

INTERVIEW

Golf's great explorer

PETER HARRADINE

Peter Harradine is part of golf design's most enduring family business – and is one of the best-travelled men in the profession. Adam Lawrence found out the lessons of his long career.

Jones, Fazio, Hawtree: there have been several golf design dynasties in the century and a bit since the profession was established. But, as far as I can tell, only one has got past the third generation.

The Dubai-based designer Peter Harradine has been active in golf architecture for many decades; his father Donald practiced as an architect for over half a century, in the process bringing golf to parts of Europe where the game was previously almost entirely unknown. Don's stepfather Albert Hockey, though principally a golf professional, remodelled his first course in 1920, and in 1925 took the family, including a 14-year-old Don, to Switzerland when he was asked to upgrade and extend the eight-hole course at Bad Ragaz to a real nine-hole course. And now, Peter's son Michael

is a key part of the family business, so the Hockey/Harradine dynasty has, uniquely, entered a fourth generation.

When one meets Peter, who will be 80 in 2025, for the first time, it is natural to see him as an English gentleman, though perhaps a slightly rakish one: he is a natty dresser with a particular fondness for stylish scarves. In fact, though his family background is English, he is a Swiss national, born in 1945 next to the old golf course in Gurten, just to the south of the Swiss capital, Berne; his father was the manager of the course at the time. When Peter was three, Don was asked to move to Lugano, in the southern Swiss district of Ticino, to manage the golf course there. Ticino is close to the Italian border, and is largely Italian-speaking. Here, Peter grew up speaking Italian as his mother language: to this



Peter Harradine, pictured with the construction team at his project in Hyderabad, India, has designed courses across Europe, Africa and Asia in a career that now spans seven decades

day, it is the language he uses when talking to his children.

Most of Don Harradine's early work was in Switzerland; he also built courses in Germany and Italy in the 1950s. In 1962, he built the Glyfada club outside Athens, Greece's first golf course – "there is a street near the course called Donald Harradine Road," says Peter with pride. Until his retirement in the 1980s, he worked across the continent, including courses in Austria, Yugoslavia (the Bled course in what is now Slovenia), France and

the Netherlands. It was the 1960s when his son Peter entered the 'family business', though he lived the spirit of the times beforehand!

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"Every year during my school holidays in summer, from 13 onwards, he would take me on site for a month – which I hated, because I wasn't

enjoying myself with my friends," remembers Peter. "When I was 18, I did a few other things for a while – sang in a band, DJed – then I went to

the States for two years to landscape school. That was a lot of fun, but it was also the base of my future career. When I got back from America, I

started working with him properly. In 1968, when I was 23, we were building the Golf Club de Campagne in Nîmes, in the south of France, and he gave me the opportunity to design the greens. That was really the first time I designed anything."

Peter and his father worked together for the best part of two decades. Don was, according to his son, a good boss, even if their attitudes to life were not that similar! "My dad was a very serious Englishman – he actually joined the Salvation Army," Peter says.

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Peter on site in Montechiarelo, Italy, with long-time construction supervisor Arne van Amerongen



Harradine describes the site for his new course near Islamabad, Pakistan, as the best he has ever worked on

“My style of life and his were not that similar – he couldn’t really understand me going out and having a great time. I used to listen to him a lot; he was very informative and spent a lot of time explaining things. He was a very good teacher. Apart from the different lifestyles, we got on very well.”

Also, in the very early stages of his career, Peter built the Rhodos Golf Club course next to Glyfada. “At that time, the Greek government was trying to encourage golf to promote tourism,” says Peter. “The government was quite authoritarian, and so a few golf courses were built. Later, it was more democratic and harder to get anything done!”

For the next two decades, Peter built courses all over Europe – more in

Germany than anywhere else – until in the early 1990s things began to change.

The Karachi Golf Club, in Pakistan’s largest city, was founded as an affiliate of the Sindh Club in 1888 and registered as an independent

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club in 1891. There were a number of golf clubs in British India in the 19th century; the oldest, Royal Calcutta, was founded in 1829, and is the oldest club in the world outside the UK. The Karachi club moved to its present site

in 1953, six years after Pakistan gained its independence; but its course was purely sand, with no grass.

From 1985, the club sought to change its course to a grass one. In 1991, Harradine was commissioned to

design a new course for the club and change the existing layout from 18 to 27 holes, which was completed the following year. And now, more than 30 years later, the architect is back in Pakistan, building a new course as

part of the enormous Islamabad Smart City development near the country’s capital. “It is the best site I have worked on,” he says. “The differences in levels are incredible, and I have actually been able to leave a valley, or ‘canyon’, right in front of the clubhouse, with the ninth and eighteenth greens on either side. It has many natural rocky features and will have only natural indigenous vegetation. We have created many lakes to capture water during the monsoon, and there are already many types of birds that have appeared since we constructed the lakes.”

