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South Africa

Golf Digest

Clifftop Spectacular!



Scotland in South Africa!

No golf course project in South Africa has attracted as much controversy, or furious debate over its contentious situation, as the Sparrebosch Clifftop Estate & Country Club now going ahead on the East Head at Knysna.

Various pressure groups, protective of this ecologically-sensitive part of the Garden Route, were keen to see the development halted.

But the Thailand investors were adamant that the estate would enhance the region, and refused to back down. At the same time, they have gone to great lengths to protect and conserve the area's natural beauty.

Golfers all around the globe will agree before long that it has been worth fighting for. When completed, and opened for play early next year, it will soon come to be regarded as one of the most impressive and challenging courses in the

world, containing great golf holes on a visually spectacular piece of land.

American course designers are **Ronald Fream and David Dale of Golfplan**, based in Santa Rosa, California. They have compared the site to Pebble Beach in California, with several dramatic holes on the clifftops above the Indian Ocean. But Sparrebosch will have a much wilder look about it, thanks to its rolling terrain and the retention of coastal fynbos as natural rough. In that respect, Fream says he drew inspiration for his design from the King's course at Gleneagles in Scotland. The style of architecture is described as Scottish Highlands links, and when the mist rolls in from the sea, it conjures up images of both Pebble Beach and Gleneagles.

South Africans generally had not minded too much about the possible harmful effect of golf

course estates until they were faced with two developments in Knysna that made them increasingly more aware of environmental concerns.

One of them, the Simola project of Ola Grinaker and Jack Nicklaus, caused long-term damage to the Knysna Lagoon in 1996 when unusually heavy spring rains shifted tons of loose topsoil into the tidal system. It was an irretrievable blow for Grinaker's dream course, which went into liquidation in 1997.

Sparrebosch has followed in the wake of that disaster, and has naturally been subject to stringent controls. The project has only been allowed to proceed under close monitoring from environmental officials.

A unique feature of the estate, and one of the main reasons for all the fuss among those opposed to any development on the East head,



The site of Hole No. 14 before construction. (above)
Hole No. 14 "Designer's Vision" (right)

"... Sparrebosch, situated on Knysna's East Head, promises to be as spectacular as it sounds. People already refer to it as "the magic on the hill."

Bernard Mostert
CapeTown Sunday Argus Sports Section
January 1/2, 2000



is that it borders on the Sparrebosch forest, a proclaimed nature reserve. The par-5 opening hole on the course borders the indigenous forest, which descends into a steep gorge. The rest of this undulating site is covered in coastal fynbos.

Golf Data, who was also involved with Nicklaus at Simola, is building the golf course, a bit at a time in concentrated areas, to avoid any possibility of an ecological disaster. The construction team is headed by Sean Quinn. Individual holes have to be grassed within strict time frames, so the course is being completed in sections.

The first three holes are already almost complete, and the rest of the front nine is progressing. The back nine, which tumbles over the hills to the clifftops, is still untouched, but the artist impressions of holes such as 13, 14 (the signature hole) and 15 are breathtaking.

Sparrebosch is being developed at a cost of

\$350 million by PK Development, a company controlled by the Karnasuta family, prominent in Southeast Asian business circles. They bought the property from Creative Homes, a subsidiary of Anglo American. A great deal of time has gone into the planning of the estate, because of the constraints imposed by the topography, specific environmental requirements, and meeting their own objectives.

A California planning firm, Klages Carter Vail, in collaboration with Golfplan, developed the master plan for the estate which has been designed with very low residential densities on average less than two units per hectare. It is this feature you first notice when visiting the site. The master plan has the holes playing through lower lying areas, while the homes occupy hills and ridges.

American club professional Jeff Clause, the first golf director at Fancourt, and who subsequently joined Grinaker at Simola, has been appointed in that role at Sparrebosch. He thus brings experience of the region to the position.

"When I initially heard about Sparrebosch, before looking at the site, I was skeptical about building a golf course on such an elevated and exposed hill, open to the elements," admitted Clause. "But it's more protected than you think because the East Head is full of valleys and undulations. That's what makes it such an exciting design. There will be some windy days, but this is going to be a very playable golf course, as well as a most challenging one off the back tees."



The completed Hole No. 14 after construction. Golfplan successfully incorporated the rugged, natural beauty of the site with dramatic bunkering and contouring into a truly unique design. Sparrebosch has the look and feel of a classic, Scottish golf course!

Sparrebosch Country Club is now known as the Pezula Golf Club. For more information, visit www.pezula.com.

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