Globetrotting a small (golf) world

Morocco: Golf void beckons

By Hal Phillips

RABAT, Morocco — Year-round golf destinations on the order of Palm Springs are few and far between in the European marketplace, where seaside resorts rarely feature enough courses to satisfy large numbers of golf-only tourists. The Moroccan business community would like nothing better than to fill this void.

With five projects underway and at least five more in the planning stages, Morocco will soon have more golf facilities than any country in North Africa. Combine these totals with its 14 existing facilities and Morocco — with its miles of coastline along the Atlantic and Mediterranean — can easily compete with Europe's leading warm-weather destinations: Portugal's Algarve region and Spain's Costa del Sol.

"It's only the last few years that Morocco has thought of golf as a pure touristic element," explained Ron Fream, whose 36-hole Bahia project remains in planning north of Casablanca. "The continued on page 48

Egypt: Hopes of new money

By Hal Phillips

HELLOPOLIS, Egypt — If Larry Packard keeps his current pace, friends at the American Society of Golf Course Architects may start referring to this venerable designer as "The Pharaoh." With 18 holes in planning here East of Cairo and 18 more under construction across town, near the Pyramids, Packard will have soon designed more than half the golfholes in Egypt, a country he describes as "ripe for development."

Before Packard arrived in the Middle East two years ago, there were only 36 holes in Egypt, in Alexandria, 9 near Aswan in Southern Egypt, and 9 across from the Cairo Hilton. "There seemed to be an 18-hole golf course across from the Hilton in Cairo," Packard explained. "It was run by the British, who wouldn't allow any Egyptians to play on it. When the British left, the Egyptians took it over and continued on page 49

Hills tapped for $500M project

DELRAY BEACH, Fla. — Arthur Hills, has joined the development team of the newly announced Addison Reserve, a 653-acre, $500 million master-planned golf and country club community planned for south Palm Beach County. Arthur Hills & Associates, with offices in Toledo, Ohio and Orlando, Florida, will design the 27 holes of golf planned for the Addison Reserve community, announced Project Director Craig Perna.

Hills & Associates have been very active in Florida with dozens of golf projects, including 19 courses in the Naples area, alone. The Addison Reserve, located on the last prime tract in the Boca Raton/Delray Country Club Market in Delray, is being developed by joint venture partners Taylor Woodrow Communities and Kenco Communities. In addition to the Arthur Hills designed 27 holes of championship golf, the Addison Reserve will feature an attractive mix of single-family homes, a Mizner-inspired multi-purpose clubhouse, and an extensive tennis complex. Continued on the first 18 holes of the golf course are scheduled to begin in early 1995.

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Q&A: J. Michael Poellot

talks design — globally

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Japan, and somebody focuses on some other area. There’s overlap, but Bob Moore is involved in what you might call the western rim, or Southeast Asia, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. Brian Costello has historically been most prominent in Japan and China; and Mark Hollinger is also prominent in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan.

GCN: Do you consider the U.S. an untapped territory?

JMP: Well, certainly untapped for us. We made a very determined effort some years ago to position ourselves in the Pacific arena. And it’s proved a wise decision. But we’re very excited to announce that we believe 1995 is the year JMP is going to penetrate the domestic market. I think there’s an opportunity for us here because we’re bringing back a level of detail that we’ve been able to express in Asia — because of their appreciation for detail—that other architects haven’t been able to accomplish here.

GCN: Are there contemporary architects whose work you admire?

JMP: I would have to say, philosophically, that the way we conduct our business and the way we like the game to be played are more akin to what Tom Fazio and Rees Jones are doing, and less of what Pete Dye is doing today.

GCN: That’s interesting because a great many people associate Pete Dye with detail. How do you differentiate between the detail you would bring back from Asia and perhaps overdoing it?

JMP: “Overdoing it” is a good way to say it. What we have tried to do in Asia is react to the techniques they have used to build golf courses themselves, which is a very “engineering” approach to golf course architecture. In so doing, while working on some difficult sites, their meager attempts at recreating nature were poor at best. What we’ve been able to accomplish in Asia is take a very difficult site and have it be — while never something superior to nature — certainly an acceptable substitute. We’ve been able to turn mountaintops and swamps into very playable, enjoyable areas.

