



ISSUE 67 // FALL 2024

BY DESIGN

Excellence in Golf Design from the American Society of Golf Course Architects



LINKS LEARNINGS

How have the links courses of Britain and Ireland inspired today's architects?

HUNKI YUN

The new ASGCA Executive Director speaks about his career and what he hopes to bring to the Society

ALSO:

- // The Landing
- // ASGCA Donald Ross Award
- // Trump Lido Indonesia



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Michael Benkusky
President, ASGCA

Links from past to present

Golf originated on Scotland's links – windswept coastal dunescapes that were of little use for agriculture but great fun as a place to hit pebbles with a stick. Over the years, this rudimentary game formalized – with its own equipment, rules and norms – and surged in popularity, spreading across the world and onto other playing surfaces – like parkland, forest and desert.

In North America, there are very few areas of land that resembles Scottish links, so American golfers – myself included – tend to grow up playing courses of a very different nature. I've since had many experiences of links golf, including at ASGCA and other golf industry meetings held in the United Kingdom. It often feels like a completely different game to what I learned as a child and inevitably impacts the way you think about golf course design.

Many of our Golden Age courses were created by designers like Donald Ross and Tom Bendelow, who hailed from Scotland or, like Charles Blair Macdonald, received a golfing education there. The template holes of some of America's finest clubs are modeled on originals found in the United Kingdom.

Today's golf course architects continue to find inspiration in links golf. In the cover story on page 12 of this issue, three of my ASGCA colleagues share some of their experiences, and how it has impacted their approach to design.

In the next issue of *By Design*, you can look forward to a new face greeting you. In my year as ASGCA President, I have had the privilege of working alongside two Executive Directors, something very few of my predecessors have been able to say! I'd like to give Hunki Yun a warm welcome – you can read about his plans for the ASGCA in the interview on page 18.

I hope you enjoy the read!

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Editor and Publisher

Toby Ingleton

Editorial contributors

Richard Humphreys, Laura Hyde, Stacie Zinn Roberts

Design

Bruce Graham, Libby Sidebotham, Dhanika Vansia

ASGCA Staff

Jeff Brauer, Mike Shefky, Marc Whitney, Ann Woelfel, Hunki Yun

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New Vietnam resort course ready to open



Golden Sands Golf Resort near Hue, Vietnam, will hold a soft opening of its North course, the first of two Nicklaus Design courses planned for the development, in September.

The layout was designed by Jim Wagner, ASGCA, who has since become a partner of Curley-Wagner Golf Design, while at Nicklaus Design as a senior design associate. The resort has been developed by Vietnam's BRG Group and built

along Vinh Xuan beach.

"The site is a natural sandy parcel located along the sea and featured a variety of natural movement, from extreme flats to chopped up rolling topography with soft elevation change," said Wagner.

"The site's most appealing landform was a natural ridge that bisects the property running north-south.

"Although most of the front nine was in extreme low-lying flats and had to be raised, the back nine is a

wonderful sequence of holes that takes advantage of natural sand dunes and gently rolling topography with long views of the sea to the east. We did very little earthwork on these holes and that should be apparent when playing the course. The back nine will undoubtedly be one of the more exciting finishing experiences Vietnam golf has to offer."

Wagner has made use of the natural ridge running north-south in the design. "That ridge is the



land's most prominent natural feature and taking advantage of it influenced the entire routing as its terminus sat below an elevated promontory, which was an obvious fit for the clubhouse location," he said. "With the sea to the ridge's east and extreme flats occupying much of the land to the ridge's west, the routing began to take shape with the ninth hole eventually playing south and back towards the clubhouse along the ridge."

Sean Quinn, ASGCA, senior design associate at Nicklaus Design, said: "Permitting did not allow us to put any holes right on the beach and we had to retain a line of casuarina trees to separate, but we have thinned them out and opened some ocean views in certain key areas. Casuarina trees have been lightly planted throughout, but they do not block vistas. When the mature casuarinas are cropped, they resemble gorse that gives the course a great look."

Robert Trent Jones, Jr. to receive ASGCA Donald Ross Award

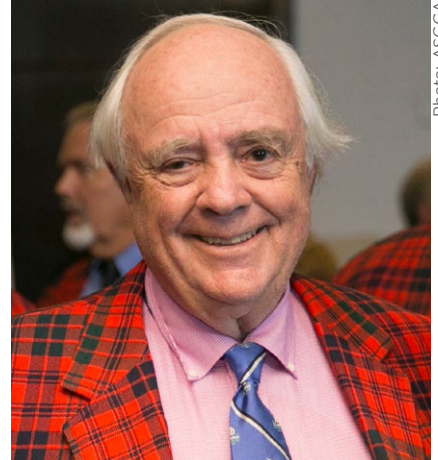


Photo: ASGCA

ASGCA will present its Donald Ross Award to ASGCA Past President Robert Trent Jones, Jr. at the 2024 Annual Meeting in San Francisco.

The award, given annually since 1976, is presented to a person who has made a significant contribution to the game of golf and the profession of golf course architecture.

"Robert Trent Jones, Jr. is a living history of ASGCA and the profession of golf course architecture," said ASGCA President Mike Benkusky. "The courses he continues to design around the world will be played for generations to come, and his commitment to the environment and securing for golf course architects the copyright protection of their work will have a lasting positive impact on the golf industry. He has come a long way from his first ASGCA Annual Meeting, when his father brought him along to serve as bartender."



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Quarry Oaks set to reopen following LaFoy renovation

Quarry Oaks Golf Club in Ashland, Nebraska, will reopen its course for limited play this fall following a year-long grow-in after a renovation by original designer John LaFoy, ASGCA, and contractor Landscapes Unlimited.

