

SAJO Construction steps into world of course ownership

By FRANCES G. TRIMBLE

HOUSTON — Texas course builder Sam Sakocius and partners Terry and Mac Brown have ventured into the world of course ownership with Magnolia Creek Golf Club, in League City, Texas, south of here. It's a first for SAJO Construction, of nearby Richmond.

"We had been approached before [about part ownership] but we had a set of parameters that had to be met before we got involved," Sakocius said. "For one thing, we wanted the project to be in a fast-growing area within 100 miles of Houston, which League City is. And we wanted to be in partnership with a strong developer with previous experience."

That developer turned out to be Kinsel Industries Inc., a major player in large-scale industrial, commercial and housing projects. As plans for the 1,100-acre Magnolia Creek subdivision developed, Kinsel decided to set aside 400 acres for a golf course. At that point, Kinsel's Lynn Watkins contacted SAJO, because he was unsure of what could be accomplished with the site.

The land was flat, featureless, and dotted with fallow trees. "There wasn't much good there to save," Sakocius noted. However, because the area needs golf facilities, and because of the proposed extension to high-volume Bay Area Boulevard to the Magnolia Creek property, the property had potential.

Course architect Tom Clark of Ault, Clark & Associates, of Kensington, Md., was brought on board to design a 36-hole complex with links-style characteristics. The terrain has been cleared and drained, and 750,000 yards of earth have been moved to create what Clark described as "simulated dunes — pot bunkers with sod-stacked sides — links concepts you would expect to see in the UK." Clark added that a canal or "burn" runs alongside some holes and crosses others. A single lake has been constructed for water retention because, in Clark's words, "lakes are not traditionally found on links courses."

Clark has crafted a design with a medley of challenges. "There will be a great variety of short and long holes," he said, "par fours ranging from 281 yards to 475 yards and both reachable and non-reachable par five's. Each nine measures between 3,500 and 3,600 yards from the championship tees."

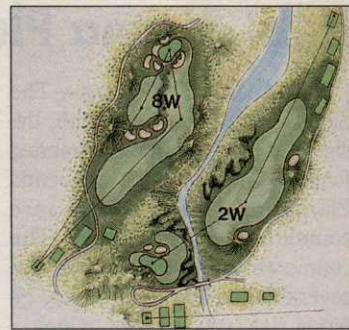
Builder Sakocius described the plantings to be added as, "native vegetation to give it a rustic, windswept, dunesy feel." He added, "Tom Clark has an

extensive design record and all of the people involved in this project have seen and experienced the old Scottish courses we are trying to recreate. That includes greens that have open approaches and closely mown collection areas at the sides and back." The typically stiff Gulf Coast winds, like the strong

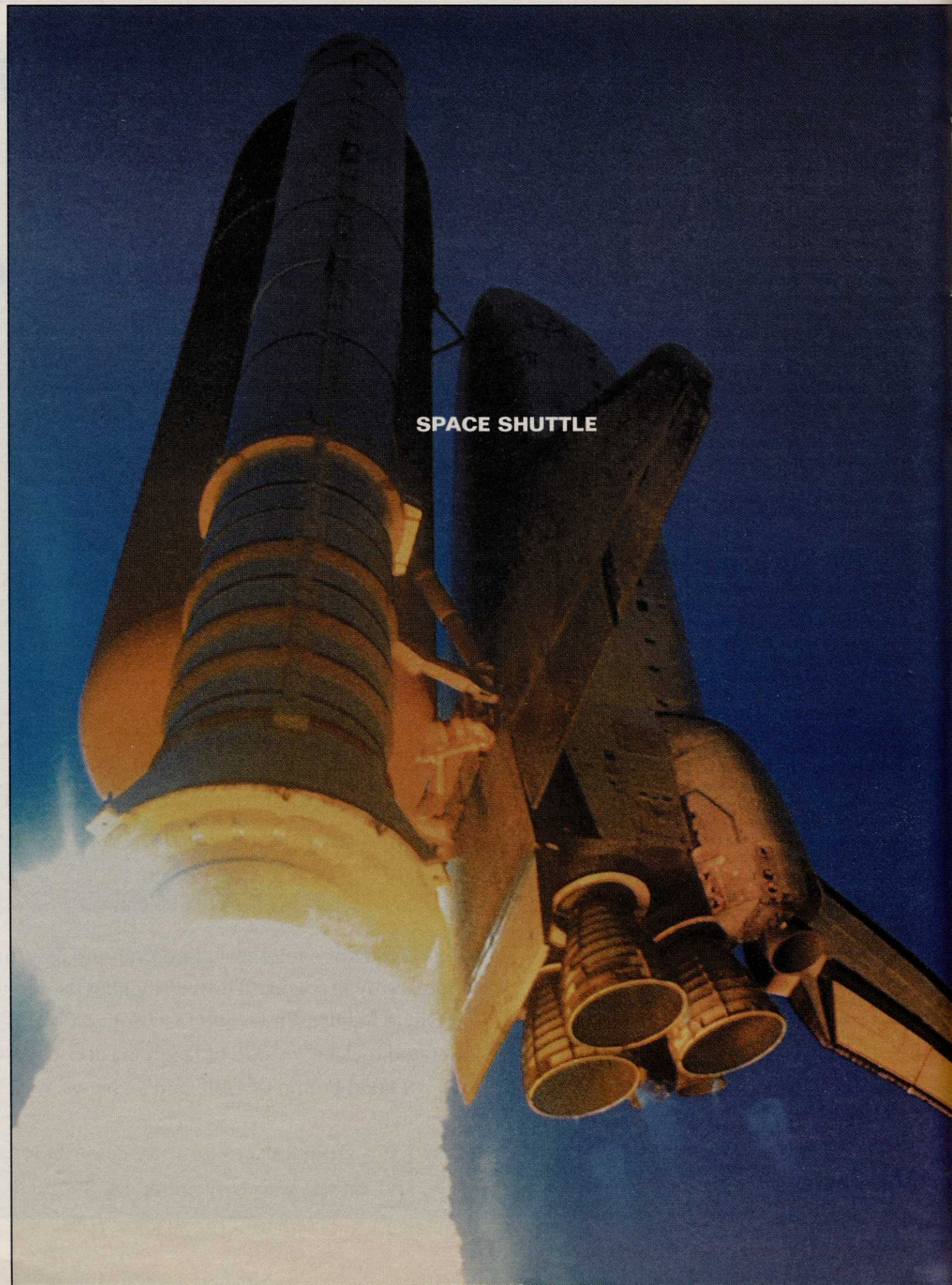
breezes of coastal Scotland and Ireland, contribute another links-type feature.

Construction at Magnolia Creek began in November 1999, and the course is scheduled to have 18 holes in play by this coming November. Golf Solutions Inc. will manage the property, and Trey Stiles, a 20-year

veteran of the golf business, has been tapped as head professional. Though Magnolia Creek will be first and foremost a golf facility, Sam Sakocius says that the Richard Williams-designed clubhouse will feature "the type of banquet and dining accommodations golfers expect to find at a 36-hole establishment."



A rendering of two holes at Tom Clark's Magnolia Creek Golf Club



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