

Best New Courses 2007

Among the year's ten most exciting new courses are some with a common-sense theme and others that rode in on a bolt of inspiration. Leading them off is a muni near Seattle that offers a case study in daring and a civics lesson all in one.

From [November - December 2007](#)

A Brand New Bay (Course of the Year)

Chambers Bay Tacoma, Washington (Public)



Courtesy of The Golf Club of Cape Cod

These days the best new American golf courses arrive like designer blue jeans—deliberately ragged and faded in hue. Inspired by a British links aesthetic, Sand Hills emerged on the Nebraska plains in 1995, followed quickly by Whistling Straits, Arcadia Bluffs, then Bandon and Pacific Dunes. For all their tattered edges, these courses are decked out with the high greens fees and resort settings that remind us we're shopping name brand. Last year the debut of the more affordable Erin Hills near Milwaukee signaled an embrace not just of the linksland look but of the ethic as well. In 2007 we're brought even closer to the original Scottish ideal. Set within a county park complex and interlaced with public paths, municipally owned Chambers Bay in Tacoma, Washington, is T+L Golf's 2007 Course of the Year.

It could have gone down in history as Ladenburg's Folly, in honor of the bureaucrat who championed the project. After reading about the 2002 U.S. Open at muni Bethpage Black, Pierce County Executive John Ladenburg visited a plot of county land that had long served as a rock quarry and was slated for redevelopment as a wastewater treatment facility. A golfer himself, Ladenburg decided that building a truly exceptional course on this site had the potential "to make Mount Rainier the second most popular tourist destination in Pierce County." The sandy soil left over from quarry operations would be ideal, but most compelling was the knockout view of Puget Sound, tracing graceful landforms against a backdrop of the majestic Olympic Mountains. After a battle to win consent for the \$20 million project, the county made another daring move, appointing architects not known for natural-looking course design—precisely what the surrounding landscape seemed to demand. The firm of Robert Trent Jones Jr. was selected over noted cofinalists on the strength of its enthusiasm and an ambitious links proposal. Design associate Jay Blasi explains: "We wanted people to come away saying, 'I thought only David McLay Kidd could do links golf. I thought only Coore-Crenshaw and Doak could do natural-looking and windswept. Maybe someone else can do this.'"

The architects inherited a 250-acre sandbox relatively free of environmental constraints. According to Trent Jones Jr. partner Bruce Charlton, the county had asked for twenty-seven

holes, but "we thought it would be better to build eighteen really good ones." The crew moved 1.4 million cubic yards of soil, using about one-fourth of it to cap the course with a foot of premium sand.

Visitors to Chambers Bay (a forty-minute drive from Seattle-Tacoma International Airport) are struck by the scale of the site. The course anchors a 930-acre park that will also include an amphitheater, twelve miles of trails and pedestrian access to two miles of beach. There are no homes or roads in view. Instead, swathes of yellow-green cloak an almost treeless, otherworldly dunescape. Add to this the whistle of freight trains running along the shore, air rimmed with the smell of the Pacific, Scotch broom flowering in May, and it's as close to the Auld Sod as most locals will ever get.

From the start, tumbling contours mimic the troughs and swells of Puget Sound, while craggy hummocks mirror Olympic Mountain peaks beyond. The dunes seem like they might conceal dinosaur bones, and sprawling, scraggly waste areas appear to have lost their turf over hundreds of years. True golfers will respond to these cues by playing seven-iron punch shots into greens (rather than full wedges out of habit). On the first hole, a slope along the right lays a welcome mat for bump-and-run approaches. At the fourth, a 568-yard par five, mounds on the left ricochet shots onto the green. Players can putt from twenty yards out on nearly every hole. The course's untamed look extends all the way back to the tee boxes, which, to the dismay of some commentators, are in many cases not boxes at all but long ribbons of rumpled turf bleeding into the fairways.

The designers carved out land features that would encourage creative shotmaking, but they also deferred to the site's existing assets. They shifted green locations to reveal the best views and elevated the tees of holes five and nine to present sweeping panoramas. At the waterfront par-four sixteenth, they excavated a twenty-five-foot berm along the right side to expose the sound. And just inland on a shelf of land above sixteen, they tilted the second and third to strengthen the impression that these holes, too, are perched directly on the water.

Within the course's wide-open landscape lie intimate nooks and niches. A natural amphitheater green at the par-four sixth is cradled by dunes, and the 398-yard tenth funnels through forty-foot sand hills toward a tiny, sheltered green. On the site of a former quarry access road, the 304-yard twelfth follows a narrow uphill passage to a large punchbowl.

