

Old world style: Silva's new Black Creek Club celebrates Raynor tradition

By PHILIP HALL

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. — When it comes to "traditional" golf course design, most architects talk the talk. With the recent unveiling of Black Creek Club, Brian Silva continues to walk the walk.

Inspired by the work of legendary architect Seth Raynor, Black Creek Club raises the bar on layouts that presume to integrate vintage design characteristics into the modern game.

Silva, *Golf World's* "Architect of the Year" for 1999, has painstakingly equipped Black Creek with a raft of genuine Old World chops: blind approaches, punchbowl and Redan greens, drivable par-4s, random bunkering (promoting alternate routes of play), and green settings whose contours encourage, if not require, players to put the ball on the ground.

"There is more to creating a traditional golf experience than mere appearance," Silva explained. "It's one thing for a course to look old school; it's quite another for a course to play that way."

"At Black Creek, all the design elements and strategies are there," he said. "The bunkers, for example, are certainly retro in their appearance — but it's their placement, their integration into golf hole and landscape that influences decision-making. That's what Raynor did so well, and that's what we've done at Black Creek."

OLD WORLD INFLUENCE

Though Raynor and his on-again, off-again design partner, the estimable C.B. Macdonald, worked during the early years of this century, they were unabashed devotees of 19th century British course design.

So strong was this Old World influence, so dutiful was their homage, that all the Raynor/Macdonald products — Na-

tional Golf Links of America and Fisher's Island GC on Long Island, Shoreacres and Chicago Golf Club in Illinois, Yale GC in New Haven, Conn., Yeamans Hall in Charleston, S.C. — include loving replicas of famous Scottish holes such as the Redan at North Berwick and the Alps at Prestwick, among others.

Silva has carried on this practice by reprising Raynor's Redan and Punchbowl greens at recent designs like Waverly Oaks and Cape Cod National, a pair of award-winning layouts in Massachusetts.

At Black Creek Club, opened for play this fall, the architect has included a larger

"Brian Silva," according to *Golf Digest* architecture editor Ron Whitten, "is now doing some of the most interesting work out there. Nothing outlandish or revolutionary. Just the opposite. It's retro design, very much reflecting the features and philosophies of grand old architects whose courses Silva has reworked over the years: Ross, Tillinghast and, especially, Raynor."

SETH RAYNOR FAN CLUB

It should come as no surprise that Black Creek Club (BCC) was developed by an ardent but unofficial chapter of the Seth Raynor Fan Club.



The 10th hole at Black Creek Golf Club in Chattanooga, Tenn.

complement of Raynor standards: the Biarritz green (number 17), the Redan (11), the Reverse Redan (7), the Cape Hole (15), the Short Hole (3), the Double Plateau green (1), and an Alps/Punchbowl hybrid at the one-of-a-kind, blind-but-reachable par-5 6th.

Silva, for his part, is currently refurbishing a pair of esteemed Raynor tracks: Mountain Lake Club in Lake Wales, Fla., and Pittsburgh's Fox Chapel GC (scheduled to host the USGA's Curtis Cup Matches in 2002).

For their part, BCC's developers are

all members at nearby Lookout Mountain (Ga.) Golf Club, a 1926 Raynor design, which Silva finished restoring in 1999.

"Black Creek Club is a unique project because the architect, developers and contractors were all of a very, very like mind: We all have the utmost respect and admiration for Raynor's work," said Silva, a partner with Uxbridge, Mass.-based Cornish, Silva and Mungam. "These clients wanted a traditional golf course in the Raynor style, and that's just the direction my own designs have taken."

Added BCC developer Doug Stein, "With Brian's restoration work at Lookout Mountain and Fox Chapel — not to mention what we saw in his original work at Cape Cod National and Waverly Oaks — we could see he had absorbed the artistry and strategic sensibilities of Raynor. And it's just these characteristics that shine at Black Creek."

THE 'RETRO' DESIGN MOVEMENT

Silva's restoration portfolio also includes vintage Donald Ross layouts like Seminole Golf Club in North Palm Beach, Fla., Old Elm in Chicago and Biltmore Forest CC in Asheville, N.C., site of the USGA Women's Amateur in 1999.

With this sort of experience, it's not surprising that many of Silva's more original holes at Black Creek, while they have no specific Raynor progenitor, stand out as beautiful, strategic golf holes detailed in the traditional style: The short, par-4 10th (dubbed "Double Cross"), the long, par-4 12th ("Dry Branch"), and the tantalizing, reachable par-5 14th ("Go On"), to name just three.

Whitten has written that "Brian Silva is leading the Retro design movement." Black Creek Club supports this assessment in spades.

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The Club at Pelican Bay

Pelican Bay reopens final nine

NAPLES, Fla. — The Club at Pelican Bay, here in southwest Florida, recently reopened the final nine of its 27 holes after a two-year renovation program. Arthur Hills/Steve Forrest and Associates, the designer of the original layout, served as architect for the refurbishment.

The improvements included rebuilt bunkers and greens, a new irrigation system, new cart paths and additional fairway drainage. The work was done

primarily in the off-season, with Wadsworth Golf Construction Company as the contractor.

