The World's Best Golf provides armchair view of top courses

By Peter Biais

Want to visit the world's top courses from the comfort of your favorite recliner? Then crack open a beer and settle back with William H. Davis' The World's Best Golf.

The founder of Golf Digest tapped his own globe-trotting golfing experience and the talents of internationally known photographers Stephen Suerle of Golf Digest and Brian Morgan of Scotland to create a 312-color volume of the world's best facilities.

Davis organized the golf globe into clusters, regions "where you can go off and play golf on a number of different courses and stay in one place. That's the best way to enjoy a trip..." Clusters are found within the United States, Great Britain, Ireland, continental Europe, Australia, Canada, the Far East, Mexico and the Caribbean.

Each cluster lists several courses along with course type (private, public, resort), designer, yardages and general information regarding layout, history and best-known holes. The Los Angeles cluster, for example, describes three George C. Thomas Jr. layouts — Riviera and Los Angeles country clubs and Bel Air.

"Ben Crenshaw commented that he enjoyed a Thomas course because of its subtleties," Davis noted.

The goal of the photos was to give a feel for not only how the course looked, but also how it played. Suerle and Morgan succeeded admirably.

Of award-winning caliber is a shot through the cactus behind the ninth green and leading back along a moon-lit fairway that disappears into the distant purple mountains surrounding Forest Highlands in Arizona.

And the viewer gets all too clear a picture of the lack of level lies along the 14th hole at Scotland's St. Andrews.

Davis shows an understanding of the difficulties facing today's architect in matching these tapestries from the past, and of the important environmental role played by superintendents.

"Protecting our wetlands and our deserts, the use of pesticides and fungicides and the management of our water resources are the major challenges," he writes in the preface.

"As Jack Nicklaus admits, 'Muirfield in the United States wouldn't have been built if today's wetland restrictions were in force.'" Davis pays homage to the designers who work with today's environmental regulations yet still craft works of art, like Dan Maples, who built a 600-foot bridge between the first and second holes to span an environmental problem at The Witch in Myrtle Beach, S.C.

And despite fears that modern designers are laying out courses to make picturesque pictures for magazines, rather than to be easily maintained or enjoyable for golfers, Davis believes "the courses of the 1990s will come to stand tall next to the revered giants."

The World's Best Golf costs $49.95 and is published by Pocket Books.

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