

BY KRISTINE KERR

# Enduring design

As golf looks to shore up its future it's important for architects to focus on its past.

**G**olfers play for fun, challenge and sociability; communing with nature, exercising, and enjoying friendships and rivalries. The golf course is the asset, and the place of enjoyment... or not; it certainly can bring out a large array of emotions! Along with the sustainable aspect of fostering environmental responsibility, as golf courses are increasingly doing, stakeholders must demonstrate strong governance, and a successful economic model. Location and maintainability are also factors. But what else leads to "continuance" in a golf course?

The embracing of design excellence is fundamental to the popularity and longevity of a golf course.

While some may eschew golf course rankings as being a marketing tool, and in some instances a case of 'the Emperor's New Clothes', a scan of international Top 100 lists shows the majority of recurrently popular courses are around 100 years old or even older, designed in the 'Golden Age' of golf course architecture – certainly indicating a level of permanence in the golfing scene.

Why is this so? Top-ranking courses typically represent a standard of excellence with classic features that lead to their enduring allure. Habitually the top 10 include three of Dr Alistair Mackenzie's courses – Cypress Point (1928), Augusta National (1933, though modernised at various points in time) and Royal Melbourne's West Course (1926).

When it comes to specific golf holes, Mackenzie's dictum was: "The ideal hole is surely one that affords the greatest pleasure to the greatest number, gives the fullest advantage for accurate play, stimulates players to improve their game and never becomes monotonous."

It is undoubtedly such a golf hole, and indeed a course that presents such holes, that keep golfers intrigued. In company with the Golden Age, and many architects following that era, Mackenzie's courses present those characteristics – classic strategic design, contest, harmony and variety.

In asking fellow SAGCA members about their favourite Australian or NZ golf course and what they think is a classic design feature that keeps people fascinated by golf or a particular course, the answers were somewhat unsurprising!

**Harley Kruse** – The current SAGCA President says "... without a doubt my favourite course is the West Course at Royal Melbourne GC." – which is also his home club (design Mackenzie / Russell, 1926). "Golf is a game of many variables and of course not one course is ever the same... for some (golfers) it's the conclusion of each hole, the thrill of sinking a putt... perhaps it is part of the intrigue and interest across well-designed 18 greens that keeps people coming back."

**Neil Crafter** – The Golf Strategies principal said: "My favourite Australian course is Royal Melbourne West. It has a tremendous sense of place and is a thinking person's course. The Mackenzie and Russell design heritage is obviously significant and has been on the whole, well protected by the club. It is our shining beacon of strategic design."

"My favourite NZ course is undoubtedly Paraparaumu Beach. An amazing links land site utilised to best effect by Alex Russell and a tremendous test of golf in the ever-present Wellington winds. It continues to improve under the great stewardship of Leo Barber."

**Paul Reeves** – The Pacific Coast Design architect said: "I lived in New Zealand for a year... I just love Paraparaumu (opposite) – it's everything golf should be: fun, full of options, challenging, playable and yet so simple. I just love short grass shaped into hollows, mounds, swales, options and these are often why a golfer doesn't even notice what the designer is doing to them."

Indeed, these are features that both Royal Melbourne and 'Paraparam' have in spades.

Paraparaumu is NZ's finest example of a true links course. The course is widely considered "the thinking golfer's favourite". Australian golf legend Peter Thomson described Alex Russell's work in carving a course out of the volcanic sand: "What was left after his departure was a gem of enjoyment, a monument to the game and a gift to the future." (Source: PBGC website)

With its near coastal location, wind plays a big factor in the changeability of the course's challenges from day to day, causing cogitation on the tee. Questioning club members on their favourite, and their nemesis holes, two fabulous and distinctly different holes were nominated: 16 and 17.



PHOTO: Airswing Media

# A sustainable future for NZ

Golf has been played in New Zealand for nearly 150 years, with the first rounds at the Dunedin Golf Club in 1871. Golf is the most played sport in New Zealand with around half a million Kiwis playing each year. As a sector, golf in NZ employs more than 2,000 people, has more than 6,000 volunteers, and contributes more than a billion dollars to the national economy each year. With some 400 golf courses for its 4.8 million population, New Zealand has the second-highest number of courses per capita than any other nation behind Scotland.

New Zealand GOLF (now Golf NZ) was established as the governing body for golf in New Zealand in 1910. It is a not-for-profit charitable trust, responsible for leading, growing and supporting the game. It is governed by a group of volunteer Directors, the majority of whom are elected by the 14 nation-wide District Association members. Golf NZ employs 32 people, with 22 in a range of roles, and 10 in their technology company – DotGolf.

The 'Enriching Lives Through Golf' Strategic Plan (2020-2025) was developed following some 18 months of surveys including by Sport NZ – Active NZ survey, Young Peoples Survey, Voice of the Participant, NZ Club workforce survey; additionally, Golf NZ held 10 forums and workshops to gather input from the golf sector.

