

# HARRADINE ON COURSE

Peter Harradine is one of the most world's great golf course architects, with over 200 courses designed and constructed worldwide. ME Golfer asked him the secret behind his success.

**ME G** You first visited Dubai in 1976, and have had an office here since 1989 – what brought you here in the first place?

**PH** Well, I had the great fortune of studying in the States, in '65 and '66, and I can tell you that I didn't do much studying! But it was a great time anyway - I was always into golf courses, and I was working for a company building golf courses, in France. They came to Dubai because they wanted to diversify, because they could see that maybe

things on the golf scene weren't going to stay the way they were, and so, as I learned about drip irrigation in the States, they asked me if I wanted to look at a job. So I came out on a six months job, and while I was here I met this very great, sincere, quiet person, who wanted me to grow some alfalfa in the desert, on five acres, which is actually quite easy on sand. In those days it was all pretty pioneering stuff, and so he asked me if I wanted to start up a company with him here. And so we started up Orient Irrigation Services, which is actually the company that built this course, built Al Hamra, built Jebel Ali, built Sharjah Golf and Shooting Club, those were all design and build contracts. We started with seven people, and now we have 850.

**ME G** So you're running a landscape company, how did you get involved in golf course design?

**PH** I always was in golf course design, my father was a designer, and I was plucked from this golf course company in France to run a landscape company.

**ME G** When you design a golf course, where does the inspiration come from, what is the beginning of that process?

**PH** Well, it really depends on the land, you know, basically a great piece of land usually makes a great golf course, a less good piece of land means you have to have a lot of imagination, and it also depends on the parameters you are given. In Europe, we are given waste land, literally rubbish dumps, land that nobody wants because they have no space, but here, you get a great piece of land like Yas Island, and it's great to start off with something like that. Abu Dhabi was a sabkah flat, white with salt, so you can really think "what can we do with that?". Here (The Track) we had to stay within the poles, the existing irrigation, so we didn't really have a huge amount of leeway.

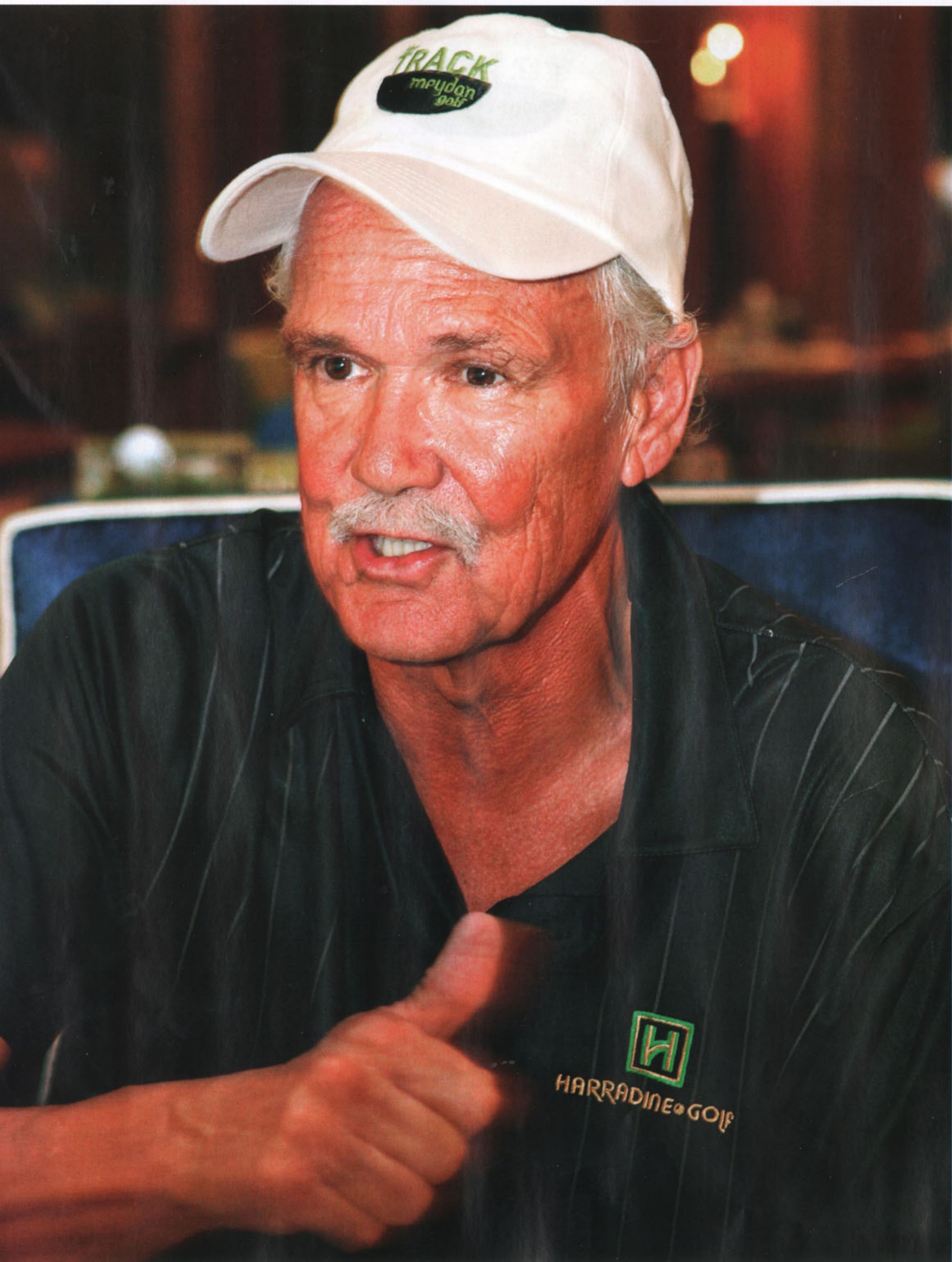
The last one we did in India, in Hyderabad, we had some great rocks there, so we were able to do a great course, but it really depends on the land you have to work with. It is always the site, the site, the site.

