

PROFILED

Tee for two

SHIZUOKA COUNTRY SHIMADA GC, JAPAN

Twin greens and a fresh design provide options galore at the Shizuoka Country Shimada course on Japan's south coast



On the par-three third at Shimada, the 'B' green (right) plays thirty yards longer than the 'A'



Placement from the tee is critical to opening up the ideal angle of approach on the closing hole, a 400-yard par four where the left green is protected by a specimen tree

The twin green system is still commonplace in Japan, even though one of the primary factors for its initial development is now largely irrelevant.

The Japanese climate has distinct extremes, with temperatures regularly plunging below zero in the winter and well into the 30s, along with high humidity, in summer. As such, many early courses were built with two greens per hole, one with bentgrass for winter use and another with korai, a zoysia grass, for the summer.

Thanks to advances in golf turf science, however, strains of grass that can withstand Japan's temperature extremes have now been available for many years, and clubs across the country have converted to single greens.

But there are still good reasons for retaining twin greens (usually denoted simply as 'A' and 'B'), if the circumstances are right: by alternating between each, foot traffic is spread and conditions can be maintained at a higher standard; twin greens offer the golfer variety, and the potential for a distinctly different experience from one day to another. Tradition shouldn't be forgotten either – the sight of two greens at the end of a fairway is a distinctly Japanese golfing experience (although it is common in Korea too, and famously occurs on two holes at Pine Valley).

When golf course architects Rees Jones and Bryce Swanson first visited the Shizuoka Country Shimada course, they could see that the circumstances were ideal for preserving tradition,

albeit with the same grass type on each green.

"It's a really good layout," says Swanson of Shimada, which was designed in the 1960s by Kinya Fujita, who thirty years earlier laid out the original two courses at Olympic venue Kasumigaseki in Tokyo. "Most holes are lined with majestic pine trees, and the course runs from some flat ground to some interesting topography that has a really wonderful feel to it."

Crucially, the expansive nature of the property meant that no compromises had been required to accommodate two greens on each hole. Ample space means a different challenge is presented by each green. "They can be a club or even two clubs different," says Swanson. That is evident throughout the scorecard, including

A bunker between the two greens on the par-five tenth has been replaced with short grass, increasing the variety of recovery shots required



on the par three third and seventeenth holes, where there is 30 yards between the A and B greens.

Swanson highlights other factors that add variety between the two targets on those holes. On the third, for example, the teeing grounds are placed so that the routes to the A and B greens cross,

the two greens, in this case the longer B option playing to lower ground.

On par fours and fives, the green locations can give the holes a very different character too. “Some of the angles mean that playing to one of the greens almost turns a straight hole into a dogleg,” says Swanson.

course to Fujita’s original design intent.

They did, however, see the opportunity to make substantial improvements by evaluating the challenge presented by the bunkering, which has been impacted by 60 years of play and maintenance, as well as advances in club technology.

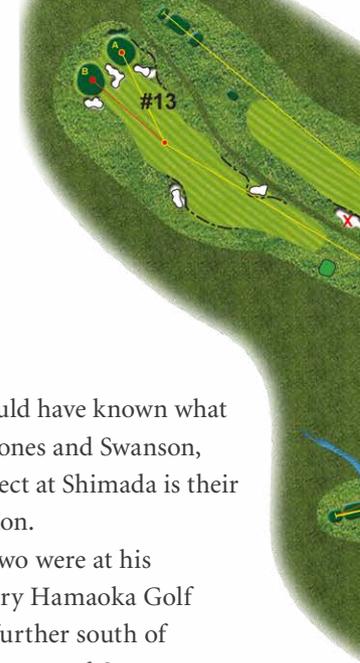
“They weren’t in the right spots for today’s players, and they didn’t create a strategy,” says Jones. “They were just penal and didn’t give you the shot options.”

