



U.S. AIRWAYS

# Attaché

## [PASSIONS]

DIVERSIONS, REFLECTIONS, AND CURIOUS DISTRACTIONS

### GOLF

## ARCHITECT AND ARTIST

BUILDING A GOLF COURSE TAKES  
HEAVY LIFTING AND A LIGHT TOUCH.

BY ROBERT SULLIVAN

**D**ANIEL ISLAND sits invitingly within the city limits of Charleston, South Carolina. This is a “masterplan community” spread over 4,000 acres. Daniel Island is modern and luxe, a hybrid of a resort and a village: There are townhomes and stand-alones and mansions; there are malls and schools and parks. Daniel Island is also the name of the private club therein. There are 10 tennis courts, a pool, and a Tom Fazio-designed golf course. When the powers-that-be decided they wanted a *second* 18,



THE DANIEL ISLAND COMPANY

**WORK IN PROGRESS:** Daniel Island, in Charleston, South Carolina, will be home to a Rees Jones-designed course in the spring of 2006.



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they approached the man who, along with Fazio, is at the very summit of golf architecture: Rees Jones. And on this day, the tall, amiable Jones is my “tour guide.”

I have flown to Charleston to learn about “process” and to see process in action. How does a championship golf course get built in 2005 and, moreover, how does a master such as Rees go about his work? Rees has just flown in to Charleston from New York—his design firm is based in Montclair, New Jersey—and has graciously agreed to let me tag along as he scopes and sculpts his course.

It's a perfect time for me to visit, for the process is just about at mid-point. Rees's sketches have all been drawn; the general lay and feel of the course has been decided. Several holes are far along, nearly ready for turf (these look like brown golf holes waiting for their green jackets). Several others are barely begun (these look like swamps). And some are halfway there, with fairways having been cut and mounds built for sand or for natural bunkers, and yet-

unworked terrain having been set aside for the green.

We begin on a hole from this last category, a par-5 that will be 590 yards from the tips. Rees and his design associate, Bryce Swanson, are looking at a large hump of mud and seeing, somewhere therein, a sand trap. “The landing area's in through here,” says Bryce, who joined the Jones firm in 2000. “We had to push the the dogleg around those trees.” If any oak, sweet gum, or hickory has a circumference greater than 24 inches, then it must, by local law, be preserved. “And now the question is how we want to have that bunker come into play.”

I'm looking at all this, as the two designers do their hand waving, and I don't see a thing. I see lots of mud, men, and machines. Rees tells me he's looking at “a canvas.”

“This bunker's out 300-something?” he asks Bryce vaguely, then pauses. “I think that bunker's more important than this one. Let's cut 'em a break. Let's get rid of

this one, make that one bigger—off the tee, they'll have a great view of it. They see it, and need to make a decision right away. It'll catch a big, bad drive if they're trying to avoid that tree over there.”

Sketches can predict only so much, and this massaging of the layout, done on-site and in-process, can be a radical step in the fashioning of a golf course. On this particular afternoon, Rees will kill off no fewer than three sand traps, change three others, and re-think the entries, shapes, and angles of four or five greens. “I do sometimes get surprised,” he tells me. “At the 11th at Redstick [a course in Vero Beach, Florida], I had to add another tee for the seniors after they started playing it. The green was sitting up in the air more than was apparent, and the hole played longer than it measured.”

“And sometimes it's not just to fix things,” teases construction foreman Clyde Hall, who's been with Jones for 25 years. “Sometimes, Rees just likes to fiddle with his bunkers.”



THE DANIEL ISLAND COMPANY

**ON-SITE DESIGN:** Rees Jones walks Daniel Island with associate Bryce Swanson (left) and island/course developer Matt Sloan (right).



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"Well," says Rees, "the bunkers are probably the most visible part of the artistry." He uses the word, but is casual and not at all presumptuous as he says it. "See there...." He points at something. I see nothing. "We'll get the noses good and fat there. Sculptured bunkers give you an indeterminate hazard—what's the risk? They force strategy. I like to think I work more on the strategy, not just hazards at random. Think your way through the holes. My aesthetic is an old-style bunker, and I really play with the angling of the greens. On this hole it'll slope toward you—see there—and if the pin's in back, you have decisions to make. Run it up? Loft it and risk flying the green?"

