

The Cutting Edge

# Golfweek's SuperNEWS

#### THE GOLFWEK GROUP

Golfweek; Golfweek's SuperNEWS; Golfweek.com; TurfNet.com and TurfNet Monthly 1500 Park Center Drive, Orlando, FL 32835; Reception: 407-563-7000; Subscriptions: 800-830-5182; Classified Advertising: 800-394-5157, x29; Editorial Fax: 407-563-7077; Sales/Marketing/ Circulation Fax: 407-563-7076; E-mail: [supernews@golfweek.com](mailto:supernews@golfweek.com); Reprints: Gay Harrison 800-382-0808 x124

#### PUBLISHER

Dale Gardner (407-563-7048; [dgardner@golfweek.com](mailto:dgardner@golfweek.com))

#### EDITORIAL

Executive Editor: Michael A. Boslet; (407-563-7040; [mbooslet@golfweek.com](mailto:mbooslet@golfweek.com))  
Editor: Bradley S. Klein (860-243-3296; [bklein@golfweek.com](mailto:bklein@golfweek.com))  
Managing Editor: John Reitman (407-563-7049; [jreitman@golfweek.com](mailto:jreitman@golfweek.com))  
Senior Writers: Mike Bailey (281-288-7604; [mbailey@golfweek.com](mailto:mbailey@golfweek.com)), Paul Hughes (714-628-0245; [phughes@golfweek.com](mailto:phughes@golfweek.com))  
Columnist: Randy Wilson ([rwilson@golfweek.com](mailto:rwilson@golfweek.com))  
Art Director: Alison Fox  
Assistant Editors: Kevin Adams, Jeff Barr, Craig Horan  
Contributing Editors: Peter McCormick, Frank Rossi, Ph.D.,  
Contributing Writers: James Achenbach, Eric Kulaas, Ken MacLeod  
Editorial Cartoonist: Roger Schillerstrom

#### PRODUCTION

Vice President Production & Distribution: Patti Green  
Senior Production Manager: Robin Daily  
Information Systems Manager: Tom Miller  
Web Manager: John Stamper  
Advertising Coordinator: Deborah Hesselbart  
Production Coordinator: Neely Jura

#### MARKETING

Marketing Director: Jennifer Collier  
Marketing Communications Manager: Tricia Van Ryswyk  
Marketing Coordinator: Jenna Reiser

#### CONSUMER MARKETING

Consumer Marketing Manager: CJ Moore  
Consumer Marketing Assistant: Cindi Aquilino  
Circulation Assistant: Janice Woeber  
Director of Events: Armand Cimaroli  
Events Coordinator: Brittany Johnson  
Events Assistant: Jack Kazanzas

#### ADVERTISING

Midwestern Sales Manager: Western Sales Manager, John F. Moore  
3341 Merrill Avenue, Royal Oak, MI 48073; Office: 248-435-6982; Fax: 248-435-8042; Mobile: 248-217-6567; [jmoore@golfweek.com](mailto:jmoore@golfweek.com)  
Eastern Sales Representative: Jonathan Kiger, 1360 Center Drive,

## OurOpinion

# A trend that we hope continues

In the last paragraph of the story "Dawn of retro-design" (pp16-17), editor Bradley S. Klein states: "America's Best doesn't mean America's fanciest. It just means getting back to nature via the game's essential design strategies."

To that end, Klein pointed out that the new kids on the block in golf course design are students of the past. They eschew the fancy for the functional, choosing form over frills. That's not to say there isn't a place on the top 100 lists for the ornate; bold and expansive earth-moving projects are numerous in the rankings. But we find it refreshing that there is an "everything old is new again" movement among some architects, and that their works have gained recognition.

Maybe such naturalistic design is a niche market, but we don't believe it is a fad. Moving dirt is expensive, as is building waterfalls and concocting an extravagant "signature hole" that gives golfers the feeling that they paid a lot of money to play a course that offers only one great hole. With the golf course market oversupplied and participation flat, the timing would seem right for a simpler approach to take hold in course design.

Gil Hanse, who authored public-access and modestly priced Rustic Canyon Golf Course in Moorpark, Calif., (debuting at No. 63) is among the new breed of little-known designers who made the greatest inroads into the top 100 Modern list

this year. We look forward to seeing more of their creations.

Of course, the team of Ben Crenshaw and Bill Coore is well-known and widely respected for its traditionalist approach to design.

Although not prolific, Crenshaw and Coore have made their mark with stunning creations evocative of the barren, windswept and scruffy landscapes of another time – and in another place.

