

Nick Faldo is Steve Smyers' design partner on Black Sand Golf Club in Iceland. The 900-acre property on the Atlantic Ocean sits a short distance southeast of the capital city of Reykjavik. Photo: Steve Smyers

By Mark Leslie

shaw's relenting to do a second course on one of the universe's great sites: Barnbough in Tasmania. Others, such as Dan Schlegel of Annapolis, Md., who has gotten a few nibbles from South America, Lebanon and Russia, aren't abroad because the opportunity hasn't yet arisen.

Still, others who've labored extensively abroad for decades have found themselves on solid ground, unaffected by the U.S. downturn.

"For a while, I didn't even realize we had a recession, golfwise, going on in the U.S.," says Phillips, who had worked overseas for Jones Jr. for some time until starting his own firm a decade ago.

WHERE THE WORK IS

For a growing number of architects, the gold rush is on, and they're not loading up the pack mules here in America. Where then? Here's a sampling:

- Jones Jr. is working on projects in Mexico, Puerto Rico, China, Korea, United Arab Emirates, Tunisia, Sweden, Denmark, Italy, Greece and Poland.
- Brother Rees, preferring to remain in relatively the same time zone, is busy in Mexico, Barbados, Costa Rica and the Bahamas.
- Smyers has projects in Iceland, Dubai, Brazil, Bermuda and the United Arab Emirates.
- Baird is engrossed mostly in South Korea, where he has a half dozen projects, and China.
- Hearn is working in Russia, Kenya, Brazil, Vietnam, Korea, the Bahamas and, soon, France.
- Arthur Hills and Steve Forrest of Toledo, Ohio, have projects in Norway, Russia, Portugal, Morocco, Mexico and the Caribbean.
- Phillips's jobs abroad are in Ireland, Sweden, Slovakia, Sicily, Holland, Spain, United Arab Emirates, Morocco and Brazil.

And on it goes. Whatever the hemisphere, whatever the continent, American golf course architects are plying their trade. The reasons are few but powerful.

"There are 16,000-plus golf courses in America alone but only 16,000 outside America," says Smyers, who first built overseas courses with Nick Faldo in England and with Nick Price in South Africa. "What's happening is the middle class in all these developing countries is becoming wealthier and more influential. And golf is a sport you can play your entire life, a great socialization sport. Plus, people in other countries don't have the multiple entertainment choices

Globe-trotters

U.S. architects keep busy by exporting American style overseas

Just as Scots and Brits such as Donald Ross, Alister Mackenzie and Willie Park Jr. stormed the shores of America with the game of golf more than 100 years ago, American designers are carrying the torch around the globe during the 21st century.

Long after Robert Trent Jones Sr. became the first globe-trotting American course designer, others are following. Most notable might be his namesake, Robert Trent Jones Jr., who now lays claim to the most golf courses designed outside America – more than half of his 248 courses. The American style is in demand throughout the world so much that many lesser-known designers are busily examining topographic maps to lay out golf courses in almost every country imaginable.

"Throughout Europe, Africa, South America and the Pacific Rim, people realize some of the greatest golf architects in the world are from the U.S.," says Ray Hearn of Ray Hearn Golf Design in Holland, Mich. "I'm not slighting the fine architects of Australia and the British Isles, but as a group, it's thought if you want the best, come to America. That's a testimony to what American architects have done collectively."

Hearn cites a British developer in southern France who called a site so spectacular it deserved an American architect.

"That's a hats-off to all of us here who practice golf course architecture," he says.

The American Society of Golf Course Architects is the predominant brand in the world, says Jones Jr.

"The American brand is something the world wants because we design and build more playable, more interesting, more dramatic, more scenic, more environmental, more competitive golf courses than others do," he says. "That's because we know more about it and have the know-how."

If that feeling is representative among golf developers worldwide, it's a good thing – and perfect timing – for American architects. Golf projects in the United States have largely withered on the vine, but in many countries, the golf world is in a "Eureka!" frame of mind – wanting more golf courses.

