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Golf

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New Classic

Sebonack Golf Club's spectacular debut

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Sebonack Golf Club

Welcome to the



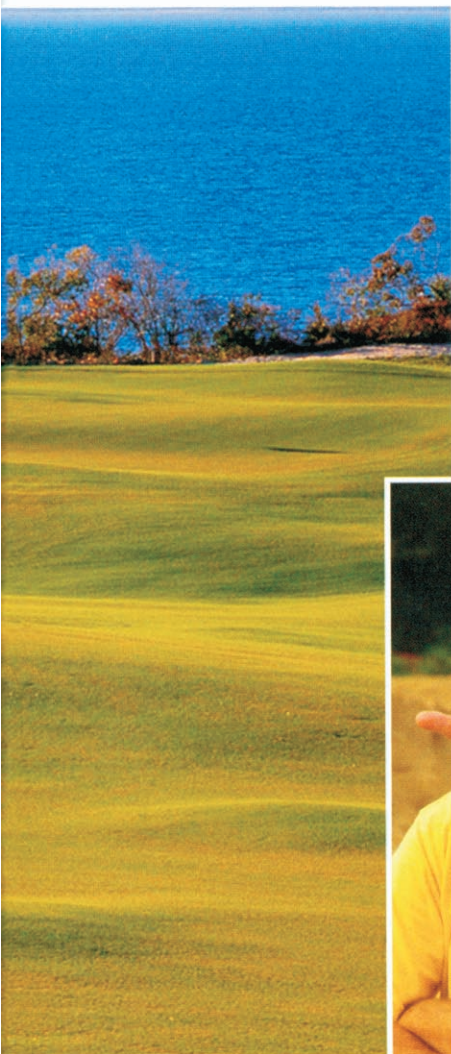
After spending \$46 million in 2001 to purchase 300 acres in Southampton, Long Island, to build his dream golf course, Michael Pascucci faced a less expensive but perhaps more important decision: Who would design it?

"I said we have to get the best out of this piece of property," the 69-year old Manhasset native says of what was known as Bayberry Land. "I asked Jack Nicklaus, who lives next door to me

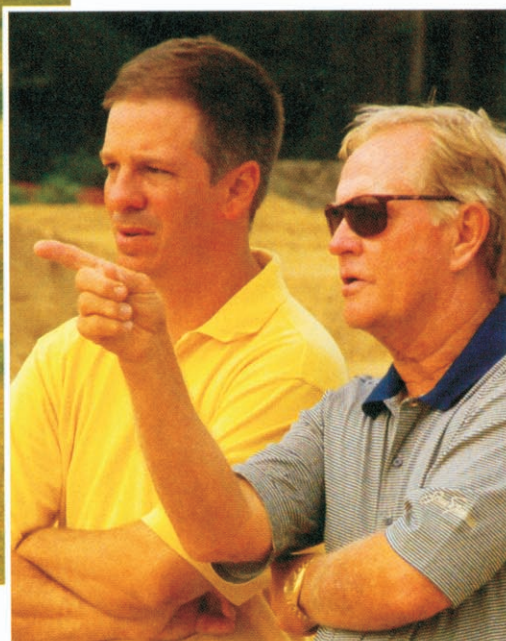
in Florida, if he was still designing golf courses. He was, so I said I have some great land in Long Island. Then I went out to Pacific Dunes and played that unique and special course. Of all the courses I've played all over the world, that one was as good as I've ever seen and the most fun to play. I met Tom Doak and liked the way he thought and what he did. Getting them together took a year and a half, but both were really gracious to each other. They really made it work

ABOVE: JOANNE DOST

Neighborhood



Sebonack, designed by the high-profile duo of Jack Nicklaus and Tom Doak, opens at a prime golf address on Long Island



BY TOM MACKIN

Designers Tom Doak and Jack Nicklaus were lured to collaborate by the chance to work on a property that offered great golf terrain and a beautiful setting.

here. And we get the benefit of that.”

The unlikely pairing of Nicklaus and Doak only adds intrigue to the much anticipated debut of the very private Sebonack Golf Club, a more than \$100-million project scheduled to open this spring, with membership expected to cost in the mid six figures. Construction of a 28,000-square-foot, two-story clubhouse and multiple on-site cottages is expected to begin then as well.

The roots of the property extend deep into

Long Island’s rich history. Used as farmland in the mid-1600s, it eventually became the summer home of New York bank tycoon and National Golf Links of America member Charles Hamilton Sabin, who in 1919 built a 28,000-square-foot mansion on the site. Thirty years later the property was sold to the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and used for meetings, a retreat, and eventually a summer camp for children.

Sebonack (right) is located in close proximity to Shinnecock Hills (below) and National Golf Links.

But it wasn't until Pascucci, who played football at Manhasset High School with NFL Hall of Famer Jim Brown and is currently the chairman of WLNY-TV (Channel 55), bought the land in 2001 that golf entered the picture. While he didn't take up the game until age 35, when he started playing at Nassau Country Club, the golf bug bit Pascucci hard. He is now a member of renowned clubs such as Muirfield Village in Ohio, Lost Tree in Florida, and Deepdale on Long Island, among others. (Pascucci made his fortune in the automobile leasing business, eventually selling Melville-based Oxford Resources in 1997.)

His search for land on his native Long Island to build his own course ended at Bayberry, a beachfront property in a neighborhood renowned for golf, with National Golf Links right next door and Shinnecock Hills Golf Club nearby. Sebonack's prime location overwhelmed the initial hesitations Nicklaus and Doak had of working together, with the latter noting that "it's hard to imagine a project bigger than this one."

