



GENERATION GAME

Designing and building golf courses in the desert is a lot easier than people think, says **Peter Harradine**, principal and a senior architect at Harradine Golf

A passion for the game from an early age and a family in the business since the 1920s meant it was practically a given that Peter Harradine would end up as a golf course architect. Harradine has worked in golf course design most of his life and has been in the region over 30 years.

The Middle East is a great terrain for golf courses, he says, dismissing the view that a desert landscape is ill suited to the construction of golf courses. "There is no problem with growing grass in the sand. It's a big fallacy," he says.

While he welcomes the current golf course construction boom in the region, Harradine, a third generation golf course architect, is less enthusiastic about the number of golf course communities currently being built.

"Our designs, especially on real estate projects, have to include a big buffer zone and that is what it is very difficult to explain to the developers," he says. "They want more frontage, more density, the houses closer to the golf course and we have to warn them that it is dangerous. This is the big argument we have with developers all the time."

Harradine talks with *COD* on what makes a great golf course, his dream project, and how to make golf courses user friendly year-round.



1. Peter Harradine.

2. Doha golf course in Qatar.

Why did you decide to specialise in golf course design?

My grandfather was a golf course architect, my father was a golf course architect so it seemed the right thing to do. I hope my son will take over and that we will become the only golf course design company that has four generations.

What do you like about designing golf courses?

First, I like the game. I think it's the greatest game in the world. Not many people understand golf; people who do play golf can understand it. Second, I like building things, with golf courses you get such a huge amount of land and you can create something new every time. Especially in the Middle East, you are creating something from nothing. It gives you great satisfaction.

You are also a landscape architect. What are the different challenges between golf course design and landscape design?

Golf is a game, so we always have to think about the game. A golf course should be like a big garden but with the game in it. Also, a golf course architect is one of the professions where you have the most liberty because you can more or less do what you want ...you can have a steep slope, a gentle slope, put a lake, don't put a lake. There is a lot of freedom in golf course architecture and I think that is one of the things that really attracted me to that profession.

How important is it for a golf course designer to be a golfer?

Very important, I think you cannot be a golf course architect unless you play golf. I'm not talking about an excellent pro-golfer, but a golfer [with a handicap of] at least under 15 otherwise you don't know the strategy and dangers. How can you design something that you've never played? Golf is a feeling, an attitude and if you don't have that attitude, how can you design a golf course?

Although I'm a landscape architect, I stopped doing landscapes maybe 20

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years ago. I prefer golf courses, but to be a good golf course architect, I think you have to be a landscape architect as well.

Why?

It gives you the knowledge of the soil, rocks, sand, drainage, irrigation, bridges, fertilisers, trees, and shrubs. All that is very important to design a golf course, it's not only the knowledge of the game.

What are the problems of designing and building golf courses in the desert?

People think it's a lot more difficult than it is to grow grass and maintain grass here. It's not true. It's a lot more difficult in Europe, because in Europe you're dealing with variables. First, you have rubbish clay most of the time, full of

weeds and so on. Here you're growing on sand, which is an inert substance so you're growing on a much better medium. Also, here you know that tomorrow it's hot, the day after it's hot; you're always dealing with the same climate. In Europe, especially in the mountains, one day you have 5°C, the next day you have 30 °C, then it rains, then it might snow. Designing golf courses and building golf courses in the desert is a lot easier than building them in Europe.

What is the most challenging course that you have worked on in the region?

In the UAE, I would say Abu Dhabi [venue of the EPGA Abu Dhabi Golf Championship]. Abu Dhabi was a sabkha flat, sabkha is white, very crystalline ground. It's completely salty. It has

3. Jebel Ali Dubai golf course.



about four times the salt content of the sea. It's very salty and you can't have a worse ground than that. You can't grow anything on that. So obviously we had to drain it, lift everything up. Technically, it was quite a problem. But today, there are no technical problems really as long as you have the funds. Rocks you can blast with dynamite, sands you can easily shift, sabkha you drain and lift; it's just a question of money.

There seem to be a lot of golf courses under development at the moment in the region...

Unfortunately, for the wrong reasons, they are developed to sell houses. They are not developed for golfers and that's a shame. Dubai misses a golf course where everybody can go to where it is a bit cheaper. The green fees are outrageous. They won't get the 'normal' player with these kind of prices. And that is what Dubai is missing. They are building golf courses here to sell houses and that is not good for the golfer because they are missing the golfing experience. The best golf courses are standalone golf



courses where the golfer can really enjoy himself, not necessarily a championship course. Dubai is full of championship courses, and it's not the best thing for the 'normal' golfer.

One of the main problems with golf course design would appear to be making the investment work during the summer months. Is there

anything that can be done at the design stage to prolong usage of the golf course?

One of the things is to put lighting so they can play at night. In summer, night is not that bad; the only problem is the humidity but if it's a dry night, it's great to play. Also, plant a lot of trees as that cools the temperature down quite a lot.

Finally, what would be your dream project?

A site like I had in Hyderabad, India, but by the sea, great cliffs and great ravines to play over. A great site by the sea, that would be fantastic. ☺

4. Abu Dhabi golf course.

5. Jebel Ali golf course.



FACT FILE

Established 1929 (Dubai, 1976)

Offices Dubai, UAE; Erlen, Switzerland; Lausanne, Switzerland; Altlandsberg, Germany

Number of staff 35-40

Services include ecology, masterplans, specifications, budget pricing, construction permits, and construction supervision

Key projects in region include Abu Dhabi Golf Course, UAE; Doha Golf Course, Qatar; Jebel Ali Hotel and Resort course, Dubai, Al Hamra Golf Course (Ras Al Khaimah, UAE), and Sharjah Golf and Shooting club (Sharjah, UAE)

Website www.harradine-golf.com

BIOGRAPHY

Peter Harradine is principal and senior architect of Harradine Golf with design and construction supervision for all projects. He is also managing director of Orient Irrigation Services. Harradine has worked in the Middle East for over 30 years, at the company's office in Dubai. He has personally designed and co-designed over 160 golf courses in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East.