#### "This has been a 'triple play' and if we had not been successful on the North, the club would still be sitting on the other two"

"In terms of style, we kept everything very much in the fashion of what Bob did," says Swanson.

Work on the North course was completed in 2017, and convinced the membership to "unleash" Jones and Swanson on the South course in the following year. Now with two successful renovations under its belt and members enjoying those changes so much, it was a natural step for the club to ask the Jones team to look at its third course.

While its location and the fact it had been laid out by a different designer meant it already had different



*The short sixteenth on the North (top) and the par-five seventh on the South, which were renovated in 2017 and 2018 respectively* 

characteristics to the North and South courses, The Preserve brought its own challenges. In particular, it had gained a reputation for being very difficult.

"It was mainly used by players with a low handicap because the layout had a lot of penal aspects to it," says Swanson. "If you miss the green, you could find a lot of trouble. We had to correct that and make it more playable because the everyday member would avoid it."

"The setting of the Preserve is more natural," says Jones. "There is housing, but quite a few holes are framed by the natural preserve vegetation. The wind is a bigger factor on the Preserve too, it has a bit of a coastal feel to it."

Routed through woods, wetlands and marshes, as well as man-made lakes, there are only two holes on the Preserve where water is not in play. The challenge for the design team was to find a balance of keeping the low handicap players, who essentially had the Preserve course to themselves, happy, but to also make it playable and enjoyable for the everyday golfer. The solution lay primarily in the green complexes, and the introduction of aspects of design that had proved successful on the North and South course renovations. Entrances to the green have been opened, and a miss no longer hands out such severe punishment, with balls potentially coming to rest on closely mown surrounds that provide a choice of recovery options.

With construction work on the Preserve taking place during 2020, the onset of the coronavirus pandemic threatened to deal a serious blow to progress. But having frequently worked on projects in Japan in recent years, where fewer site visits take place, Jones and Swanson were by now well accustomed to using technology such as drones to design from a distance. This, combined with the excellent relationship they had cultivated with Glase Construction and the club over the previous two renovations, allowed them to continue with little interruption even while travel restrictions were in place.

The Preserve course reopened in November 2020 and is now attracting the entire membership base. "There are now more higher handicappers playing there, which is a real measure of our success," says Swanson. This has been particularly beneficial for the club in coping with the rise in demand for tee times that has arisen because of the pandemic, allowing them to spread play more evenly across all three courses.

Jones has taken particular satisfaction in "success breeding success," with the positive results of each renovation delivering him and Swanson another commission at the club.

He highlights that a major challenge of working at Florida clubs is the small window of time there is to get the job done. "Members don't want it to close before the end of the season in April. And they want it back open before Christmas," he says. "So, if you have a major storm, for example, you've got a problem." Jones credits a strong team - designers, constructors and the club's team of greens committee chairs Jay Sandza and Rich Antonelli, general manager Brian Bartolec and course superintendent Eric Ruha - for delivering a positive outcome under this pressure. Not just once, or twice, but three times.

"This has been a 'triple play' and if we had not been successful on the North, the club would still be sitting on the other two," says Jones. "It becomes easier to get a 'yes' vote once you have completed a project very successfully," he says. "Creating three distinct challenges for the members to play has been a progressive move for the club." **GCA** 

#### FEATURE

# Grand sand designs

Golf is set for rapid growth in Saudi Arabia. Toby Ingleton finds out about the origins of the game in the Kingdom, and what the future holds



he birth of golf in Saudi Arabia can be traced back to the geologist Max Steineke. It was his 1937 order to 'keep on drilling' that convinced executives of the Standard Oil Company of California to continue what had been a fruitless search. A year later, in the desert of the Eastern Province, a few miles from the Gulf coast, workers finally struck oil.

Within a decade the oil firm – by then named Arabia American Oil Company, or Aramco – had discovered new fields, built a refinery and was exporting tanker loads across the world. To support this burgeoning industry, people were needed.

At the same time, golf was surging in popularity among Americans. So it made sense for Aramco executives to shape golf holes from the sand at its Dhahran complex, providing an amenity to attract expatriates to its rapidly growing workforce.

One of the earliest accounts of golf at Aramco was detailed in a July 1942 letter from chief petroleum engineer Philip McConnell to friends in the United States, written as British and German tank divisions were manoeuvring in the desert west of Cairo. An extract was published in the 2011 book about the history of Saudi Aramco, *Energy to the World*.

