



The Middle East Envoy

In the current economic climate, it's little wonder that Africa and the Middle-East are offering new opportunities as traditional markets falter.

Peter Simm spoke with Dubai-based architect Peter Harradine about his thoughts on the prospects for the region.

■ Having spent half his life living and working in the Middle East, Peter Harradine is better qualified than most to know about the potential for building golf courses in the region.

Born and raised in Switzerland, Harradine moved to Dubai in 1977 and has had no reason to regret his decision ever since. Trained as a landscape architect, the 64-year-old freely admits to not having much involvement in golf design when he first moved to the area, preferring to concentrate on continuing to create courses in Europe.

Harradine was not the first person to build a course in the region but he quickly spotted the potential to create a niche for himself in the market and he is now regarded as the most prolific course designer in the Middle East.

Quite simply, Harradine's list of achievements reads like a *Who's Who* of golf courses in the region.

Three of his lay-outs featured in this year's top-ten ranked courses in the Middle East include Abu Dhabi Golf Club and Doha Golf Club in Qatar – both now regular venues on the European Tour calendar.

But the designer is not resting on his laurels. Three more courses were under construction in Dubai and another one in Sharjah and Harradine is still genuinely excited at the potential that still exists for the area, and further a-field in the emerging market of Africa.

"My first involvement in the Middle East came 19 years ago in Abu Dhabi, Doha in 1992, followed by Kuwait and Egypt," said Harradine.

"Karl Litten designed the first course in the region 21 years ago but I was the first golf architect to continue after seeing the opportunity.

"I am also a landscape architect and in the first years that I was starting out in Dubai I wasn't too involved in golf. I would travel back to Europe every month and design golf courses in countries like Switzerland, France, Italy and Germany.

"There are development opportunities in the Middle East but many projects have been put on hold in the present economic climate. We are, however, still building two courses in Egypt and I still think the Middle East has space. "In Dubai, there is definitely room for public "municipal" golf courses to be built for people to play and enjoy themselves.

"But, we have to reevaluate what we are building. One can easily accommodate two or three executive courses. We have to get away from these monster courses for the good of the game.

"Guys like Ernie Els and Tiger Woods have to create "monuments" otherwise people would say you could have got someone like me to build it, but we have to get back to creating courses for the normal amateur golfer."

Peter's father, Don Harradine, established Harradine Golf in 1929 and the company has since been responsible for building more than 200 courses worldwide in four continents, including little known golfing destinations such as Greece, India, Algeria, Slovenia and Tatarstan, whilst designing other projects in Albania, Georgia, Jordan, Serbia and Libya.

In fact, there aren't too many countries where Harradine hasn't worked but it is the potential that lies in Africa that really has his creative juices flowing for the future.

Harradine has already built courses in Sudan, Algeria and Morocco and believes the land available and building regulations make it the perfect candidate to be golf's newest emerging market – although he accepts the continent does have other problems that need to be overcome.

He said: "I have just finished a course in the Sudan in Khartoum. It's not a long course but it's an interesting one and we convinced them not to fall into the trap of making it too long.

"The site was just a flat piece of rubbish and was full of silt from the Nile. We moved a lot of earth to create a great course.

"Africa has a great future but it has its own problems which are not related to water, greens and grass. The continent definitely has a future if they get themselves sorted out.

"It has some great potential with some great coastlines, hinterland and parts of it are very lush and green.

"The potential in Africa is enormous and it's incredible in terms of real estate.

"Environmental restrictions are not severe in the Middle East and Africa. They will definitely come in the future but they are not there now.

"It was easier for us to build a course in Sudan than it was in Eastern Europe.

"The planning procedure and bureaucracy involved in Eastern Europe just to design and build a little bridge to cross a stream is unbelievable, and it's crazy the time it takes to get things approved.

"The problem in Central and Northern Europe is that you are very limited concerning the type of land you receive. You just don't get great sites any more as they are environmentally protected so the best sites are to be found in the emerging countries.

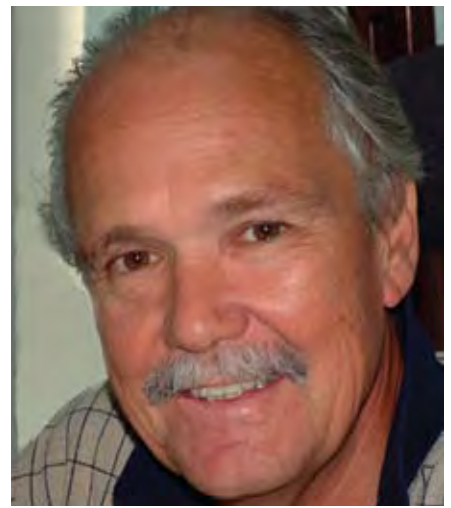
"You are also not limited by the type of land you get there. I've never been lucky enough to receive my dream site by the sea, but that won't happen with EU regulations any more.

"In fact I always seem to receive pretty boring sites that are either flat agricultural land, salt flats, or rubbish dumps!"

With so much going for it, it's easy to see why the golfing industry is turning its attention to Africa which is why PPC Golf – a sister company to *Golf Management Europe* – is expanding its property brokerage into the region.

Already, PPC Golf is offering for sale a 200-hectare development site in Safi, Morocco, which includes outline planning consent for an 18-hole golf course plus hotels, beach club, marina, tennis club, villas and equestrian centre.

As the game grows in popularity, it is anticipated that PPC Golf will be in a position to help expand and develop similar sites not only in Africa, but throughout the Middle East. **GME**



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