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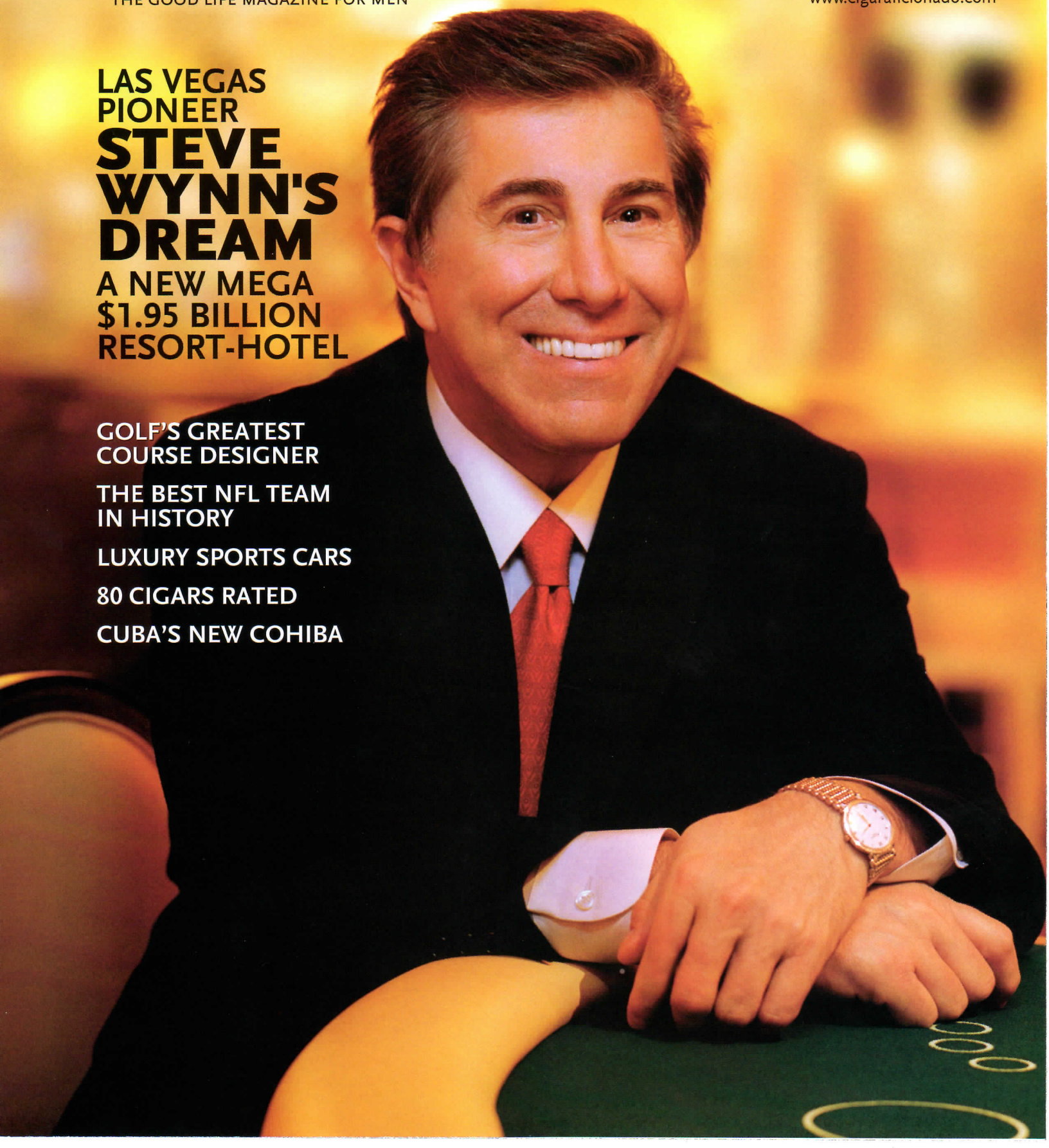
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