Sand Hills Golf Club in Mullen, Neb., and Friar's Head in Baiting Hollow, N.Y., Nos. 1 and 3, respectively, on the Modern list (pp22-23), complement a top 5 that includes the natural, lay-of-the-land designs known as Pacific Dunes in Bandon, Ore. (No. 2), Whistling Straits in Mosel, Wis. (No. 4), and Bandon (Ore.) Dunes (No. 5). Remarkably, three of these five are open to public play, albeit for hefty green fees.

By making top 100 lists such as ours, designers find their concepts or philosophies validated to some degree. In turn, their techniques find acceptance among peers, who go on to design variations of heralded works that impressed them as well.

It is our hope that what we're seeing – the move to let nature speak for itself – will continue and prosper. America's Best does indeed include some of America's fanciest golf courses, but as we're seeing in the Modern rankings, there's room – and appreciation – for all schools of design. ■



9.6



7.5

# New breed of old school designers debuts on top 100 Modern list

By Bradley S. Klein

**H**ighlighting the ninth edition of *Golfweek* America's Best golf course rankings are works by a previously unheralded group of designers.

The big names of the Modern era – Tom Fazio, Jack Nicklaus, Pete Dye, Rees Jones – didn't deliver a new top 100-breaking product. Instead, Graham Marsh, Baxter Spann, Gil Hanse and David Esler, along with veteran, yet hardly prolific designer Tom Weiskopf, authored the rookies on our post-1960 list.

Pine Valley Golf Club (Classic) and Sand Hills Golf Club (Modern) top our annual lists for the ninth consecutive year. The



*Golfweek* America's Best lists are a yearlong compilation of ratings by our 350-member course rating team. (Top 100 rankings, pp. 20-23.)

Most of the newcomers are in sparsely populated areas or followed less-than-conventional market strategies. At No. 13, the private Sutton Bay Club, nestled in the town of Agar, S.D., 40 miles north of Pierre, is the highest-debuting modern course. Designed by Marsh, the former PGA Tour player from Australia, Sutton Bay sits on bluffs overlooking the Missouri River. The 5,000-acre site was transformed by club developer

Mark Amundson into a hunting, fishing and golf retreat.

Black Mesa Golf Club, in La Mesilla, N.M. (No. 50 Modern) sits on rugged, high desert terrain 20 miles north of Santa Fe. At \$55 for state residents, \$66 for nonresidents, this Santa Clara Tribe-owned course designed by Spann is moderately priced by national standards, though not as much as a bargain

as another rookie on the list, Rustic Canyon Golf Course in Moorpark, Calif. (No. 63).

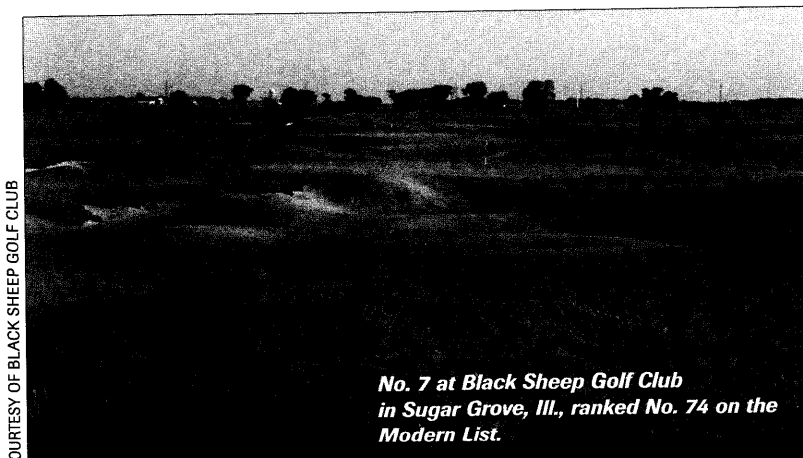
Owned by Ventura County, Rustic Canyon, 40 miles northwest of Los Angeles, costs only \$35-\$53 to play, making tee times hard to get. Lately, the Alistair MacKenzie-inspired design has been operating as a 15-hole course since a January flood damaged parts of the front nine. Repair and restoration work were expected to return the entire course to play by July (story, p18).

Some of the most innovative design work of late has taken place in out-of-the-way spots and often has involved talented people who are not (yet) household names.

Consider Hanse, who co-designed Rustic Canyon with golf writer Geoff Shackelford.

