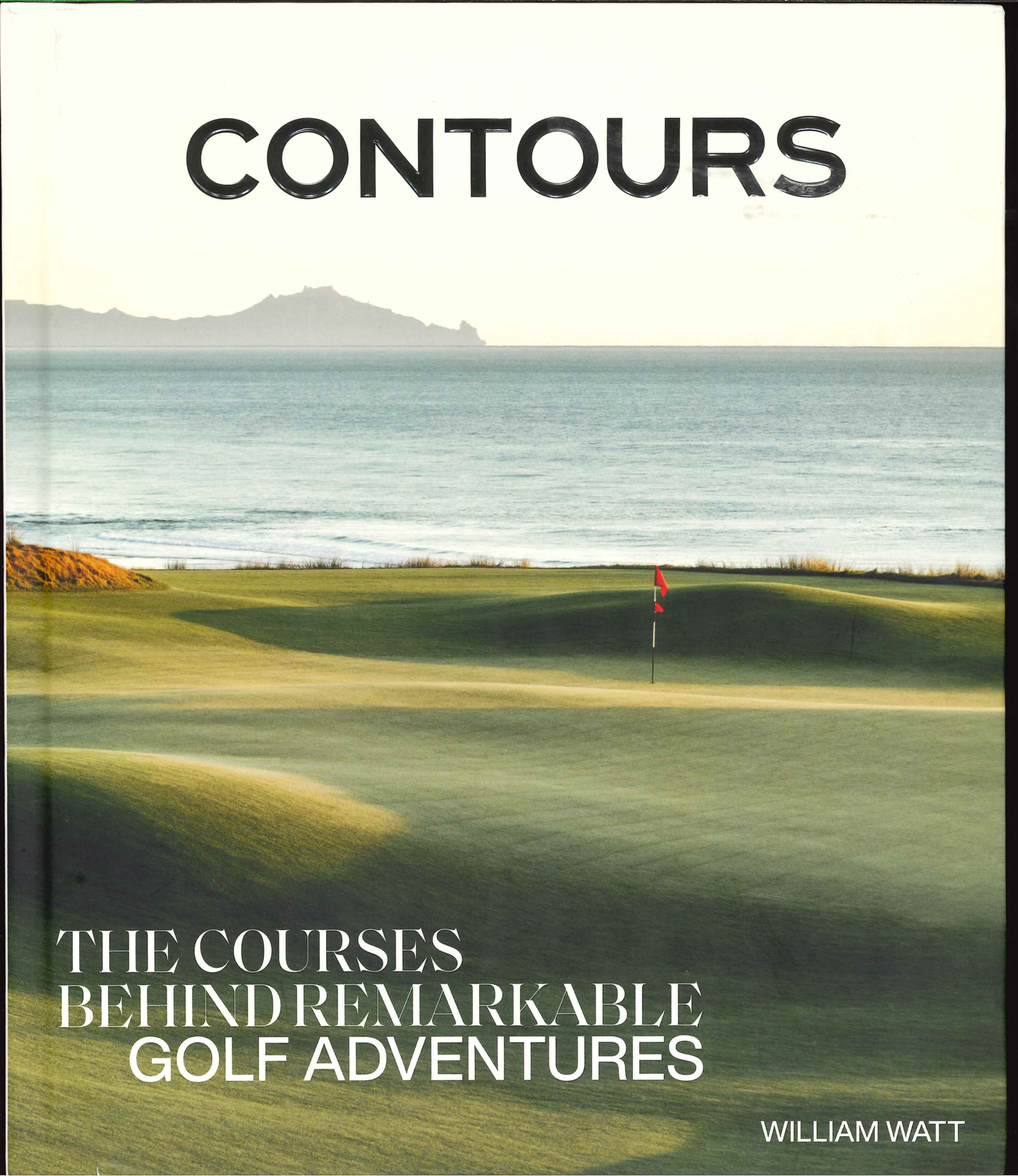
