

The Best Living: R.T. Jones

Robert Trent Jones Sr. was the leading vote-getter among living golf course architects in the survey asking for the best architect of all time. Larry Dennis, who worked with Jones on Jones' book "Golf's Magnificent Challenge," shares this piece.

BY LARRY DENNIS

Jack Nicklaus stood on the first tee at Muirfield Village Golf Club on a summer day in 1974 and surveyed the rolling, wooded Ohio landscape. Nicklaus the player and friend Tom Weiskopf were about to start the official opening round at Muirfield, the dream course of Nicklaus the architect. The architect then made a prescient observation.

"It's not hard," Nicklaus admitted, "to design a great course on land like this with an unlimited budget."

Of course it's not. Assuming the designer has even a modicum of expertise, the task with good land is basically to avoid screwing it up. The holes are there. The beauty is there. Just find it all.

Muirfield Vilalge, favored by its

terrain and, at inception, enough money to do it right, has gone on to rank among the world's best courses. Others are not so lucky at birth. Nature created the first courses, at St. Andrews and the other Scotland links. Nowadays man must do it, and many, if not most, venues leave something to be desired.

Herbert Warren Wind, the peerless golf historian, once noted: "I think it's the easiest thing in the world to criticize a finished course... But it's helpful if one occasionally sees a golf course before it is finished. When you see it in its rough, rude form, the land-

scape that the golf course architect takes over tells you something. I've been frightened a great deal when I've walked out and seen the land that certain friends had to work with — part of it swamp, no natural features in sight and the worst sort of trees. On top of it, the man has a low budget to work with ... You wonder how he is going to get it so that the featureless land really plays, and when you return to this land and see what he's done with it, then you can appreciate the work that the professional architect is able to do."

Every architect knows the feel-

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GCN's first survey

Several stories dealing with *Golf Course News'* year-end architects' survey appear in this issue and more are on the way.

The course designers chose Tom Fazio as 1989's Architect of the Year. Rees Jones finished second. Arthur Hills, Ed Seay, Jack Nicklaus and Jay Moorish tied for third.

Donald Ross and Alister Mackenzie were 1-2 in the Best Architect in History category. They were followed by A.W. Tillinghast, Robert Trent Jones, Sr., Dick Wilson and Stanley Thompson.

Wadsworth Construction Co. was the runaway winner for Best Builder of 1989. Golf Course Consultants, Landscapes Unlimited and Paul Clute followed.

Cypress Point edged out Pinehurst No. 2 as the Best Course. Others receiving multiple votes were Pine Valley, Pebble Beach, Augusta National, Banff Springs and Shinnecock Hills.

We'd like to thank those who took the time to respond to the survey and look forward to working with you in the future.

Jones took golf around world, says Perry Dye

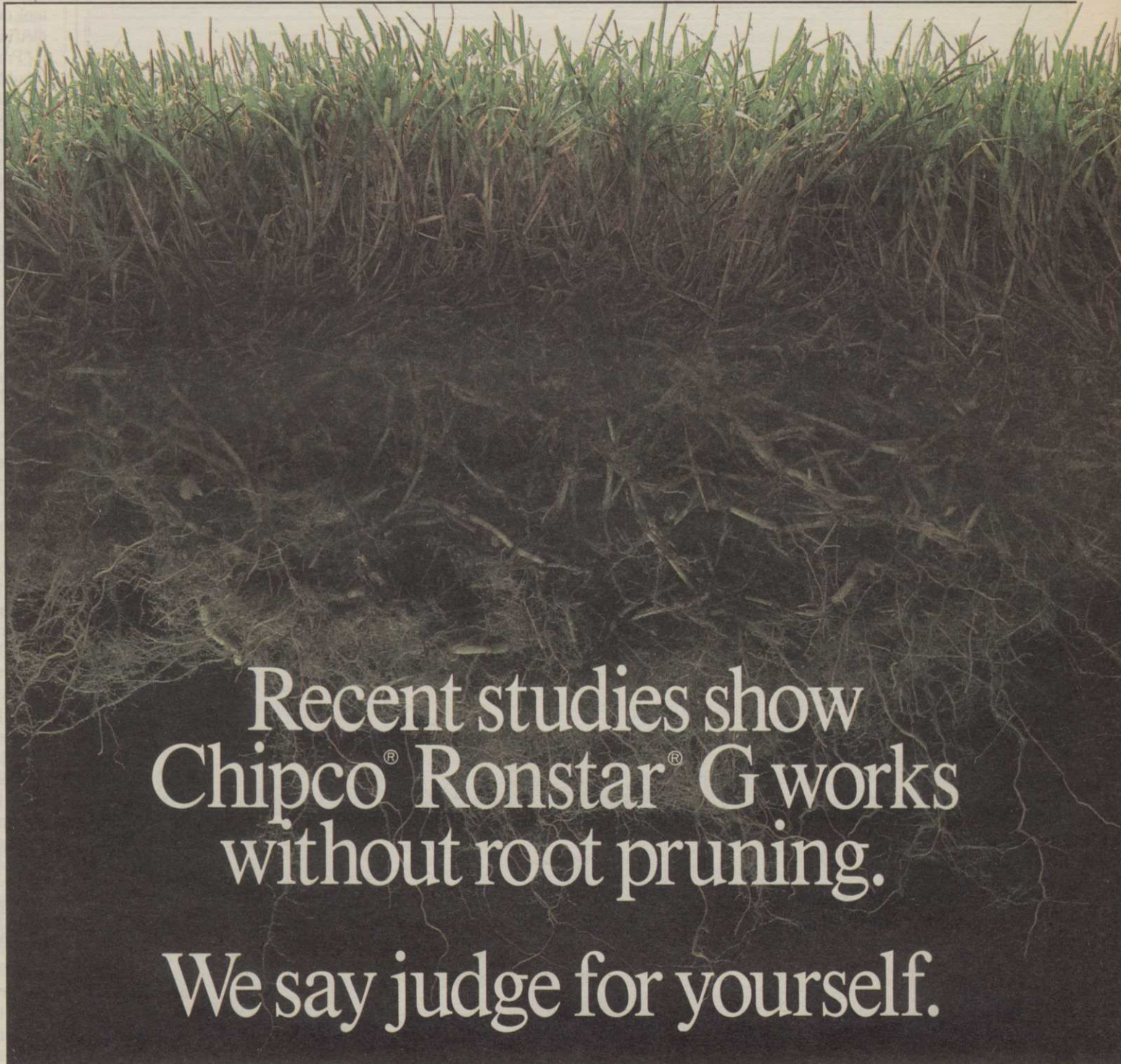
The president of the Golf Course Builders of America laid upon the shoulders of Robert Trent Jones Sr. the credit for taking golf around the globe.

