

It was an intriguing mix of seemingly oil-and-vinegar collaborators, a blend of the highly successful designer Jack Nicklaus and the now-mid-40's-but-still-Boy-Genius Tom Doak. Quibble, if you must, about who added the sizzle and who added the spice. We prefer to savor **Sebonack Golf Club's** many pleasures without worrying about which chef to compliment. Both deserve full credit.

Being among those privileged to have witnessed its creation ("Head to Head in the Hamptons," December 2005), we can vouch that the finished product exceeded its potential. It was hardly an outstanding piece of land in the beginning. Today it is a showcase of American golf, half of it linksland overlooking Great Peconic Bay (after a considerable amount of tree removal), the other half a sideslope of inland forest. Holes presumed to be weak links during construction—the short opening par 4, just 355 yards from the back tee; the par-3 eighth over a pond; the par-5 13th—turned out to be fine, solid, attractive, even invigorating. Those that were knockouts even in dirt—the risk-and-reward, par-4 fifth, the windows-on-the-bay 11th and 12th—are now exceptional.

The true secret to Sebonack's success was the transformation of the mundane into the magnificent. A modest campus

of concrete-block dormitories has become the rolling, dunesy, par-4 second. A roadbed is now the rumpled seventh fairway. An old mansion and swimming pool made way for the bluff-top, par-5 18th.

Another potential mansion, intended to be a new home for owner Mike Pascucci in the center of the course, was scratched once he realized it would detract from the natural serenity of the layout. That allowed Doak and Nicklaus, months after the course had opened for play, to relocate the 16th green farther up a hill, on Pascucci's intended driveway, extending the par 4 from a drive-and-pitch 376 yards to a powerful-statement 467 yards, with a cleverly concocted new putting surface that feeds low, bouncing approach shots from the left down to pin positions on the right. The lesson? Even the best can stand improvement.

For all its high profile, Sebonack is really about nuances and illusions, a wry wrinkle in a putting surface that diverts a shot from its intended line, a bunker that looks tight but is far removed, a green that looks shallow but plays deep. Someday, maybe sooner rather than later, it might join neighbors Shinnecock and National Golf Links in that pantheon of course architecture, America's 100 Greatest.


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T **THOUGH**

there are no sure things, in life or in Golf Digest's annual survey of America's Best New Courses, the teaming of Jack Nicklaus and Tom Doak in a course design seemed like a can't-miss proposition.

And it didn't miss. As many expected, Nicklaus and Doak's symbiotic **Sebonack Golf Club** in Southampton, N.Y., reigns as America's Best New Private Course of 2007. It's the seventh Best New honor for Nicklaus since 1984, the second for Doak since 2001.

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