Golf course designer Gary Roger Baird of Brentwood, Tenn., says 90 percent of his workload is overseas right now. That might be the highest percentage among architects, but many of his colleagues report a similar disparity. Rees Jones of Montclair, N.J., Trent Sr.'s other son, and Kyle Phillips of Granite Bay, Calif., peg their international-domestic split at 80-20, while Jones Jr. pegs his at 75-25, Hearn at 60-40 and Steve Smyers of Lakeland, Fla., at 50-50.

Some Americans – such as Bill Coore of Coore & Crenshaw in Austin, Texas, and Jeff Brauer of Arlington, Texas – aren't testing the global market by choice. That is, except for Coore & Cren-





About 75 percent of Robert Trent Jones Jr.'s work is abroad in places such as China, Korea, the United Arab Emirates, Tunisia, Sweden, Denmark, Italy, Greece and Poland. Photo: Robert Trent Jones II

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COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Americans have, so golf is very attractive."

Consider the results of a KMPG study released last month: In 2006, more than 160 new golf courses and almost 100 significant course expansion projects were underway in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. The revenue generated by these capital projects (including renovations and facility improvements) was \$5.5 billion – almost two-thirds of that generated in the much bigger U.S. golf economy.

A tremendous catalyst in many of these countries is how well their professional golfers are doing, Smyers says, citing Argentinian Eduardo

Superintendents find working abroad worthwhile

By John Walsh

With more development happening outside the United States, opportunities are available for those who wish to travel. But working overseas can be quite different than working in the U.S., especially for superintendents. David Brinkel, vice president of Dubai Golf City in the United Arab Emirates, and Mike Heacock, v.p. of golf course maintenance for Pacific Golf Management in Tokyo, shed light on what it's like to work afar.

Brinkel first worked overseas in 1984 in Germany with architect Jim Engh. He has been working overseas since, except for a two-year stint in Florida with Toll Brothers more than five years ago.

"I've got 100-percent support from my family," he says. "My wife is happy here, and my daughter just finished high school here and is back in Florida attending college."

The two biggest pros about working overseas are the pay and benefits, Brinkel says.

"We're usually provided with a place to live and a vehicle," he says. "Sometimes it's not that different from working at a high-end club in the States."

"I like the quality of life over here, although the stress is high," he adds. "I like the thought of being listened to more than what you get in the States. In the States, golf is run by opinionated businessmen who don't listen well and are difficult to work with. Overseas, people are looking for information. It's refreshing. People appreciate what you're doing."

Heacock agrees. He likes working in Japan because the people are wonderful, the food is great, the country is beautiful and Tokyo, where his office is located, is amazing.

While there are perks to working overseas, Heacock advises those who are considering working abroad: "Make sure you know where your money is going, and be sure you know what your perks and benefits are. Will you have help with housing? In what currency will you be paid? What kind of health insurance will you have? You have to look critically at everything because it's all different in Asia."

Challenges and opportunities

The international golf market is a small world and everyone has the ability to have a reputation, which is what you have to protect the most, Brinkel says.

"I know most architects, developers, the folks at Troon and IMG," he says. "The international golf development market is a small business with good people doing good jobs, sometimes in horrific conditions."

Heacock likes the challenge of growing business in a newer market. Lone Star, a private vulture fund in Texas, is his link to Asia. The company has assets all throughout the world, including 145 golf courses in Japan and majority ownership in publicly traded Pacific Golf Management. Lone Star looked into hiring a management company to operate its courses in Japan, but decided to run the courses in-house, hiring a couple of ex-American Golf



Rees Jones is working on projects in Mexico, Barbados, Costa Rica and the Bahamas. Photo: Rees Jones



Romero's win in the U.S. Senior Open. Additionally, golf academies and instructors are expanding rapidly in these countries. Though they're way behind the U.S. regarding the knowledge and development of the game, it's a fast-growing sport.

"Because you're getting winners such as Romero and Angel Cabrera (Argentina), Michael Campbell (New Zealand) and Trevor Immelman (South Africa), that's generating a phenomenal interest around the world," Rees Jones says. "They're hiring American architects because we're the ones who've had the technology to build on all kinds of sites, and we're

employees, including Heacock. Heacock who has been a superintendent since 1976, joined American Golf when it had 25 courses in its portfolio. When he left in 2002 to pursue a career in turfgrass academia, the firm had 300 courses. Heacock looks forward to being part of growing Pacific Golf Management's portfolio in a similar way. He says Lone Star has deep pockets and he wants to take advantage of that.

