



OPPOSITE PAGE: The 1st hole Peninsula Kingswood North's course. PHOTO: Mark Wilson – Golfplus Media. BELOW: The par-4 10th at Victoria GC.

A HOST OF TOP DESIGNERS HAVE BEEN BUSY CHANGING AUSTRALIA'S GOLFING LANDSCAPE FOR THE BETTER.

WORDS Paul Prendergast

When it comes to the new and the redesigned over the past few years, 'mind-blowing to long overdue' would encapsulate the range of outstanding course improvement work that has been undertaken in Australia. Star newcomers in Tasmania's Cape Wickham and Ocean Dunes have received global acclaim and have added diversity to the tapestry of Australian golf course offerings that have traditionally been headlined by the wonderful layouts of the Melbourne Sandbelt.

Some of the more high-profile restorations have been a focus of recent attention on the Sandbelt, headlined by the remarkable outcomes achieved at the 36-hole Peninsula-Kingswood at the southern end of the Sandbelt at Frankston. Ogilvy Cocking Mead (with former partner Mike Clayton) were responsible for this massive

undertaking, which has seen the fully renovated North and South Courses vault up the rankings lists of Australia's greatest layouts.

Victoria Golf Club has also been a beneficial recipient of the OCM treatment (as featured in our autumn issue), with the project replacing greens first laid in the 1920s and restoring the course's ranking among the world's Top 100 and as arguably the country's finest classic 'stay and play' destination.

Other projects completed or in train are Sydney's Bonnie Doon and The Lakes, Royal Canberra, Healesville, Lonsdale, Sandringham and a consulting partnership with the Royal Queensland Golf Club ahead of its return as host to the Australian PGA Championship in December, underline OCM's standing as Australia's most in-demand design firm.

High-profile American Tom Doak has been active on the course design landscape in this part of the world over many years and has recently completed a dramatic restoration of the Yarra Yarra club in Melbourne. Among the many transformative aspects of the project, Doak has removed encroaching non-indigenous flora and restored playing corridors and Sandbelt characteristics that had eroded over the passage of time.

Doak has also been busy with The National Golf Club's Ocean Course on the Mornington Peninsula and, further north, completed a well-received overhaul of the Concord layout in Sydney's inner west. The latter project alongside the ongoing work at Bonnie Doon and The Lakes. Bob Harrison's revamp of the Castle Hill Country Club in Sydney's northwest and Killara's renovation under Harley Kruse, might hopefully signify change is quite literally



The Tuncurry course at Forster Tuncurry GC, NSW.



ABOVE: The 6th fairway at Teven Valley GC, NSW. BELOW: An aerial view of the 6th green at Teven Valley GC.

afoot in a city and state that had been relatively light on recent design projects.

Final design and council approvals appear on track for the commencement of Doak's compatriot Gil Hanse's major reconstruction of Royal Sydney Golf Club, with work expected to start in the autumn of 2021. So too are extensive changes planned in coming years at the acclaimed Newcastle Golf Club, plus a new build by Crafter + Mogford at Arm's End near Hobart.

Elsewhere in NSW, Craig Parry is overseeing minor alterations to the vastly underrated and largely unknown Tuncurry course on the mid-coast of NSW, part of a broader master plan for the Forster Tuncurry club's business.

The coastal location of the layout originally constructed by the late Kel Nagle and Mike Cooper fits squarely into the 'hidden gem' category and presents as a tremendous value-for-money prospect.

"It's a beauty. I fell in love with it the first time I played it," Parry said. "I reckon the course has got some of the best undulations anywhere; the design is amazing."

New South Welshman and former New Zealand Open champion Dimitrios Papadatos played Tuncurry a number

of times during his formative years and his recollections of the layout haven't dimmed over time.

"It was mint. I remember how hard it was at the time, navigating through all the ti tree off the tee," Papadatos said. "A great test."

Parry's ongoing work at the picturesque nine-hole Teven Valley course – 'Royal Teven' to locals – in the northern NSW rainforest hinterland will also be worth the trip once the course works are completed, by Christmas.

"It is amazing, there's no other way to describe," Parry enthused. "A lot of trees have been removed and new zoysia grass strain introduced that requires few pesticides and provides a quality surface year-round."

"The first hole comes down about 20 metres from the tee, with a creek running along the right-hand side. It just looks like the 13th at Augusta National, except it doglegs around the other way."

"There are some really cool things about it. There's platypus in the river. It's just really special."

Even prior to Parry's involvement, Teven Valley was a great template for how much fun and how egalitarian short-course golf can be. It's a chorus that keeps growing louder and louder from pundits calling for quality 'short



The Grange golf course. Photo courtesy of Great Golf Courses of Australia.



course' facilities to be developed to encourage people of all ages and skillsets to come together without needing to commit hours to a round or fearing the need to be accomplished enough to hold their place on a 'big' course.