"Midway between camp and the seashore lies a barren blazing waste, distinguished from other barren blazing wastes by a faint hint of soil caught in a great depression among the brown mushroom hills and sheltered there from the claws of the shemaal," wrote McConnell. "It is within this garden spot that our golf course has been spread, a course consisting of nine tees, stakes to mark the limits of the otherwise undistinguishable fairways, nine oil-sanded greens and a great amount of otherwise idle desert. Occasionally, a herd of camels ambles over our greens, leaving deep pits in the carefully smoothed sand; or a pair of donkeys may patter across, distributing smaller but sharper pockets for the trapping of a perfect approach shot. The terms 'fairway' and 'rough' imply a distinction that is theoretical only. Fairways lie between





Rudimentary golf holes fashioned among dunes to attract expatriate workers and their families to Aramco's Dhahran headquarters became the Rolling Hills Golf Club, right



two rows of stakes but possess nearly the same number of rocky outcrops, sand dunes and gravel banks as the rough. However, we meet that emergency promptly by creating local ground rules that permit the use of artificial tees for all shots except putts — and that means from even two feet off the green."

The end of this passage also reveals that this wasn't even Aramco's first layout: "And remember, this is our new course," wrote McConnell, while also confirming the modest nature of these facilities: "We grew discouraged with the one farther south. Now we play on what undoubtedly is only the second worst golf course in the world."

Golf was clearly a welcome diversion for the oilmen and their families, because as Aramco continued to expand, more of these courses were shaped at other campuses: Abqaiq, Udhailiyah and Ras Tanura – the location of the Kingdom's first refinery.

At the main Dhahran campus, where the earliest of these courses emerged, the Rolling Hills Golf Club was created. In 1949 it hosted its first challenge tournament, where all four main camps came to the club for the beginnings of what would become known as the Aramcoama Golf Tournament. Dhahran won the 1949 event, edging out Ras Tanura by just 2.5 points.

When Aramco completed its Trans-Arabian Pipeline to the Mediterranean Sea in 1950, more sand-and-oil courses could be found at 'Tapline towns' like Qaisumah, Badanah and Turaif – communities that were emerging into the northwest of Saudi Arabia, along the route of the pipeline and where its main pumping stations were located.

A passage from a 1972 issue of *Aramco World* magazine describes

what the game was like in those early days: "The balls are red because in the glare of the desert sun you can't always see a white ball against the sand and rocks. The greens are brown, or sometimes black, because they are made of oil-treated sand. The fairways are hard because they are made of sand or marl sprayed with oil and compacted to preserve them from the desert wind. As for the rough, one golfer put it this way: 'There just ain't nothing else out there'."

A generation of Aramco golfers honed a different technique to those who played on turf, learning to pick the ball off the compacted sand, because driving through the ball into the ground could bring an early demise to their clubs.

It would be a half century until Saudi golfers would need to learn a new technique. In the 1990s the Kingdom's







*Golfers at Ras Tanura, above, the site of Aramco's first refinery, played over 'browns' of sand and oil* 

first grass layout was built at Dirab Golf & Country Club, in the shadow of the Tuwaiq escarpment southwest of the capital, Riyadh.

While the new course was well received, it didn't yet signal an opening of the floodgates. Since the turn of the millennium, just a few more grass courses have followed.

In 2002, thanks to the efforts of Saudi Aramco's Community Services, the Rolling Hills club was transformed from sand to grass. In order to properly utilise the space it was decided to convert the 27-hole layout to an 18-hole course of 6,649 yards. The remaining nine was decommissioned, but if you stroll the jebels on either side of the current course, which is now open public land, you can still find old tee boxes, benches and ball washers.

There are two more 18-hole grass courses close to Riyadh. North of the

city, Riyadh Golf Courses started life in 1986 as a sand course, and in 2005 was converted to grass. Each hole is an oasis of green on the desert landscape, with waste areas to be carried from the tee. There are a few lakes, the largest of which includes an island green for the par-three eighth.

Nofa Resorts, around 60 miles southwest of the capital, is a contrast, with wall-to-wall grass. Barrie Gregson – formerly the golf operations manager for DeVere Hotels in the UK – replaced the resort's original nine-hole course with an eighteen-hole layout in 2013. The back nine lies entirely within the interior of the Nofa horse racing track.