The designers carefully evaluated the location of each bunker and created a new scheme where every hazard had a strategic value. “It’s harder to redesign bunkering for the twin green system,” says Jones. “If you introduce a bunker that is designed to drive the strategy for play to one green, you have to be

“Many green complexes in Japan are guarded by either bunkers or rough. Chipping areas give players more options for the recovery shot”

forming an X shape, and providing a substantially different direction of play. While the seventeenth is one of several holes where there is a significant change in grade between

With so many options presented by the existing layout, Jones and Swanson felt no need to make routing changes, or significantly alter the placement of the greens, in order to return the



careful that it doesn't overly penalise play to the other green."

On many holes, bunkers located between the two greens have been removed in favour of natural swales of closely mown grass. "Many green complexes in Japan are guarded by either bunkers or rough," says Swanson. "Chipping areas give players more options for the recovery shot."

Jones also emphasises the importance they placed on ground game options into greens: "By opening up a lot of the entrances, we've reintroduced the ground game," he says. But the golfer may in turn have to decide whether they want to attack the pin. "They may have an opportunity, for example, to

carry a bunker if they want to go for the right side of the green, or hit a ground game shot to the left side."

In addition to revisiting the strategy of the bunkers, there has been a change in visuals. "We wanted to bring the character of a windswept bunker," said Jones, of the lightly ragged-edge hazards they have introduced. It is a marked contrast to the bland ovals that Jones says are common on Japanese courses, particularly those that were built around the same time as the Shimada layout.

Shizuoka's owner, Norihisa Kawamura – also the owner and president of Nissei Corporation, one of Japan's largest drinks bottling

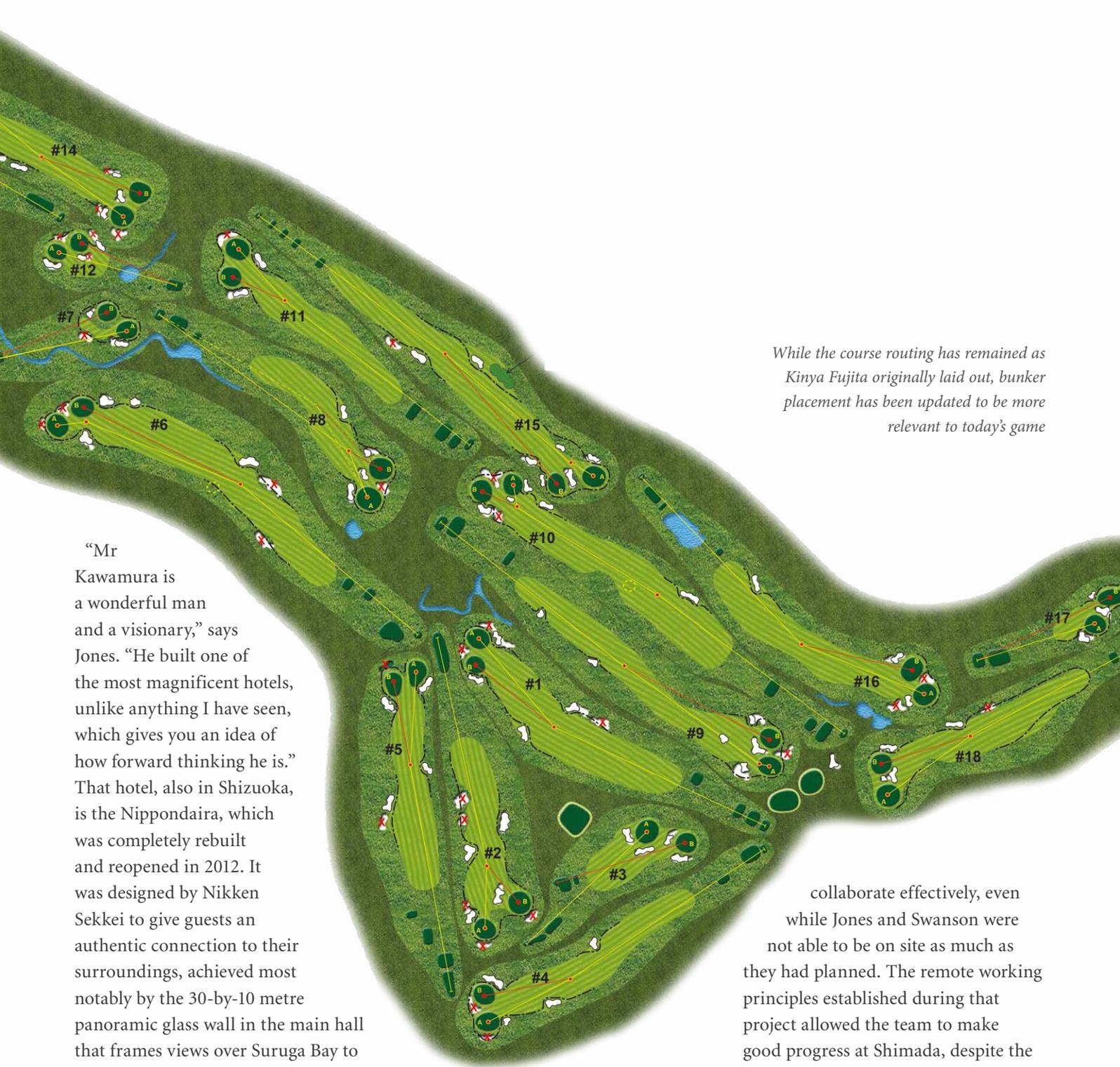
operations – would have known what to expect from Jones and Swanson, because the project at Shimada is their third collaboration.

