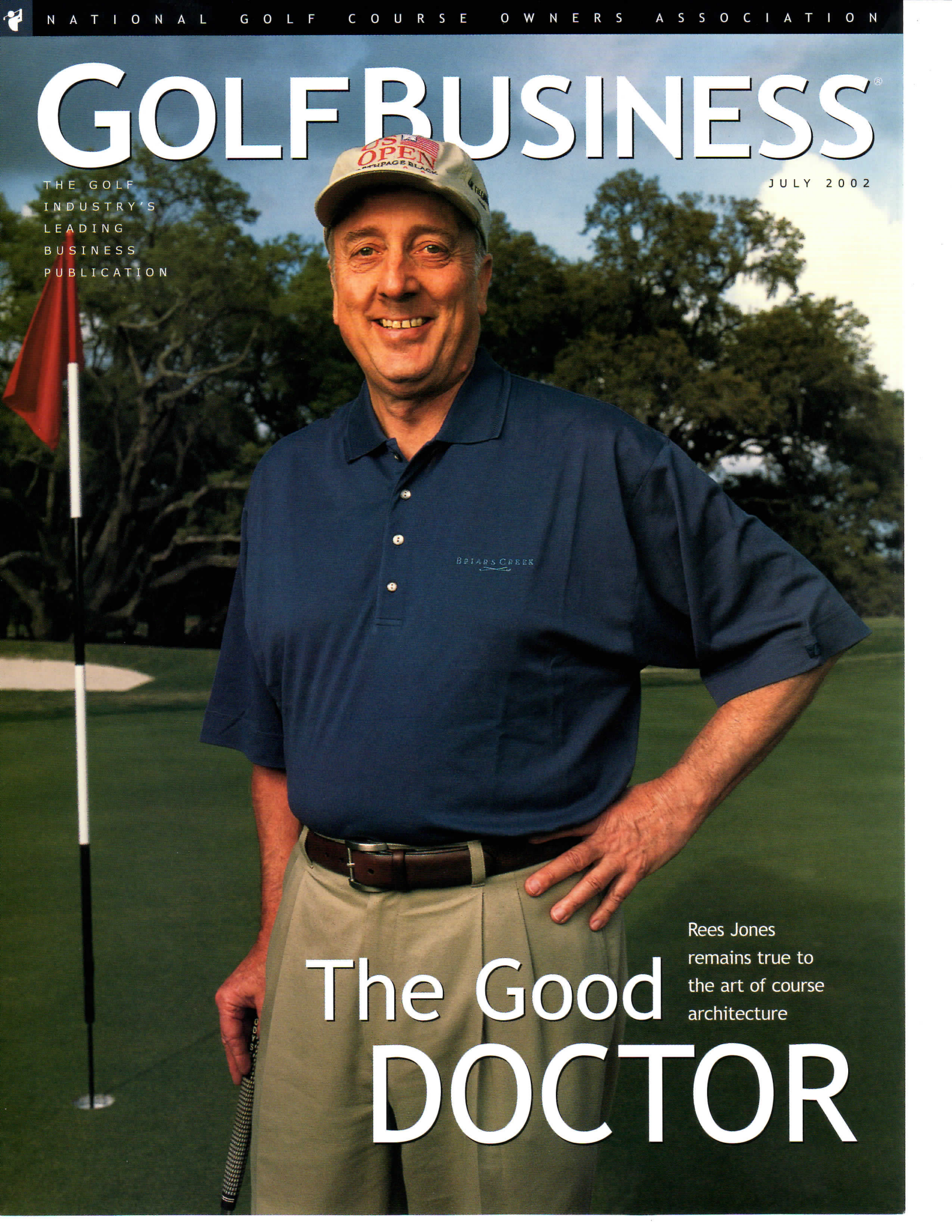




# GOLF BUSINESS<sup>®</sup>

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BEARS CREEK

Rees Jones  
remains true to  
the art of course  
architecture

## The Good DOCTOR

# The

BY JACK BACOT

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# Good

Golf's resident redesign  
specialist remains  
true to the art of  
course architecture

# Doctor

He's been called the "U.S. Open Doctor" so many times it hurts. It's a good hurt, though. One he embraces. With the skill of a surgeon, he has operated on a number of elite golf courses across the country, giving each a new lease on life and, more importantly, offering some of them a chance to shine as major championship venues.