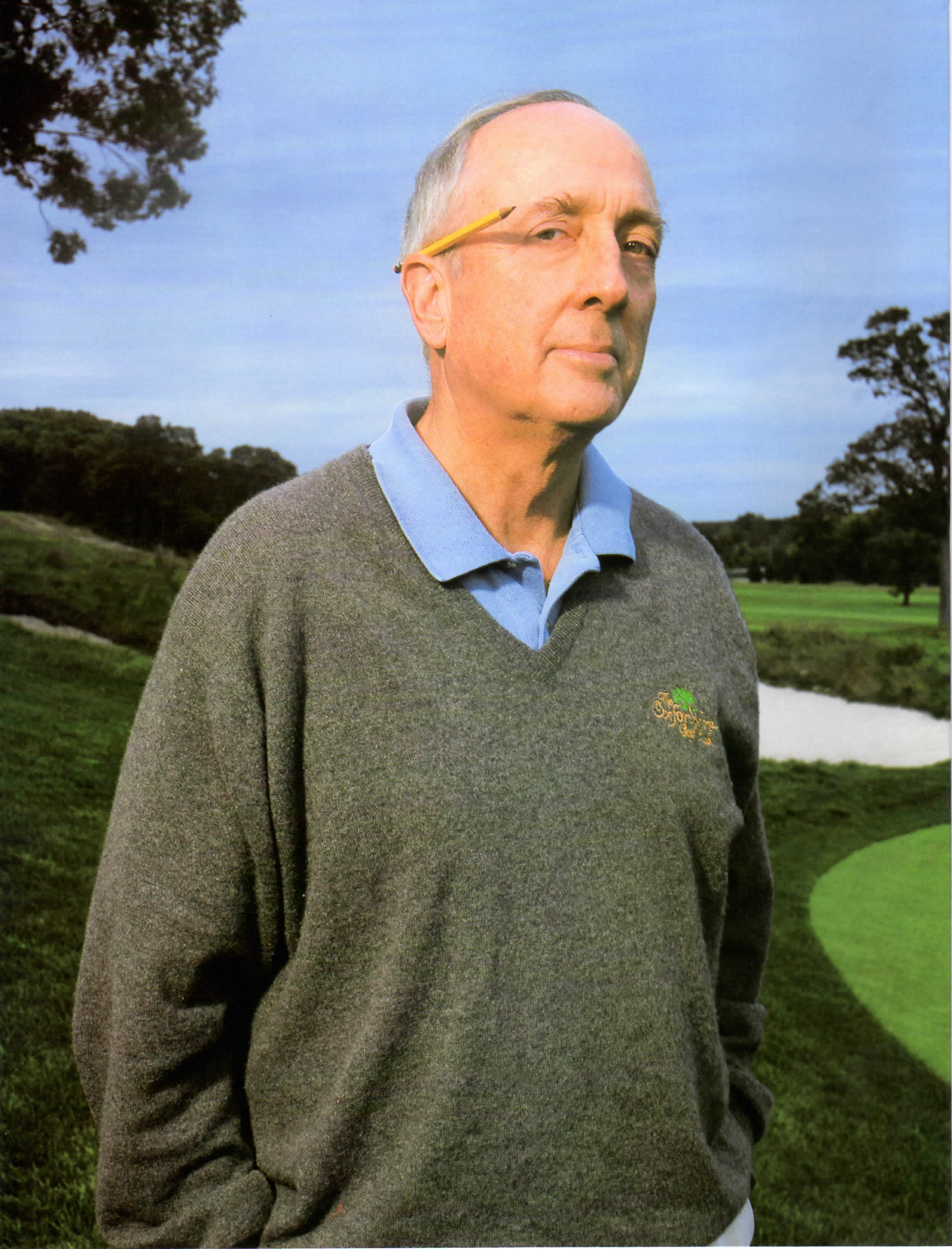
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# 1 for the love of the fairway

