

SPECIAL REPORT I

GOLF COURSE DEVELOPMENT

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— Rees Jones

Rees Jones overlooking the golf course.

FIRST NEW FOR REES JONES

Yunling Golf & Spa Resort, the first new course in Asia for Rees Jones, Inc., has quickly established itself in southwest China in Yunnan Province, the 27-hole club is situated on the outskirts of Kunming, known as the Spring City of the South. At 1,800 meters above sea level, the region's spring-like climate is considered the finest for golf in China. Rees Jones, Inc. has



Rees Jones, Inc.
GOLF COURSE DESIGNERS



The facility's first 18 will be seeded in October 2010, with a soft opening slated for summer 2011, after which the third nine will be built. The 27-hole facility will feature a mix of both open and wooded holes plus an elevation change of nearly 600 feet. The golf club has been designed and built to championship standards. Yunling Golf & Spa Resort will function as a private member's club with resort guest access.

"We are blessed with a great site and a client who is committed to doing a first-class job," said Greg Muirhead, Senior Vice President at Rees Jones, Inc.

Muirhead noted that two-thirds of the Yunling site is open. Holes 1 through 9 and holes 19 through 27 occupy rolling, generally treeless terrain, while the second nine, holes 10 through 18, will be carved from a mixed forest of conifers and deciduous trees. There are also prominent rock outcrops on site that have been incorporated into the design of the course.

"We've emphasized to the developer that we can accentuate the site's natural diversity with our overall design," Muirhead said. The first nine, Muirhead said, occupies the lower portion of the property, but still offers panoramic views of Yangzonghai Lake, a fjord-like body of water. The second and third nines--one wooded, one open—occupy the high points of the site and offer dazzling 360-degree views of the entire region. The 27-hole complex will enable players to experience three different 18-hole combinations.

"The most memorable golf courses generally have the most natural variety," Muirhead stated. "Yunling's natural diversity is a real asset that other golf courses in the area don't have. The site's topographic and vegetative variety can really work in our favor."

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GOLF COURSE DEVELOPMENT

"The developers want a championship-caliber course that can attract major tournaments, and that's what we're building, but we wanted them to see first-hand a variety of design styles at public, private and resort facilities in a variety of environments, including open, wooded, flat and hilly locations," — Greg Muirhead, Senior Vice President at Rees Jones, Inc.



Greg Muirhead with his Chinese counterpart, Lu Wei

Muirhead said the Chinese development team behind Yunling Golf & Spa Resort visited the U.S. to tour a variety of Rees Jones-designed courses before construction began. "The developers want a championship-caliber course that can attract major tournaments, and that's what we're building, but we wanted them to see first-hand a variety of design styles at public, private and resort facilities in a variety of environments, including open, wooded, flat and hilly locations," he explained.

For his part, Rees Jones said of the esteemed Kunming project, "We're delighted to be working with a great development team to create a flexible course that will present a fair examination to the game's best players while at the same time offering an enjoyable golf experience for all." He added that the firm's extensive experience building versatile, playable courses that can double as tournament venues will stand it in good stead on the rugged site.

"We're trying to make the golf course at Yunling visually dramatic and exciting," Jones said. "The Asian culture is very keen on aesthetics and the overall relationship with the landscape. Water, for example, is a highly regarded element in Chinese culture. Our concept is to create water features that fit the landscape. We're creating ponds and other water features, both for strategic and aesthetic purposes, where they would appear naturally, in existing low areas. They'll also be visible from the club's surrounding residential area."

At more than a mile above sea level, Muirhead explained that Yunling presents its own unique set of design challenges. "On the highest elevation holes where wind will be a major factor, we've made the fairways wider and the greens slightly larger, with adjacent 'saving' features," he said. The facility will feature bentgrass tees, greens and fairways. The primary rough is bluegrass. The second band of rough is a blend of fescue grasses. Out-of-play areas will be planted with creeping lovegrass to provide a different visual texture.

Muirhead said the layout incorporates state-of-the-art construction materials and techniques, including both drainage and irrigation infrastructure. For example, all fairways and roughs have been sand-capped to promote excellent drainage and provide a superior growing medium for the turfgrass. The greens will be built to USGA specifications. These putting surfaces, Muirhead explained, will be of various sizes, elevations and shapes. "The idea is make them all unique and receptive," he said.

"We've learned that many Asian golfers equate 'quality' golf with course difficulty," Jones stated. "We're trying to balance the expectations of Asian golfers with the realities of what we've learned over the years about across-the-board playability. In order to attract and retain new golfers in China, it's important these new courses are playable and enjoyable for beginning and intermediate players."

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- 6 PGA Championships
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18th hole at Bethpage Black, host of the 2002 and 2009 U.S. Open Championships

Photography courtesy of Larry Lambrecht



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