

McFarlane brings a bit of Scotland to America, and vice versa for Garl

By MARK LESLIE

LAKE MARY, Fla. — Citing the travel both ways “across the pond,” with Brits seeking golf course design jobs in The States and Americans taking on projects in the United Kingdom, American designer Ron Garl believes he has jumped out in front of the pack on both accounts.

Ending a search that began two years ago, Garl has hired Scotsman Steven McFarlane. On the one hand, McFarlane will bring “a touch of Scotland” to the Garl team’s designs in North America and elsewhere around the world. On the other hand, having the Scotsman in his stable should help land projects in the UK, Garl said.

A native of Troon, McFarlane graduated from the University of Glasgow with a degree in civil engineering and spent the last 12 years working with British architects Hawtree Golf Design.

“We worked on the renovation of a lot of the old courses in Britain, including Portmarnock and Royal Birkdale,” McFarlane said. “A lot of that rubs off. It’s going back to the traditional look in design. That style of golf suites me quite well.”

McFarlane has spent years playing the great courses of the UK.

Yet, having married a North Carolina lady, he has spent a lot of time on the East Coast, particularly the Carolinas, Georgia and the Boston area.

“I’ve been planning to come over [to work] for quite a few years,” McFarlane said. “It seems a great time to be working in The States. The golf industry is very bouyant now.”

At this point in time, he added, there is “a far greater scope of sites” in America than Great Britain.

“In England — and Scotland,

to a lesser extent — not many courses are being built,” McFarlane said. “Scotland only has five or six courses per year being built. Twenty to 30 in England. Planning and restrictions on decent land are so difficult now in England. You certainly can’t get any linksland, though in Ireland you can. In England

it’s very difficult to even get woodland, or parkland, or heathland either for environmental reasons or the ‘landscape character,’ where they call the land of Special Scientific Interest.

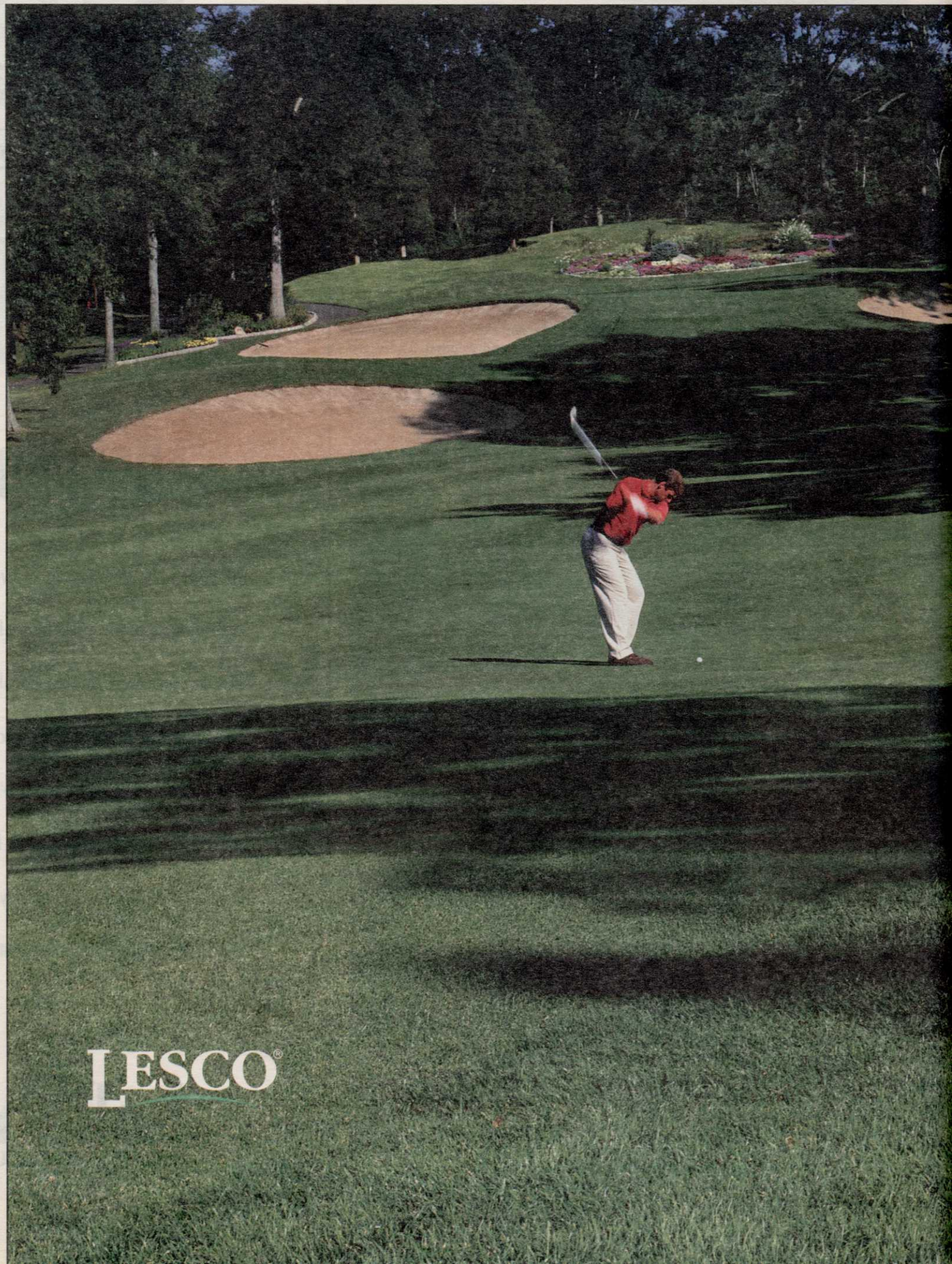
“On 90 percent of the courses where you can only get permission, it is really dull farmland.”

