

New course boom 'up and over'

BY BRADLEY S. KLEIN

The international golf boom has reached Down Under.

Australia, which already sports one of the world's highest per-capita rates of golf courses, is rapidly expanding its offering of venues. The continued growth of golf is exercising a dramatic effect on the overall character of golf course construction and maintenance techniques.

Australia's proximity to the Japanese market assures a regular supply of wealthy, golf-starved travelers. The abundance of land in so unsettled a country has led to a veritable land grab along the more attractive coastal areas north of Sydney and in Queensland.

Small wonder that a number of well-placed superintendents of long standing are moving into the design business.

Forty-four-year-old Peter Williams, who had spent 29 years on the greens staff at Royal Melbourne, half of them as its chief superintendent, recently left to work the international design firm of Marsh-Watson Ltd. Australian golf star Graham Marsh and his associate, Ross Watson, have offices in Perth, Western Australia, and on the Gold Coast, Queensland.

Their company is now working on 12 Japanese courses, with three of them under construction. They have begun turning earth on the Coral Sea island of New Caledonia, one thousand miles east of Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Back home, they have just finished the 27-hole Vines complex in Perth and have four others underway throughout the continent.

Former Australian Open champion Jack Newton has also formed a design partnership, this one with two of the Sandbelt's more renowned superintendents — John Spencer of Huntingdale Golf Course (home of the Australian Masters) and Graham Grant of Kingston Heath.

Greg Norman is the latest Australian golf pro to turn his attention to course design. Designs under his name will actually be done in conjunction with Bob Harrison, a designer who now works out of Mark McCormack's International Management Group office in Sydney. He does the drafting, then converts them via computer-graphics into images that are faxed or express-mailed to the globe-trotting Norman for his inspection.

Norman is a golfing star of immense drawing power in Australia. Golf tournament promoter David Inglis, who engineered the 1988 Bicentennial Classic at Royal Melbourne and now runs the Johnny Walker Classic, claims that Norman's mere presence in a tournament field guarantees the success of that event.

Small wonder that he commands — and receives — upwards of \$125,000 in appearance fee for a single tournament. It will be no surprise that clients have already begun lining up to sign on Norman and Harrison for their own golf development projects.

Greenskeepers 'Down Under'

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half of all practicing superintendents have joined the newly formed Australian Golf Course Superintendents Association. It lacks an independent office or publication, but several pages of each issue of *Turf Craft Australia* are devoted to news of the association.

As explained by John Odell, the superintendent at Royal Sydney and

president of the New South Wales GCSA, the profession is beginning to upgrade its training techniques and incorporating, on a scientific basis, the accumulated insights of the industry as developed and codified in the rest of the golf world.

Odell is one of the industry's new breed; like Garry Dempsey at New South Wales Golf Course or Martin

Rose at Royal Canberra Golf Course, Odell combines extensive on-site experience with a rigorous program of formal academic training.

The result is a whole new generation of greenskeepers with the training to use sophisticated chemicals and the ability, as well, to explain the details of filtration, agronomy and biochemistry whenever the local greens committee has questions.

A good example is Dempsey's work at New South Wales GC, where a course ranked among the world's top 100 has never had pesticides applied to its fairways.

The scientific use of modern

chemicals is part of a larger phenomenon that has indelibly altered the face of Australian golf. The process might be called the modernization of the game. Here is a sports culture in which the most exclusive and expensive courses charge no more than \$2,000 to join. Membership at most courses can be had for a few hundred dollars — and this for golf around the year.

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for designers Down Under

A lot of money is going into development of the game and the changes have begun to affect the character of play and maintenance at the most staid and traditional clubs. The glitzy clubhouses, the availability of motorized carts, the manicured, all-green look of these new facilities. When members at traditional venues return from their visits to the Gold Coast or to the Murray River resorts along the border of Victoria and New South Wales, the inclination is to ask why these conditions cannot be reproduced at home.

The answer, of course, is money. To emulate these standards a whole

new set of considerations enter into the picture. In many clubs, serious in-house debates concern the propriety of moving along to adopt these modern elements—if not cart paths, then at least better grooming.

Not every innovation has caught on, however. Two courses 70 miles south of Melbourne at Cape Schanck, designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr., opened up in 1987 with much fanfare. They were located on a stunning site of mountainous dunes, with the Tasman Sea on one side and Port Phillip Bay on the other.

Critics say many holes are over-designed and artificial, and the course

is so demanding that rounds take well over five hours—in a country where the native foursomes average just over three hours. The course virtually requires a motorized cart given the severity of the terrain.

The result is that the municipal course at Cape Schanck is underplayed and the private course under-subscribed for membership. The hope now is to bring in a private resort developer who would use the golf course as the focal point of an exclusive corporate retreat.

Cape Schanck is an exaggerated example of what happens as Australia modernizes. The more encourag-

ing signs are that techniques of course maintenance have reached new heights of sophistication.

It remains to be seen whether the newer resort courses going up along the coast will continue exercising their effects on the rest of Australia, or whether the abiding force of British golf club traditions will hold their own and preserve the classical traditions of simplicity and quaintness that so distinguish golf in the (former) British empire from golf elsewhere.

Bradley S. Klein, who lives in Bloomfield, Conn., recently spent 10 weeks "Down Under."

MacKenzie to Norman, Australia's on golf map

As a former British penal colony first settled in 1788, the island continent of Australia has always had the fate of its sports culture shaped by foreign influences. Golf took hold in the early 19th century, but not until the visit of legendary Scottish-born architect Dr. Alister MacKenzie in 1928 did modern principles of strategic course design find a place.

Until then, home-bred architects had fashioned rough-hewn courses following strictly penal principles, or, in many cases, no aesthetic principles at all.

Recruited by Royal Melbourne for the princely sum of \$1,000, MacKenzie supplemented his fee by picking up local work for \$250. He lent his acumen on a piecemeal basis to varying degrees. Though credited with New South Wales Golf Course, for instance, MacKenzie made cosmetic changes there to the design drafted by the popular Australian pro Des Soutar.

He added only light touches to Royal Sydney and The Australian, but both courses have recently been so compromised that nothing remains of MacKenzie's work. At Kingston Heath in Melbourne's Sandbelt, he created what remains today some of the most imaginative bunkering shapes in the world. And at Flinders Golf Course, south of Melbourne on the Mornington Peninsula, MacKenzie rather hastily laid out a seaside venue that is eerily similar to Pebble Beach.

But it was the West Course at Royal Melbourne to which MacKenzie devoted himself wholeheartedly. The club had acquired several plots of land and asked MacKenzie to expedite a shift of grounds that would incorporate several old holes into basically a new course. The good doctor obliged with a plan that cleverly left intact several old cross bunkers and mounds along the 14th and 15th holes. But the larger genius of the new venue was to create massive rolling putting surfaces and strategically placed bunkers that made the holes enjoyable by golfers of every caliber.

Strangely enough, MacKenzie never saw the finished product at Royal Melbourne. Indeed, he never turned a spade of dirt on the course. Travel plans required that he leave before funding for construction could be secured. By the time the club recovered from the effects of the

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