"Our firm has been fortunate to be part of a number of great golf course communities in the Naples area," Hills said. "Pelican Bay is a very successful project, which opened its first 18 holes in 1980. These latest improvements further define the Club at Pelican Bay as one of the premier layouts in this area."

Tom Kite launches Comanche Trace in Texas hill country

KERRVILLE, Texas — Comanche Trace Ranch, once one of the Texas hill country's major horse ranches, has been transformed into a premier golf community. Its 18-hole layout, designed by the Senior PGA Tour's Tom Kite, along with Texas golf architects Roy Bechtol and Randy Russell, opened in December.

The master-planned community lies in the Guadalupe River Valley 60 miles from San Antonio and 90 miles from Austin.

"We've created a very playable course in the beautiful setting," said Kite, an Austin native. "There's a thrill and a challenge and a great view from every hole. Each hole has its own personality and blends into the land with understated beauty."

TIFSPORT FAIRWAYS

Fairways are planted with first-growth TifSport, a patented turf grass known for its ability to keep growing after the first winter freeze and to green up in the spring before Bermudagrass.

The greens are bentgrass. Superintendent Scott Parker selected the L93/

Crenshaw blend bent to match the temperature, humidity and other climate conditions of the hill country. "This blend gives us synergy — a true northern bentgrass and the well-known capacity of Crenshaw to handle higher summer temperatures," he said.

According to director of golf Jimmy Terry, the course will have some of the finest putting surfaces in Texas. "And due to the carefully planned soil and water conditions," he added, "we should be able to maintain some of the best turf in the state. The hill country is now home to four of Texas' 10 best golf courses."

HITTING EVERY CLUB

The course plays from 5,133 yards from the forward markers to 7,103 from the back pegs. "You'll probably hit every club in your bag," Terry said. "Depending on which tees you play, it's either relaxed and fun or an ultimate challenge, with six of the par-4s measuring over 430 yards from the championship tees."

Complementing the layout is a 15-acre practice facility, with chipping, putting and sand bunker areas. The full-service Pinnacle Clubhouse houses a bar and grill, a pro shop, locker rooms and a fitness and aerobic center. A 100-acre nature park and flower farm with nature trails provides other recreational options.

Black Creek

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Many architects play lip service to "promoting the ground game" via transparent efforts like grass selection. Yet appropriate turf choice is merely the final step. Making the ground game really work requires time, dedication and a thorough understanding of agronomy and tradi-

tional play strategies.

THE GROUND GAME

Over the course of its 7,044 yards, Black Creek truly delivers on the ground game, thanks in large part to the 60-plus site visits Silva, a former USGA agronomist, made during course construction.

"Brian spent an inordinate amount of time getting the contours 'just so,'" Stein says. "When

he didn't feel the proper effect had been achieved, he'd be out with one of our shapers for a couple of hours, paint gun in hand. This attention to detail continued through the grassing stage, with Brian out there the whole time flagging fairway contours."

At Black Creek, many holes simply wouldn't function properly without this sort of meticu-

lous attention to detail. The "reverse" Redan 7th, for example, is a 235-yard par-3 which can play as long as 250 yards. The Redan characteristics at number 7 call for a low, running tee shot played short and left of the putting surface, where Silva's contouring (combined with firm turf conditions) will usher the ball onto the green.

Even the best players cannot



The ninth hole at Black Creek

fly their tee shots to, and stop the ball on, the back two thirds of this putting surface, which is firm, shallow, pitched front-to-back and surrounded by intimidating bunkering.

FORGET THE AIR MAIL

"This is what makes traditional design so intriguing, so strategically interesting, and so much fun," Silva explained. "A guy who couldn't hit a 235-yard 2-iron to save his life can hit a five wood to the left approach of number 7, let the ball take the Redan slope, and when the ball finally stops rolling, he may well have 10 feet for birdie. He can get a result – a result his game couldn't achieve via the dart-board approach – provided he thinks out and executes the shot properly."

"By the same token," he added, "a stubborn scratch player will hit 2-irons all day at number 7 and, depending on the pin position, never get the ball that close."

"This strategic scenario," Silva said, "is common at Raynor courses. The holes play fun for an average player but they're a real challenge for a scratch player, who is perhaps more accustomed to having his way with a golf course. At 'traditional' layouts – like Fox Chapel and Black Creek – a good player is forced to recognize the alternate routes of play and adjust. If he doesn't, there occurs this leveling dynamic, which is even more applicable today when good players are used to 'air-mailing' shots into every green. You simply can't do that and expect to score at a place like Fisher's Island or Black Creek."

PRIVATE LAYOUT

Black Creek is a private club which accommodates outside play for guests of the Bluff View Inn, an amalgam of Victorian B&Bs in Chattanooga's Bluff View Arts District, just 10 minutes from BCC.

Having christened four original golf course designs in 2000, Cornish, Silva and Mungeam (CSM) will open four more layouts in 2001, including partner Mark Mungeam's LeBaron Hills CC, a private club in Lakeville, Mass. CSM will also unveil several high-profile renovation projects this year, including Silva's completely refurbished Ocean Course at The Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach, Fla. ■



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