Language and cultural barriers are difficult at times. In Germany, Brinkel learned the language, but it took a while to get over the communication barrier.

The language barrier also is a challenge in Japan. Heacock says most Japanese don't speak English and nobody who works on a golf course speaks English. He works through interpretation.

Overall, superintendents need a completely different mindset when working abroad.

"The guys who failed tried to do what they did in the States," Brinkel says. "You have to adapt to the culture. Superintendents usually want to buy chemicals and fertilizers right off the bat, but those things might not be readily available over here. Sometimes it takes six to eight weeks for those to be shipped here. You need to go in and open your ears and eyes and keep your mouth shut. You need to figure out how to get the job done with the tools you have. I got spoiled in Florida when the LESCO truck showed up every two weeks."

In Dubai, there aren't many pesticides approved for use on golf courses, Brinkel says. The UAE is trying to separate golf and agriculture.

"It's difficult for them, but it's getting better," he says. "We can get Daconil now. They have good organic fertilizer over here, so you make your own witch's brew. You have to think outside the box."

In Japan, the style of golf course maintenance is different from anywhere else in the world, Heacock says.

"It's more traditional because they have less access to modern techniques and procedures," he says. "For example, they don't like to fill aeration holes, and they don't get ahead of their greens' problems, such as drainage. However, everybody over here uses verti-drains."

Labor, one of the biggest challenges for superintendents in the U.S., isn't a problem in Dubai. Workers come from the Philippines, Pakistan, India and Nepal. Brinkel's crewmembers speak English well enough for workplace communication and have good experience, but it's difficult to find good mechanics and irrigation technicians, he says.

Middle Easterners tend to take their time making decisions, but once those decisions are made, they expect action immediately. It's difficult to do at times, Brinkel says, adding that you need to have patience and foresight to plan ahead and cover everything you need.

Brinkel plans to stay in Dubai at least for another three years because that's how long it will take to finish the job he's working on. However, he doesn't plan to come back to the States after that.

The 62-year-old Heacock plans to return to the U.S. in a few years. Even though there aren't many American superintendents in Japan, he encourages superintendents to work overseas.

"It's a very enriching experience," he says. "I recommend it to those who aren't afraid to do it." **GCI**

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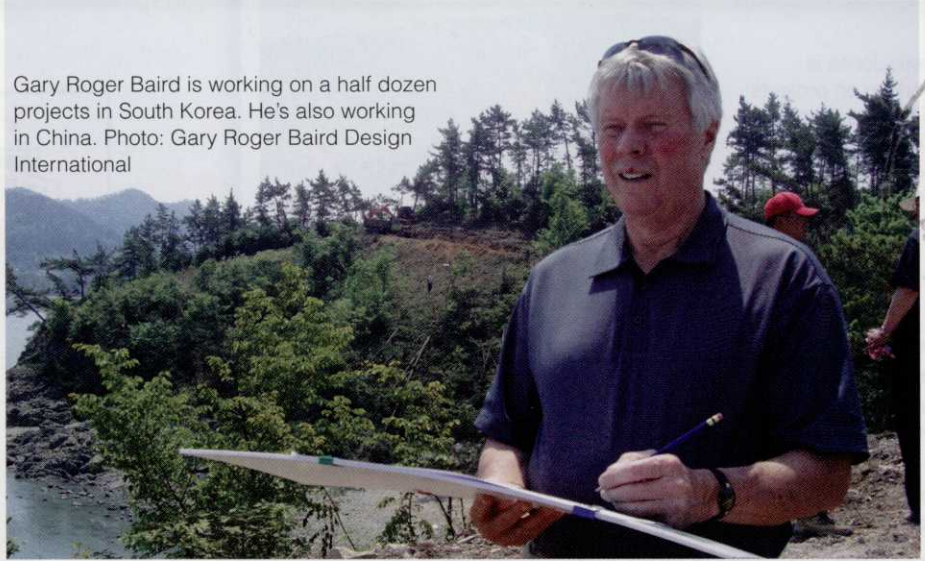
recognized as being in the top echelon of the business.”

