

GOLF  
MAGAZINE

# Best New COURSES

2014

LARRY LAMBRECHT



In terms of pure fun and playability, few courses can match Gamble Sands.

Jack Nicklaus enjoys a banner year, while David McLay Kidd, Tom Doak, Gil Hanse and Robert Trent Jones Jr. amp up the fun factor

BY  
JOE PASSOV

**D**ESIGN FANS HAD MUCH TO CELEBRATE IN 2014. We're witnessing a welcome new architectural trend that's moving away from difficult, hazard-filled courses that were primarily created as lush lots on which to build McMansions. Now the emphasis is on wider fairways, clever contours near the greens, reduced rough and increased options for all handicap levels. David McLay Kidd's Gamble Sands, in Washington, exemplifies this movement. Renovations of existing tracks are following the same path, notably at Poppy Hills in Pebble Beach. Among our winners in the Renovation categories, selective tree removal, strategic bunkering and improved irrigation are hallmarks—and in some cases, inspired reimagining has elevated courses to success levels they never knew before. At price points ranging from \$40 (Keller Golf Course, just outside of Minneapolis) to \$495 (Trump National Doral Miami), our best new and renovated courses of the year offer great golf for any budget. Course connoisseurs eagerly await 2015, with new tracks from Tiger Woods and Donald Trump and a Canadian cliff-top stunner courtesy of Coore/Crenshaw. Until then, plenty of fun, forgiving new courses await you. These are the best of the year.

## BEST NEW COURSE OF THE YEAR / BEST NEW U.S. COURSE YOU CAN PLAY

### Gamble Sands

BREWSTER,  
WASH.  
7,169 YARDS,  
PAR 72;  
\$85-\$150

509-436-8323,  
[gamblesands.com](http://gamblesands.com)

**W**hen David McLay Kidd first walked this treeless sand plateau above the Columbia River in remote central Washington, he knew he had found what was probably the best site he'd seen for a course since his Bandon Dunes project in the late 1990s. What he created for the Gebbers family, one of the nation's largest apple and cherry growers, is appropriately sweet. In fact, it's the most enjoyable, player-friendly course to open since, well, maybe ever. Start with rolling, massive (about 75 yards, on average) sand-based fairways leading to greens that are mostly open in front. Meanwhile, mounds and slopes redirect the ball

away from trouble. And absent is joy-killing conventional rough. Although vast, serpentine bunkers frame many landing areas, there's also lots of room to avoid them. Huge greens beckon, many with helping backstops and sideboards, so you'll hit more of them. While the fescue putting surfaces have vexing contours, they roll pure and are maintained at exactly the right speed to promote a quick pace of play—while still making you feel like you're playing a big-time course. There are a few forced carries over desert washes, but less skilled players almost always have an alternate route. Handsome high-desert scenery, including Columbia River views and vistas

of the snowcapped northern Cascades, round out a complete golf experience. Kidd now scoffs at the notion that golfers want to be tested to their limits on hazard-filled tracks. "The design of Gamble Sands allows the player to determine a strategy, pick a line and swing with confidence," Kidd says. "There is nothing lurking to humiliate and frustrate, but plenty to promote a quick pace of play. I want every golfer to play their best here." With a great number giving up the game over the last decade, golf needs faster play and a lot more fun. Kidd and his Gamble Sands design deliver in both departments, and we're proud to present him with our Best New Course Award.

**BEST U.S. RESORT RENOVATION**

**Trump  
National  
Doral  
Miami**  
(Blue Monster)

MIAMI,  
FLA.  
7,510 YARDS,  
PAR 72;  
\$250-\$495  
  
305-592-2000  
trumpgolfdoral.com

**T**he best renovation of 2014—the Blue Monster course at Trump National Doral Miami—is also one of the best renovations of all time. Every objective set forth to make the course relevant for PGA Tour pros, but still playable for members and resort guests, was realized. True, in the second round of the WGC-Cadillac event in March the pros howled about shaved banks and unfair results, but those complaints

could mostly be attributed to not-quite-mature greens and wild winds. Truth be told, architects Gil Hanse and his associate Jim Wagner teamed with the Donald to test the world's best players for the next 50 years—while honoring the design integrity of the course's first 50 years. Among many significant changes: no more cupcake par 5s, with the addition of 50 yards and water to the first hole, as well as heightened risk/reward drama at the

10th; increased options and excitement, such as the newly watery, if shorter, par-4 16th; and creative contouring on the greens, including the small plateaus at the par-4 11th, a palm-dampening back-left shelf at the par-4 14th, and the two-level beauty at the par-3 15th. Wisely, Team Trump left the iconic par-4 18th largely untouched. The Monster now has sharper fangs, yet with more variety than ever. It's a tremendous achievement by any standard.