Work began in summer 2022 with a substantial tree management program that saw over 4,000 trees removed.

All bunkers have been rebuilt and reshaped. Fifteen new bunkers were added; four at greens and 11 in fairways. “The new and rebuilt fairway bunkers will

have the biggest impact on strategy,” said LaFoy. “We have had the luxury of seeing where golfers hit their balls for the last 20-plus years, so we were able to locate them to have maximum impact.

“Greens have been restored to their original sizes, with original contours restored where needed or otherwise enhanced.”

The project has also seen the creation of a new tee on the fifteenth, built on top of an old dynamite shack.



“The Nicklaus Design office was a great learning environment”

Dave Heatwole, ASGCA

In the latest podcast from *Golf Course Industry's* “Tartan Talks” series, Dave Heatwole, ASGCA, talks about his career at Nicklaus Design and what it was like to start his own firm.

“The Nicklaus Design office was a great learning environment,” says Heatwole. “There were not only golf course architects, but also constructors and agronomists, too. It was great to have so many guys

to exchange ideas with, see other projects that they were working on and be exposed to a wide variety of projects.”

Heatwole formed his own design firm in 2002. “Although I set up my own company, it was great to continue working on projects that I had started with Nicklaus Design,” he says. “Once they were done it was a bit of change to go from working on new golf course

sites and dealing with an owner to doing renovations where you are primarily working with a greens committee. However, I was glad I got into renovation work as when the recession hit, I had already got a foothold into that type of project, and that’s where a lot of the work shifted to.”

Listen to the full “Tartan Talk” at golfcourseindustry.com.

Here are links to other recent “Tartan Talks”, now featuring over 90 episodes:

- Stephen Kay, ASGCA, and Scot Sherman, ASGCA, [talk about their approach to trees.](#)
- Jim Wagner, ASGCA, [discusses his career in Asia and his new partnership with Brian Curley, ASGCA.](#)

Golfplan completes renovation at Japan's Kasugai club

Kasugai Country Club in Japan will reopen its East course in October following a renovation by Golfplan.

“While the routing was relatively solid, strategy and options were minimal,” said Kevin Ramsey, ASGCA, of Golfplan. “Shaping and bunker character were nondescript, leading to a course with a lot of missed potential.”

The initial focus was the course’s roundish greens. “The surrounds were gently concaved or slightly elevated,” said David Dale, ASGCA, of Golfplan. “There was little challenge and made for a pedestrian and mindless playing experience. They now have a more classic, Golden Age character with some plateau greens and collection



Photo: Golfplan

area surrounds to create a variety of short-game recovery options. The surfaces are now capable of hosting national championships.”

The renovation also included the removal of over 1,000 trees,

new irrigation, drainage upgrades, Better Billy Bunker liner, new grass varieties and new cart paths to collect storm water.

Once the East reopens, Golfplan will turn their attention to the West.

Neil Haworth, ASGCA, 1960-2024

Neil Haworth, ASGCA, passed away in Ottawa, Canada, in June 2024.

A native of Edmonton, Alberta, Haworth attended the University of Guelph and earned a bachelor’s degree in landscape architecture.

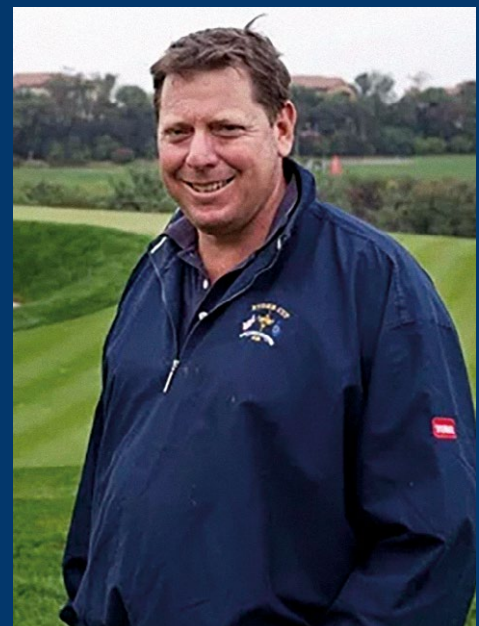
In 1985 he joined the firm of Graham Cooke and Associates before moving to Singapore in 1990 to work for Nelson & Wright. Haworth became an ASGCA member in 1996 and, four years later, became chairman of Nelson & Haworth. Together, with Robin Nelson, ASGCA, and Brett Mogg, he designed courses in a host of countries, including Australia, France, Japan, Pakistan, USA and Vietnam.

Haworth was responsible for many of Asia’s top courses, including Sheshan International and Jade Dragon in China.

Following Nelson’s death in 2013, Haworth and Mogg retained the firm’s name in Nelson’s honor.

Other Haworth-designed courses include Golf Saint-Raphaël in Canada, Royal Hills in Thailand, TPC Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia and the rebuild of the Island course at Singapore Island Country Club.

Haworth is survived by his wife Masha, and daughters Vivienne and Sophia.



New Ernie Els Design course opens in Indonesia



Photo: Jacob Sjöman

A new course from Ernie Els Design has opened, Trump International Golf Club Lido in Indonesia.

The club, owned by resort developer MNC Land, is located at MNC Lido City, a new destination two hours south of Jakarta designated as a tourism special economic zone by the government.

“It’s such a beautiful piece of land with incredible views, so naturally we wanted to work with that and create a golf course that goes with the flow,” said Greg Letsche, ASGCA, design associate at Ernie Els Design. “For bunkers, sometimes the topography whispers gently to you and, as a designer, you listen. The greens are interesting because the elevation changes and the wider landscape creates something of an optical illusion. Some of the greens look like they go one way, or may appear relatively flat, but they play very differently, so they’re deceptive.”