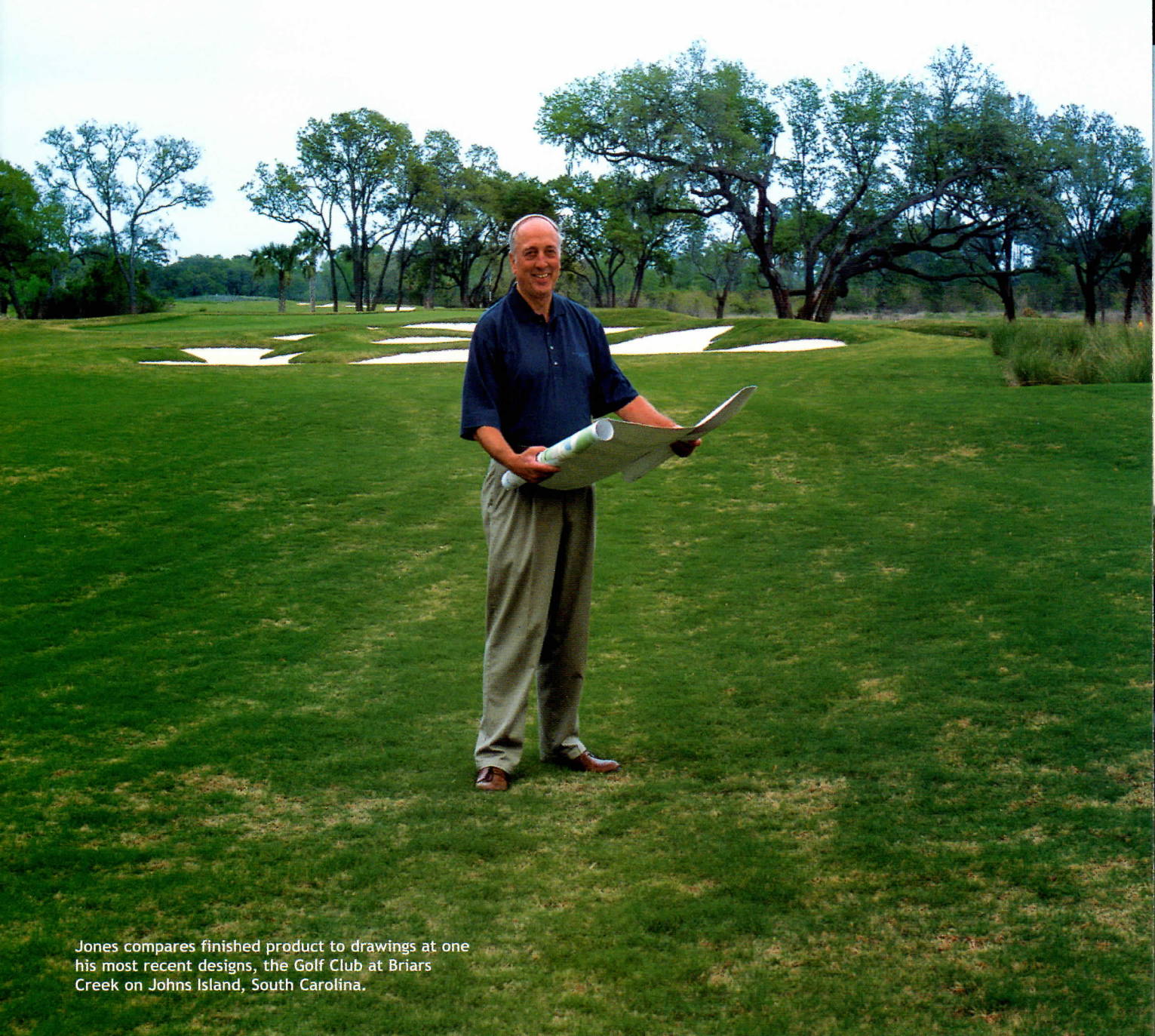
In 1988, the world found out how good a "doctor" Rees Jones is. The Country Club in Brookline, Massachusetts, had been chosen to host that year's national championship, but the USGA felt the course had strayed from its original design through the years. Before showcasing the course to the entire world, the USGA ordered a refurbishment. Jones, already a noted architect, was the one they called.

"Brookline was my first and, perhaps, the most exciting," Jones says. "We really did bring the course back to Willie Campbell's original design





Rees Jones, known to many as "The Open Doctor," has bolstered his reputation as a designer with renovations of famed layouts.



Jones compares finished product to drawings at one of his most recent designs, the Golf Club at Briars Creek on Johns Island, South Carolina.

style.” In preparation for the event, Jones and his staff rebuilt and expanded greens, relocated bunkers, reconstructed tees, lengthened the course and incorporated different types of grasses. “It was Brookline that reminded people that you don’t have to have all these bells and whistles to have a great golf course,” Jones notes.

Although he was already respected throughout the industry, Jones’ work at Brookline catapulted his reputation. Now, it seems you can’t host a U.S. Open or PGA

Championship without first having Jones work his restorative magic on the chosen venue.

“My approach to remodeling a classic existing course is not unlike an art restorer with an old painting,” Jones philosophizes. “After careful study, I strip away the accumulated effects of years of wear and tear.” The result: a course true to its original design intent but one that bears in mind the abilities and equipment of today’s golfers.

Many architects might view redesigning an existing course as a

less-than-satisfying experience. Not only does Jones find it satisfying, he embraces the challenge. The gratification, he contends, comes from watching the best players in the game compete on a golf course that he has enhanced, then having the course stand up to the test.

“The ultimate jobs from a remodeling standpoint are those where you can really impart a lot of your design philosophy in bringing a golf course back to prominence,” Jones says. He points to Congressional Country Club, Brookline, East Lake Country





### Continuing Education

For proof of Jones' philosophies in action, consider one of his most recent renovation projects: Bethpage Black, site of this year's U.S. Open. The course, located on Long Island, presented a number of unique challenges because it was a completely public facility that receives a heavy amount of play each year. Jones viewed the project as a chance to learn from A.W. Tillinghast, another of the game's great architects.