The previous two were at his Shizuoka Country Hamaoka Golf Course, a little further south of the city, where Jones and Swanson rebuilt both the Ogasa (where they replaced twin greens with singles) and Takamatsu (where twin greens were retained) courses, in 2018 and 2020 respectively. The results, particularly in terms of member satisfaction, delivered on these projects gave Kawamura the confidence to proceed with the same team for his flagship golf property at Shimada.



Photo: Shizuoka Country

The project team of, from left, Shizuoka owner Norihisa Kawamura, Rees Jones, Inaji Landscape & Construction managing director Hiromi Yanagisawa, and Bryce Swanson



While the course routing has remained as Kinya Fujita originally laid out, bunker placement has been updated to be more relevant to today's game

“Mr Kawamura is a wonderful man and a visionary,” says Jones. “He built one of the most magnificent hotels, unlike anything I have seen, which gives you an idea of how forward thinking he is.” That hotel, also in Shizuoka, is the Nippondaira, which was completely rebuilt and reopened in 2012. It was designed by Nikken Sekkei to give guests an authentic connection to their surroundings, achieved most notably by the 30-by-10 metre panoramic glass wall in the main hall that frames views over Suruga Bay to Mount Fuji.

That connection to nature was demanded of the Shimada project too. “The golf course is viewed like a Japanese garden, with great pride,” says Swanson. “Plant material is revered, and water bodies are too,” adds Jones. This meant that any work on trees had the objective of allowing nature to thrive, and on several holes, such as the par-five tenth and par-four eighteenth, specimen trees have an important bearing on how the hole is played.

Jones’s team worked alongside Inaji Landscape & Construction at Shimada, rekindling a relationship that has been forged over several other projects that Jones has completed in Japan and that also brought success with Kawamura on his two courses at Hamaoka. The Takamatsu renovation was completed during the onset of the pandemic, and saw the design, construction and ownership teams establishing ways to

collaborate effectively, even while Jones and Swanson were not able to be on site as much as they had planned. The remote working principles established during that project allowed the team to make good progress at Shimada, despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic. “Our great partnership with the owner meant we could do a good job in difficult circumstances,” says Jones. “We’ve developed a wonderful relationship. Old-time golf course architecture in America, like at Atlantic [on Long Island], Ocean Forest [Sea Island, Georgia] and RedStick [Vero Beach, Florida], was built on individual relationships. I think it is much the same here with Mr Kawamura.” **GCA**