Atlas Turf International provided Zorro Zoysia turfgrass for tees, fairways and rough. TifEagle bermuda was chosen for greens, while broadleaf carpet grass was chosen as the external rough all the way to the boundary perimeters.

SOCIAL UPDATE



Patrick Koenig
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The stunning pastel beauty of Erin Hills in the morning mist, followed by the contrast of its emerald fairways and brown fescue later in the day, was really quite a pleasant surprise.



Golf Course Architecture
@Golf Course Architecture

Bangkok’s Stonehill course, which hosted the inaugural Asian leg of LIV Golf, has set a new level for Thai golf. The layout was designed by Kyle Phillips, built by Flagstick GCCM and grassed by Sports Turf Solutions.

Search ASGCA on the below channels for more posts:



Lessons of the links

When Pete and Alice Dye first experienced the links courses of Scotland in 1963, it shaped their philosophy and the direction of golf design in America. But how are today's architects inspired by links golf?

“The true links course is the supreme test of golf,” ASGCA Founding Father Donald Ross once wrote. “It is not only a physical challenge but a mental one. Each hole is a puzzle to be solved, and the changing winds make it so that no round is ever the same.”

British and Irish links are revered by golfers, architects and TV viewers alike, providing a glimpse into golf's past and often described as the purest form of the game. The venues of the Open Championship, like Royal Troon this year, stand apart from almost any others on tour, and place unique demands on the golfer. “Literally, everything we do here is completely different than what

we do in the States,” said Xander Schauffele, shortly after winning the Claret Jug.

In 1963, Pete and Alice Dye took a trip to Scotland, to experience links golf for the first time. It shaped their own design philosophy and influenced much of their subsequent work, and the work of their protégés, in the United States.

Today's architects are typically well travelled, and many have seen and designed courses across the globe. So how do links courses influence their work?

Upon joining the Society in 1995, Raymond Hearn, ASGCA, was encouraged to set out for the British Isles. The advice from Dye? “Be a sponge, ask lots of questions, meet

the club historians and take in as much as you can.”

Hearn took those words to heart and went on to make numerous trips to the UK and Ireland. Between 1997 and 2003 he co-taught a seminar on golf course architecture through Michigan State University (MSU), which saw him visit courses such as Turnberry, Muirfield and Royal County Down. “I learned as much as I taught. These trips were the best thing that could have ever happened to me as a young designer.” During a visit to Royal Portrush, Hearn vividly recalls the historian saying that the 1970s and 80s of American golf course architecture veered away from playability and the ground



Photo: Ken May Photography

Pete and Alice Dye, in the foreground, on the steps behind the first tee of the Old course at St Andrews

game. “That speech resonated in my career,” says Hearn. “The relationship between the green, surrounds and the approach is a key consideration for me on every project. I give the approach just as much thought as I do the green complexes – it equates to a much better playing experience.”

The notorious links gales changed his thinking on design, too. “The strength of the wind required a four-club shift on certain holes,” he says. “The bump and run was essential, and I have endeavored to design holes that allow golfers to feed this shot into greens.”

Bill Bergin, ASGCA, first experienced links golf in qualification for the 1984 Open

at St Andrews. His qualifying site was Lundin Links. “The wind was significantly different each day, giving me an education on links golf and the tremendous variation one might encounter,” says Bergin.

“These trips were the best thing that could have ever happened to me as a young designer”

“The course record was 65 and I intentionally played for a bogey on the last hole, to avoid out-of-bounds left, and secure my spot at The Open.” He qualified in second place, with rounds of 71 and 65.

He recalls his practice round at

St Andrews: “Lee Trevino said the Old course was ruined by installing irrigation. But it was brick hard! I had never played on ground that firm and fast. Chipping was faster than putting! I ended up making

the cut on the nose, and then shot 66 and 71 at the weekend to finish tied for 14th. The 66 on Saturday equaled the best round of the week, and I was paired with Nick Faldo on Sunday. Quite the introduction to links golf!

DESIGN INSPIRATION



Photo: Raymond Hearn, ASGCA



Raymond Hearn, ASGCA, has made over a dozen trips to the UK and Ireland and says experiencing the likes of Royal Dornoch (above) and Royal County Down (right) was crucial to his career as a designer

“Although the course was totally flat, it was well camouflaged. It was difficult to see a variety of features, and while not a student of architecture at the time, I mapped the course from right to left, because you could always see the right edge – which was mostly trouble!”

Bergin would also play in the 1984 Irish Open at Royal Dublin and the 1985 Open at Royal St George’s, which he describes as “the hardest test” he had played at that point in his career, highlighting “the constant crosswinds to narrow, fast fairways.”

Bergin compares the coastal winds of Britain and Ireland to those atop Lookout Mountain in Georgia – the setting of his latest design, The Keep at McLemore, which he has created alongside ASGCA Past

President Rees Jones. “The 200-acre windswept property is on the edge of a mountain,” says Bergin. “While it may be hard to imagine the links influence, there is no doubt that wind will be a factor, impacting the length and difficulty of holes, reminiscent of my experiences at the Irish Open.”

Bergin may not have been a student of golf course design at the time, but those trips were the foundation for his golf course education. “More than any other period of my golf career, I learned how golf is played on the ground and how design around greens impacts the way the game is played,” he says. “The impact of wind and how much different a course can play is never more apparent than on links golf. During

the Irish Open, I recall playing a short iron into a par five for my second shot, while the adjacent par four was unreachable in two shots. Par can become completely irrelevant based on conditions. There is a joy in that aspect of the game, forcing a player to only consider executing a proper shot without regard for the imposed parameters of par.

