



ALLSPORT

Rees Jones oversaw a major renovation of Atlanta Athletic Club's Highlands Course, which plays host to the PGA Championship Aug. 16-19.

Tripleheader

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Don't be surprised if New Jersey-based course designer Rees Jones opens a temporary office in Georgia for the month of August. For three consecutive weeks, courses bearing his imprint in the Peach State will be featured during national telecasts of major competitions: Ocean Forest Golf Club on Sea Island for the Walker Cup Aug. 11-12; Atlanta Athletic Club (Highlands Course) in Duluth for the PGA Championship Aug. 16-19; and East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta for the U.S. Amateur Aug. 20-26.

Though Atlanta Athletic Club and East Lake were major renovations, Jones devoted as much time to those jobs as he did to Ocean Forest, an original creation. The projects, all undertaken in the 1990s, add to and in some ways revise the reputation of an architect who has struggled to establish his own design identity.

It takes years to build a name in course architecture—even for someone who has been born into a renowned design family. At 59, Jones has been at it for 35 years—the last quarter of a century on his own. After graduating from Yale University in 1963, he worked for a decade under the tutelage of his father, Robert Trent Jones Sr.

Business was booming in the late 1960s, and Rees spent his time on the East Coast doing drafting and field work. His work then—at Montauk Downs Golf Course in Montauk, N.Y.; Ocean Pines Golf and Country Club in Ocean City, Md.; Tumberly Isle Country Club in North Miami Beach, Fla.; and Inverrary Country Club in Lauderhill, Fla.—was entirely in his father's mold, with boldly dog-legged fairways, oversized clover-leaf bunkers and well-fortified greens.

Developing his own "look" would not really come until he set up his own design shop in 1974. Because of high interest rates and the oil

Architect Rees Jones' touch showcased during three-week stretch

embargo, however, the country's golf development business was at a standstill. At one point, Jones flew at his own expense to Australia tracking down a hot lead for work—in vain, as it turned out. It taught him, he said, one valuable lesson: "Have them send you a ticket."

Jones enhanced his reputation within the business by co-authoring (with Guy Rando) a book through the Urban Land Institute, "Golf Course Developments," that two decades after its publication remains the standard work in the field. Over the next few years, Jones applied principles of sound land planning to a number of successful golf and real estate undertakings in the southeast. His colleagues thought highly enough of him that in 1978, they elected Jones as the youngest president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

He first came into national prominence in 1986 with Pinehurst's No. 7 course in North Carolina and Haig Point on Daufuskie Island, S.C. But it was not really until his sensitive restoration of The Country Club for the 1988 U.S. Open in Brookline, Mass., that his work became acknowledged worldwide. The phones at his office in Montclair, N.J., have been ringing off the hook since.

Unlike many prominent designers today, Jones maintains a modest staff and turns down at least as much work as he accepts. At Brookline in 1988, veteran golf scribe Herbert Warren Wind took Jones aside and reminded him not to get carried away with his new found success.

"It was the best advice I ever got," said Jones. "Otherwise, you lose control."

Today, he works on a handful of new courses a year plus an equal number of renovation projects. Jones inherited from his father the informal title of "Open doctor," the designer to whom clubs turn when planning to host a U.S. Open. After the 1988 Open, there were plum jobs—conspicuous though not lucrative: prepping Hazeltine for the 1991 Open, Baltusrol for 1993, Congressional's Blue Course in 1997, Pinehurst No. 2 for 1999 and Bethpage State Park's Black Course for 2002.

In course development, Jones likes to say the routing is decisive.

"The course architect doing the routing is like the tailor

who cuts the cloth," he said. "Once the proper cut is made, alterations are possible. But it must be cut properly the first time, or else it will never truly fit."

On occasion, that means negotiating with a client.

"Asking for a little more acreage," said Jones, "can sometimes make the difference between a functional layout and a great one."

At Ocean Forest, ranked No. 55 on *Golfweek's* America's Best Modern Courses list, Walker Cup team members from the United States and Great Britain & Ireland will face a 7,134-yard, par-72 layout unencumbered by real estate. Holes weave seamlessly across natural dunes, wetlands and tidal salt marshes, with the last two holes perched along the Atlantic coast and buffeted by stiff ocean winds.

At 7,213 yards, the par-70 Highlands Course at Atlanta Athletic Club will pose a very demanding test for the PGA Championship. Jones' 1995 renovation and the ongoing maintenance by longtime superintendent Ken Mangum, CGCS, have given this layout more stylistic coherence and maturity than was the case when it hosted the 1976 U.S. Open (won by Jerry Pate) and the 1981 PGA (won by Larry Nelson). This is, after all, a course formed out of nines separately designed by Jones Sr. in 1967 and Joe Finger in 1971, and subsequently renovated by George and Tom Fazio in 1974, and Arnold Palmer and Ed Seay in 1987. Rees Jones regraded fairways, unified the bunker look by rolling the sod down the faces and created green contours capable of handling slick, grainless Crenshaw bentgrass groomed to .125-inch mowing height.

"It just doesn't look like the same course from '76 or '81," Mangum said.

At East Lake, Jones restored an old Donald Ross design into the No. 34 course on *Golfweek's* list of America's Best Classical Courses. At one time, the layout had 36 greens, one set for summer grass and one for winter grass. Jones had a free hand in creating a retro-styled course that evokes Ross' spirit with its mounds, hollows and ground-game approaches. East Lake's zoysia fairways tend to reduce ground roll and make the par-70 course play even longer than its 7,091 yards might suggest. The course certainly stood up well to the PGA Tour pros during the 1998 and 2000 Tour Championships.

It all adds up to quite a month for Georgia golf—and for Rees Jones' résumé.



Rees Jones

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