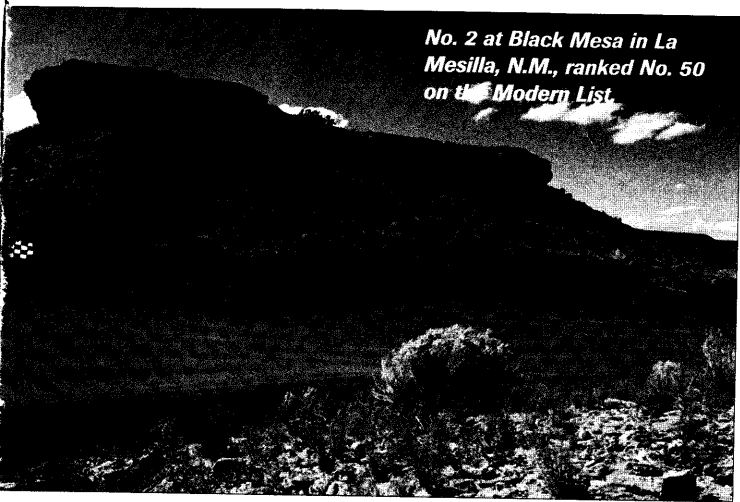
Hanse, 41, is Cornell educated, with a master's in landscape architecture. While at Cornell, he won the prestigious William Frederick Dreer Scholarship, allowing him to spend 1987-88 studying golf courses in Great Britain and Ireland. He then went to work for a previous Dreer scholarship winner, Tom Doak, a stint that included their collaboration on Stonewall Golf Club in Elverson, Pa., No. 61 on the Modern list.

Since going out on his own more



No. 7 at Black Sheep Golf Club in Sugar Grove, Ill., ranked No. 74 on the Modern List.

COURTESY OF BLACK SHEEP GOLF CLUB



No. 2 at Black Mesa in La Mesilla, N.M., ranked No. 50 on the Modern List.

COURTESY OF MIKE NUZZO

than a decade ago, Hanse has excelled at ground-hugging golf architecture and scruffy, traditional bunkers. He's done this not only with new courses like Rustic Canyon, but also with subtle restorations at such luminary classic courses as Fishers Island (No. 11), Quaker Ridge (No. 28), Plainfield (No. 30), Fenway (No. 55), Lancaster (No. 71) and Ridgewood (No. 76).

Hanse is not alone in hoping that old-school design has carved out a firm place in today's design market.

"I can't tell if it's a niche," he said. "I'd like to think there's a more widespread appeal and that golfers are becoming more appreciative of what (Bill) Coore and (Ben) Crenshaw and Doak and we are trying to do."

Heady company, what with two of the top three courses on the Modern list being Coore and

Crenshaw courses: Sand Hills Golf Club in Mullen, Neb., is No. 1, and Friar's Head in Baiting Hollow, N.Y., is No. 3, up from last year's debut at No. 11. And Doak's Pacific Dunes, in Bandon, Ore., sits at No. 2 – yet more evidence of what happens when a designer's work enhances, rather than imposes, itself upon interesting native contours.

Of course, sometimes the contours and slopes have to be created, which is exactly what Esler did in designing Black Sheep Golf Club in Sugar Grove, Ill. (No. 74). The private club sits on lightly rolling farmland 45 miles west of downtown Chicago. Esler, 41, a native of Wakonda, Ill., played

varsity golf from 1982-86 at Ohio State University, where he also earned his degree in landscape architecture. He always had aspirations of becoming a course designer, and after a fling at playing professionally he opened a design shop and eked out a living for a decade.

"I'm the world's worst marketer," Esler said.

Finally, Esler was hired by Chicago-area real estate developer Vince Solano to design a layout "on an ordinary cornfield with a pretty modest budget," Esler said. Solano turned Esler loose to create a wide expanse of playing surface, evocative of Prairie Dunes in terms of native grasses but unlike anything in the Chicago area. With the membership limited to men only, and with only two sets of tees per hole, Esler adhered to a basic

principle: "The closer you hit it to the primary hazard, the better your next shot is."

Not all of the newcomers to our list are the handiwork of up-and-coming designers. Lahontan Golf Club in Truckee, Calif., (No. 88) is the fourth design (or co-design) by Weiskopf to make the list.

At least Weiskopf still around to see his work gain recognition. The late Donald Ross had two more of his designs added to his top 100 portfolio, making for a total of 27, thanks to long-term restorations of Skokie Country Club in Glencoe, Ill. (No. 86 Classic) and Beverly Country Club in Chicago (No. 100 Classic). Both restorations were undertaken by Ron Prichard, who has turned classic touch-up into a cottage industry.

Old school? New school? There's plenty to go around, as we demonstrate in this issue. There are 52 public-access courses on the top 100 lists, the bulk of them on the Modern side. For those of you who shy away from the nearly \$400 green fee at Pebble Beach Golf Links (No. 5 Classic), we'd recommend a trip to America's heartland, say North Dakota. There, for less than \$50 per round, you can play two top-100 Modern courses, Hawktree Golf Club in Bismarck (No. 49) and Links of North Dakota at Red Mike Resort in Williston (No. 58).

America's Best doesn't mean America's fanciest. It just means getting back to nature via the game's essential design strategies.

---

*Editor Bradley S. Klein can be reached at [bklein@golfweek.com](mailto:bklein@golfweek.com).*