“A few years later, as a teaching professional it became even clearer to me how the ground game, approach and chipping areas impact the way the game is played on links courses and on traditional American courses.”

Tim Liddy, ASGCA, spent much of his career working with the Dyes, and has also worked and lived in St Andrews when remodeling the



Everything we do as golf course architects can be found in the Old course," says Tim Liddy, ASGCA

Dukes course, which overlooks the town, in 2006. "Yardage means nothing as the variable wind and firm conditions provide a test that differs every day," he says. "Five sets of tees are not needed because yardage differences are not as important without the forced carries and target golf so prevalent in the modern US-led version of the game. For example, the Old course at St Andrews, set up for the dry conditions of the 2000 Open, included fairways that in some cases rolled faster than the greens. These conditions defended the golf course against the power hitters. Tee shots traveled to the edges of the fairways where serious hazards await and approach shots to firm greens had to be played from the right place. Course management was crucial.

At its best, links golf is a chess game with different pieces and a different board every day. It requires as much, and perhaps more, skill and strategy than power. In America, by contrast, we fly the ball to the green, making golf a one-dimensional game."

For Liddy, St Andrews showcases the strategic pillars of golf course

many more. The basic tenants of strategic design travel well; the endless variety of taking more risk on a shot for reward on the next. Golf on the ground was an integral part of the design strategy of the early links layouts and adds greatly to the enjoyment of the game for the average player. It also offers

"At its best, links golf is a chess game with different pieces and a different board every day"

design perfectly. "Everything we do as golf course architects can be found in the Old course," he says. "Risk/reward, strategy, angles, blindness, alternate routes, long views, the joy of firm turf and

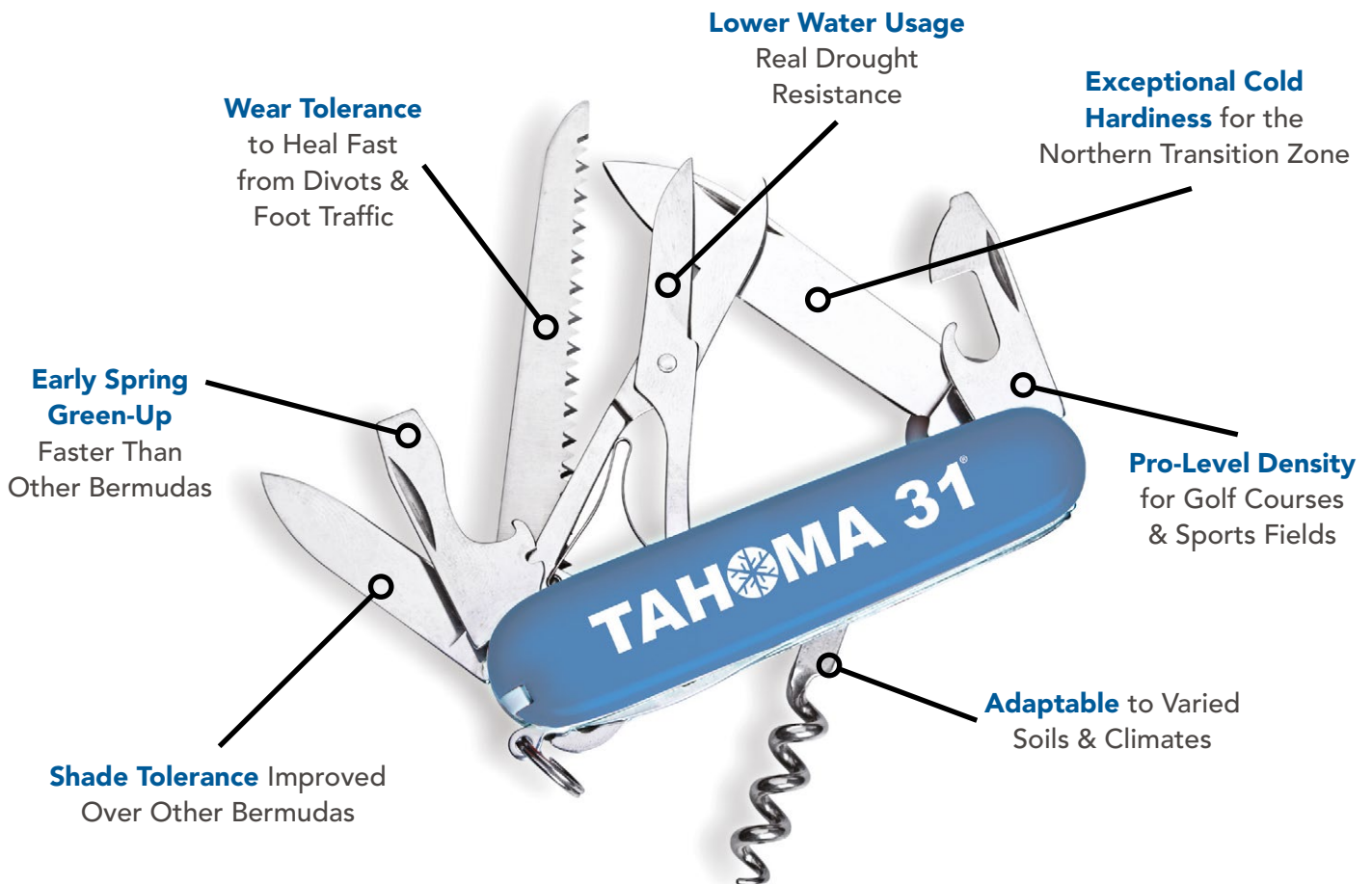
more options for the better player to shape the shot in both directions. This concept of alternate routes for different levels of golfers is a timeless lesson."