Rounds may briefly stall here at the drivable twelfth (this is a muni, after all). But as waiting foursomes greet players on the adjacent fifteenth tee and nongolfers stroll by on the public paths, the spirit of St. Andrews is keenly felt. A slope overlooking the fifteenth green and the shoreline's lone fir is an ideal spot for waving to train engineers or watching sailboats glide past Fox Island. The fortunate few will glimpse a migrating gray whale. On holes eight and thirteen, a player may notice an impromptu gallery of locals enjoying the fresh air and the arc of a well-struck shot.

The decision to forgo carts made this network of walking paths possible. It also opened the door to a bona fide caddie program and spared the linky fescue, which cannot survive heavy cart traffic. Eventually the grass will be weaned off fertilizer and irrigation water, allowing it to play

firmer and faster and to take on a properly faded look. The course's putting surfaces will grow slicker, and while the rough will continue to grow in, the goal is keep the tall fescues thin, wispy and playable—until a major championship arrives.

Chambers Bay may vie to host a major event—ideally a PGA Championship, since its maritime climate is so preferable to the heat that engulfs the rest of the country in August. The venue offers space for corporate tents, bleachers and ample parking. Way-back tees have been scouted, and even pros will wince to discover hazards strewn in the fairways, such as the pot bunker on the cape-hole fourteenth or the steep dunes on seven and eleven.

"This course is a leveler," says Jones with a measure of pride. "It's democratic." Indeed, Chambers Bay provides exquisite recreation by and for the people. —Jessica Shambora

Architect: Robert Trent Jones II. *Yardage:* 7,585. *Par:* 72. *Greens Fees:* \$65–\$150. *Tee Times:* 877-295-4657, chambersbaygolf.com.

Golf Club at Ravenna

Littleton, Colorado (Private)

Decorated with the type of sandstone monoliths that spawned Colorado's legendary Red Rocks Amphitheatre, this striking layout south of Denver rattles and hums with the intensity of a U2 concert, earning every bit of its 75/149 rating. Throughout the round, bunkers in various forms (blowouts, pots, trenches and fingers) harmonize with quirky geological formations, forested slopes and rippled fairways to create deceptive approaches and often illegible putts. A trio of forced-carry par threes highlights the front nine, which is routed along the piedmont, affording better views of downtown Denver than of some of the landing areas. A giant hogback leads to the testy back nine, where the three-club plunge from tee to green on the par-three sixteenth becomes even more dramatic thanks to an optional "betting tee" shielded from the green by a wall of mature trees. —Jon Rizzi

Architect: Jay Morrish. *Yardage:* 7,263. *Par:* 71. *Membership Inquiries:* 877-339-1600, ravennagolf.com.

Stonebrae Country Club

Hayward, California (Private)

David McLay Kidd's soon-to-open Castle Course in St. Andrews is keeping his publicists busy, but Kidd's Stonebrae Country Club overlooking San Francisco Bay delivers a similar one-two punch of expansive vistas and strategic golf. Kidd courses tend to reward shots that are well-played rather than simply well-struck. Stonebrae's par-four fifth is a perfect example: Slightly longer than three hundred yards, it is drivable yet dicey. Mountains were moved at this private club, but Kidd deftly covered his tracks, and the result is a course that appears to have been merely nipped and tucked into the rolling hillside. —Scott Gummer

Architect: David McLay Kidd. *Yardage:* 7,140. *Par:* 72. *Membership Inquiries:* 510-728-7878, stonebrae.com.

The Home Course

DuPont, Washington (Public)

Washington State knows how to clean up a mess. Like Chambers Bay twelve miles to the north, the Home Course was built on a former brownfield. Mike Asmundson's breezy links-style design contains the concrete remnants of munitions dumps. Tread lightly on that huge mound in the fairway on fifteen: It's a buried dynamite bunker. Clean lines and a spare beauty characterize the layout, which opens and closes with panoramic views of Puget Sound. Why the name? Two regional golf associations own the course and plan to make it a statewide headquarters of golf. — Dan Raley

Architect: Mike Asmundson. *Yardage:* 7,437. *Par:* 72. *Greens Fees:* \$31–\$55. *Tee Times:* 866-964-0520 or 253-964-0520, thehomecourse.com.

Promontory, Painted Valley Course

Park City, Utah (Private)

Scooping out a few ponds and lakes is all in a day's work for course builders these days. Leave it to Jack Nicklaus to build a river. No fewer than fifteen holes on this 8,098-yard potboiler bring the gurgling hazard into play. In the distance are snowcapped Wasatch Mountain peaks for the golfer to gaze at. Even though the ball travels ten yards farther in the thin air, from the tips you may find yourself overswinging—Painted Valley opens with a 718-yard par five. The greens are fast and undulating and the wind can wreak havoc, making this a black-diamond run for the average player. —David T. Friendly

Architect: Jack Nicklaus. *Yardage:* 8,098. *Par:* 72. *Membership Inquiries:* 888-458-6600, promontoryclub.com.

