

108TH
MGA OPEN



AT
SACCONNESSET

An Architect's

Rugged terrain on Cape Cod inspires a sense of reverie and a naturally-fitting course layout at TGC at Sacconnesset, the host site of the 2017 MGA Open.

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with

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Photographs by
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THE BEST PLANS are often hatched, and then refined, during a brisk walk. At the 2017 MGA Open media day, Charlie Passios, COO of TGC at Sacconnesset, remembered such a stroll in Falmouth in 2000: "Walking the woods when this was just woods, walking the center lines which we had just flagged, looking at the land... I called Rees after that walk and said, 'Rees, wait until you see the layout.'"

Passios's pal Rees Jones, who has designed or redesigned more than 225 golf courses, recalled not waiting long to come take his own walk: "This is a natural piece of ground... this is just an architect's *dream* to get a site like this."

Fast forwarding from those initial jaunts through raw ground to June 23, 2008, one year after TGC opened for play, Jones would share some thoughts on his professional beliefs and the grow-in work with the club's members.

"I've been very fortunate. I'm the son of Robert Trent Jones, and he taught me when I was a young designer that this golf course architecture is a craft and you have to work at it. You shouldn't take on too many jobs, you should take the best jobs, or the best piece of property, and optimize them. I really feel that this place has been optimized. This is a phenomenal piece of property... it's a rugged piece of property."

In the inaugural 2007 season, the course, then known as The Golf Club of Cape Cod, became a championship venue when it played host to the MGA Senior Amateur. Since then, TGC has served as host site of the 2011 MGA Senior Four-Ball, the 2013 MGA Father-Daughter, the 2016 MGA Mid-Amateur and, now, the 2017 MGA Open (see pages 24-25).



Dream

“TGC at Sacconnesset has been a tremendous partner with the MGA,” declared MGA executive director Jesse Menachem at the media day. “For a club celebrating 10 years and hosting five MGA championships, it’s a true testament to their commitment to amateur golf. TGC is nothing but a first-class operation.”

In the days leading up to the MGA Open, Jones was confident that TGC’s par 72 layout, which tops out at 7,050 yards, would prove to be a worthy challenge for the contestants.

“They are probably thinking it’s going to be a pushover looking at the yardage, and some of them are going to be surprised,” said Jones. “You’re going to have 65s and 66s and you want to have a couple of those, [but] they are not going to have a 65 or a 66 every day.”

Of course, the architect also has walked this layout often as a player. In TGC’s first opening day tournament in 2007, the best score from each teeing ground was to be deemed an official course record. Jones elected to play from the



tips, in part because he expected to have less competition from the black tees. His round of 79 was the day’s best round from *any* of the tees. And so, at the then age of 65, he held TGC’s *overall* course record; at media day, he confided he was just delighted to have broken 80.

Built on some of the highest and most varied Cape Cod topography, which is studded with pines, oaks and granite boulders, TGC’s course weaves through sandy glacial terrain made up of ridges and kettle holes. The multiple tee boxes on every hole offer many choices, designed to provide a challenge to players of all skill levels.

Jack Laurendeau, one of TGC’s three managing partners, noted: “It is a different course,

TGC’s 18th
Jones posed outside the clubhouse behind the closing hole at the MGA Open media day on May 25. He noted: “The 18th is a swing hole with opportunities to make a low score.” While the 570-yard hole can be reached with two crack shots, it must be navigated thoughtfully to produce a good final number.”



TGC's 3rd

Above: Jones terms the course "...an old-style classic design" that abounds in strategy. He points to the 3rd hole as one example.

one that you don't see on the Cape. It has enough levels of tees so you can make it as friendly as you like it or as challenging as you need it based on the length you choose to play. With Rees's help we have made some nice renovations to a few holes to make it a little more user friendly and to keep speed of play a priority."

Jones attempts to incorporate a balance of three different hole classifications into all his designs. As a result, TGC has a mix of difficult holes, easier holes and what Jones calls "swing holes" — ones that can go either way, capable of yielding a birdie or exacting a bogey. The key to scoring, he notes, is understanding how to best deal with the strategy of each type of hole.

To wit, Jones noted: "The 3rd hole is a par 5 that looks easy, but you have to manage it."