Links golf can provide insight into

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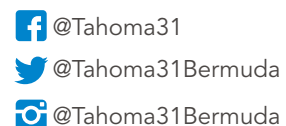
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At Mistwood in Chicago, Raymond Hearn created a links aesthetic by incorporating fescue throughout the course and building some vertical-faced pot bunkers



Photo: Raymond Hearn, ASGCA

the role of vegetation in golf design, too. “I was blown away as a young designer by the natural vegetation, the beauty of the heather, gorse and fescue. It’s magical,” says Hearn. “The relationship between that gnarly-ness, the different vegetation and the contrast of the fairways, approaches, runoffs and greens, it really is a world that is in logical order. You’ll be looking at your shot angle and options and then glance to the side and see an untamed paradise.”

Hearn has sought to achieve similar in the US. “I have pushed that envelope with my clients,” he says. “I have contrasted that unruliness with manicured fairways and greens at White Lake and the Donald Ross Memorial course in Michigan and at New Jersey’s Metedeconk National.”

Hearn was able to push a links aesthetic even further at Mistwood in Chicago. He and the late owner Jim McWethy decided to build some vertical-faced pot bunkers and introduce fescue throughout the course. “Some people don’t have the chance to go to Scotland or Ireland, so I gave them a little bit of a taste and they love it,” says Hearn. “Since the renovation in 2013, the club has become one of the most financially successful public golf facilities in the Midwest, and I give thanks to that little touch of Scotland and Ireland.”

At Florida’s Santa Rosa Golf & Beach Club, sandy terrain made links features a natural choice for Bergin. “We made excellent use of the site’s sandy dunes and natural vegetation,” he says. “We also incorporated closely mown areas with gentle slopes

on firm ground, allowing balls to feed to interesting chipping areas – from those positions, a wide variety of recovery shots can be hit.”

“To remain relevant, golf in America must take on its competition,” says Liddy. “Golf can offer solitude and natural elegance against the crass modern society, a private experience instead of mass media. But we need to stop building artificial golf courses, with cart paths, range finders and yardage markers. If we drive our golf cart and play to yardages all day, why not just play to targets on a range? What is the difference? To compete in today’s society, golf needs to offer the antithesis of today’s society, not a reflection of it. Links golf courses provide the natural, sustainable model for a healthy outdoor exercise.” ●

A new chapter

By Design speaks with the new ASGCA Executive Director Hunki Yun about his career in golf and what he hopes to bring to the Society.

The newly appointed Executive Director of the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA), Hunki Yun, is just the third person to hold the position in the Society’s 77-year history.

The award-winning journalist and United States Golf Association (USGA) administrator follows in the footsteps of Paul Fullmer, who served from 1970-2004, and Chad Ritterbusch, who held the position for the last 20 years.

Yun has previously worked as a writer and editor for publications such as *Golf Digest* and *LINKS Magazine*, followed by 13 years with the USGA, most recently as Director for Brand Marketing. He has spoken at events such as the Golf Innovation Symposium and the GCSAA Conference and Trade Show.

Before taking over the reins from Ritterbusch, who will retain an involvement as Executive Director Emeritus, Yun spoke with *By Design* about his career in golf and his initial priorities for the role.

How did golf become part of your life, and then your career?
I started playing golf when I was 15, tagging along with my dad. I was

hooked from my first swing and got good enough to play low-level college golf. More significantly, I was able to take advantage of going to school in New York to get hired for a couple of internships, first with a book publisher then with *GOLF Magazine*.

My plan throughout college was to go to law school, and after graduating, I got a job as a paralegal at a big law firm. But a couple of weeks before I was set to start, I saw an opening for an entry-level editorial position at *Golf Digest*. I applied without really thinking it

with *Golf Digest* led to a job offer after a few nervous weeks. As I told my parents at the time, I could always go to law school in a few years. Well, a few years became a few decades, and there hasn’t been a day that I have regretted that decision.

Through my career in golf, I have met my wife, worked with a lot of wonderful people, experienced historic events and visited lots of amazing places. With this new role, I look forward to adding to this scrapbook and making a lasting impact on the game.

“ASGCA members play a huge role in growing the game and making golf healthier and more sustainable”

through and I was contacted for an interview. The only problem was that the interview was the same day as my first day at the law firm. When I called the law firm to ask whether I could start the following day, they said, “Don’t bother.” Apparently, they just went down the list to the next candidate.

It probably wasn’t the greatest career move – my parents certainly thought that. Luckily, the interview

What attracted you to the role with ASGCA?

At the USGA, most of my work was on the long-term sustainability of the game through both resource consumption and by fostering greater enjoyment of the game. My portfolio included areas such as agronomy, pace of play, handicapping and the rules.

I would say that the common thread of those areas is that they





Yun has attended several ASGCA Annual Meetings and has already worked with many members on projects including presentations, on-course research and public course programs

contribute to the golfer experience, which became very important to me. When it comes to playing golf, no matter how good you are or where you play, the field of play is the crucial element of the playing experience because of the variety and uniqueness of each course.

Through their design of courses that fit and help the local environment, provide a respite from the stresses of everyday life, challenge players and provide a background for a game that everyone can enjoy, ASGCA members play a huge role in growing the game and making golf healthier and more sustainable.

I want to be part of that, and I hope to work with the ASGCA's staff, leadership, members

and partners to help make the organization – and the game – stronger for generations to come.

Since you began conversations with ASGCA leaders, has your perception of the Society changed at all?

At the USGA, I had the opportunity to work with dozens of ASGCA members, whether through presentations, on-course research or administering a joint program to help public courses. I was always impressed by the breadth of knowledge about the game that ASGCA members possess.

