

In a league of his own

GCSAA honors architect Rees Jones with award also given to his father

By Bradley S. Klein

If a golf course architect's work speaks for itself, then all Rees Jones needs to do as guest of honor at the GCSAA Dinner Show is run a slide projector. The body of evidence he could present would include image after image of sensitive but masterful course restorations and original designs that would leave onlookers in hushed praise.

He won't get off that easily, though, as the recipient of the 2004 Old Tom Morris Award.

In being recognized for lifetime commitment to the welfare of the game, Jones becomes the first second-generation recipient of the association's highest honor. The distinction likely won't be lost before a group that is rooted in the legacy of the father-son team of Old Tom and Young Tom Morris.

"Nine minutes, that's all I've got," says Jones of his time limit before an audience of superintendents and golf industry representatives. "It will be hard to express the awe I feel for an award given by the people who work with you and know you."

Considering Jones' experience at speech-making, he should do just fine. It was his father, the late Robert Trent Jones Sr., who took a casual approach to speeches, preferring off-the-cuff remarks or tapping his youngest son to talk on his behalf as the renowned patriarch of the Jones design family piled up awards over his career. Among those accolades was the 1987 Old Tom Morris Award, which the elder Jones accepted as Rees watched.

'Restoration' yields recognition

It takes years to build a good reputation in the design business – even for someone who has been born into a heralded design family.



LARRY LAMBRECHT/COURTESY OF REES JONES

Rees Jones says the best advice he has ever received was to not take on too much work.

Now 62, Jones has been at his craft for nearly four decades, the last 29 years on his own. But it wasn't until his sensitive restoration of The Country Club in Brookline, Mass., for the 1988 U.S. Open that his work gained worldwide recognition. The phones at his office in Montclair, N.J., have since been ringing off the hook.

Until that project, older courses were "modernized" or "renovated." Jones' work at The Country Club brought "restoration" into the lexicon of golf course modern architecture. He showed the value of pouring over old photographs and maps in search of traditional design elements that could be recaptured.

And it was in Brookline that Jones received some sage advice. Veteran golf scribe Herbert Warren Wind took Jones aside and warned him not to repeat his dad's mistake by taking on too much work.

"It was the best advice I ever got," admits the younger Jones. "Otherwise, you lose control."

Today Jones maintains a modest-sized staff, with four design associates: Keith Evans, Greg Muirhead, Bryce Swanson and Steve Weisser.

In 1997, Jones' skills at restoration were put to work at Bethpage State Park's Black Course in Farmingdale, N.Y., a legendary A.W. Tillinghast design had deteriorated under municipal management. With the blessings of the U.S. Golf Association, Jones dug bunkers again, reclaimed abandoned hole placements and helped restore the bite to the course so that it could stage the 2002 Open. Bethpage's Black was the first municipal course to hold an Open, and it will do so again in 2009.

When Jones is handed the Old Tom Morris Award in the San Diego Convention Center ballroom Feb. 14, he will be only 10 miles from another municipal gem he rebuilt for an Open, Torrey Pines Golf Course. Its revamped South Course will be the host site in 2008.

When Jones visited Torrey Pines in 1999 along with a Who's Who of San Diego business and community leaders, he made a point of calling upon superintendent Gerald Dearie to talk over plans for the course.

"That was a very thoughtful thing to do," says Dearie, who won't be in attendance at the dinner despite its proximity.

The GCSAA convention takes place during tournament week of the PGA Tour's Buick Invitational at Torrey Pines, and Dearie will be working with his crew getting the South Course ready for the final round.

He learned by doing

Born in 1941, Jones is two years younger than his brother, Robert Trent Jones Jr., who also went on to establish himself as an acclaimed architect.

After graduating from Yale University in 1963, the younger Jones spent a year at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, then joined his father's staff.

"I learned much more from hands-on experience than from the classroom," he says. "This is a learn-by-doing business, and early exposure really helps."

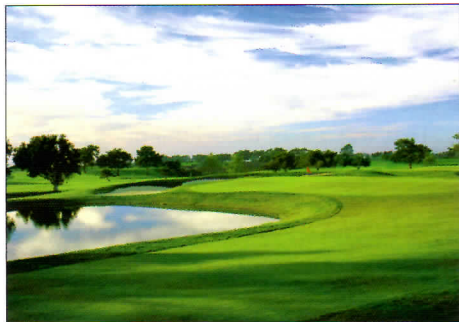
Developing his own "look" would not really come until he set up his own design shop in 1974. But business was slow because

of a combination of high interest rates and an oil embargo that stalled golf development in the United States.

Despite the lack of work, Jones gained notice when he co-authored with Guy L. Rando "Golf Course Developments," published in 1974. The book remains the standard work in the field.

