

Q&A: Poellot

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an end in itself. Here in the United States, the emphasis seems to have been that golf is one of any number of amenities required to sell real estate. The more houses you could line up on the fairways, the better. But in Asia, it was golf for golf's sake.

GCN: That has turned around the last several years in the U.S.

JMP: Yes, I think it has — for a couple reasons. There seems to be a subtle shift away from cookie-cutter planning, where you lined up the homes along the fairways. Now they are creating courses that are intended to be great playing experiences in their own right. If that necessitates building a core golf course, then so be it.

Also, I think there is an upsurge in daily-fee courses being built, often with no associated real estate. There has to be a happy balance between the two.

GCN: What is your particular strength?

JMP: It's a commitment to the project. It's being available. We're not playing the "name" game where you're buying a marquee name to put on your sweater. We're selling a product. And the only way to create that product is to be there and do it. That's another shift in our approach. We are not going to do a lot of projects. We will do a very limited, special number in key market areas of the United States.

We are already identifying what those key markets are.

I'm a bit overwhelmed by the interest in our firm. We are being highly selective. When a client comes to us, I want to be sure we're not opening another one up 5 miles down the road that will be competing with him.

We have a high-profile project in New York State, one in the D.C. metro area, one in Florida on a magnificent site on the water, another in the Caribbean and a couple here in California that we're excited about.

That's it right now. We want to get these gems polished and open for people to see and experience.

GCN: With your projects having been in such faraway places, has it been difficult to get back into the American marketplace, seemingly without skipping a beat?

JMP: Golf is an international game. Even though much of my work has been in Asia and the Pacific Rim, I know an owner of one of our Japanese courses has close contacts with Augusta National; he has been here to play and his American friends have traveled there. Golf writers here in the States have seen those courses. A lot of the well-known golf photographers have shot them. The word got out on the street about what we have done. People sooner or later recognize that.

Sometimes when one door closes, another opens. We've been blessed that that

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Poellot's U.S. jobs: excitement mounts

By MARK LESLIE

CARMEL, Calif — The Golf Trail at Santa Lucia here, 10 minutes from the gates of Pebble Beach, will be "a landmark project for the U.S. — a prototype of how to do it right," according to golf course architect J. Michael Poellot.

Here sits 20,000 acres of "the most pristine California landscape you could imagine — like you envision California a couple hundred years ago," Poellot said. "You ride through the gates of this Spanish Land Grant property with big hacienda. It's untouched.

"I call it Jurassic Park. There are bobcats, eagles and wild turkeys running all over the place."

Poellot's firm, JMP Golf Design Group, has been working with Sandy Tatum on the design for several years. But the developer, Rancho San Carlos Partnership, is bringing in Tom Fazio as the "signature architect" to "polish the gem," he said.

A joint venture between Olympus Real Estate Corp. of Dallas and Westbrook Partners LLC of New York, Rancho San Carlos Partnership hopes to begin construction this year. Of the 20,000 acres, 18,000 will be a permanent open-space nature preserve which the owners will fund in perpetuity. Very

limited housing will be built on site.

"It is the most well-documented, well-conceived, environmentally perfect as any golf course project can be, in a tough situation," Poellot said. "They have spent \$120 million to \$130 million just in land acquisition and permitting costs.

Poellot's intricate double-drainage system and environmentally sound design principles have already won a National Merit Award from the American Society of Landscape Architects. Water running down hillsides is intercepted, piped under the fairways and released on the other side, while irrigation and rain water is collected and contained within a second drainage system, and stored in a lake to be reused on the course.

Other JMP projects stateside are:

- Wild Hawk in Sacramento will hold a grand opening in August. It is a daily-fee course on very flat, barren agricultural land, and Poellot hailed it as "a good example of how to build a great golf course with a reasonable budget."

- Sterling Forest in Tuxedo, N.Y., situated on 2,000 acres, is in planning while the town updates its general plan. The property used to contain

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Palmer Design Co. honors Charles Fraser

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. — Charles E. Fraser of Hilton Head Island, S.C., has been presented The PCDC Award, the highest honor given by Palmer Course Design Co.

An award for innovative excellence, performance and accomplishment, it is presented to an individual or organization for creative contributions that continue to have a positive impact on the business of golf course development.

Fraser is considered the dean of recreational and golf development. Founder and chairman of

the Sea Pines Co. from 1956-1983, "Charles Fraser has generated a record of excellence that is unmatched in our industry," said Arnold Palmer, president of the Palmer Course Design Co.

"All of us at Palmer Course Design are extremely excited and honored that Charles is the first recipient of our award," said Ed Seay, Palmer Design's chief operating officer.



Charles Fraser

Poellot in U.S.

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another 15,000 acres which state agencies bought and turned into Sterling Forest State Park.

Much of the site is an old iron mine dating back to Revolutionary War. A low-density housing development for senior citizens is planned, along with limited commercial and office space, with the cornerstone being the 18-hole

course and 9-hole executive track.

• Coyote Creek, a short course in San Jose, which is in the planning stages.

• An unnamed 18-hole high-end municipal course under planning in Pleasanton, Calif.

• Roddy Ranch, a stand-alone 18-hole public facility in Antioch, Calif., developed by Roddy Ranch LLC, is under planning but expected to be fast-tracking through the permitting process.

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has happened to us. With the Indonesian crisis and other things in Asia slamming the door on projects, opportunities have been coming in as frequently, if not more so, here in the United States.

We are still an international firm. But given the opportunities being given to us in the U.S., we will be much more highly selective in what we will do. We are giving thought to a project in Brazil.

GCN: Do you see a difference in what developers want from one part of the world to another? How about in the States?

JMP: It depends on the country. In developing countries, like Central and South America, golf is relatively new in their marketplace. Just having a golf course in a development is all they need to start selling real estate. They're not at the level where they can differentiate between a cluster of fairways and a truly great golf experience.

There is a big difference. We have a huge legacy of understanding the game in the United States and, here, what sells it is the quality of the product. A developer in Japan, for example, wants a course he can distinguish and differentiate from the one down the street; and there are a lot down the street. It has to be special to market, because historically the membership fees have been astronomical. That is not so true today, but historically it is.

There is a little difference between developers here in the United States. There are certain "name" architects who have been around for quite some time. Pretty much every major area has a few of those already. Perhaps that's why we're getting the response we're getting: People are looking for a new face, for something different, something that has a little marketing edge over one of the old, established labels.

GCN: Do you have a favorite "classical architect"?

JMP: That would have been a very easy answer a month ago. I would have said Alister Mackenzie as most architects would initially respond. But having seen some of George Thomas' work [Riviera, Bel-Aire, and particularly Los Angeles Country Club], I was overwhelmed.

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