In South Australia, Crafter + Mogford and former Greg Norman Design associate Ryan Van Der Veen have collectively been responsible for works completed at two of Adelaide's foremost clubs: The Grange and Glenelg. Bunker reconstruction and input into their longer-term strategic plans are evidence of each club's desire to continually improve their courses for members and guests.

Further west, in Perth, Cottesloe has finished remodelling several holes, adjusted some of its bunkering and also constructed a new 19th hole as part of the final stage of a long-term course development plan. Both Mount Lawley and Royal Fremantle have also made recent changes to a number of their green complexes.

Clayton's association with Curlewis on Victoria's

THE GRANGE AND GLENELG: BUNKER RECONSTRUCTION AND INPUT INTO THEIR LONGER-TERM STRATEGIC PLANS ARE EVIDENCE OF EACH CLUB'S DESIRE TO CONTINUALLY IMPROVE THEIR COURSES FOR MEMBERS AND GUESTS.

Bellarine Peninsula stretches back two decades, but heavy investment by new owners over the past few years have increased the scale of improvements to substantially elevate a golf course originally laid out in the early 20th century.

Clayton, of course, was at the centre of one of two high-profile announcements reverberating around the local course design industry in 2019 when he left his partnership with Ogilvy, Cocking and Mead to form an equally impressive alliance with American Mike DeVries and Dutchman Frank Pont.

The other interesting development at the back end of 2019 was the news that Hall of Famer Karrie Webb had joined forces with the late Peter Thomson's design partner, Ross Perrett, to pursue course design projects in Australia and abroad. The outcomes from the combination of Perrett's decades of course design experience and Webb's flare and a playing knowledge gleaned from years on the world stage will be fascinating to observe. □

KARRIE WEBB: DESIGNING A FUTURE

Having made the choice to remain in Florida rather than return to Australia this year, Australia's winningest major champion and Hall of Famer has been able to play quite a bit of golf at her local club and in the surrounding Palm Beach County area. Webb notes that the upward participation trend in golf in Australia these days has been mirrored in Florida.

"That has been the great thing to come out of this [pandemic]. People have realised that getting out and playing golf, just getting outdoors and getting some fresh air, is a good thing. It's probably brought in more new people and others returning to the game that used to play," she said.

In normal circumstances, assorted LPGA appearances would have been on her agenda, but significant energies would also have been devoted to developing her recent course design venture with industry veteran Ross Perrett.

Like many thousands of global industries, course design activities for Perrett Webb and many others have been placed largely on the backburner so far this year. Webb has turned this negative into a positive, however, taking the opportunity to build on a repertoire of skills to embellish her considerable course knowledge and experience playing at an elite level around the globe.



Karrie Webb: Australia's 'winningest' golfer putting playing experience into course design.

"I've been reading a lot about golf course architecture and been researching different turf grasses, the playability of them and what grasses are suited to certain areas and climates," she said.

"I've also been taking online drawing classes. I'm not as proficient at drawing as I'd like and I feel being able to provide some rough sketches to support what I'm talking about will add to the creative process.

"When I was a kid, I used to draw golf courses on pieces of paper, back before mobile phones took up all of our time. As a player, you're such a perfectionist. But drawing is not about perfection. The more I do it, the better at it I'll get, but I have to get away from thinking I need to do it perfectly straight away.

"I'm pretty good at explaining and communicating my thoughts to Ross and the guys in the office. We haven't had any problems to date but I'd still like to develop that skill so I can also communicate what I'm thinking."

In the late 90s, as Webb was approaching the height of her outstanding career, she was approached to be involved in the development of a second course at

Laguna Quays (North Queensland). While initially questioning how she could contribute at such a young age, she relished the opportunity to get her hands dirty on the project – walking the rainforest with the design team to scout the land and seeing the corridors cut and fully shaped, ready to be grassed.

Unfortunately, the project ran out of money and the land has since been reclaimed by the rainforest.

"That was a great education for me, seeing how the course architects worked with the topography and could have a course routing in mind before they even set foot on the land. It was a huge learning curve and a real disappointment that we couldn't get that course opened."

Over the past 10 years, Webb has been involved in the gradual redesign of Townsville Golf Club, which still has five holes to be completed. She was also invited by Perrett and the late Peter Thomson to join them in the submission process to design and construct the course for golf's return to the Olympic Games at Rio 2016 – a process that ultimately resulted in the project being awarded to American Gil Hanse.

"I'd known Peter for many years before that and I'd met Ross in passing, but working with them through that Rio process was the most enjoyable experience. I felt that my ideas were heard and taken on board as part of that submission process, so it's been really pleasing that Ross and I have been able to team up and be successful with a bid to redesign the courses at Indooroopilly Golf Club in Brisbane.

"I couldn't have partnered with a better guy than Ross. He's got great knowledge and experience building quality courses all around the world, as well as being a great bloke to sit and chat with. It's just been hard for us trying to source work when the whole world has been shutting down."

Hopefully, for Perrett Webb and the world in general, the tide will begin to turn towards the positive before too long. □