Nine-hole grass courses in Saudi Arabia include the par-34 grass layout at the Arizona Golf Resort residential community close to the centre of Riyadh, and the par-36 Safaa Golf Club layout at the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology near Jeddah, which was designed by Dave Sampson of European Golf Design and opened in 2010.

In recent years, as Saudi Arabia has developed its Vision 2030 to diversify the economy and develop public services, golf has climbed the agenda. With the establishment of the Saudi Golf Federation, the organisation of the sport in the country has been formalised and ambitious plans created for the game's future development.

The task of driving this change has fallen to Majed Al Sorour, the CEO of Golf Saudi, a subsidiary of the Saudi Golf Federation. A former professional footballer, playing for Saudi Premier League side Al Nassr FC, Al Sorour went on to study and work in the United States, during which time he also carved out a successful amateur golf career and



The Rolling Hills club in Dhahran (above) was converted to grass in 2002. Fifteen years later, the country's first European Tour host course (right) was built alongside the Red Sea at Royal Greens Golf & Country Club

found a passion for the game that would draw him back to the Kingdom.

Having first been recruited by the Saudi Golf Federation in 2010 as chairman of its Technical Committee, Al Sorour's focus shifted to driving golf participation in the country. "My goal was to develop and create one of the most sought-after national team programmes," he says. Working with public golf courses, primarily around Riyadh, Al Sorour's initiative offered complimentary golf club memberships for young players, the best of whom would go on to represent Saudi Arabia in national team events around the Middle East region. Collaboration with the Ministry of Education and schools has already seen over 18,000 children participate in the game. The fuse has been lit for a new generation of Saudi golfers.

By the middle of the decade, alongside the chairman of the Saudi Golf

Federation – Yasir Al Rumayyan, who is now also the governor of the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia and chairman of Saudi Aramco – the conversation turned to the creation of new golf facilities and a drive towards mass participation. "When we started building the strategy, we looked at pillars," says Al Sorour. "In order to get people to play golf we have to build the golf courses. To turn the rest of the world's minds towards the Kingdom we have to host events. And to sustain golf, we have to create mass participation. It was a puzzle we put together."

The first of a new generation of courses in the Kingdom was completed in 2018, with the opening of Royal Greens Golf & Country Club.

Royal Greens is located in the King Abdullah Economic City, one of the Kingdom's 'megaprojects', on the Red Sea coast north of Jeddah. The course saw Dave Sampson, designer of Safaa



Golf Club's nine holes, return to the Kingdom to lay out an 18-hole course that would provide environmental benefit to the new Emaar Properties community built around it.

The 80-hectare site has just 40 hectares of maintained turf, the rest being the native desert landscape of exposed sand and wadis (valleys). The golf course also provides storm drainage capabilities for the development. "The network of wadis and streams carry water away from the housing and into four large saltwater lakes on the course," said Sampson, in the July 2018 issue of *Golf Course Architecture*.

The opening of Royal Greens also gave Saudi Arabia a course of the quality and with the surrounding infrastructure required to host the European Tour. A deal was signed and the Saudi Invitational was born, with the first event of a three-year



agreement being played in February 2019. That event also gave rise to the first Saudi golf professional, with Othman Almulla, a Saudi Aramco worker, being the first golfer in the Kingdom to compete internationally.

Roval Greens has now also hosted the Ladies European Tour, with the inaugural Aramco Saudi Ladies International taking place in November 2020. Speaking at the opening, Al Rumayyan emphasised the Kingdom's focus for golf developments: "The central tenet of our national golf strategy is sustainability. The ambition is for golf in Saudi Arabia to be recognised for taking a highly advanced approach to establishing the most socially beneficial, economically productive and environmentally responsible sector possible."

Golf Saudi has turned to golf industry experts for best

environmental practices, entering into a partnership with GEO Foundation and the Sports Turf Research Institute of the UK.

