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Why would Peter Oosterhuis, once one of the biggest names in European golf, leave the Hollywood set at the prestigious Riviera Country Club in Los Angeles for a pay-and-play course on a former rubbish tip near Heathrow Airport?

Because Stockley Park is special. It is a Robert Trent Jones Senior design. It has USGA-spec greens and tees, and wall-to-wall irrigation. Set in the middle of a 250-acre country park, the 18-hole course is owned by the London Borough of Hillingdon but run by the PGA European Tour, Mark McCormack's International Management Group and Stockley Park Consortium, the developers of the course and nearby business park.

And although it opened less than a year ago (last June), it has staged a Challenge Tour event and it is set to host a Senior Tour competition.

"The intention is to have a great golf course that anyone can play," says course manager Cameron McMillan, the youngest of Jack's sons.

Furniture and fittings

Because it is new and different, we thought we'd use it as our case study for our annual course furniture and fittings feature.

There is nothing too fancy here because the 6723-yard course is in the middle of a public park and things could easily get stolen or vandalised.

What they have got that's a bit different is EC regulation signage warning pedestrians of golf in play, horses, vehicles crossings, not to swim in the three lakes, keep to the footpaths etc. These signs have standard colours (like road signs) and pictures as well as words for the ethnic minorities who don't speak English. There are also signs telling horse riders to keep to the bridlepath and
telling dog owners where they can exercise their pets. One particularly interesting idea is information boards telling everyone about the wildlife and trees in the park.

Hole information is carried on 2ft high 'telegraph poles', but Cameron is thinking of replacing these because the elm wood is splitting and Peter thinks they're intrusive. They would prefer plates set in the ground.

Also on the tees are pineapple-shaped tee markers. There are eight ball washers on the course and half a dozen rubbish bins in addition to the bins in the park. There are no benches for golfers, just for the public in the park.

The developers used gravel and London clay from the flat site for the business park, when construction began in 1985. The holes created were filled in with rubbish from the business park area. The capping was taken off and more landfill was put on top of landfill to create the contours Robert Trent Jones Snr wanted. The site was then recapped.

They knew the landfill would generate methane for 10-15 years so they installed a methane extraction system which sucks methane to the far end of the golf course and burns it off - enough to power a 1 megawatt generator for ten years but the cost of building and running a generating plant was too prohibitive.

Transition layer

The golf course construction continued with the creation of a "transition layer" (subsoil) upon which man-made topsoil (a mixture of the original capping material and sewage sludge) was put. This is proving to be a very good growing medium: "We'll have to cut the fairways daily in the summer," says Cameron. Because it was man-made, they had to "plant" 1.5 million non-casting earthworms.

During the construction, 4.5 million cubic metres of material was moved in nine months. To get a better idea of how much earth this is, imagine a one acre base with all this soil and rubbish piled on top -- it would be higher than Mt Snowdon.

Once the land had been shaped, approximately £3.5 million was spent turning it into a golf course. The fairways and rough were seeded with perennial ryegrass and smooth stalk meadow grass, the tees with perennial ryegrass, smooth stalk meadow grass and fescue, and the greens with Colonial bent/fescue. Poa annua found its own way there -- "I inherited that," Cameron is quick to point out.

140,000 indigenous trees were planted -- a mixture of fast and slow-growing species. The course also has 56 bunkers (large and unusual shapes, as you'd expect from an American architect).

The tees and greens were built to US standards, so they need a lot of water and feeding, but...
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Information boards tell park-goers all about the trees and wildlife.

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