As I proceeded through the interview process, I became better acquainted with the ASGCA's culture, and I was even

more impressed by the leaders' professionalism, dedication and camaraderie.

ASGCA members are a fun bunch who I enjoy spending time with, and I am looking forward to getting to know them better.

During this past U.S. Open, several members – who didn't know that I was being considered for this role – sought me out and came by to where I was working to say hello, chat and catch up. That speaks volumes about the ASGCA and its members.

What do you expect from your first months in the role? Do you have any initial goals?

My biggest goal is to get out of the way of the staff and committee



members who are hard at work organizing the Annual Meeting!

I've attended several Annual Meetings, and I was always impressed by how well run they were and by the educational topics... even if I was one of the speakers! I want to make sure this gathering meets our very high standards, and I'll support the planning as best as I can.

In the meantime, I plan on spending the first couple of months leading up to the Annual Meeting in November on a 'listening tour', speaking to as many members as I can, so I can learn more about what they do, their views on the organization, where the industry is headed and the ASGCA's potential role in the game. This tour will help to determine how we can provide more value to members and the industry.

I'll also talk to a lot of partners and others who play key roles in making the ASGCA a successful organization. We want to make the ASGCA as relevant as possible, and we want to gather as many thoughts and ideas as we can.

“Communication is the strongest tool in our skillset as the professional staff of a member organization”

Has Chad given you any advice?

Chad has given me a lot of advice over the past few months. But even before this transition, I was able to learn a lot from working with him and the entire ASGCA staff, which reflects his leadership. I have always enjoyed my interactions with him, but over

the past few months, I have had a peek 'under the hood' of Chad's thoughtfulness, management style, leadership and communication, which has been invaluable.

These interactions have reaffirmed that communication is the strongest tool in our skillset as the professional staff of a member organization.

And communication goes both ways – effective communication starts with listening. I will always make sure that members know what's going on in the organization and where we're headed. Conversely, members can always feel like they have a voice. My door is always open for an exchange of thoughts and viewpoints.

We may not always act on every idea and not every initiative will have unanimous agreement. After all, this is an organization comprised of a lot of smart, successful, creative professionals who have a wide variety of views and experiences – but that is what gives the ASGCA its strength. So, we will make sure every voice is

heard and considered as we try to act in the best interests of the game, the organization and the members.

Finally, it really says something that the ASGCA only has had two executive directors over the past 50 years, and I am honored to be inheriting this legacy and hope to continue in this tradition. ●

Versatile turf for flexible design

Tahoma 31 was the ideal choice for a new reversible nine-hole par-three course in Philadelphia.



Stacie Zinn Roberts

Stacie Zinn Roberts is a marketing strategist for Tahoma 31 and an award-winning writer and marketing expert with more than 25 years of experience.

The first time I ever saw a golf course, I was about seven years old. There was a playground adjacent to my elementary school in Northeast Philadelphia and one afternoon, I scaled a steep hill behind the swingset and entered a deep, dark woods. A dirt path led through the tall, spindly trees, and sunlight dappled through the leaves. At the end of the path, a long green hillside sloped down gently to an enormous white house, the likes of which I'd never seen before. As my friends and I held our collective breath, we felt as if we'd stumbled upon a secret fairyland.

When I got home, I excitedly told my mother. She said the enchanted fairyland was the Torresdale-Frankford Country Club. The green slope was part of the golf course

designed more than 100 years ago by Donald Ross, and the mansion at the bottom of the hill was the clubhouse.

Many years later, in 2014, the club was renamed as The Union League Golf Club at Torresdale. It is one of four owned by The Union League of Philadelphia, a patriotic society founded in 1862 to support the policies of Abraham Lincoln and now a city club with over 4,000 members.

On the crest of the hill I'd climbed as a child, The Landing at Torresdale opened in May 2024 as an all-new par-three, nine-hole reversible course, designed by Steve Weisser, ASGCA, of Rees Jones, Inc. The goal was to take some of the pressure off of the main 18-hole course, and offer an additional amenity on a previously



Photo: The Union League Golf Club

The Landing at Torresdale has Tahoma 31 bermudagrass on all playing surfaces except for greens, which are bentgrass

untouched 25 acres in the bustling urban neighborhood that is landlocked on all sides by Northeast Airport, shopping areas, the school playground and established homes.

Weisser, along with the club’s leadership team, agronomy staff and project manager Chase McEvers,

can be easily made by simply moving tee markers. The bermudagrass continues to the perimeter of the in-play areas, where it sweeps up the slopes and down into grass collection areas. The areas beyond were seeded in fescue to transition out to the native surrounds.

of golf into a small area while also making it feel organic to the site. “Donald Ross greens traditionally slope from back to front,” says Scott Bordner, Director of Agronomy for The Union League. “We talked about trying to throw in Ross features to The Landing. In order to play it from two directions, you can’t have it falling away from the golfer from one side and facing towards the golfer or the other.”

Instead, the decision to have no tee boxes allows for a myriad of approaches. “It’s just the greens and fairways all around. So you could go even beyond the two set directions we have, you could really jump into it from a lot of different angles and play a little different golf course each time,” says Bordner. “There is 70-foot or so of elevation change

“The decision to have no tee boxes allows for a myriad of approaches.”

devised a brilliant solution to maximize the usability of the 25-acre space. The nine-hole course has no definable tee boxes, and no rough.

Greens were seeded with a mix of bentgrass, while all other surfaces feature Tahoma 31 bermudagrass. It is mowed uniformly at a half-inch so a change in the direction of play

The Union League has made a concerted effort to grow the game; at each of its four locations, members are encouraged to take one free lesson each week. Creating a short course offers those new to the game the chance to try out their skills.