Nicklaus agrees, adding that the course is a collaborative effort. "The look is more Tom's, and the golf is a combination of both of us," says Nicklaus. "My idea was to make sure we had good, playable golf. Tom will throw bunkers in different places for the aesthetics, so that's the look. I think the combination has turned out quite well. I think I've learned a lot from this golf course, it's given me another dimension on how to do golf courses. I would hope Tom has learned some things from me. I think this is a better golf course than if Tom had done it by himself or if I had done it by myself."

Nicklaus is one of the leading practitioners of the modern style of golf architecture, involving a lot of earth-moving, while Doak's minimalist style harkens back to the classic courses. Both are strong-willed individuals, but they managed to make it a team effort.

"One thing I've learned from working with Jack is that not much gets by him," says Doak. "If a mound is different, he notices it. We really did have to work together



as a team and come to a consensus on what we were doing. Once in a while we would disagree, and sometimes he would win or I would win. That's where it's a blend of our two thoughts. Michael's goal from the beginning was to have a course that was better than either one of us would have done on our own. Now we have to wait and see what everyone thinks."

"We designed each hole together," says Nicklaus, "although Tom took a first crack of getting a layout down on paper to figure out acreages of fairways for the permitting process."

"The routing stayed pretty much intact," says Doak of his original topographic study. "But maybe only 50 percent of the bunkers are in the same place. That's typical for either one of us on a project. You have some idea when you lay out a hole, but when you get to strategizing a hole, you may or may not actually decide to use a bunker."

Despite its location right next to The National, Sebonack will have its own distinctive feel, according to Doak. "I always thought from the beginning that it was going to be different from The National because we have all this water and they don't," he says. "So the feel here as soon as you drive in is much different. One of the keys to the design was that we touch the water in different spots. It's right next to the first hole and close by on the second. Then you go up and away from it, before you come back near it on 11 and 12, and then again on 17 and 18."

The designers took full advantage of the natural mounds and swales already existing on the property, and often defend greens with deep and difficult bunkers. "It's intimidating looking off the fairways, but the fairways themselves are really pretty wide," says Doak. "It's not as tight as it looks. There are actually a lot of short grass areas around the back of greens that can be the worst place to be."

At 7,225 yards, with a par of 72, Sebonack has the muscle to take on the pros. "This is a long course by my



“What I hoped for was to have Tom’s minimalist approach on the site, coupled with Jack’s strategy as the greatest golfer ever,” says owner Michael Pascucci.

standards, but not by PGA Tour standards,” says Doak. “It is challenging from the back tees, but you don’t want every par three to be 200 yards long. For example, the downhill par-three 12th can play anywhere from 75 yards to 160 yards, but it’s the most exposed place to the wind on the course, so putting the ball up in the air with a short iron is not easy—you’d almost rather have a long iron in.”

“With the wind up, it will be very difficult,” says Nicklaus of Sebonack. “I think you’ll be able to score on this course in nice conditions.”

The closing hole, originally planned as a par four but now a spectacular 570-yard par five that runs parallel to the Great Peconic Bay, was the topic of much discussion. “When Jack and Tom got together, they said okay, we can do the collaboration, but what do we do when we can’t agree?” says Pascucci. “I said, well, I’ll break the tie. Jack said to Tom we’re never going to let that happen. We did the last hole first and I begged basically to change it. I wouldn’t get off it. Finally they agreed to give me this as a par five and then they said we’re done with him. It was the last thing I got.”

“Originally, it was a 460-yard par four,” says Doak. “But Michael didn’t want to end on a hole like that for the members, who might walk off the green with a bogey or double bogey. So we moved the green and tee back and stretched it into a long par five, since it will play downwind a lot of the time. I’m really happy with how it turned out.”

“The big bunker that cuts across the fairway on 18 was the swimming pool for the old house on the property,” says Nicklaus. “We wanted to save that valley. On the par four, it was just window dressing really, but now with the tee moved back it comes into play on the second shot. And the big old flagpole behind the green is on The National, so we lined up everything right at that.”



Scotland, and specifically the Old Course at St. Andrews, came up often between the pair during the design process. “When we were trying to figure out what to do on the par-four fifth hole, Jack mentioned the 12th hole at the Old Course,” says Doak. “I caddied there for a couple of months after college and I love the Old Course. And I realized then that we have that place in common, so that’s one we could talk about a little. But we both take a lot from having seen a lot of golf courses

in our lifetime. When you’re out there trying to solve a hole you’re really talking about the piece of ground you’re on. Those outside influences are secondary.”

As a result, Sebonack is not a replica of a Scottish links, or any other type of course. “I don’t think it looks like anything but Sebonack,” says Nicklaus. “Every property has its own personality. You may use inspiration from other places, but it has its own personality.”

As for what he learned from Doak, Nicklaus says, “I think there’s one thing here that’s sort of different than what we would have done in our company. The greens have little rolls and imperfections. Tom likes to have little imperfections. I like that, too, but I didn’t know how to get it done. That’s one of the things I learned from Tom. You don’t have to be perfect. Not-so-perfect is sometimes better.”

In the end, Pascucci’s decision on course designers may have been his best. “What I hoped for was to have Tom’s minimalist approach on the site, coupled with Jack’s strategy as the greatest golfer ever, and fashion a course of beauty and a test of golf skills,” he says. “My motive was to get the best 18 holes of pure golf out of this property. I have to say after watching them work together, in my opinion we could not have gotten any more for my money than I got.” ■

Tom Mackin is Associate Editor of Divot Communication.

PHOTOS BY JACANN DOST