At 533 yards, the 3rd hole is a reachable three-shotter, but one has to wonder if it is worth taking the chance to go for the green in two or whether the prudent play is to attack the flag with a wedge. Jones defends the first landing area with a bunker left 275 yards off the tee and then narrows the fairway on the right side 40 yards beyond. Further along, the fairway expands but tapers again as a fishhook-shaped bunker arcs into the second landing area 100 yards from the green's center. The fishhook's 'shank' portion runs along the right side of the fairway up to a green, which has bunkers around three sides but an unguarded front.

"Length is not the major factor," added Jones. "We've got a lot of really good finesse holes."

One of those finesse holes, nearing the end of a round, is the 17th, the longest of the par 4s on the course at 461 yards. The fairway snakes its way in between three fairway bunkers staggered along the route. A narrow opening at the front of the green is also guarded on both the left and right sides by bunkers.

Jones summed up his design work at TGC with a long-term perspective: "Unlike a lot of New England courses that have rugged terrain, TGC has 18 holes that fit the land naturally. And 100 years from now they're going to think this is a pre-Depression golf course."

After its first 10 years, TGC has proven to be an inspired golf walk, and one that has realized an exceptional architect's dream. ■

TGC's 17th

Below: Jones notes: "The rolling coastal land of Cape Cod is great terrain that lends itself beautifully to the design of a natural, classic golf course."



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Keeping Up With Jones

The course designer known as the ‘Open Doctor’ makes another house call in Massachusetts.

BORN IN 1941 in New Jersey — where he still resides — Rees Jones grew up in a golf-centric home. As the son of eminent course designer Robert Trent Jones and as the younger brother of course designer Robert Trent Jones, Jr., Rees was exposed to the game early and often (see page 3). That includes a lifelong association with historic Montclair Golf Club, where his firm Rees Jones, Inc. presently is conducting restoration work, including for the 27 holes Donald Ross designed there in 1920.

As a boy, accompanying his father surveying courses, Rees could have had no better tutor.

In their authoritative tome *The Architects of Golf*, Geoffrey Cornish and Ron Whitten succinctly state: “By the mid-1960s, Robert Trent Jones had become the most widely known and the most influential course architect in history.”

Rees joined both his father and his brother at the firm

of Robert Trent Jones, Inc. after his graduation from Yale and his graduate studies at Harvard University’s School of Design, Department of Landscape Architecture. Rees would assist his father on numerous golf courses until forming his own firm, Rees Jones, Inc., in 1974.

Cornish and Whitten pick up the story in *The Architects of Golf*: “Rees Jones entered private practice in 1974 and subsequently planned numerous layouts that rivaled his father’s for beauty, challenge and attention.

“In the 1980s Rees Jones became a leading figure in golf architecture, in part because of a series of well-received remodeling projects. His first triumph was his sensitive restoration

of The Country Club... for the 1988 U.S. Open. Then came modifications to Hazeltine National GC for the 1991 U.S. Open, followed by a major remodeling of Congressional CC’s Blue Course [for the 1997 U.S. Open].”

A moniker as the ‘Open Doctor’ was earned by Rees for his remodeling a total of seven layouts that would host U.S. Opens (including Bethpage Black Course and Torrey Pines GC) and of layouts that would host events like the 1999 Ryder Cup (again, The Country Club) and the annual Tour Championship (East Lake GC).

Regarding remodeling, Rees has reflected:

“Our firm has extensive experience successfully restoring the work of many of the classic Golden Age golf course designers. A good example is The Country Club, where our restoration of the course prior to the 1988 U.S. Open proved that strategic design elements could still test the

game’s top players. By restoring this historic course to its original style, we started a trend that persists to this day.”

Cornish and Whitten also praise Rees’s new course work: “His original designs also set new standards for clarity and playability in design.”

Along with TGC and The Country Club in the Bay State, Jones has done original and/or remodeling work at Blackstone National GC, Marshfield CC, Nantucket GC, Nashawtuc CC, New Seabury Club (Dunes Course and Ocean Course) and Pinehills GC (Jones Course).

TGC at Sacconnesset members now benefit from the Open Doctor’s practices, the best of both old and new standards. — MMC



Jones spoke during the 2017 MGA Open media day on May 25. In 1998, he collaborated to build Nantucket Golf Club with his friend Charlie Passios (left), now the COO of TGC at Sacconnesset.