Designing from memory
Three legends join forces to recreate their 18 favorite holes

BY MARK LESLIE

B RASELTON, Ga. - Special memories. Special people. Togethers, they translate into a special golf course, according to all parties involved.

Gene Sarazen, Sam Snead and Kathy Whitworth — Hall of Fame legends all — have combined their golfing memories, pleasures and partialities and designed The Legends at Chateau Elan, which will open in mid-July. Joining highly rated sister course Chateau Elan Golf Club, the new 18-hole Legends track is "the essence" of the three famed golfers' favorite holes in the world, said coordinating architect Denis Griffiths.

"Each one picked holes memorable to them," said the Brancelton designer. "We wanted to provide potentially the same shot or memories to other golfers. It involves similar strategy at a similar hole, like No. 12 at Augusta National."

Sarazen loved it. Whitworth had a blast. Snead had "a lot of fun."

"I've been out there quite often to look at my work because I'm anxious to see it," said Sarazen from his Marco Island, Fla., home.

"I'm so glad they [owners Don and Nancy Panoz] included a woman," said Whitworth. "To be in the company of Sam and Gene was quite nice."

Kathy and I played as a team years ago on the West Coast. We played pretty well. She still plays well," Snead said, adding that working with old friends was a joy.

Snead, who 2-1/2 years ago joined architect Robert Muir Graves, was the only one of the three who had previous design experience. In fact, the 90-year-old Sarazen, who has played thousands of golf courses, had never seen one under construction.

But Griffiths, who designed the original Chateau Elan course, said working with this...
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"Augusta's 13th where you have a really good drive. So it was a fun hole to play. I'd rather it be my decision [the course]." Whitworth shared her favorites and "gave my stamp of approval" when the course was complete.

"A lot of the holes Gene and Sam picked were certainly ones I would like the opportunity to play again," she said. "We generally agree that a lot of the holes we selected or liked were not necessarily hard holes, but there was something unique we liked about them... Maybe they were a driving hole or a precision hole. A finesse type hole, or the par-5 at Augusta National. Rolling land. And they all fit into that land very well."

Saying "I don't profess to be an architect at all," Whitworth shared her favorites and "gave my stamp of approval" when the course was complete.

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Hills: 'Enviro-golf' is here to stay

"A decade ago there were occasional sites that required sensitive environmental treatment, while today every potential golf course site must have a series of environmental impact studies," explains Art Hills, president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

Hills acknowledges the impact environmentalists had in alerting the golf industry that many sites required special treatment, and accommodation should be made for birds, fish and other wildlife.

Ronald G. Dodson, president of the Audubon Society of New York, says that from his perspective, America's 14,000 golf courses provide the equivalent of nearly 1,500 square miles open space.

"We've had to accommodate butterflies and owls in California...gila monsters in Arizona and sand-manders in Massachusetts," said Hills, who noted that the industry now has the capability to regularly engineer, design and construct complex solutions to the most difficult ecological problems. "And that technical ability will multiply year by year."

The Carmel Valley Ranch in Carmel, Calif, is a good example of "enviro-golf."