Retooled Bay area layout reopens as Monarch Bay

**By JAY FINEGAN**

SAN LEANDRO, Calif. — An $8.1-million renovation has transformed the San Leandro Golf Complex into a sparkling 27-hole layout now called Monarch Bay Golf Club.

Set on San Francisco Bay, the remodeled facility gives Bay area residents a retooled championship layout and a spiffed up nine-hole executive track called Marina Golf Course.

Architect John Harbottle completely redesigned both courses in this project undertaken jointly by the City of San Leandro and American Golf Corp. It's believed to be one of the largest privately funded renovations ever on a municipal golf facility. "American Golf brought the money to do the development and the city guaranteed the lease," Harbottle said.

Measuring over 7,000 yards, the 18-hole daily-fee track — the Tony Lema Course — holds the distinction of being the second longest and most difficult par-71 layout in the state. However, multiple tees give players a range of options.

Named after local hero and British Open champion Tony Lema, the links-style layout meanders over gentle terrain. Sixteen of 18 holes enjoy views of San Francisco Bay, with some parts of the course bordered by natural wetlands. 

**FIRM, FAST FAIRWAYS**

The executive nine-holer was closed for a year for its renovation, followed by the year-long shutdown of the Lema layout, which reopened in March.

"We renovated both of them top to bottom," Harbottle said. "There wasn't a blade of grass left unturned. The Tony Lema Course is totally different now. A lot of the layout remains the same, because the holes fit the terrain very well. But green locations have shifted, and the bunkering is completely changed."

Steep, sod-faced bunkers placed throughout the course create a complex design, where careful strategy is rewarded with shortcuts and open approaches to the greens. The firm, fast fairways and prevailing winds make for a true links feel. The challenging layout is already scheduled to host the USGA Mid-Amateur Championship qualifying round in August.

**LANDFILL LOCATION**

The $8.1-million budget wasn't as large as it sounds, according to Harbottle.

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Barbaron, Southeastern co-building the North Course at Bonita Bay’s Mediterran

**NAPLES, Fla. — Last December, on the same day the Bonita Bay Group opened the South Course at Mediterran, the company broke ground for its second layout, the North Course, two years ahead of schedule.**

Now, in an innovative move to ensure the opening of the North Course this December, the company has hired two separate golf course contractors to build the Tom Fazio-designed layout. 

"This is the first time we have worked side by side with another contractor on the same course," said Danny Momot of Barbaran, "and it’s working out extremely well."

According to Mickey McSwain, this is also the first time that Southeastern Golf has worked on a course in conjunction with another contractor.

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Ross renovation
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right there on each individual hole plan. It's not just a route plan - these are the original working drawings used during construction.

"The club also has some very good vintage photography, too, so we know quite well what Ross intended this course to look like, Bit by bit," Silva said, "the scope of the work changed and eventually the club decided to go the full restoration route."

HONING TO VINTAGE STYLE

Working with superintendent Greg Burleson and Gainesville, Ga.-based contractor Course Crafters, Silva will thoroughly restore the Augusta layout.

All 18 putting surfaces will be refurbished in accordance with the Ross drawings. Existing bunkers will be restored in the vintage style. Lost bunkers will be reinstated to their original positions and configurations. And all 18 tee complexes will be rebuilt in the classic, rectangular style Silva employed to such great effect at Biltmore Forest.

"We won't be moving fairway bunkers further down the fairways to accommodate modern play lengths," explained Silva, "and here's why: Ross used his trademark, random bunker approach at Augusta. He sprinkled bunkers about the fairways in such a way that they would come into play for everyone, no matter how far you hit it."

"Also, and just as important: the original bunkers were cleverly cut into slight upslopes. Moving them for distance's sake would not allow the bunkers to be placed in such wonderfully natural positions."

CLUB'S EARLY DAYS

Formal golf has been played here by Rae's Creek since 1897, when the nine-hole Bon Air Golf Club began accommodating local members and guests of The Bon Air Hotel, which owned this course. By 1900, when Harry Vardon played an exhibition at Bon Air GC, the facility had expanded to 18 holes. Later that year the hotel renamed it the Country Club of Augusta.

To ease crowding on this so-called Lake Course, club members built another 18 strictly for their use - the Hill Course. Designed by club president Dr. William Henry Harrison Jr. and longtime pro David Ogilvie, it debuted in 1909. Summer guests included John D. Rockefeller, Warren G. Harding and William Howard Taft.

In 1921, the club officially settled on its current moniker, Augusta Country Club. Five years later, Seth Raynor would convert the sand greens on the Lake Course to Bermudagrass.

In 1927, Donald Ross - in town to design the Forest Hills Golf Course - was retained to convert the sand putting surfaces on the Hill Course to Bermudagrass. He also substantially rerouted the front nine and completely rebunkered the layout, as detailed on his drawings.

BOBBY JONES' GRAND SLAM

The Lake Course would not survive the Depression, but the Hill Course not only endured but compiled a luminous tournament history of its own.

Bobby Jones kicked off his Grand Slam year at Augusta CC with a 13-shot victory over Horton Smith in the inaugural Southeastern Open. That was 1930, several years before he would found the adjoining Augusta National Golf Club on the other side of Rae's Creek.

"Like Biltmore Forest, Seminole and others, Augusta Country Club is a great example of Ross' ability to use the terrain to its absolute best advantage," said Silva, a partner with Uxbridge, Mass.-based Cornish, Silva and Mungeam Inc. "The routing here is superb, but the Ross details need reviving. His working diagrams show putting surfaces that had more undulation than they do today. The work we do this summer will seek to re-instill some of this flavor - within reason, considering today's faster putting speeds.

"The original course was sprinkled with random bunkers throughout the fairways," he added, "including a really great set of diagonal cross-bunkers on the uphill third hole. There was wonderful flow to the layout, as the fairways sinewed their way around bunkers from tee to green.

The working diagrams even show the 16th as a punchbowl green. The club is determined to bring all this back."