

Best New
COURSES
★ **2013** ★

Renovations rule, as the usual suspects—Tom Doak, David McLay Kidd, Robert Trent Jones Jr. and Gary Player—deliver top new tracks

By Joe Passov

RESTORATION AND REDESIGN WERE the architectural buzzwords in 2013, as design connoisseurs embraced a spate of inspired renovations in the U.S. and abroad. Updated or restored bunkering, improved irrigation and occasional re-routing can make courses feel new, or at least refreshed, as our best-renovation winners show. And while new courses are still in short supply, those that did debut in 2013 are true standouts, with Tom Doak's private Dismal River (Red) in the sandhills of Nebraska leading the way. Public players seeking value can celebrate our Best New Course You Can Play, Max A. Mandel Municipal, a Robert Trent Jones II design in Laredo, Texas, that charges less than \$50 during the week. Over the next 12 months, anticipated new courses by the likes of Tiger and Trump will enter the arena. Until then, we'll embrace the marvelous layouts that opened, or reopened, their doors this past year.

Fast, firm and fun, Dismal River (Red) is an instant classic.



Once more, Doak has given us a natural layout with almost limitless shotmaking options.

BEST NEW COURSE OF THE YEAR

Dismal River Golf Club (Red)

MULLEN, NEBRASKA; private

The latest if-you-build-it-they-will-come destination to pop up on the prairies of the Midwest is only "dismal" in name. Even with a prime piece of real estate, that wasn't always a given. Not only did Tom Doak edge out Tiger Woods for the design commission, but between his other masterworks on sandy soil, Coore/Crenshaw's

nearby Sand Hills and an acclaimed Jack Nicklaus course already on property, the pressure was on Doak to nail this one. He did. The fescue fairways, which allow for linkslike ground-game options, play firm and fast—they're watered with only 1,100 irrigation heads, half what the Nicklaus course uses. Meanwhile, the bentgrass greens, with fewer

chaotic contours than some of Doak's other winners, offer premium putting. A throwback yardage (6,994 from the tips), an unconventional routing (the final par 5 comes at the 10th) and a smattering of blind, lay-of-the-land shots are standards in Doak's arsenal. The layout itself is more unusual. Mostly walking-friendly, it opens with eight holes

in the dunes, though on relatively flat terrain; at the ninth, it crosses the clubhouse road and closes in a dramatic valley, surrounded by bluffs that rise more than 200 feet. In the end, Doak has again crafted a fun, compelling, natural layout with almost limitless shotmaking options for every handicap. You can't ask for more.



The bluff-bound back nine sits amid 200-foot dunes.

BEST U.S. RESORT RENOVATION

Kyle Franz's reboot added menace to the Donald Ross original (below).



LEFT: JOHN GESSNER, CENTER: SANDHILLS INSIDER, DOAK: BEN VAN HOOK

Mid Pines Inn & Golf Club

SOUTHERN PINES, NORTH CAROLINA; 7,040 YARDS, PAR 72; \$75-\$180; 910-692-2114, pineneedles-midpines.com



Mid Pines President Kelly Miller knows from great golf courses. After all, he's won multiple club championships at both Pine Valley and Seminole. Kyle Franz was an itinerant young shaper/architect who pulled stints with Tom Doak, Gil Hanse and Kyle Phillips, among others. When Miller took notice of the field work Franz was doing nearby for Coore and Crenshaw at their masterful

restoration of Pinehurst No. 2, a lightbulb went on, introductions were made and Miller tabbed Franz to rejuvenate Mid Pines, a 1921 Donald Ross creation. The results are brilliant. Roughly 400 pines were yanked out, restoring width, angles and strategies. Green areas and contours were put back to Ross's specs and regressed with ultra-dwarf Bermuda, which provides firm, consistent surfaces year-round. As he had done at Pinehurst,

Franz replaced fairway rough with hardpan sand speckled with wire grass. Bunkers regained both their menace and their beauty. Fairway corridors remain the same, but otherwise, the course sports a look not seen since our grandfathers were children. While Pinehurst No. 2 will likely always be the region's top attraction, fans in search of authentic Donald Ross should flock to Mid Pines.

ARCHITECT OF THE YEAR

TOM DOAK

Architecture's boy wonder is now the other side of 50, but he still exhibits youthful glee when presented with a wonderful site. Such was the case at Nebraska's Dismal River [see p. 94]. Jealous competitors might say it's easy to build a great course when you start with such a remarkable, sand-based site. But Doak had formidable challenges to conquer, notably the inevitable comparisons to the other minimalist masterpieces of the last 20 years, including his own Pacific Dunes, the top-ranked course you can play in the U.S. Doak has said

that his objective in designing a course is that "it should look like it's been there forever." He adds, "I like to build natural-looking courses and to let the natural contours of the ground generate the interest in the course." Unquestionably, that strategy has helped Doak scoop up scores of awards and accolades over the past 15 years, and we're here to place one more on the pile. For his commitment to cost-effective, walkable designs that tantalize with options rather than frighten with hazards, Tom Doak is our architect of the year for 2013.

Another year, another honor for Tom Doak.

