

Scottish project takes shape

David Southworth is getting a lesson in the purist's view of golf for his new development project. Construction began last spring on the Machrihanish Dunes golf course on Isle of Kintyre on the southwest coast of Scotland. It's next to Old Tom Morris' Machrihanish Golf Club and across the island from St. Andrews.

This is the first Scottish course project for Southworth, president of Southworth Development and a partner in Brightside Leisure Development, the group developing Machrihanish Dunes. Australian entrepreneur Brian Keating, one of the partners in the project, came upon the site.

"Keating researched management companies and golf developers and contacted us, and that started the ball rolling," Southworth says.

In addition to the course, the project also includes refurbishing the Royal Hotel in the nearby Campbeltown and the development of the Kintyre Hotel and Cottages and the Residences at Machrihanish Bay, which will overlook the course.

Machrihanish Dunes and the Royal Hotel are scheduled to open in the summer of 2008, followed by the Kintyre Hotel in the fall of 2008. The residences will be the last part of the development.

David McLay Kidd, the architect who designed Bandon Dunes in Oregon (currently ranked No. 2 in the world by Golf Digest) and the Castle Course at St. Andrews, designed Machrihanish Dunes. Kidd seemed like a natural choice for the pure, links-style course.

"It's a location we've always dreamed of going to," Southworth says. "We've built courses in the desert, the tropics and places in between. Although there are differences between those courses, there are many similarities. Building a links course is whole different process, and it's been fascinating to learn. It was described to me by David McLay Kidd as finding a fairway and building a tee and green around it."

Machrihanish Dunes has another connection to St. Andrews – Euan Grant. Grant, formerly the head greenkeeper at the Old Course, will manage the greens and construction/greenkeeping



So far, four greens and five sets of tees have been shaped at Machrihanish.

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crew at Southworth's new course. Keating approached Grant about managing the grounds at Machrihanish Dunes.

"I was sold on the project after a quick visit to the site," Grant says.

Grant is monitoring the grow-in. So far, four greens and five sets of tees have been shaped.

"The site is pure sand," Grant says. "Greens and tees are constructed by

removing the existing turf, shaping, installing irrigation and seeding. It's simplistic. The seed being used on the greens is a Barenbrug mix of slender creeping red and chewings fescues."

For the tees, a 5-percent browntop bentgrass was added, and fewer cultivars of the fescues were used.

Patching damaged areas is another task of the maintenance schedule.

"We're reusing the turf to patch rabbit damage and damaged areas from stock grazing through the winter months, including high, exposed areas," Grant says. "It's labor-intensive, fiddly work. We're planning ahead to prepare areas before cutting turf from the next construction site."

The undulating areas of the course are comparable to St. Andrews, Grant says, adding that Machrihanish is more remote, making it more of a challenge for golfers who want to visit.

The land is within an area of designated Special Site of Scientific Interest, the first of its kind. This designation has led to several restrictions on the project and the need to work closely with the Scottish Natural Heritage, Grant says.

Grant also is intrigued by the process of building the tees and greens around the existing conditions.


"No other project is working with the existing sward in such a way as to only be mowing it out – the natural undulations are fantastic and lend themselves so well to golfing links," Grant says. "It's the same land Old Tom Morris was heard to say, 'the Lord must have had golf in his eyes when he created this place.'" – HW

For more information, visit www.machdunes.com.



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