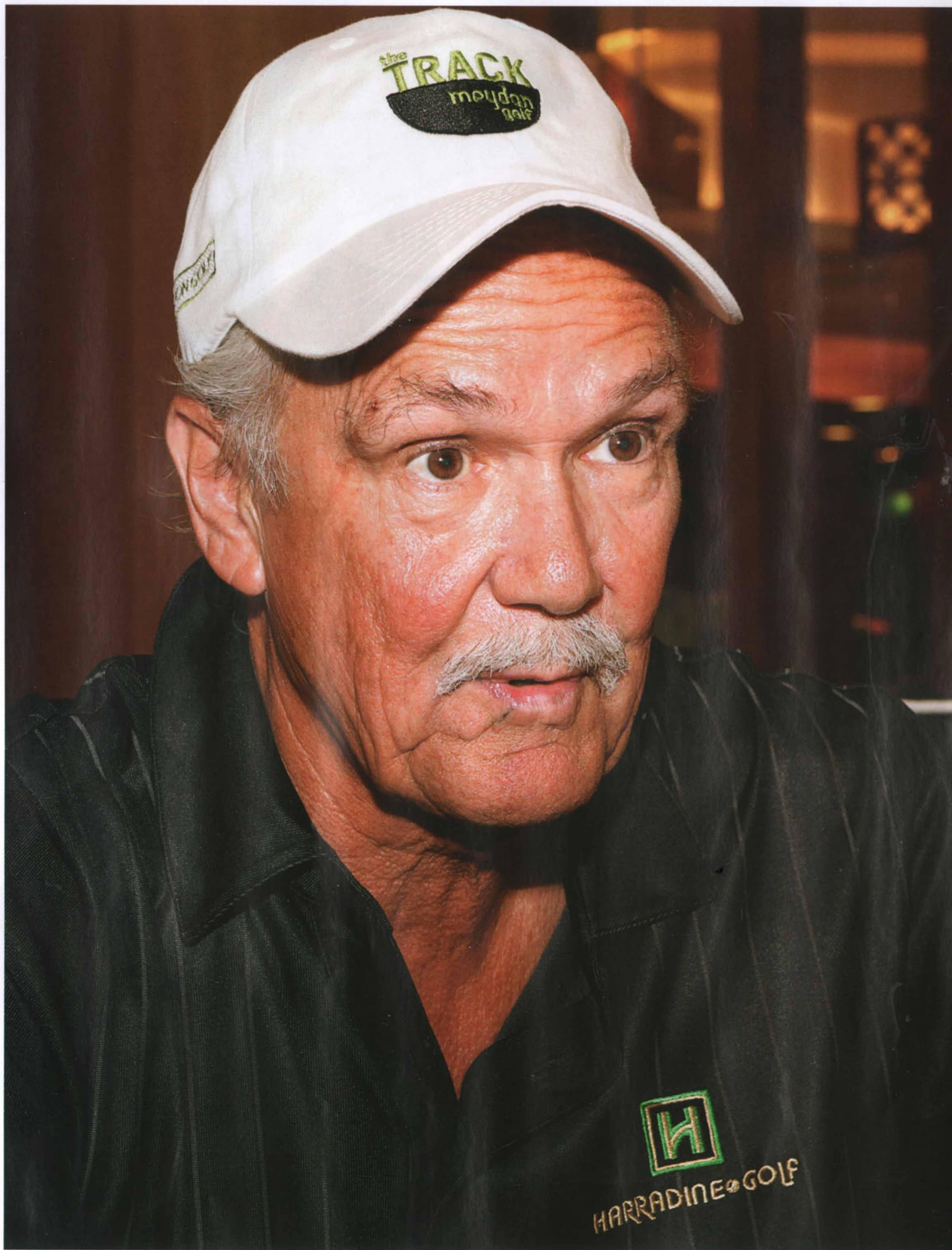
**ME G** Do you have any sort of favourite holes, that you include in every design?