"Golf Saudi's strategic planning has rapidly accelerated its position as a leader in golf and sustainability," says Jonathan Smith, CEO of GEO Foundation. "Their foresight, to develop such a comprehensive and robust framework, now provides the clarity and direction for all involved in golf in Saudi Arabia to advance the sport in a way that delivers many positive outcomes, whilst considering closely the critical issues of environmental sustainability encapsulated in The Green Agenda. The underpinning goals around carbon and climate, ecosystem restoration, circular economy and water stewardship are particularly important." Ground has been broken on Golf Saudi's first accredited Amenity Turf

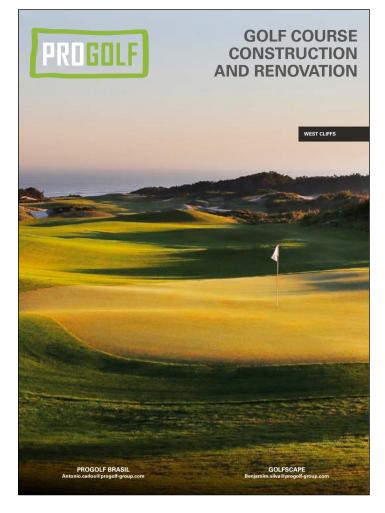
and Landscaping Centre at Dirab Golf & Country Club and a partnership has been established with Atlas Turf in the development and distribution of the most climatically adapted turf species (see box on next page). Training schemes have been established for club and turf managers too. "We have sought to create an educational framework that can accommodate the formulation of a skilled localised workforce, creating the pathway for members of the Saudi community to embark on a range of careers in and around golf, ultimately creating an abundance of new job opportunities," says Al Sorour.

The national golf strategy is the foundation for the development of new courses in the Kingdom. There could be many, as the sport has a core place in the Kingdom's place for future development. "Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman has planted

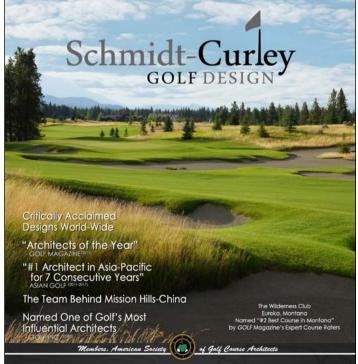
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*Plans for a new residential district close to the 18th century city of Diriyah include a 27-hole course designed by Greg Norman's firm* 

the seed of making golf an integral part of the lifestyle of Saudi Arabia," says Al Sorour. "He has said we have to improve the life of Saudi people. And seeing greens around you will improve your life."

Al Sorour currently expects 13-16 new courses to be built in the Kingdom by 2030. To date, details of just two of these have been announced. Greg Norman's firm has signed an agreement to create a 27-hole golf course as part of a new residential district developed by the Diriyah Gate Development Authority, in a valley northwest of Riyadh.

Speaking about the project at the Golf Saudi Summit in 2020, Norman said: "I have never designed anything on this scale before, the site is massive, and the cliffs are magnificent. There will not be a lot of blowing up or moving around which fits into my mantra of the 'least disturbance approach'. Once I walked the site and understood the corridors and the land plan, I was mesmerised by it."

And in early 2021, Golf Saudi announced that Nicklaus Design will create a new golf course as part of the massive Qiddiya development, supported by the Kingdom's Public Investment Fund, that is already in construction southwest of Riyadh.

Qiddiya is expected to become the capital for sports, entertainment and the arts in Saudi Arabia, with residential, retail, hospitality and industrial components that will stretch over a 100 square kilometre area. The first phase, scheduled to open in 2023, will feature a Six Flags theme park.

The new golf course will be framed by the Tuwaiq mountain range. Jack Nicklaus says: "I've already spent time looking at the topography of the land, images of the backdrop and terrain, and discussing with our design team a strategy for the course. The design will fully integrate the natural environment and the beautiful Qiddiya



### Sustainable partnership

Golf Saudi has teamed up with Atlas Turf for sustainable turfgrass excellence

As Golf Saudi moves forward with its ambitious plans for golf course development in the Kingdom, Atlas Turf International is their designated partner for sustainable turfgrasses. The two companies are working together to establish a turf farm in Saudi Arabia, which will offer licensed and certified turfgrasses.

Currently under construction, the farm will grow paspalum, bermuda and zoysia grass varieties specifically selected for genetic purity, as well as maximum sustainability and performance in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region. The chosen varieties offer dialled-in turf solutions for the unique climate through salt, heat and drought tolerance, requirement of fewer inputs and quicker establishment and grow-in rates.

"Given the importance that Golf Saudi has placed on sustainability, we have challenged Atlas Turf to help us create a vital part of the supply chain with locally grown, environmentally appropriate turfgrasses," says Majed Al Sorour, CEO of Golf Saudi.

Also, in line with Golf Saudi's goals, the turf farm will include a research facility to develop improved varieties of turfgrass and a training programme for Saudi nationals interested in pursuing careers in turf management, production and research.