"Renovation is an opportunity to put the 'character' back into a course, and that was my goal at Bethpage—I wanted to put Tillinghast's character back into the course," Jones says. "The way you learn is by seeing a master's work and studying the process. The opportunity at Bethpage allowed me to continue my studies."

Jones notes that Bethpage really hadn't changed much through the years—but it had deteriorated. The bunkers had eroded, the tees needed to be renovated and the course needed to be lengthened. He and his staff studied aerial photography to develop the feature ideas, which included moving some of the fairway bunkers farther out because of the distances modern players are hitting the ball. They also located greenside bunkers closer to putting

of the toughest courses in U.S. Open history. In fact, because of Jones' work at Bethpage, there may no longer be an argument about equipment and technology rendering classic courses obsolete. While almost anyone with a modicum of golf knowledge can make a course incredibly difficult by lengthening holes and tricking things up, the art lies in uncovering the true challenge that lies within every course. That's what Jones was able to accomplish at Bethpage.

But what happens now that the U.S. Open has been played? "The renovation was ultimately done for the people of the state of New York," Jones says of the facility. "When the 2002 Open leaves town, the course belongs to them. This is a U.S. Open-caliber course that you can play for \$39. It brings the public player into the major championship of the year."

### Famous Footsteps

Following in a famous father's footsteps is all too often the prescription for an unfulfilled life. Jones, the son of famed golf course architect Robert Trent Jones, Sr., has more than reversed the trend. In fact, many believe his work has surpassed that of his father. He has done so by holding dear to his own design philosophy.

"My approach to remodeling a classic existing course is not unlike an art restorer with an old painting. After careful study, I strip away the accumulated effects of years of wear and tear."

Club and Atlanta Athletic Club as prime examples. "Those courses didn't have those tournaments before we redid them—they were embraced by the golfing world because we brought them up to modern standards," Jones notes. "I find it gratifying anytime one of my courses is selected to host a tournament."

surfaces to protect the hole locations. "We just wanted to make it more of a championship test for today's players," Jones notes. "It has, and always will be, a thinking man's course."

And what a test it was. The par-70 Black Course proved to be one

"If I were to summarize my philosophy for golf course design, it would be this: to create an environment for the game of golf that is challenging, fair and aesthetically pleasing," Jones says. "I would rather create a natural, classic course that blends with its sur-

Article continued on Pg. 6 (back panel)





Jones' work at Bethpage Black transformed the public facility into a U.S. Open-caliber layout.

Jones opines. "And I like the fact that my ideas will live beyond me, that I'll leave something behind for people to discuss, debate, enjoy and fret about. Architecture is an art form and by going back to the design styles of the classic era, we're in a renaissance period of our craft."

Part of that renaissance, in Jones' opinion, includes a migration toward more renovations of existing courses. He cites a relatively flat number of rounds played and

roundings than a course full of unnecessary gimmicks which discourage the average golfer." Jones has adhered to this mantra on each of the 100-plus original layouts—and 52 redesigns—he has created around the world.

Prior to forging his own path, however, Jones worked patiently under the shadow of his legendary father. He started with his dad's firm in 1965, at a time when the business was not very lucrative. "The fees were modest, and there was not much building," he says.

In 1974, believing it was time to establish a reputation of his own, Jones started his own golf course design company in his hometown of Montclair, New Jersey. His work quickly garnered critical acclaim as his designs fulfilled his personal philosophy to the letter.

The industry's success, however, could be double-edged. Jones is in the business for the craft, but he worries that money may be spoiling the game and the design profession. He points to his father and the founders of the American

"The ultimate jobs from a remodeling standpoint are those where you can really impart a lot of your design philosophy in bringing a golf course back to prominence."

Society of Golf Course Architects as craftsmen who loved the game and building golf courses for the sake of building. "Several of them died penniless but happy," Jones adds. "Think about the fact that C.B. MacDonald never wanted to be paid, thinking it might jeopardize his amateur status."

Jones is at the stage of his career where he's aware that just as his father did before him, he will leave a living legacy to the game he has served. Having been recognized with numerous design awards by virtually every golf industry publication and association, he can reflect on a career that has touched all aspects of the game.

"It's exciting to be involved in all elements of golf during the era of Tiger Woods, and working with industry icons like David Fay,"

the eagerness of older golf clubs to upgrade their facilities to remain competitive as the primary drivers behind this trend.

"The building of new golf courses seems to have peaked," Jones says. "However, the private club market remains strong, and real estate developments have finally realized that golf can be a profit center instead of a 'loss leader.'"

After pondering the past and comparing it to what the future holds, Jones offers this bit of philosophy: "The ultimate measure of success is building uncontrived courses that have enough variety and character to retain the golfer's interest, round after round. I strive to build my courses to stand the test of time." 🏌️

Jack O'Leary contributed to this article.