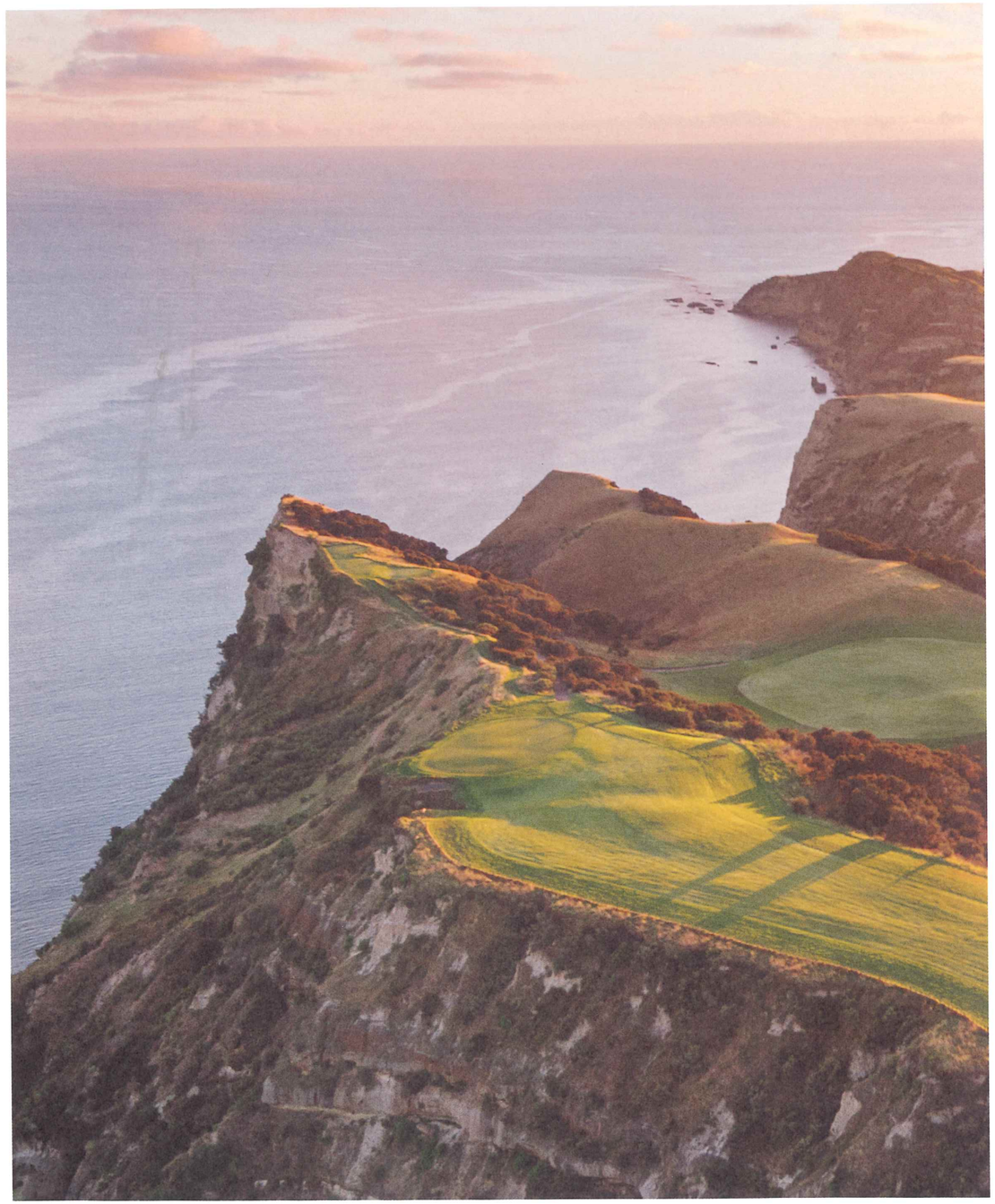
CONTOURS