Working with long-time Garl designers Ricky and Ty Nix, McFarlane is especially excited to work on what Garl called “a true Irish-type links course” in Port St. Lucie, called Waterville; a seaside site in Puerto Rico called Cayo Largo, which has 2-1/2 miles of oceanfront; a property 30 miles south of Salt Lake

City, Utah; and a couple of courses in Costa Rica.

“I have worked on a lot of different types of land — different characters and different environments throughout Northern and Southern Europe, and on desert land,” McFarlane said. “I adapt what I’ve learned to each project

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RTJ II changes

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with RTJ II, Jones said. The two are currently collaborating at the Golf Course De Lage Vuursche in The Nether lands, which is in the early stages of construction. They will also work together at Real Club Puerta de Hierro in Madrid, Spain.

Phillips, a lead designer with Robert Trent Jones II for 17 years, began his own company in 1997. His current work includes The Kingsbarns Golf Links 7 miles from the home of golf, St. Andrews, Scotland, which is scheduled to be completed in the spring; and Golf Eichenheim, in the Austrian Alps, due to be finished in the fall.

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, S.C. — The opening of Belfair's new East Course offers golfers the choice of putting on Crenshaw bentgrass or Bermudagrass.

The new Tom Fazio-designed East Course, a par-71 layout measuring 6,959 yards from the championship tees, features Crenshaw bentgrass putting surfaces. Although the course will be open for limited play through the spring, the East Course will be closed through the summer in preparation for a fall grand opening.

At Belfair, choose bent or Bermuda

"We still have some work to be done before the course is completely ready. But most of that work needs to be done during the summer growing season," said Belfair Director of Golf Keith Goodaker. "So in the meantime, we want to give our members a chance to test out the East Course."

Over the summer, the Bermudagrass that carpets tees, fairways and rough will

be grown in and native grasses, including Bahia, sweetgrass and spartina, will be planted. Ten holes on the East Course were open for limited play last summer, while construction was under way on the remaining eight holes. Therefore, for virtually half of the course, the coming summer will be the first growing season for the Bermuda-grass. This explains the planned summer closing and the fall grand opening.

The original West Course at Belfair, also a Fazio design but with Tifward Bermudagrass greens, opened in 1996.

In designing the East Course, Fazio created a traditional style course that encourages walking.

Describing it, Fazio said: "The style is a combination of looks, but the overall result is distinctive. There is some Pine Valley in it; there's some Wild Dunes in it. There's some Jupiter Hills in it, some Shinnecock, some old classic style. But when you put it all together, it really has its own style."

McFarlane and Garl

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and site. You look at the constraints you have, what grows in that area, and what type of course fits that environment. It's a matter of absorbing all the information from all the sites and working your style onto that canvas."

Hiring McFarlane, Garl said, came as a response to developers.

"Constantly, clients keep talking about the Scottish influence," he said. "It looks simple, but to do it correctly is extremely difficult. If you do it right, it looks great. If you don't, it looks terrible, and there's a fine line between the two."

"A lot of people say they have a Scottish design," Garl added. "But, personally, I think they miss the visual impact. Most people think 'Scottish' just means no trees. So if they get a piece of fairly flat ground with no trees, they say, 'We've got a Scottish golf course.' But it's the subtle nuances and also the feeling you get while you're there."

Asked if he thought he could duplicate that feel, Garl said, "We think if you get the right look — and landscape it properly, which is often greatly overlooked — we can duplicate it."

Meanwhile, Garl intends to "bring something to the table that nobody else can find in Great Britain: an American firm that has Scottish and American architects."

Having an architect in the office who lived there, he said, "we feel we have the upper hand for somebody who wants to hire an American firm. We have someone who has worked over there for years, knows the contractors, knows the environmental responsibilities, understands the customs, knows who are the best local shapers and contractors."

"Everybody talks about design being our business. But there is another side of it that is extremely important, and that is picking the right people to build it and getting the job done properly and on time. Steven has done that. Americans have no experience in doing it over there. Everyone who goes over there is reinventing the wheel."

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