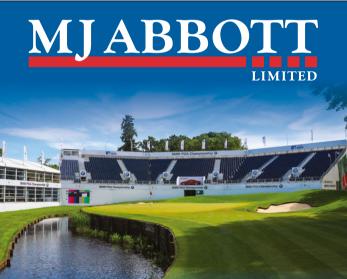
"The opportunity to partner with Golf Saudi on this progressive endeavour is a major step forward for us," says John Holmes, president of Atlas Turf. "Our focus has always been to provide high-quality turf that meets both design and environmental challenges. This joint venture allows us to advance even further by incorporating sustainability at the farm level, the project level and beyond."

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landscape, bringing together green spaces and mountainous terrain to form a picturesque canvas for both a beautiful and challenging golf course."

There are plans for another course at Qiddiya, but the designer is yet to be announced.

The choices of Norman and Nicklaus fit with Al Sorour's desire for "branded" courses. Gary Player has become an ambassador for Golf developments that unfold.

It may not be too long before we see courses designed by a Saudi national, too. Landscape designer Abdullah Kamakhi has been accepted into the European Institute of Golf Course Architects (EIGCA), positioning him to become Saudi Arabia's first golf course architect.

Al-Sorour says: "This is one of the most rewarding parts of the job, seeing

#### "It is easy to see how golf could complement an emission-free green vision for the future"

Saudi and was a keynote speaker at the Golf Saudi Summit, where other firms headed by signature designers – including Nick Faldo, Ernie Els and Phil Mickelson – were also represented. But that brand needn't necessarily be a former pro golfer – big-name architecture firms including Golfplan, Robert Trent Jones II and Dye Designs were present too and will be keeping a close eye on the Abdullah thrive in a career path that, only a few years ago, didn't exist within Saudi Arabia."

The latest radical infrastructure project to be revealed in Saudi Arabia is the extraordinary 'The Line' in the northwest of the country. A zerocarbon city built over 100 miles in a straight line, there will be no streets or transport above ground, with the entire metropolis accessible by a five minute walk to an underground metro, capable of transporting people from one end to the other in just 20 minutes. It is easy to see how golf could complement an emission-free green vision for the future.

Al Sorour says: "The clean, hightech environment that The Line will create will no doubt allow golf courses to flourish due to their aesthetics, environmental development and consideration for health and nature in conjunction with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, turning the Red Sea coastline into a hub for golf."

While their eyes are firmly fixed on the future, those running the game in Saudi Arabia have a deep respect for the game's past over the desert sand. Al Sorour's dream is for a really great desert tournament over four rounds, that alternate between desert and grass. "Seeing these golf courses built with sand and oil is heart-warming," he says. "It's surreal, you visit them, and you can feel it – those old souls taking a break from going out to discover oil." GCA

### Playing it cool

#### Oregon resort gives guests the option of a round in the snow

hen snow covers a golf course, play stops. Right? Not at Silvies Valley Ranch, in Oregon.

From November 2020 to March 2021, the resort set up a five-hole loop of its par-three Chief Egan course for 'cool golf'.

Guests use high-loft clubs and brightly coloured tennis balls. It's not the first year the resort has offered it, but they have refined the concept – from an eight-inch hole in the ground to 10-inch buckets located in front of the greens.

"You play with one club – an eight iron, nine iron or pitching wedge," said Sean Hoolehan, course superintendent at Silvies Valley Ranch, who came up with the idea. "When you hit the bucket, you have holed out. If you hit your ball into the bucket, you subtract one stroke off your score.

"Most holes are about 80 yards long. The second is downhill about 30 feet and the conditions constantly change.

*Golfers play with high-loft clubs and neongreen tennis balls and hit to 10-inch buckets*  If there is fresh snow, the surface can be soft, and you get no roll. If the snow has been on the ground for a while it gets firm on top, and the ball may roll towards the hole. After a few players have made it around, the footprints become an obstacle and you are forced to play through the air more."

Hoolehan, who proudly holds the 'cool golf' record of two under, notes

that most winter guests are not what he would describe as core golfers. "It's less intimidating, and guests quickly get competitive because it's really all about having fun," he said. While a few players head back to the lodge after five holes, most opt for another loop. "Every player I have taken out leaves feeling like it was one of the most fun experiences they have had." **GCA** 



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