THE COURSES BEHIND REMARKABLE GOLF ADVENTURES

WILLIAM WATT



Cape Kidnappers and Barnbougle Dunes proved destination golf could work down under.

FOREWORD

BY TOM DOAK

I first landed in Australia on 3 March 1988. I remember the date only because the immigration officer loudly announced, 'The date is 3/3, even you Americans can't get it wrong.' I was in the midst of building my first solo design and as the project was under snow in Michigan, I thought it would be great to get to the Sandbelt and try to learn what great bunkers looked like. I'd been struggling to get the shapes right.

I didn't know if I would ever get back that way, so I gave myself three weeks in Australia and a week to see New Zealand, as sort of an afterthought. Amazingly, because I had been writing for *Golf Magazine* as a side gig in the United States, I was in contact with a couple of Aussies who were on the panel to rate the top-100 courses in the world, who offered to host me. This led to a friendship with Tom Ramsey, the late golf writing legend, and a memorable dinner at Richie Benaud's apartment in Coogee on my second day in the country.

I spent a few days in Sydney getting my bearings, three days in Adelaide during the Festival, and then a good ten days in the Sandbelt, seeing everything I'd heard of except Woodlands. All the best courses were in the suburbs. I never saw a kangaroo or wallaby that first trip, except at the zoo – though I did make the pilgrimage to Barwon Heads, where the late Bud Russell played with me, and even went down to the Mornington Peninsula to see a brand-new course called The National. Mostly, I was mesmerised with The Royal Melbourne, and impressed with the work that Kingston Heath superintendent, Graeme Grant, had carried out to improve his course.

En route home, I stopped in New Zealand, which wasn't considered a golf destination at the time. Titirangi, Paraparaumu, Wairakei and Rotorua were the only courses I'd heard of, but I thought I should see the countryside. I never had an inkling that it would play such a meaningful part in my life. Over the years, I've made thirty-three trips back to build my three golf courses, or occasionally to stop in and play them on my way to Oz.

Luckily, just as my reputation was starting to grow in the late 1990s, so was golf development in Australia and New Zealand. My first foray was to interview to build one of the two new courses at The National in 1998, but Peter Thomson and Greg Norman were both Australians who had won The Open, and I wasn't and hadn't, so that was that. A year later, David Inglis asked if I would be interested in building a course down the road at St Andrews Beach and I jumped at the chance, though he abandoned the project when the local council wouldn't grant zoning for residential property to help pay for the land acquisition.

In 2000, we built Pacific Dunes in Oregon, and my reputation went from being a designer with 'potential' to someone who made the most of beautiful land. But it's harder to get permission to build on beautiful land in America than it is down your way, because there are more people around to object to 'growth'. So in the year after Pacific Dunes opened, my first calls to work on great land were from Cape Kidnappers in New Zealand, and then Barnbougle Dunes in Tasmania. Then Mike Clayton asked if I'd like to work with a new developer at St Andrews Beach. We built all of those courses, back-to-back, in 2002–03.

The success of Cape Kidnappers – building on David Harman's Kauri Cliffs and Barnbougle followed by Lost Farm – was just as good for golf development in the two countries as it was for my career. Prior to that, there was much doubt in Australia that a course outside of the big cities could be successful. Barnbougle proved it could happen, opening the way for the resort's expansion and for further developments on King Island. The success of Cape Kidnappers proved that US and UK visitors would travel that far for destination golf, which led to the development of high-end courses in Queenstown, and later to Tara Iti and the new resort down the beach.

Better yet, because those courses were all open to the public, the golf magazines published photos of them around the world. No matter how far away they were, readers could conceivably go play them, which they couldn't do at the other great course of its generation: Sand Hills in Nebraska. So the boom in resort and public golf has also led to a greater interest in golf course design. Forty years ago, I had to go through an inter-library loan to find a copy of Alister MacKenzie's book. Now, every book on design has been reprinted and you can get it in two clicks from Amazon, and there are hours and hours of podcasts and website interviews with me and other modern designers.

This book you're holding shows just how far we've come – from technical manuals hidden away in libraries to rich explorations of how these courses came to be. If you have even a passing interest in the topic, you may easily be lured into the depths.

Don't say I didn't warn you.