It was some time before this that Peter made the move that would change his life. “I first came to Dubai in 1976, but it was not for golf,” he says. “I was building a course at Saint-Cyprien

in the far south-west of France, not designed by me, and working for a contractor called VEB that did a lot of landscape construction, not just golf,” he explains. “They decided they wanted to open an office in the Middle East and, as I knew a fair bit about irrigation, I went out to set it up. I met a local Sheikh who said to me, ‘Peter, you’ve got to stay here, we’re going to build golf courses, plant trees and everything. We’ll start a company, and I will be your partner’. I didn’t believe him, but he agreed to my conditions for staying, and that’s why I’m still in Dubai. We opened our landscaping company in 1977, and Harradine Golf in Dubai started up in 1989.”

His first projects in the Gulf were the Doha Golf Club in Qatar and the

Abu Dhabi Golf Club, both of which were the first grass courses in their respective emirates. Doha started first, in 1995, and has been a regular feature on both the European men’s and ladies’ tours ever since. Abu Dhabi followed shortly afterwards; the course played host to the European Tour’s Abu Dhabi Championship from 2006-2021. “The project started in 1995, both the main National and the nine-hole Garden courses were built in 1998, and the club opened in 2000,” says Harradine.

Since then, Harradine has made regular trips – at least monthly – back to Europe; he maintains an office in Switzerland, in Caslano, where he grew up. The globetrotting has got ever more intensive; apart from

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Harradine's Abu Dhabi course hosted the European Tour's Abu Dhabi Championship from 2006 to 2021



Photos: Harradine Golf



Peter now works alongside his son Michael, pictured here at Golf Club de Campagne in France. Above, the Fenti course in Sudan

eastern, central and southern Europe, he has worked in Algeria, Egypt – he designed the Mirage City course in the late 1990s and has since built four more projects – Morocco, Kuwait, India and even Iran, though that project fell afoul of the 2008 financial crisis and was never finished. But, when asked the most outlandish place he has worked, the answer is quick to come. “Sudan is the most extravagant place I ever built a golf course,” he says. He built the nine-hole Fenti course outside Khartoum in 2008. “Actually, it was quite easy,” he continues. “We worked for a very big company that has a lot of experience in the country – and we got paid on time. They have their own terminal at the airport. The course is very successful. The usual uninformed

reporters said that we were taking water from the Nile which was not true – we had some wells. It was next to a very densely populated, quite poor area. But I never felt threatened – in fact I’ve never felt threatened anywhere. I feel more threatened at the main railway station in Milan.”

“My own philosophy of design might be summarised as ‘easy to play, difficult to score’”

And his design influences (apart from his dad, obviously!)? Peter says that he has a particular admiration for Robert Trent Jones Sr, and especially his course at Valderrama in Spain. “I think Jones is the father of modern golf course architecture,” he says. “His detailed designs, specifications

and tender documents gave the contractor a clear idea of what he should be quoting for and building. My own philosophy of design might be summarised as ‘easy to play, difficult to score’. Golf designers should never forget that the people who pay our fees are principally the 24-54 handicappers,

not the professionals and scratch or better amateurs. There are too many ‘Championship’ courses, but not enough ‘champions’ to keep them busy! And it is quite easy to transform a ‘normal’ course to host a championship if you need to. Golf must be fun, not a drudgery, if it is to prosper.”

As might be expected from someone who has lived so cosmopolitan a life, Peter is multilingual. But therein lies one of his biggest regrets. “I speak four languages fluently – English, German, French and Italian,” he says. “I pick up languages quite easily. But I really do regret living out here in the Gulf for so long and not learning to speak Arabic fluently.”

If not learning Arabic is Peter’s greatest regret, one of his proudest moments happened in July 2000 when the British Association of Golf Course Architects (of which Don was a founder), the French Association and the European Society, of which Peter was president at the time, merged to create the European Institute of Golf Course Architects – which has been a partner of GCA since the magazine

started in 2005. “My dad started the International Society of Greenkeepers and that, I think, drove me to pursue the amalgamation of the architects’ societies,” he said. “People said to me, ‘You’ll never manage this’. It took three years of negotiations, but eventually we brought it off. And the continued success of the EIGCA makes me very proud.”

The Harradine name will continue in golf. Peter’s son Michael has now joined the business after graduating in landscape architecture from a Swiss university and five years playing golf on the amateur circuit –

to a handicap of plus five. “I always really wished that Michael would enter the family business,” Peter says. “That is why I strongly urged him to study and obtain a degree in landscape architecture, which I firmly believe is one of the requirements most needed to become a good golf course architect.”

Peter Harradine may be approaching his eightieth birthday, but he is still lively and enthusiastic about the golf design business, and still putting in the miles. “I’m not going to retire,” he says. “I’m having a great time; I love what I do. Why would I retire?” **GCA**