Over the next decade, Jones applied the book's principles of sound land planning to a number of successful golf and real estate undertakings, including Arcadian Shores Golf Club in Myrtle Beach, S.C. His colleagues thought enough of him in 1978 to make him the youngest president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

In developing a golf course, Jones likes to say, "The course architect doing the routing is like the tailor who cuts the cloth. Once the proper cut is made, alterations are possible. But it must be cut properly the first time, or else it will never truly fit."



LARRY LAMBRECHT/COURTESY OF REES JONES

Rees Jones has renovated Torrey Pines Golf Club's South Course in San Diego. The municipal layout will hold the 2008 U.S. Open.

Ocean Forest Golf Club on the far end of Sea Island, Ga., is a fitting example of Jones' tailoring expertise. Jones brought dunes land, a saltwater marsh, ponds, river front terrain and the Atlantic Ocean into play in an inspiring combination of playing surfaces. The course made for a magnificent stage for the 2001 Walker Cup Matches. That event was the second in a three-week bonanza of national publicity and acclaim, when three Georgia courses Jones worked on staged national championships. The week before the Walker Cup, the PGA Championship was

THE BEST OF REES JONES

Original courses

- ▶ Arcadian Shores Golf Club, Myrtle Beach, S.C., 1974
- ▶ Haig Point Club, Daufuskie Island, S.C., 1986
- ▶ Atlantic Golf Club, Bridgehampton, N.Y., 1992 (No. 40 Modern, *Golfweek's America's Best*)
- ▶ Huntsville Golf Club, Wilkes-Barre, Pa., 1994 (No. 75 Modern, *Golfweek's America's Best*)
- ▶ Ocean Forest Golf Club, Sea Island, Ga., 1995 (No. 52 Modern, *Golfweek's America's Best*)
- ▶ Nantucket Golf Club, Siasconset, Mass., 1998
- ▶ Cascata Golf Course, Boulder City, Nev., 1999
- ▶ Olde Kinderhook (N.Y.) Golf Club, 2000

Prominent restorations

- ▶ The Country Club- Championship Course, Brookline, Mass. (1988 U.S. Open)
- ▶ Congressional Country Club-Blue Course, Bethesda Md. (1997 U.S. Open)
- ▶ Atlanta Athletic Club-Highlands Course, Duluth, Ga. (2001 PGA Championship)
- ▶ East Lake Golf Club, Atlanta (2001 U.S. Amateur)
- ▶ Bethpage State Park-Black Course, Farmingdale, N.Y. (2002 U.S. Open)
- ▶ Torrey Pines Golf Club-South Course, San Diego (2008 U.S. Open)

— Bradley S. Klein

staged at the Atlanta Athletic Club-Highlands Course in Duluth. The trifecta was completed with the U.S. Amateur at East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta, a Donald Ross masterpiece that Jones had restored in 1994.

Ken Mangum, CGCS of Atlanta Athletic Club, worked with Jones on the Highlands Course in 1994-95. In 2002-03 they rebuilt the club's other 18-hole layout, the Riverside Course.

"In our case," says Mangum, "Rees stepped into a politically delicate situation and handled it with grace and professionalism. He's very good in front of club officials and members."

Jones says the Riverside's restoration made him a better architect. It certainly has helped him get away from his early reliance on symmetrical containment mounding. The study of classical courses also gave him the confidence to develop a more artful style of bunker work. Those elements helped distinguish Atlantic Golf Club in Bridgehampton, N.Y., where Jones turned a fairly low-lying potato field into a fascinating, links-style layout.

Perhaps the most impressive achievement at Atlantic is its environmental ingenuity. Jones worked closely with superintendent Bob Ranum and with area ecologists and environmental groups in preserving wetlands, protecting animal species, and reintroducing indigenous wild grasses.

Builders and shapers are so sophisticated that sometimes the land doesn't matter as much as the owner's intent, budget and imagination. Jones, for one, is fond of saying that "given the choice between a good

owner and a good piece of land, I'll take the good owner every time."

Lowell Schulman, founder, owner and developer of Atlantic Golf Club, appreciates Jones' sentiments and says he tried to live up to the adage.

"The entrepreneurial focus in creating a golf courses is often overshadowed by other things – houses, pace of play, money," says Schulman. "The owner's job is to stay involved without being controlling. I made it my business to be on site every time Rees was on site. It helped me understand what was going on and gave him even more confidence to go ahead with his design."

Not that Jones – or any architect – lacks confidence about his craft. You don't climb this far in the business or learn from someone as strong-willed as Robert Trent Jones Sr. and not know what you want. But Jones' great skill, beyond his technical capacity to design, is his way of connecting with powerful people and his ability to convert business relationships into friendships.

Few aspects of the golf business are more competitive than course design. It is a trade in which "name" seems to be half the battle and hype and excess too often win out over subtle quality. Yet, there is something to be said about letting your work speak for itself and for cultivating genuine relationships. Just ask course architect Rees Jones.

Better yet, ask the people who have worked with him.

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