Weisser and The Union League team had to find a way to fit a lot



Tahoma 31 sod was laid on 80,400 square feet of green surrounds and slopes

on the property. The same hole can play downhill one day and uphill the next. It doesn't feel like you are on the same golf course when the routing is the opposite direction."

"Our goal was to not have people play it one time and say, you know, that was fun, but I don't have to do it again," says Weisser. "It's playable for beginners, but interesting enough that people would keep using it."

From a design standpoint, the wear tolerance of a fast-healing warm-season grass like Tahoma 31 bermuda provides versatility for a shorter course with a smaller grassed surface.

"Tahoma 31 was part of the design philosophy," says Weisser. "You can imagine the amount of wear that tees of a par-three course get. To be able to play clockwise one week and counterclockwise the other week, you're able to spread

the wear out. And that was part of the reason we were using Tahoma 31 – for recovery."

Warm-season Tahoma 31 bermudagrass, is known for its cold hardiness and drought resistance. The NFL's Philadelphia Eagles and MLS's Philadelphia Union play on Tahoma 31 at their stadiums, and both University of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia Phillies teams practice on, so it was only a matter of time before a Philadelphia-based golf course took the leap to use the grass beyond driving ranges and tee boxes. Prior to construction, superintendent Andrew Dooley visited with the Eagles' head groundskeeper Tony Leonard to discuss planting Tahoma 31.

Dooley says: "We went for an afternoon field trip

the day after a thunderstorm. Tony said, 'Last night you were probably sweating and you couldn't sleep because you thought your fairways and greens might have pythium. When it thunders and lightnings and you get two inches of



rain, it's the best thing for Tahoma 31. And when it's dry and my irrigation system doesn't work, it's the best thing for Tahoma 31. It can just handle anything'."

That endorsement gave the team the confidence to proceed. The course was shaped in-house and grassed in spring and summer 2023. Tahoma 31 sod, grown by Central Sod of Maryland, was laid on 80,400 square feet of green surrounds and slopes. For 8.86 acres of fairways and tees, 10,632 bushes were sprigged.

Having previously only managed cool-season grasses, Dooley noted key differences in Tahoma 31 turfgrass management: Less mowing – Dooley says the divot recovery is good but the vertical growth is fairly slow, which is an advantage.

The crew only mows Tahoma 31 once a week which saves on labor. It retains its color – although the bermudagrass will go dormant in the winter, Dooley says he has no plans to overseed. He doesn't expect play in the winter to warrant the cost or labor of overseeding. Plus, this past winter the grass stayed green longer than expected. He says: "The Tahoma 31 stayed fairly green until Thanksgiving. That was a surprise to us. We thought it would be brown by Halloween". "It requires less fertilizer – this past summer the club was still heavily fertilizing the Tahoma 31 to push the grass, which in the sprigged areas is 99 percent filled in. Dooley says he expects to use dramatically less fertilizer next year.

Still, converting to bermudagrass

this far north in the Transition Zone, to be the first ones in the area to do it to this extent, took faith on the part of the members and the staff.

"There's a learning curve for someone who's never done it before," says Dooley. "But into the heat of summer, I have no concerns that the grass is dying. On the other hand, the bentgrass/poa greens here, we have to check five, six times a day."

The members wanted reassurance too. Dooley says. "On opening day, one of the members who was not really in favor of bermudagrass said, 'Andrew, is this bermudagrass? It looks like bentgrass!' No one can tell the difference apart from a superintendent on hands and knees pulling out the stolons and rhizomes."

The seven-year old me smiled at that thought. ●

The Landing was designed by Steve Weisser, ASGCA, with golfers able to play the nine-hole layout in two directions



