

Designing to a brief

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AS golf course architects, we play a lead role in the creation of new courses. But sometimes it is necessary to curb our creative juices, bury our egos and work as a team with other members of the project team to get the best outcome for the development. For example, the establishment of a clear project brief supported by a financial feasibility is fundamental to the project's success. Many projects are doomed before they start as not enough energy has been directed to the commercial reality of the project. Important questions like "how much will the course cost to build", or "who is the target market" and "how will the project pay for itself" must be addressed at the outset. Otherwise don't start.

A course that appears to have gotten it right is The Legends Course at Moonah Links. It has been open for 7 years now and its reputation is growing as a popular course to play by golfers of all levels. In fact, in January nearly 5000 golfers enjoyed a game at The Legends. At 6,320 meters it is substantially shorter than its big brother The Open



The 420-metre 13th has a distinct Irish feel with powerful dunes surrounding a large green with no bunkers

Course, which is 6829 meters from the black tees. Whereas The Open was purposely built to test the champions, The Legends was designed to offer an enjoyable challenge for the average golfer.

The design brief was very clear in that the course must

- Look different to, and be less intimidating than, The Open Course

- Be playable by golfers of all levels of ability
- Offer golfers an enjoyable and memorable golfing experience
- As a 'pay-for-play' course, repeat business was essential to its commercial sustainability
- Be cost effective to build and to maintain
- Accommodate approximately 75% of the real estate of the total project.

The site was an interesting tract of land, full of valleys and ridges typical of the Peninsula's famed cups country -- which is a unique landform formed over thousands of years by wind-blown sand. A bottomless pit of sand overlying an abundant water table with a generous covering of indigenous woodland provided the basic ingredients for a great golf course. The land is very different to that of

The Open Course as it is steeper with terminating valleys and is in part more heavily wooded.

Further contrast was achieved by a number of design factors:

- A bold wild bunker style was adopted which built upon the erosion caused by cattle that formerly grazed on the land. This idea has its roots in the origin of bunkers which evolved

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from erosion caused by sheep sheltering from the harsh winds of the Scottish linksland. The bunkers are positioned for reasons of strategy, aesthetics and balance with a natural continuity and organic logic.

- Greens are deliberately larger and more receptive with generous aprons to provide for the fun options of putting, bump-and-run or pitching.
- The introduction of a low profile ground plane of indigenous grasses and ground covers to frame the course. Trees are only used to soften the interface with the ever present residential precincts.



The short 11th is played through a sandy wasteland to a green slightly offset in a small amphitheatre protected by some heavily bunkered broken ground

The Legends had to be a traditional loop of 18 holes given the vast distances to the outer reaches of the site and the need to aggregate as much real estate near the clubhouse and central facilities. The character of the land on the journey changes dramatically from woodland to linksland and back again and the challenge was to effectively manage the changing landscape into an integrated whole. Just like a well composed piece of music, themes are introduced and reinterpreted throughout the journey to provide a balanced and harmonious composition.

Superficially The Legends is like most modern courses in that it is a par 72 comprising of four par-5s, four par-3s and ten par-4s, but it is the arrangement and sequence of these holes that make it an interesting journey. Underpinned

by a philosophy of respecting the land, the order of things is dictated by the land's geometry rather than by some preconceived idea. For example, the nines are uneven in length and par, and all the par-5s are out of the way by the 12th

The par-5s are all strong but totally different to each other. The opening hole is a strategic 510-metre par-5 which is bunkered boldly on the centre line to the green, creating a double dogleg of risk and reward. The golfers can choose the shortest route home over the hazards in order to get on for two, or take the safe longer route via a very generous fairway. Sandy wastes are introduced from the first shot and hint what is to come. The next par-5 is the downhill 6th which is reachable in two and played to a double green that is shared with the 8th hole. The 9th hole

is a favorite and was one of the easiest to build as the land was ideally suited to a par-5 with all the undulations already perfectly placed. The bunkers which dominate the right side were enhancements of the natural erosions that existed. The green site selected itself and it is at the furthest reach from the clubhouse in the tradition of the out-and-in nines of the old links. The final par-5 is the long twelfth which is distinguished by a blind bunkerless green in a dell.

The par-4s vary greatly in length and include several drivable holes such as the 2nd and the 11th. The short 11th is played through a sandy wasteland to a green slightly offset in a small amphitheatre protected by some heavily bunkered broken ground. At the other end of the spectrum are the 435-metre 8th and the difficult trio

of par-4s which provide the teeth of the course. The 420-metre 13th has a distinct Irish feel with powerful dunes surrounding a large green with no bunkers. This is followed by the 420-metre 14th which runs in the opposite direction so that at any time one of these holes will play downwind with the other into the wind. The 14th is dramatically bunkered and played to an elevated green. The difficult 15th follows and reconnects the links-style holes back into the woodland. It is a sharp dogleg that begs for a lay-up tee shot in order to get the best angle into a heavily-guarded elevated green framed by Moonah trees. The 18th, at 410 metres, complete the strong par-4s and plays back to the clubhouse.

Par-3s are always popular with the average golfer as there is always a chance for par or better. The Legends

has four par-3s of contrasting character starting with the dramatic 3rd which is a mid-iron uphill over an intimidating wasteland. Generally played into the wind it usually requires more club than you think and it is prudent to finish below the hole to avoid a slick downhill putt. Next is the short 5th, a mere drop shot to a small green partly hidden behind a dune. The 10th is certainly the hardest of the par-3s as it is generally played into the prevailing wind. A plateau style green is protected front right by a small but deep pot bunker and to the left with a severe closely mown slope. Extensive bunkering / erosions deceptively short of the green frame the hole making it a more daunting proposition than it really is. With no bunkers, the long 16th is a chance for some fun and a test of putting. At 1,800 square metres it is the largest single green in the Melbourne area with an endless variety of pin positions that range from simple to almost impossible. Played downhill from a variety of tee positions it can be anything from a three iron to a pitching wedge depending on the wind direction and the pin position.

The Legends Course is attracting more players each year as golfers of all standards have the opportunity to enjoy the golfing experience - the setting, the excellent playing conditions and the tremendous variety of holes and shot making. Given its popularity and patronage it has successfully satisfied the project's brief. ◀

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