"Tillinghast and McKenzie," he continues, mentioning two of history's classic designers. "McKenzie's bunker style influenced me, but Tillinghast in particular, his bunker style and shot options—he forced shot options and strategy. I've gotten to work on renovations of some of his courses—Bethpage Black, Baltusrol,

Quaker Ridge. When you walk the masters' courses, you see their thinking, and you learn from them. So I've been influenced by Tillinghast and McKenzie.

"And, of course, my father."

★★★

Rees Jones was to his profession born. After graduating from Yale in 1963, he learned the trade at the knee of Robert Trent Jones Sr., the preeminent postwar golf-course architect of his time, the man behind Hazeltine, Spyglass Hill, Valderrama (in Spain), and the redesign of Donald Ross's Oakland Hills South, among hundreds of other daunting tests. While Rees's brother, Robert Trent Jones Jr., adhered more closely to his father's tough-par, easy-bogey philosophy, Rees sought, quite quickly after learning the rudiments of design, to make his courses not a test of brute

strength so much as a show of talent, ingenuity, even character. "Dad built much bigger, more undulating greens than I do," he says. "And would put hazards right in front of greens. You have to go over. I like a person to have to decide if he should try running it in or flying it in." That is a dilemma a golfer must consider on at least half the holes of a typical Rees Jones layout. Left or right? Lay-up or blast? Even on those angled greens and with flat stick in hand: Lag it or roll it?

After working with his dad on a number of projects, Rees hung out his own shingle in Montclair in 1974. He "resisted trends and fashions—the pot-bunker era, the big-mound phase"—but consciously emulated the pre-war classicists. He firmly established his reputation with the 1988 redesign of The Country Club in Brookline, Massachusetts, prepping that old layout for what is



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annually the pros' toughest test, the U.S. Open. Some of his father's "course doctor" work in anticipation of this championship had caused the world's best players to howl for mercy, but the son's considered touch on The Country Club was applauded by fans and competitors alike. A stern but fair test, said all—and it was beautiful, to boot.

**THE TICKET**

To learn more about the new Rees Jones course or the community of Daniel Island, go to [danielisland.com](http://danielisland.com) on the Web.

Many of Rees's best ideas can be found on such triumphant layouts as Atlantic, Briar's Creek, and Nantucket, and on redesigns of such famous courses as Congressional, East Lake, Medinah, Pinehurst No. 2, and

Torrey Pines. "There are redesigns and there are redesigns," says Jones, the world's hardest-working set-up man, who will prep

five of the next seven PGA Championships (including from August 11 to 14 this month's at Baltusrol in New Jersey), and four of the next six U.S. Opens in advance of those events. "Sometimes you are going lightly, sprucing it up. But sometimes you're just following the routing and basically building a new course over the old. Either way, when-ever I proceed on one of those commissions, I think hard about what was intended originally. Those courses—you're working hallowed ground."

In Daniel Island, by contrast, you're sculpting from what is, literally, wet mud and clay. The men and machinery at work this afternoon in the slanting rain will, by the time the course opens in the spring of '06, have moved or brought in thousands of tons of soil, fill, and sand—at a total project cost exceeding \$4 million. That's heavy lifting, overseen by Clyde and his crew. The brush strokes are applied by Bryce and his boss. "Rees is an artist," Clyde all but whispers. "I'm just his hand."

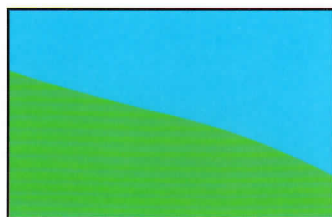


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"This will be a good way to finish," says Rees of the uphill dogleg. "Everyone watching the players come up toward the green. The owners will be happy with this."

He pauses. "Opening Day's almost sad for me," he says. "It's done—and now it's theirs, not mine any more."

"I really think I enjoy building it more than I enjoy playing it." ★



**Rees Jones, Inc.**  
GOLF COURSE DESIGN

  
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CHARLESTON

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