“Look at the sports column any week,” Baird adds. “Who are the LPGA winners? Seven of the top 10 ladies are from Korea. In Korea, there’s a social strata so different from ours. Kids don’t play on computers every day. They’re walking to school, working and serious about life. They start playing golf at age 3. They don’t hang out and do nothing like American kids.”

SLOW IN AMERICA

Hills acknowledges the oversaturation of golf courses in some parts of the U.S. but also thinks there’s still underdevelopment elsewhere, adding many people in Europe are prospering and looking for second homes, thus the development of more golf communities. In Europe alone, the number of courses and players has doubled since 1985, according to the KPMG report. In the U.S., the number of courses and players has

Gary Roger Baird is working on a half dozen projects in South Korea. He’s also working in China. Photo: Gary Roger Baird Design International



leveled off since 2000.

In the U.S., a piling on penalty could be called against the forces that have converged to stop golf projects. Overconstruction is combining with flat-lined golfer growth and a variety of fears born from a soft economy. The subprime mortgage meltdown is one of the painful factors.

“We were doing fine with these real-estate developments until the subprime mortgage problem occurred,” Rees Jones says. “And now people are waiting to see how the real-estate market is in certain vicinities. Those projects

will go, but it’s a matter of waiting to see how the real-estate market is selling in their areas.”

Smyers sees domestic projects moving at a slower pace, but says that’s occurring with all businesses in America right now.

“We talk about the downturn of golf in America – it’s a cycle that had to happen,” he says. “Throughout the world, there has been growth in golf, and then it has slowed. Thailand went through it. So did Japan. We did and so did Europe. You reach your maximum capacity, and it stagnates for a while.”

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THE AMERICAN STYLE

Meanwhile, the dozers keep chugging abroad. And while the Scots and Brits brought the linksland style of golf course design to U.S. shores, Americans are exporting a site-specific style. The overseas market, as a whole, wants parkland courses, Smyers says.

"We're trying to be site specific," he says. "We're from the strategic school of design. We try to assess the site and do what it will allow us to do to produce the most dramatic product. That means something different in Iceland than it does in Bermuda or Brazil because the sites, climates, elements, wind, water and topography are all different."

Styles are predicated on location, Rees Jones says.

"If you're next to the ocean, you'll have a rolling links-look golf course," he says. "If you're on sandy soil, you'll have a heathland design. If you're among trees – and in a lot of European countries, you can't take out the trees – you'll have a parkland course. The style, whether links-like, heathland or parkland, will be thought out. But it will be more of an American style on the inland golf courses."

Baird tells clients site distinctions become design distinctions. He says the Asian market demands the manicured Augusta National-type look; it's not ready for the Scottish look yet. The Augusta National look – highly manicured turfgrass, beautiful trees and color galore – is basically thought of as America's style. And most of the requests overseas are for the manicured parkland-type courses prolifically seen in the U.S., Hearn says.

Hills equates "American" with "parkland" but says it depends on whether the site is sandy.

Phillips, who works a lot in Europe, disputes the idea most foreigners want the American style, which he defines as artificial-looking, generally featuring big mounds, flatter and perimeter-weighted fairways, and big, in-your-face stuff with high-fertility maintenance programs.

"So far, you've seen the American style in Dubai and China, but in the U.K. and Europe, people aren't big fans of that style of golf," he says.

But a significant factor in whatever is done is the client on the project.

"Budgets have a lot to do with it, too," Jones Jr. says. "If Michelangelo hadn't been given a piece of Carrara marble and had to create 'David' on a budget, it would have been a lot smaller."

The bottom line, though, even visible from Brauer's perch in Texas, is this: The American style is in demand. **GCI**



Eighty percent of Kyle Phillips' work is overseas in places such as Ireland, Sweden, Slovakia, Sicily, Holland, Spain and Brazil. Photo: Kyle Phillips Golf Course Design



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