**The renovated Blue Monster begins to bare its fangs early at the long, all-carry par-3 fourth.**



**Keller Golf  
Course**

MAPLEWOOD,  
MINN.  
6,675 YARDS,  
PAR 72;  
\$40-\$55.50  
  
651-766-4170  
ramseycountygolf.com

**A**rchitect Richard Mandell is best known for his role as founder of the annual Symposium on Affordable Golf. With his renovation of Ramsey County-owned Keller in suburban Minneapolis-St. Paul, he clearly practices what he preaches. This venerable muni just northeast of the Twin Cities dates to 1929. Olin Dutra and Chick Harbert won PGA Championships here in 1932 and 1954, and Sam Snead, Ken Venturi and Raymond Floyd are among those who

have captured PGA Tour events there. Still, Keller never earned much acclaim for its actual design. Credit Mandell for balancing the desires of the regulars with a realistic look to the future. New grasses, sand and irrigation have improved playability, and Mandell consolidated the hodge-podge of bunker formulations into one cohesive, classic style. He also improved sightlines, restored some greens to their original configurations, and created needed space between some of

the greens. And he even left two controversial trees in place, one of them directly in front of the green at the 150-yard, par-3 fourth. That

wasn't his preference, but he surveyed the locals, and tradition won over convention. To which we say, Power to the people!



**The likes of Snead, Venturi and Floyd have won on this venerable muni.**

**BEST U.S. PRIVATE RENOVATION**

**Philadelphia  
Cricket Club  
(Wissahickon)**

FLOURTOWN, PA.  
  
PRIVATE

**P**hiladelphia Cricket Club is less heralded than many of A.W. Tillinghast's great parkland courses, such as Winged Foot, Baltusrol and Bethpage Black. Yet Tillinghast had a special reverence for his 1922 creation. After all, Philly Cricket

was his home club; he was a long-time member. After numerous subtle and major alterations over the past 90 years, the club honored Tilly's legacy by restoring his original design. They enlisted restoration specialist Keith Foster to assist, and the results are superb. Foster

removed 2,000 trees to improve turf circulation and uncover long-lost views of an ideally undulating property. The routing was reverted to a 1920s version of the course, with holes 4 through 6 swapped for holes 7 through 9. Foster reintroduced Tillinghast's "Great Hazard" concept

(also seen at Baltimore C.C. and Baltusrol, among others) at the newly numbered seventh, in the form of a vast complex of bunkers and rough grass between the landing area and the green. A smaller version of this hazard now fronts the par-4 14th. When the restoration was complete, the greens, grasses, irrigation and bunkers were all restored or otherwise improved. Tillinghast, whose ashes were scattered in nearby Wissahickon Creek after his death in 1942, would no doubt cheer the makeover of his old haunt. For design aficionados, it's now a lot sunnier in Philadelphia.



**Keith Foster resurrected Tillinghast's "Great Hazard" concept at the Cricket Club's seventh hole.**

**BEST U.S. SEMI-PRIVATE RENOVATION**

**Poppy Hills  
Golf Course**

PEBBLE BEACH,  
CALIF.  
7,002 YARDS,  
PAR 71;  
\$70-\$210

831-622-8239,  
poppyhillsgolf.com

**S**o maligned was the original Poppy Hills that when it served as co-host for the PGA Tour's AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am from 1991 to 2009, it consistently ranked among the bottom three courses on Tour in *Sports Illustrated* player polls. When those same pros returned for a Champions

Tour event in September 2014, the reception couldn't have been more different. Nick Price summed up the feelings of many: "It's a huge improvement on the old course. It looks beautiful. They deserve a pat on the back for the terrific job they did." The biggest tip of the hat goes to the Robert Trent Jones II firm, which radically made over their

original 1986 design. Jones and his team sand-capped the entire course with a five-inch layer of sand beneath the turf, a move that created bouncier fairways. They also eliminated traditional rough (à la Pinehurst No. 2), replacing it with native-style sand areas and using just one fairway-height cut of grass. The result is less time spent looking for balls, which speeds up play and increases the options into and around the greens. Dated mounds were also deleted, and the multilevel greens saw their contours softened. Jones also created a brand-new par-3 11th, and he converted the awkward dogleg par-5 12th into a downhill par 4, clearing enough trees to provide a stirring view of Monterey Bay. Gushed Davis Love III, "At times you're like, 'Wow, it looks like Augusta.'" Augusta with an ocean, that is.



Like Pinehurst No. 2, Poppy Hills had much of its traditional rough converted into large swaths of native sand.

DAVID ROSE

**BEST NEW U.S. COURSE YOU CAN PLAY—HONORABLE MENTION**



Potomac Shores takes full advantage of its wooded Virginia setting.