**The Plan addresses key areas including:**

**Growth** – Grow the profile of golf through marketing, media promotion for clubs, national golf awards, database, programs to develop talent from district level to national academy.

**Participation** – Increasing player numbers through 'Love Golf' programs, Futures Golf Apps, a brand created for young golfers, and the 'Love Golf Live Long' health initiative.

**Support Clubs and Facilities** – A 'Golf NZ Services' guide sets out programs, initiatives and resources that are available to affiliated partners, which can be golf clubs, courses and all golfing facilities including driving ranges, mini-putt, virtual golf etc. Services range from new participant initiatives to club support and the provision of technology.

The central technology platform is world leading and based on the centralised handicapping platform introduced in NZ in 2000 – a world first.

Golf NZ is the founder, primary funder and capability partner of the NZ Golf Industry Council (NZGIC). Per its Charter, its role is "to encourage coordination and collaboration between organisations in the New Zealand Golf industry". Dean Murphy had closely followed the Australian model and was keen to bring it to NZ.

A Golf Tourism initiative has been running with Tourism NZ since 2013, where Golf NZ and TNZ work together to promote the best of golf NZ into international markets.



Golf NZ is in the first year of partnering with Golf Environment Organisation (GEO) to encourage Environmental, Resource and Community Sustainability in golf clubs, through workshops and an online sustainability program for golf clubs and course management: 'OnCourse New Zealand'. It is receiving great feedback from the clubs who have engaged to date. Around 20 NZ clubs are on board and those that have received international accredited GEO Certified labels include Remuera Golf Club, Jack's Point, Royal Wellington, Tara Iti, and Wairakei (pictured below).

**\* Golf NZ is supported by their many partners, including GEO, the NZ Sports Turf Institute and the NZ Golf Course Superintendents Association.**



PHOTO: (c) Gary Lisbon / www.golfphotos.com.au



PHOTO: Leo Barber

**Par-3 16th (above):** A short hole at 126 metres, depending on the wind it can be anything from a wedge to a 5-iron. It is deemed a potentially calamitous hole, as one must hit a very good tee shot to be rewarded with a chance of a birdie. The green is long and narrow. A mishit, or less-than-perfect tee shot landing on the mini-dune to the left of the green can kick away; on the right a drop-off can be a killer. There are no bunkers (indeed there are only on 35 on the course) as instead, Russell employed numerous grassy hollows.

In design, the ruse of playing with perspective can beguile, challenging the golfer's ability to gauge distance between features; subsequently they must dare to either take on a challenge – and perhaps be penalised for misreading it. Where the designer should create a visual balance in achieving this, a satisfying 'picture' may also pleasantly distract the golfer and lure him in further.

Two of my own takes on classic risk-reward holes are the 10th and 15th at Pegasus Golf and Sports Club (Canterbury, NZ); the 10th being a mini-'Cape' hole, a dogleg-left curving around a lake. Bunkers on the lake edge must be carried, often into the prevailing wind. Danger is also teeing off too far right, lengthening the hole, with a right-to-left sloping fairway, hitting down towards the green with lake beyond, or bringing into play the bunker short right of the green.

**Par-4, 17th (right):** This in contrast is considered a favourite hole by many due to the options afforded by the split-level fairway; long hitters play to the upper right for a good line into the green, whereas the lower left fairway is a safe option for shorter hitters (particularly when into the wind). Grass is short and firm and the ball gets a good run. However, playing from the lower fairway brings more difficulty around the green.

In looking at thought-provoking design features, Neil Crafter offered an example as being centreline bunkers. "While golfers initially might balk at the idea that a 'good' tee shot might end up in a bunker, once they play it and understand the alternatives they do find it intriguing – although some might have other words for it." An example he gives is the centreline pot bunker they placed on the short par-4 4th hole at Glenelg (Adelaide, South Australia): "We redeveloped this hole back in 1998, and this bunker is still going strong some 22 years after it was built. It still influences golfers on the tee by asking them a simple question – how do you avoid me?"



PHOTOS: Airswing Media

The 17th is a driveable par 4, where the prevailing wind can work in one's favour, helping carry the deep wetland that splits the fairway. Too far left to avoid the wetland and the green slopes away towards the wetland.

One may contend that the golfing experience is heightened by the beauty of the course and surrounds – qualities that give pleasure to the senses or exalt the mind or spirit. Who doesn't savour being on a beautiful course on a beautiful day, or out in the elements in a dramatic remote location? However, in terms of enjoyment, whatever the type of course, location, and membership, it is essential that the course provide golfers with the opportunity to develop and hone their physical and mental golfing skills, offer variety of holes and options to play them, and most importantly, have fun.

In the words of newly elected President of the ASGCA, Forrest Richardson: "If we were to define the role of the golf course architect in a few simple words, it is to get the golfer to come back time after time."

So, the enduring message is "design to last".