The Golf Club of Cape Cod

Falmouth, Massachusetts (Private)

Unearthed boulders tucked into the oaks identify this site as part of the Buzzards Bay Moraine, a rugged upland landscape where the last glacier slammed on its brakes back in the Pleistocene days. On the second fairway of this Rees Jones design is a human-built glacial kettle that collects every decent drive down the right side and forces steep, tender pitches up to a shallow green. Terrain of this type is always ripe for elevated tees and greens, but that tactic isn't used to excess here. At the sixth, a longish par four, any player coming up short will have a wedge to a green perched high. The next hole is a two-shotter whose putting surface is basically level with the fairway but guarded by a pot bunker etched into the front middle of the green. Stylistically the course tends toward a formal look with casual tatters here and there. Bunkers and bumps are arranged into dazzling swarms in places. And although the greens are young enough to have excuses for how they roll, no such apologies are needed. —David Gould

Architect: Rees Jones. *Yardage:* 7,047. *Par:* 72. *Membership Inquiries:* 508-457-7200, tgccc.com.

Creek Club at Reynolds Plantation

Greensboro, Georgia (Private)

The late Lee Lynch, Al Geiberger's semiliterate caddie, used to describe a hole that looked one way but played another as "one of them optional illusions." Lynch never saw a Jim Engh course, but if he had, he would likely have applied his pet phrase to it. Engh's Creek Club is the fifth course at this lakefront development and the first built exclusively for members, who are quickly realizing that tee shots hit anywhere within a hundred-yard corridor can wind up on the fairway. Likewise, approach shots struck the right distance might land twenty feet to either side of the pin and still funnel toward the hole. There are several risk-reward shots, most notably at the par-five twelfth, with its alternate fairway. But the real risk on this course is hitting approach shots short. Make that error and you'll be blasting from deep, steep bunkers or facing an epic putt over a five-foot swale. Engh's contours are too odd and the bounces too haphazard for some, but players who can pull the right iron should find it pleasing, both visually and on the scorecard. — Steve Eubanks

Architect: Jim Engh. *Yardage:* 7,079. *Par:* 72. *Membership Inquiries:* 800-800-5250, reynoldscreekclub.com.

Kinloch Club

Kinloch, New Zealand (Public)

Jack Nicklaus played an exhibition in New Zealand forty-five years ago and fell hard for the place. But despite having designed courses in thirty countries, Nicklaus hadn't left his mark on the Land of the Long White Cloud until now. After four years of planning and construction overlooking moody Lake Taupo in volcanic terrain, Nicklaus has completed the Kinloch Club. The course rumbles across a dramatically undulating landscape punctuated by exposed rock. Its fairways are contoured and conditioned for ground play and flecked with disheveled bunkers. The second nine, delayed slightly, is set to open in December. —Nigel Wall

Architect: Jack Nicklaus. *Yardage:* 7,340. *Par:* 72. *Greens Fee:* \$190. *Tee Times:* 011-64/2131-0611, kinloch-golf.com.

Gozzer Ranch Golf & Lake Club

Coeur d'Alene, Idaho (Private)

Wending lazily around fragrant pines and tranquil ponds, Gozzer Ranch is more likely to incite reflection than frustration. Glistening Lake Coeur d'Alene provides a bust-out-your-camera backdrop beginning on the mountaintop tee of the third hole, a plunging par three. The rap on architect Tom Fazio is that his real estate courses go overly easy on members, but Fazio pulls no punches at the 475-yard fifth or the 472-yard eleventh, a pair of wicked par fours. The course does rather coast home beginning at the 501-yard sixteenth, an easily reachable downhill par five. Still, it's hard to leave without wearing a smile—albeit one that's tinged in purple, thanks to the club's homemade huckleberry ice pops. —Scott Gummer

Architect: Tom Fazio. *Yardage:* 7,237. *Par:* 71. *Membership Inquiries:* 208-765-9034, gozzeranchclub.com.

Cobble Beach Golf Links

Owen Sound, Ontario, Canada (Public)

Only two letters separate this course from a certain layout on the Monterey Peninsula. Neither is a true links, but both occupy stunning stretches of waterfront. Doug Carrick's great achievement here was in making the inland holes not merely passable but some of the best on the course. He starts with a wicked false front on number one and a set of elusive, ridge-influenced angles on the second green. Complemented by its luxurious spa and ten-room inn (both housed in the grand Nantucket-style clubhouse), Cobble Beach is the Toronto golfer's new hot destination. — Thomas Dunne

Architect: Doug Carrick. *Yardage:* 7,134. *Par:* 72. *Greens Fees:* \$100–\$135. *Tee Times:* 888-278-8112, cobblebeach.com.