ALLEN KENNEDY

**BEST NEW INTERNATIONAL COURSE**

**Quivira  
Golf Club**

LOS CABOS,  
MEXICO  
7,139 YARDS,  
PAR 72;  
\$115-\$295

800-990-8250,  
quiviragolfclub.com

**B**ack in the 1980s—long before Golden Tee—you'd only find fantasy holes on illustrated golf calendars: a par 4 stretching above the Grand Canyon, or a par 3 plunging 100 stories into the heart of Wall Street. In October, Jack Nicklaus seemingly brought such fantasy holes to life with the opening of Quivira. Located on the southern tip of Baja California, Quivira was two years in the making when the financial collapse of 2008 ground the project to a halt. But it resurfaced in spectacular fashion a few years later, with a wild layout

featuring 350 feet of elevation change, including three cliff-top jaw-droppers that dive into massive dunes even as they soar high above the Pacific. Arroyos, dune ridges and mountains all factor into the round, as do accessible greens and strategic bunkering. In Cabo, the wind howls off the ocean, so even the yawning fairways might not be wide enough to capture many drives from high-handicappers. But for the views, the design's dazzling variety, and the sheer audacity of the routing, Quivira is our Best New International Course.



Jack Nicklaus's design at Quivira is as quixotic as it is stunning.

BRANDAR

**Potomac  
Shores  
Golf Club**

POTOMAC  
SHORES, VA.  
7,020 YARDS,  
PAR 72;  
\$95-\$115

571-383-3050,  
potomacshores  
golfclub.com

**A**nother survivor of the 2008 recession, Potomac Shores is a dramatic Jack Nicklaus creation that took eight years from the start of construction to opening day last May. "It took a long time to finish, but it was worth it," Nicklaus told us. And that's no bull from the Bear. Worth it, it was. After new developer SunCal emerged in 2011 and paired original Nicklaus staff architect Rick Jacobson and superintendent David McGregor to raise the course from its fallow

state, this Washington D.C.-area layout was on its way. If you can renovate a course that never opened, that's what the team achieved, with overgrown landing areas reestablished and widened, bunkers identified and changed where needed, greens expanded and tee boxes added. It now bears the classic Nicklaus imprints: ample fairways that play firm and fast, a stern challenge, and a stunning setting near the Potomac River amid steeply rolling, hardwood-choked terrain.

**BEST U.S. PRIVATE RENOVATION**

**Medinah  
Country Club  
(Course One)**

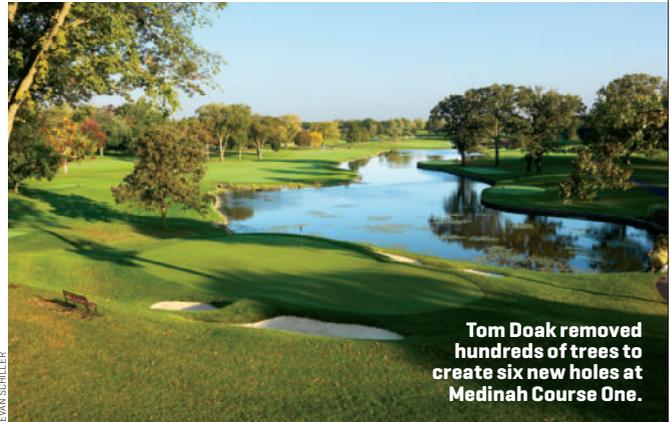
MEDINAH, ILL.

PRIVATE

**A**lways well respected but never in the same league as Medinah Course Three (its brawnier, Ryder Cup- and major championship-holding sibling), Course One has emerged from the shadows thanks to an inspired renovation by Tom Doak. With an original mandate to address flooding issues, Doak started work 13 hours after the Ryder Cup ended. He removed 770 trees and opened up the middle of the property for new holes that could be routed diagonally through the old corridors. That portion of the course is now open, in contrast to the previous narrow back-and-forth routing

between the trees. Twelve of the 18 holes remain in the existing footprint, although they sport a completely new character and sequencing. What's more, the club elected to add a

mix of bluegrass rough and fescues, providing a more natural look to frame the fairways. Course Three will always be the torchbearer, but Course One is now a very worthy alternative.



**Tom Doak removed hundreds of trees to create six new holes at Medinah Course One.**

EWAN SCHILLER

**ARCHITECT OF THE YEAR**

**JACK NICKLAUS**

**B**y any measure, Jack Nicklaus enjoyed a sensational year. His Gleneagles (PGA Centenary) course hosted the Ryder Cup, and his renovated Valhalla was a drama-inducing PGA Championship venue. But this award recognizes excellence in new-course design, and in 2014 the Bear—who's 75 in January—had a banner year. With 380 courses (and counting) to his name, Nicklaus isn't done yet. "I have no desire to retire," he told us. Jack reigns supreme in his preference for downhill holes and spectacular visuals. Nowhere is that more true than at Quivira and Potomac

Shores, his two award-winning creations. Simply put, people love them. And give credit to Nicklaus the innovator. "Few realize it, but it was at Glen Abbey and at Muirfield Village that Jack built the first spectator mounds," Pete Dye said. "It was Jack's idea to incorporate those mounds into the course." Nicklaus is probably the greatest player of all time. Amazingly, he's forged a majestic design legacy that approaches the greatness he achieved on the course. For that triumph—and for the remarkable new courses he introduced in 2014—Nicklaus is our Architect of the Year.



**With almost 400 courses to his name, Nicklaus, who turns 75 next month, shows no signs of slowing down.**

BENJAMIN HOOK