Hollinger: We spend a great deal of time on landscaping, which most of our contemporaries spend very little, if any, time on. For every project we spend hundreds of hours preparing a detailed landscaping plan — and that includes water features, rock outcrops and tree formations; all kinds of visual landscape elements... That’s some of what Mike is talking about, and some of what think we can bring to bear in the domestic market. That’s not to say other courses don’t have nice tree plantings, but it’s taking it to another level.

GCN: Minimalism — or, at least, talking about it — is definitely in vogue these days. How do you reconcile that with your approach?

JMP: When you say

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Bangkok’s North Park shows a special environmental sensitivity by designer J. Michael Poellot. One of scores of tracks designed by Poellot in the Asia-Pacific region, North Park opened in 1994.

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Q&A: Poellot

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minimalism, are you making an analogy with what some people are calling "classical design"? I have to smile sometimes when I hear an architect say he's returning to "classical design," because I don't think there is a classical design — any more than there is a return from computers to slide rules. Circumstances today are so different than what they were 50, 60, 70 years ago. Sites are so different today than what Mackenzie had to work with.

Maintenance innovations have made things different. And, most subtile of all, player expectations are different. To try and revert is pointless. In fact, tied in with that question is our philosophy with regard to the whole environmental debate going on today. Many architects and environmentalists are at loggerheads over development. And maybe I'm stepping out on a limb here, but I would say we're 180 degrees from most architects on that issue. The issues raised today are sound, a lot of them. In the long run, cooperation between architects and environmentalists is only going to create a better game of golf. It will get golf out of the wet areas and onto dry land again, which is going to result in lower construction costs, lower maintenance costs. Long term it'll make golf more affordable. Nature survives. Golf survives.

It's hard to swallow that today, with architects who've been working hard on projects that are resolved in these long, multiyear approval processes. I guess the normal reaction is to fight back. But if we can learn to hold hands on this, we're all going to be better off for it.

GCN: What have you learned from Robert Trent Jones II and Dick Phelps that you still carry with you today?

JMP: I wouldn't say that I learned. I would say that I was exposed to certain aspects of the business. It was more of an apprenticeship, and in that process I was given the opportunity to develop my own style, my own technique, my own philosophy. To try and articulate that philosophy is tough, but I think it's not something you create from nothing. There has to be an inherent love of the game that has to, somehow, be expressed, either through architecture or as a player. It calls upon a tremendous amount of vision and imagination — coupled with determination. I think it's one thing to come up with a beautiful set of plans, but it's another to hang in there for the duration of a project, get it done and get it done right. And fight for what you believe in.

GCN: We ran a feature on The Ratings Game last month. How do you view how these courses are rated and judged, and whether it's changed design?

JMP: It's an extremely political game. We just went through that process because one of the magazines recently visited one of our projects in Japan [Caledonia Golf and Country Club in Chiba Prefecture]. The interesting thing about these competitions, in a way, is that virtually half of the 100 best courses were designed before 1940. And we're beginning to see that process because one of the present-day architects even knew which end of the pencil to hold. It goes to show that there were values instilled in the game of golf 50, 60 years ago that we haven't learned to recreate today, as hard as we might try.

GCN: Do you have favorite "old-time" architects? You must have seen a lot of C.H. Alison in Japan.

JMP: Yes, we've seen a lot of Alison. He's revered over there for his famous bunkers, which were really novel when constructed...it sounds trite, but we admire Mackenzie. He's a mentor of ours. Tillinghast. Ross.

Great names from the past, but they've left a legacy of golf that is hard to surpass today.

GCN: Was there a course you played as a kid that got you interested in golf course architecture?

JMP: When I was a kid, I played a nine-hole golf course that would be kindly referred to as a goat pasture. That was my introduction to golf, but that was all I could afford. But through that experience I learned to love the game. And I loved it for many other reasons: What it brought out in me; the opportunities to be with other people; competitive spirit. And I'm sure there were disappointments at the time, but I didn't know what they were.

It's only more recently that I really understand what constitutes a great golf course. But it certainly wasn't from a childhood experience.

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