

Muirhead lays hands to Dubai golf project

By, JOHN TORSIELLO

The desert of Dubai, located on the right flank of the Mideast's Arabian Peninsula, is the natural pallet on which noted golf course architect Desmond Muirhead has created another of his innovative layouts.

Muirhead, whose course designs at times approach the ethereal, is in the finishing stages of his latest jewel, Emirates Hills, an 18-hole layout that will be ready for play this year. It will be the future site for the Dubai Desert Classic, a stop on the European PGA Tour. Eventually, there will be four courses at Emirates Hills. They will be full-length courses capable of hosting a PGA tournament. European PGA star Colin Montgomerie is on board as the celebrity endorser of the course.

The Emirates Hills course is the centerpiece of an ambitious master plan, also prepared by Muirhead, that calls for residential homes, a town center, schools, business districts, non-golf recreation and leisure activity venues, and support facilities.

Among Muirhead's previous works are Muirfield Village Golf Club (along with Jack Nicklaus) in Dublin, Ohio, Mission Hills in Palm Springs, California, and the almost surrealistic Imperial Golf Club in Jakarta, Indonesia, where some of the holes can legitimately be described as landscape art.

Emirates Hills is another of the Englishman's unique course creations. He has called the Dubai layout a course that will "stimulate the imagination and elevate the golfer to the pinnacle of his game."

Creating a lush golf course is no mean feat in the parched country of Dubai. "But there was no shortage of sand," Muirhead said with a laugh during a recent interview. "The course is 100 percent irrigated and most of the trees, shrubs, and flowers were imported."

Muirhead said, "Dubai is part of the United Arab Emirates and is an extremely wealthy country. There is no shortage of anything. The Arabs can get what they want so there was no problem with developing the course as we wanted. The most difficult problem is always water. Most of what there is comes from distillation. To maintain a golf course in a desert you need a million gallons of water every day."

Muirhead called the Dubai course "interesting work," and said that creating a brand new community around the golf courses excites his creativity and draws on his knowledge and understanding of urban planning.

"The homes (which will be between 10,000 and 20,000 square feet in size) will be selling for millions of dollars apiece," he said. "The residences will be built to mesh with the golf course."

Muirhead said it will take about 10 years to complete the entire development.

The Emirates Hills golf course project alone cost \$25 million and a large, extravagant clubhouse that has yet to be built is expected to cost upwards of \$50 million. The total project will eventually cost over \$8 billion, he said.

Muirhead said the Dubai project has been one of his more

demanding. He has been working on it for almost two years, necessitating 18-hour flights between his California and Dubai offices.

Building a golf course in a desert is not for the faint of heart.

"The weather is bloody awful at times," Muirhead said. "The winters are extremely nice, something like Florida only hotter. But the summer is very diffi-

cult, 100 degrees or more with 80 percent humidity. It makes work progress very slowly at times."

Muirhead said the citizens of Dubai have become enamored with the game of golf.

"There are three other courses in Dubai of tournament caliber and there are more and more Arabs who can afford to play

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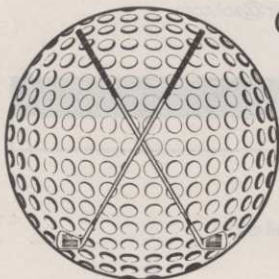
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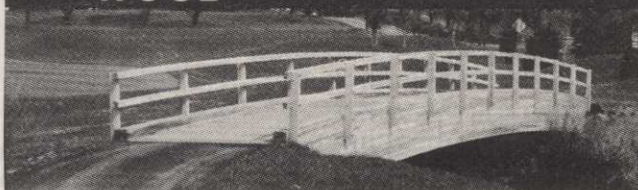
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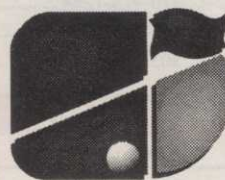
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Dubai

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golf," he said.

As for the course itself, the par-3 13th, called "Dubai", has the longest tee and longest green of any golf hole in the world, Muirhead said. There are limitless possibilities for tee and pin positions, ranging from a monstrous 220-yard carry over water to a 50-yard "lollipop" across land.

The architect said the hole was designed to symbolize the Emirate of Dubai and its history. True to that history, Muirhead has incorporated a flying fish bunker and a group of date palms that denote the commerce on which the Emirates are founded.

Adhering to his belief that the 18th hole of a golf course should always be a memorable hole, Muirhead designed the final hole at Emirates Hills to offer a myriad of choices by which to approach the par-5.

The hole consists of two diagonal peninsulas joined by a narrow neck of land. The golfer can bite off as much as he feels able, said Muirhead, but there will be few who can reach this 600-yard par five in two shots. Usually, a short iron will have to be negotiated from one of two fairways divided by a lake to a green that offers a variety of hazards.

"I believe the 13th and 18th holes are unique in the word of golf," said Muirhead. "I feel the 18th hole on a course should be a fair but also challenging and adaptable."