

Harbottle, owner co-design Calif. track

STEVINSON, Calif. — The Savannah Course at Stevinson Ranch, an upscale public golf course in California's Central Valley, is scheduled to open Sept. 1.

Jointly designed by architect John Harbottle and co-owner George Kelley, the 18-hole, par-72 layout adheres to the character and traditions of the great Scottish links courses while preserving the native wetlands, terrain and habitat of the surrounding farmlands.

"It's the best thing I've ever done," said Harbottle.

"We expect to be ranked among the best new public golf courses in the country,"

said Kelley, whose Merced County dairy farming family is developing the project together with the San Francisco-based Lurie Co. The course has filed for inclusion in the Signature Program of the Audubon Society of New York, Kelley added.

With four sets of tees, Savannah stretches from 5,400 to 7,000 yards. The layout employs the risk-reward theory of design, requiring skilled shot-making and careful course management.

A 350-yard-long, dual-sided driving range is already open for practice from one end. Golfers on the all-grass practice tee are charged by time.



The 9th hole at Stevinson Ranch Golf Club's Savannah Course.

Q&A: Ron Forse

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[A.W.] Tillinghast was the same way. He changed his style constantly. At Sunnehanna that we are working on [in Johnstown, Pa.], it has very deep grass-faced bunkers. So does Sands Point on Long Island, where we've worked. And in other places like Newport [R.I.] Country Club, they're flashed. He did the same thing at Ridgewood in Gramace, N.J.

"Indigenous" and "strategic" are our watchwords, while being totally sound in the land-use multifunctional facets. We need courses that fit the land in their final form, and have no unnecessary earth-moving.

Basically, the art and functional side of construction still must serve the game ultimately. You can lose sight of that.

GCN: Have people lost sight of that?

RF: Sometimes. Art for art's sake on a golf course is not a great idea. The best synthesis is where you have dynamic-looking holes that make the game interesting and exciting. Holes that are good golf, that are done in a beautiful way that are maintainable and don't cost an arm and leg to build.

GCN: How would you describe your new courses?

RF: Our new work incorporates all the great strategic concepts. Royal Oaks [Golf Course in Lebanon, Pa] does that, and seems to be working. The place is full. And it shows there is room for good-quality public golf. Markets all over the country still need it. We need to do things [at public courses] like have bunkers that interrupt the line of flight, because it honors and compliments the daily-fee player with the choice of playing over the bunker, around it, or pulling up short.

GCN: Compare new construction and remodeling for us.

RF: New construction in some ways is harder. Some people say remodeling is harder. The hard part about remodeling is making sure of your style. You have to be a chameleon and make your style fit with what's there. With new work, you have a blank canvas. Depending on the site, there isn't as much inspiration. So, in order to come up with a good design, you plainly have to be a good designer.

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