Rees Jones has designed some of the world's top new golf layouts and restored to greatness some of America's most revered courses BY JEFF WILLIAMS

**R**ees Jones is into dirt. • If his pants get dusty, his boots get muddy, no problem. Dirt is his medium, the landscape his canvas. Dirt is what he does best. Dirt for fairways and greens and tees. Dirt is the man's destiny. • For nearly 40 years as a golf course architect, Rees Jones has left his mark on courses from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the Canadian border to Mexico. If you go to the hallowed golf grounds of eastern Long Island, the land of Shinnecock Hills, National Golf Links and Maidstone, you will find Jones's Atlantic Golf Club and the newly opened The Bridge Golf Club. If you go to the sand hills of North Carolina, to the land of Pinehurst, you will find Jones's No. 7 Course at Pinehurst Country Club. If you go to almost any of the recent U.S. Open courses, the lands of the United States Golf Association, Jones has redone, restored and rejuvenated them, courses like The Country Club at Brookline in Massachusetts, the Black Course at Bethpage on Long Island, Congressional near Washington, D.C.



## "I think one of the reasons I am an accomplished architect is that I like

And everywhere he was into the dirt, directing its movement into the flowing forms we recognize as golf holes.

With a bachelor of arts degree from Yale University and studies in landscape architecture at the Harvard School of Design, he has the formal education to pursue his passion. He was born to that passion, born to walk the land and find a golf course on it. What else might you expect from the son of the most prolific golf course architect of all time, Robert Trent Jones?

If you were looking in an illustrated dictionary for the word "affable," Rees Jones's picture would appear next to it. His broad smiles strongly suggests a man you would like to talk to, a man who would like to talk to you. He laughs easily, often in loud eruptions that belie his soft voice. Conversations, on any topic, are easy and intelligent.

Jones has designed courses for the privileged and the public, for championships and for recreation. Most of all, he has designed courses to be enjoyed for their shot values, their ebb and flow, their aesthetics, and courses to be remembered, not because he designed them but because he discovered them.

"I like to build golf courses that are suggested by the land," says Jones. "I love to walk the site and look for holes, look for natural sites for tees and greens, fairways that flow. You have to make golf holes work with a bulldozer, but for the most part you want to discover as many holes as you can rather than create them."

When Robert Rubin wanted to build a golf course on a magnificent piece of property he owned on eastern Long Island, he turned to Jones, who had completed the nearby Atlantic Golf Club in 1992. "I see Rees as the custodian of neoclassical golf course architecture," says Rubin. "This was a very important piece of property in the Hamptons; it had been the site of a prominent racetrack, and I wanted a classical course there that paid homage to both the land and the track. Rees is an architect with the assurance and the ability to build a course the old way."

Golf courses aren't built the old way anymore. No more horse-drawn scrapers and hordes of day laborers with shovels and rakes. But most modern courses built recently are in the old style where the land dictates what is done, where the natural drama of the landscape is emphasized. It's a style that fits Jones like a favorite wool sweater. So many of his cues come from his father, who traveled the world to build courses. And much of what Rees brings to the game comes from his love of it and an upbringing in New Jersey that allowed him access to the great old courses of the East, to courses designed by legendary architects like A. W. Tillinghast and Donald Ross.

"I think one of the reasons I am an accomplished architect is that I like to play golf and I like to walk the great courses," says Jones. "I'm really anxious to play them. Playing golf is a learning process anyhow. You have to learn how to play a course, and in doing so, you can take things away that can help you in your design work, the shot values,

Rees Jones reshaped the bunkers on the par-4, 18th at Bethpage's Black Course and created a great finishing hole.





to play golf and I like to walk great great courses,” says Rees Jones.

strategy. I think you have to play a lot of courses to understand how to design them properly.”

Jones is a member of Pine Valley in New Jersey, Seminole in Florida, Maidstone and National on Long Island, and a course his father designed, Spyglass Hill on the Monterey Peninsula of California. His home course is the Montclair Country Club, not far from his New Jersey office. At age 61, he holds a nine handicap at Montclair and has been as low as a four. He recently won an invitational at the Redstick Country Club in Vero Beach, Florida, one of his newer designs.

It's his work on U.S. Open golf courses that has earned him the nickname “Open Doctor” and has fueled his reputation. Before he ever worked on an Open course, he had designed nationally prominent courses—Haig Point on Daufuskie Island, South Carolina, and the No. 7 Course at Pinehurst. He had written a book that was well received and used extensively within his field—*Golf Course Developments*. But his rise to prominence was his restoration and rejuvenation of The Country Club at Brookline, a storied old championship tract in a wealthy suburb hard against the Boston city line. It has been popular with the USGA as a host for U.S. Opens, but its members felt that it had become a little threadbare.

The club interviewed four architects for the job. “Ken Burns was the club's Open chairman, a real knowledgeable guy about the game,” recalls Jones. “When he asked me why I should get the job, I

said because I know the history of the game of golf. And they said, When can you start?”