Mesa Country Club

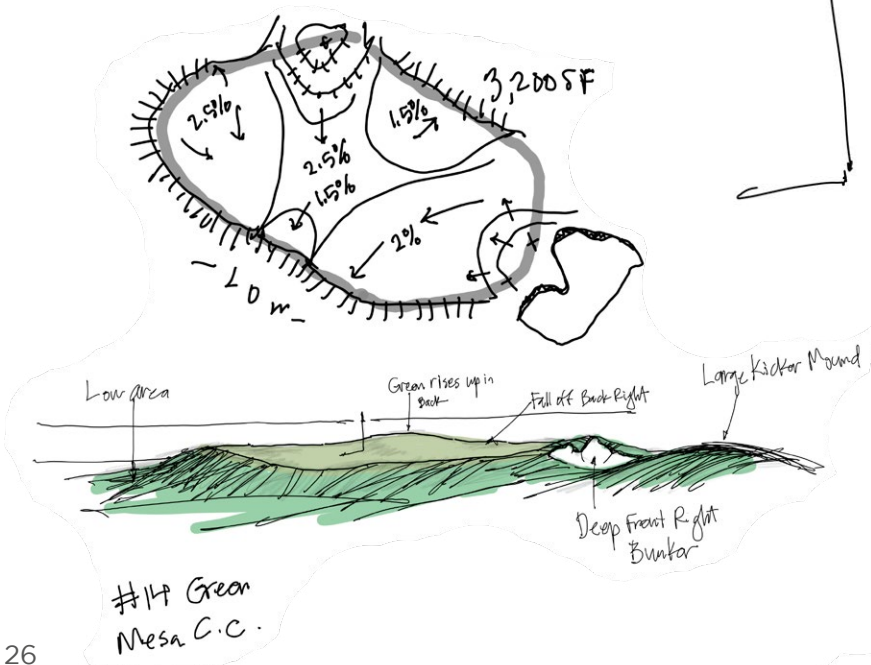
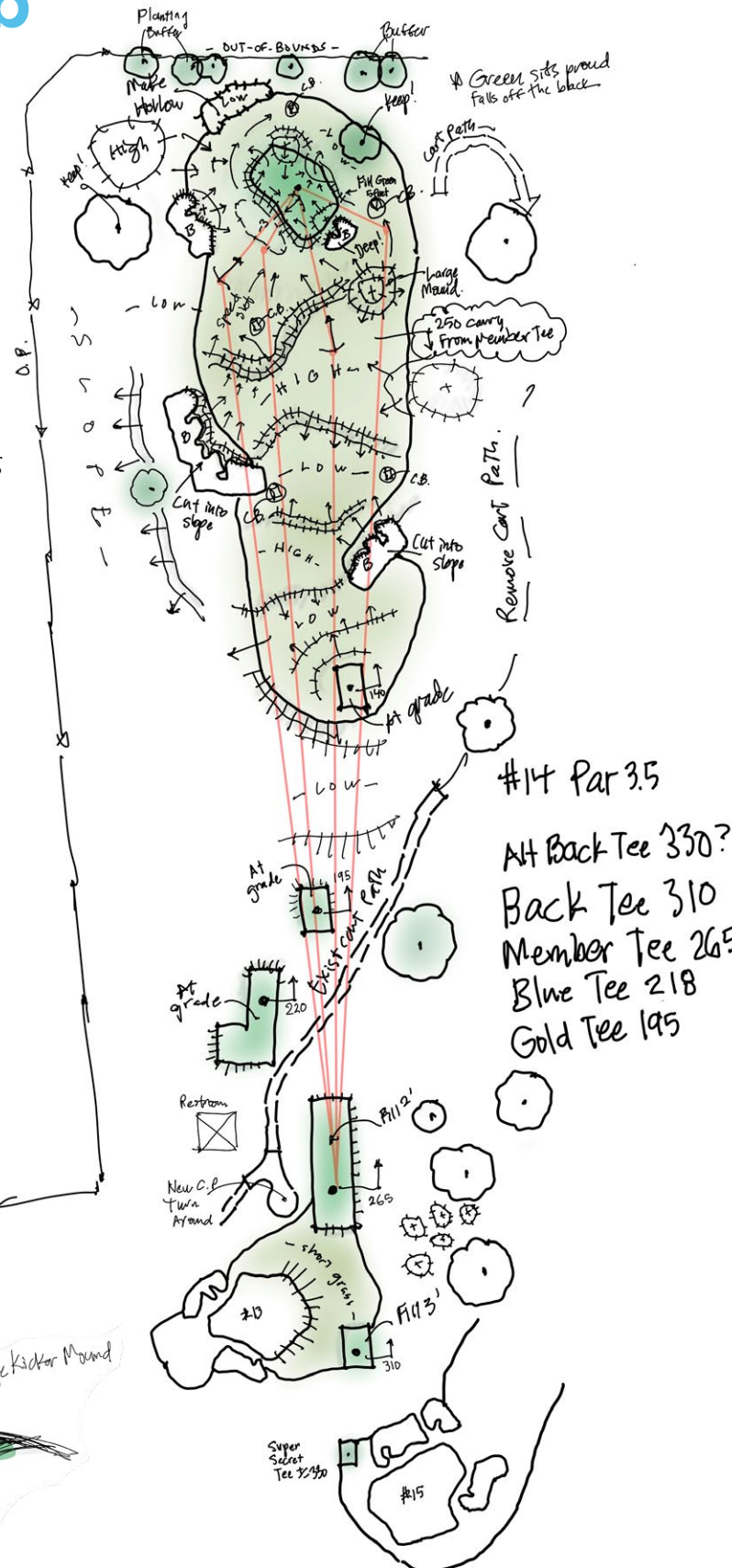
The fourteenth hole at Mesa Country Club in Arizona has been redesigned by Andy Staples, ASGCA, as part of a renovation of the 1948 Billy Bell design.

Staples has transformed the hole from a mid-length par three to a short par four, with new tees ranging from 140 to 335 yards. Close inspection of the sketch reveals a small ‘super secret’ tee that has been incorporated into the new design.

“I’d like all players to be able to try for the green, so the tees are set to accommodate this intent,” said Staples. “The strategy is to weigh going for the green versus laying up. The small green is angled from right to left, and slopes in a variety of directions, which places a premium on the approach. I can see many players just mindlessly hitting driver to have as short of an approach as possible; however, the downhill and sidehill slopes around the green, combined with the contours of the putting surface, will make the ‘half wedge’ quite tricky. Also, a wayward shot that finds a bunker or a grassy hill will be a very difficult up and down.”

“This hole is a perfect example of a par 3.5, something that does not really exist in Arizona,” said Staples.

“I’m certain it will garner a lot of talk after the round – players will either love or hate it!” ●





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Tahoma 31® Bermudagrass

Developed by the turfgrass experts at Oklahoma State University, Tahoma 31 Bermudagrass pushes the geographic boundaries of bermudagrass into the northernmost reaches of the Transition Zone. Highly cold tolerant, the name "Tahoma" comes from the Native American word that means "frozen water," and the grass lives up to its name. Golf courses as far north as Chillicothe Country Club in Ohio (fairways and tees), and Liberty National in Jersey City, NJ, (driving range tee), benefit from Tahoma 31's ability to stand up to cold winters yet thrive in hot summer temperatures. Tahoma 31 creates a sustainable and maintainable golf course with dramatically lower disease pressures compared to cool-season grasses. A tight, dense turf generally mowed as low as 1/4 to 1/2-inch for excellent playability, with notable wear tolerance to heal quickly from divot damage, and strong drought tolerance to save water, its deep blue-green color offers stunning visual contrast for golf course design.

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