"If it weren't for him it really wouldn't be a world-wide game," said Perry Dye of Dye Design Inc. in Denver, Colo. "He's the one who took it around the world. My dad's (architect Pete) done an unbelievable job domestically but Mr. Jones took it around the world ... after the Scotsmen of the 1920s."

Dye cited Jones' extensive travels when "with the assistance of the military, the World Bank and the development concept, he developed 600 golf courses during a 20-year period.

"Really, nobody has done that since then, so whatever exposure golf got (around the world) as far as design, architecture and construction are concerned was done once, by him," Dye said.

"These were sometimes small islands, small countries. But he stopped by and built a golf course and started the game there. And now they've built up a golf population," he said.



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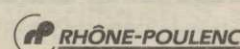
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R.T. Jones

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ing. Ask Pete Dye, a master at making something out of nothing. PGA West, the wicked beauty carved out of desert flatland, may be his best example.

Better yet, ask Robert Trent Jones Sr., At 83, he is golf's master builder. He has designed almost 500 courses around the world, and he pioneered the art of creating them in impossible places. He literally has grown grass where nobody thought it could be grown. As a result, there are courses where nobody suspected they could be built.

Every golf course architect, especially these days, has to deal with regulations concerning wetlands, flood plains and the like ... and with environmentalists who want to protect every living organism in sight.

Trent Jones has dealt successfully with more basic problems. He boasts that he has found very few places during his career where a golf course could not be built and grass grown.

In 1958 he built Dorado Beach for Laurance Rockefeller on Puerto Rico property that was basically all sand. Despite a number of doubt-

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ers, including the U.S. Golf Association's Green Section, Jones said, "Hell, I'm not going to put topsoil on the sand. They grow grass on sand all over the British Isles, and I don't see any reason we can't do it here. All you need is water and fertilizer."

Jones theorized that if grass were planted in sand, the roots

would grow deeper. With drainage installed underneath, running into a pond, the moisture level could be controlled. Water draining into the pond meant that the moisture level was satisfactory and the sprinklers should be shut off. That eliminated the chance of "brown patch" caused by excessive moisture.

The scheme worked. On opening day, Rockefeller said to Jones, "Trent, this is the most gorgeous turf I've seen."

At Mauna Kea on Hawaii, a course also built for Rockefeller in 1965, Jones was faced with exciting terrain but desolate land covered with volcanic rock, cinders and boulders. The average rainfall was just eight inches a year. Rockefeller had doubts.

But Jones determined that the lava rock could be crushed and used as a soil base that, with enough water, would support grass.

Using a bulldozer fitted with a special ribbed roller, his crew crushed the lava into a red dust the consistency of talcum powder and spread it over the course. Jones improvised a watering system to stabilize the lava dust, mixed it with coral sand and put the seed down. When the grass came up, it was weed-free, because nothing had ever grown in the material before.

Jones then drilled two 400-foot wells that produce a million gallons of water a day, installed one of the first fully automatic underground irrigation systems and, presto!, created an oasis.

Since then, half a dozen courses have been built on the island using the same technique.

While Jones was building the Pevero Golf Club at Costa Smeralda in Sardinia for the Aga Kahn in the early 1970s, Italian agronomists advised the Aga Kahn that he would have to import topsoil and spread a foot of it over the course, at a cost of millions.

Jones, however, had discovered a lot of disintegrated granite on the property that could be crushed into dust and, with nutrients added, serve as soil. He said, "Your Highness, it's your money, but if you want to take a chance on spending \$35,000 for seed, I don't think you'll have to spend millions for topsoil."

Two years later the Italian Open was played at Pevero on lush grass growing in granite. It saved the Aga Kahn \$2.5 million.

"The staff is still upset with me," Jones chuckles. "One said to me, 'Every time it comes to spending money, he relates your story to us.'"

Sometimes Jones doesn't even need land to create a course. He built Marine Park in Brooklyn for the New York Department of Parks on swampland, filling it in with garbage and inorganic refuse, spreading a heavy layer of sand over each layer of organic fill. The project took 18 years before its completion in 1963, but there now is a fine golf course where no one imagined there could be.

Jones is using a similar technique to build a course called Stockley Park, near Heathrow Airport outside London, on an old garbage dump.

Might we next expect to see Jones lay out 18 lush holes in thin air? Not likely, perhaps ... but maybe we shouldn't bet against it.

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