Jones remodeled the course in advance of the 1988 Open won by Curtis Strange. Strange paid the course, and by extension Jones, the ultimate compliment when he said that it was the kind of course that could host a U.S. Open and the next day host its members.

“That job catapulted my career,” says Jones. “That helped me get jobs at Atlantic, Hazeltine [in Pennsylvania], Baltusrol [in New Jersey], Atlanta Athletic Club, Sahalee [near Seattle], Pinehurst No. 2 and Bethpage. I think I am so well regarded as a remodeler because I've seen all the great courses, I've grown up playing them. I know how to work the angles, the shot options. I know how to work the ground game because when I was a kid, there was no fairway irrigation.”

His work on U.S. Open courses has been under the employ of the host clubs. It is clubs' wishes that he attempts to fulfill, though he also works with the USGA when rendering a championship course. He says every course is a labor of love, but Open courses especially get the juices going. Last summer, the world saw for the first time the Black Course at Bethpage as host of the U.S. Open, which was won by Tiger Woods. Bethpage Black is a New York State Parks Department course, one of five in the complex about 30 miles east of Manhattan. It was the dream of USGA executive director David Fay to bring the Open to a truly public course and it was Fay's idea to







At East Lake Golf Course in Atlanta, the site of the 2002 PGA Championship, Jones revitalized a course that had fallen on hard times.

bring Jones in to rejuvenate a course that has almost a mythical quality to players in the New York area.

Jones understood. For the first time, he worked for the USGA for nothing. Pro bono. Free.

"This was a very special opportunity," says Jones. "The Open was coming to a public course for the first time. It's a classic A. W. Tillinghast design. It was a great design that needed to be cleaned up, aligned, made whole again. We redid all the tees, the bunkers, and added some lost greens space in a few spots. This was my chance to give something back to the game."

Over a six-year period starting in 1996, Jones thinks he made more than 100 visits to the Black. It's not that far away from his Montclair office, and he has a home in the Hamptons, so overseeing the renovation was easy. "You have to visit renovations frequently because they go so fast," says Jones. "When you are building a course, you could spend six months clearing some properties, but when you redo an existing course, things happen quickly."

The course was closed in the summer of 1997 and reopened the following summer. The deep, gorge-like bunkers had been pushed closer to the greens. Some fairway bunkers that had been abandoned over the years were restored. The tees were redone with new back tees built on a few holes. Using his knowledge of the game and of Tillinghast courses, Jones remained true to Tilly's form while creating the ultimate championship test for the twenty-first century. The pros were awed by the course, both for its strength and conditioning. As

proud as Jones was for what he had done, he was just as proud for Fay.

"David Fay's dream was totally realized," says Jones. "My goal was to put the Tillinghast character back into the course. The Black changed the face of the game, the fans, the enthusiasm. From the pros' standpoint, it could have been the best-maintained golf course they had ever seen. The players loved it."

Certainly, Fay was thrilled, and loved what Jones had accomplished. "He has been a good friend of mine for many years," says Fay. "He's very easy to work with and very caring about what he does. He has a great eye and he's a great listener. He has his own style, but when he does work on an existing course, he can weave in his own talent with the designer of the original course. When you look at Rees's work at Baltusrol or Congressional, or the Black Course, you don't say, 'Oh, this must be a Rees Jones course.' You say, 'Gee, there was some great improvements, but it's in the style of the original design.'" Fay's admiration for the Long Island course also led to an announcement last fall that the Open would return to Bethpage Black in 2009.

For three weeks in August of 2001, the impact of Jones's work was felt throughout the golf world. Three consecutive high-profile tournaments were held at courses that Jones either had redone or created. It began with the Walker Cup, the biennial competition that pits amateur teams from Great Britain and Ireland against a team from the United States. The Walker Cup was held at Jones's magical Ocean Forest Golf Club on Sea Island, Georgia. The course winds through marshland, along a river and out to the Atlantic Ocean. Next was the PGA



## Jones has created or renovated more than 100 courses in the last 20 years. He is called the “Open Doctor” for work on U.S. Open venues.

Championship on the Highlands Course at the Atlanta Athletic Club, which Jones had totally made over in 1995. Then it was crosstown to the East Lake Golf Club, the course where Bobby Jones grew up playing, and where the 2001 U.S. Amateur Championship was held.