**PH** Not really. I try to always create Par 3s that do not go up – that's sort of a rule of mine – so they are generally flat or going down, so you can see the landing area.

I don't mind starting with a Par 5, but I'm not hidebound by rules or traditions, I always respect the topography of the landscape so I don't have to follow a







theoretical sequence of holes.

**ME G** Do you have a favourite course, anywhere in the world?

**PH** The great thing about golf courses is that they are all different. Some are long, some are difficult, some are easy, some are spectacular, but I think we all like golf courses that we play well on. Where you come off and say “wow, that was a great round”. There are some courses, where for some reason, you just seem to play better than others, and you don’t really know why, it is all in the head. Those are the courses we like.

At the end of the day, I have two favourite courses, the one that I have just finished, and the next one we’re working on!

**ME G** Do you have a favourite hole? Everybody designs their fantasy course, taking the third from here, the fifth from their, shot over the Atlantic – how about you?

**PH** No, I don’t try and do that, I always respect the topography, but I have to say Pebble Beach, the par three there beside the sea, I don’t think we’d be able to do something like that any more, so it’s special.

**ME G** If there was one course in the world you could redesign, which would it be?

**PH** Ha! I’m not going to say! I mean, look at St Andrews. You know, if we designed a course like St Andrews now, we’d be in real trouble, it’s dangerous. It’s a course that was designed such a long time ago, it’s the home of golf, but it absolutely doesn’t fit any of the rules and parameters, a modern day design wouldn’t allow us to do that kind of thing.

**ME G** What makes it dangerous?

**PH** You go and stay in the Old Course Hotel and you’ll see why it’s dangerous! It’s the equipment we have now, they’ve lengthened the course, but the sorts of distances we’re getting now, well it was never designed for that. It’s a fantastic traditional course, one of the very best, but you have to play it that way. And you know, in fact, there are a lot of courses like that, especially real estate courses, where the equipment has changed so much that now people are getting a lot of balls in their gardens and problems, they have to put nets up, and there are some of these courses that should

definitely be redesigned. Modern equipment – just look at the club I used today – modern players can hit the ball such a long way.

**ME G** So, to what extent does technology shape the way you design courses now?

**PH** We started out, we were putting doglegs in at 220 meters, in 1968, and now I’m up to 270 metres, that’s 50 meters increase. It has to change the way we think, because golfers today wants to hit that ball as far as they can, which means that we have to make bigger buffer zones, bigger margins, but land is getting ever more expensive, so it’s a constant battle between the developers, the equipment manufacturers and the designers. Equipment now is so good that anyone can hit a great shot.

**ME G** You said one of your favourite courses is the next one you’re working on. Do you have any unfulfilled ambitions?

**PH** I’d love a golf course by the sea, I’ve never had a course beside the sea. I’ve had hills and rocks and sand and links and some spectacular locations, but never the sea.

**ME G** Where’s next? Anything in the Far East?

**PH** I’m very fortunate that we’ve never had to look for work, there’s always been more than enough to do. At one point in 2008 we had 47 projects on the go, but it was too much and with the crisis everything got cut back and we lost 30 of those, and we lost some people too, which was hard, but it was all out of control and I didn’t have the time to put into every project that I really wanted to. Now we’re working on a total of seventeen projects, in various stages, and I can devote the time it needs to get things right.

We’re looking at one in Turkmenistan at the moment, and one in Poland, there’s one in Kazakhstan...

**ME G** So where is the next frontier for golf?

**PH** I think definitely Eastern Europe, South America, and Africa. South America is a very big untapped market, Rio is going to be the first time they’ve played a big game there, so I think it is going to be a great time for golf. It’s a big market for the Americans.

**ME G** Thank you very much indeed, a fascinating conversation!