These were three very different projects. Ocean Forest is a private club attracting a small and elite clientele. The Atlanta Athletic Club is an enormous suburban private club with two courses and a ton of other athletic facilities, and was the original club that owned the East Lake Golf Course. East Lake, abandoned by the ACC in the 1960s, had fallen on hard times, but because of the desire of Atlanta developer Tom Cousins to restore the neighborhood by restoring the course, Jones was called in to give it a sprucing up.

“Ocean Forest was a wonderful piece of land to work with,” says Jones. “You don’t get many pieces of land like that, so I have been very lucky. The Atlanta Athletic Club is a very knowledgeable group of people. They couldn’t have treated me any better. And to redo East Lake, for the purposes that Tom Cousins had in mind to revitalize the community, was a very special thing to do.”

Jones has no shortage of work and has created or renovated more than 100 courses during the past two decades. He could have taken on much more work, but he learned something from his father beyond the scope of golf course design.

“My father was never home,” says Jones. “He started up a business coming out of the Depression, and he had to take business wherever he could get it around the world. I made the decision to stay within the

confines of the continental United States. I coached my daughter’s basketball team for three years and I wanted to do that.”

Unlike his older brother Robert Trent Jones II, who followed his father’s footsteps around the world, Rees Jones is a comparative homebody. He has worked on a course in England, The Oxfordshire; a course in Puerto Rico, at the Palmas Del Mar Resort; in Canada, the Royal Oaks Golf Club in Moncton, New Brunswick; and in southern Africa, the nine-hole Swakopmund Golf Course in Swakopmund, Namibia.

He holds a landscape license in Hawaii, but has never used it. “The Oxfordshire, that wasn’t hard to fly over, have dinner with them, look at the course and fly back,” says Jones. “I’m doing a course in Madrid now and that’s the same thing. The reason I never went to Japan or the Philippines is because it’s a 10-day trip. I like to be involved in the field, and if you have to give a lot of time to a job like that, then the other jobs suffer. My worst nightmare is too many jobs, not too few. If I took too many, I’d lose my influence, my control. I take five or six jobs a year and a couple of remodels.”

The awards have frequently come Jones’s way. *Golf Digest* named the Atlantic Golf Club its best new private course in 1992 and bestowed the same award for the Nantucket Golf Club in Massachusetts in 1998. The magazine also selected the Sandpines Golf Club in Florence, Oregon, as the best new public course in 1993. A number of Jones’s courses are rated in the top 100 by both *Golf Digest* and *Golf Magazine*, and he was *Golf Digest*’s 1995 Architect of the Year.

His ultimate reward, however, is taking a piece of ground and

Jones preserved  
spectacular hilltop  
vistas at The Bridge  
on Long Island.







Before he redesigns or renovates a course, Jones relishes walking the property to get a feel for the land.

fashioning a course out of it. He loves to be on the site, dealing with his crew. He has his own shaping company, Calgolf, a crew that creates the greens, the tees, the bunkers and the fairways. "I control my quality by having my own crew," says Jones. "My crew did Ocean Forest, Nantucket, The Bridge, Brookline, Hazeltine, Congressional, Atlanta Athletic Club. That's why when it's done, it is so well received because it is done by accomplished people. Some of them have worked for me a long time, and one of them [construction foreman Austin Gibson] worked for my father when I was working for him."

From his father, Jones learned how to rout a course, how to contour greens, how to cut and fill, how to use ponds for both strategy and drainage. From Gibson he learned how to take a set of office drawings into the field and make them work. And he learned early in his career not to build what are known as signature holes, holes that stand out from the others. "I never tried to make one hole better than the rest," says Jones. "I learned that early on from a real

estate salesman: don't make the hole next to the sales office the best one, because when I take the people out to the rest of the course, they are going to be disappointed."

When Jones left his father's business to start his own in 1974, it was a leap of faith. On one hand, he carried the Jones name, which opened doors. On the other hand, his work, like his brother's, would always be compared to his father's. "It was a bit of risky business to go out when my father was at the top of his profession, but it's worked out OK," says Rees. "I've been very lucky."

That phrase comes up often when you talk to Jones. He says he's been lucky to get good pieces of ground with which to work, that he's been lucky to deal with good developers, that he's been lucky to have good people work for him.

But as it is often said, the better you are, the luckier you get. ♦

*Jeff Williams is a sports writer for Newsday on Long Island.*