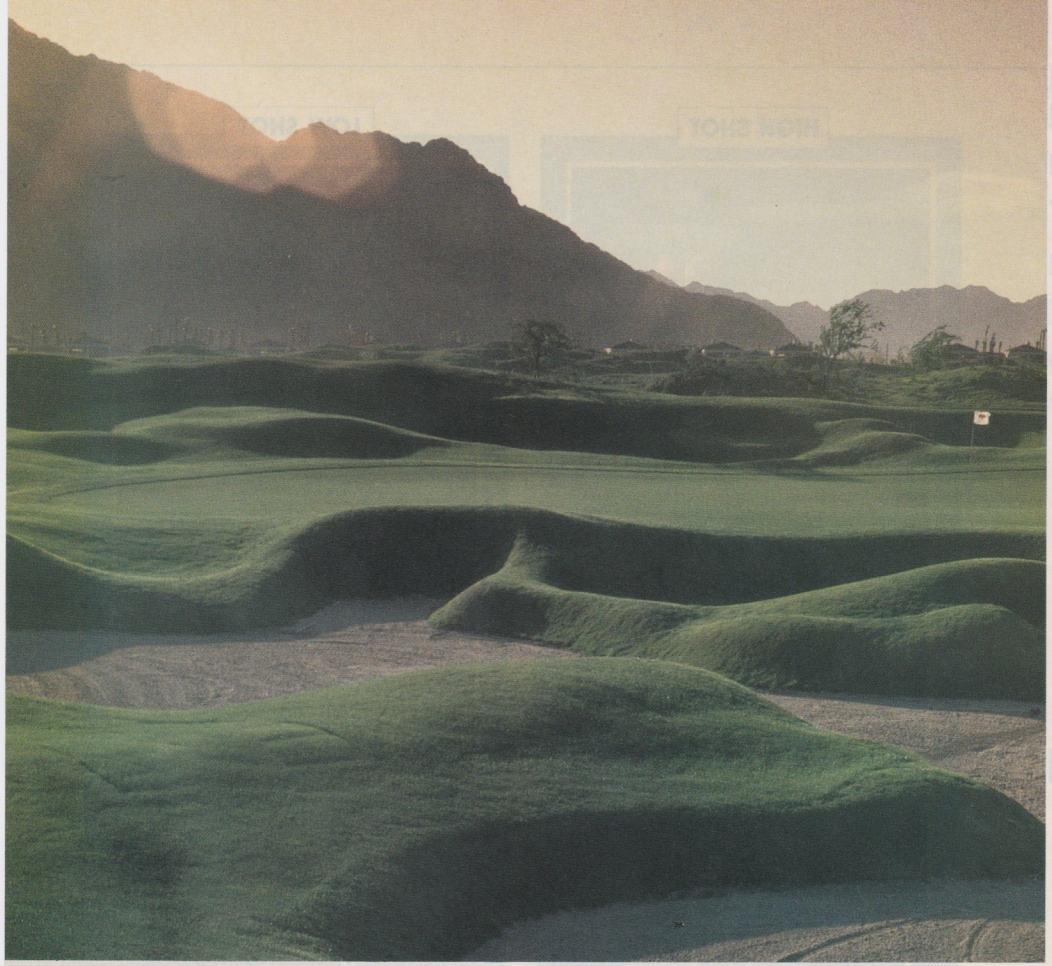
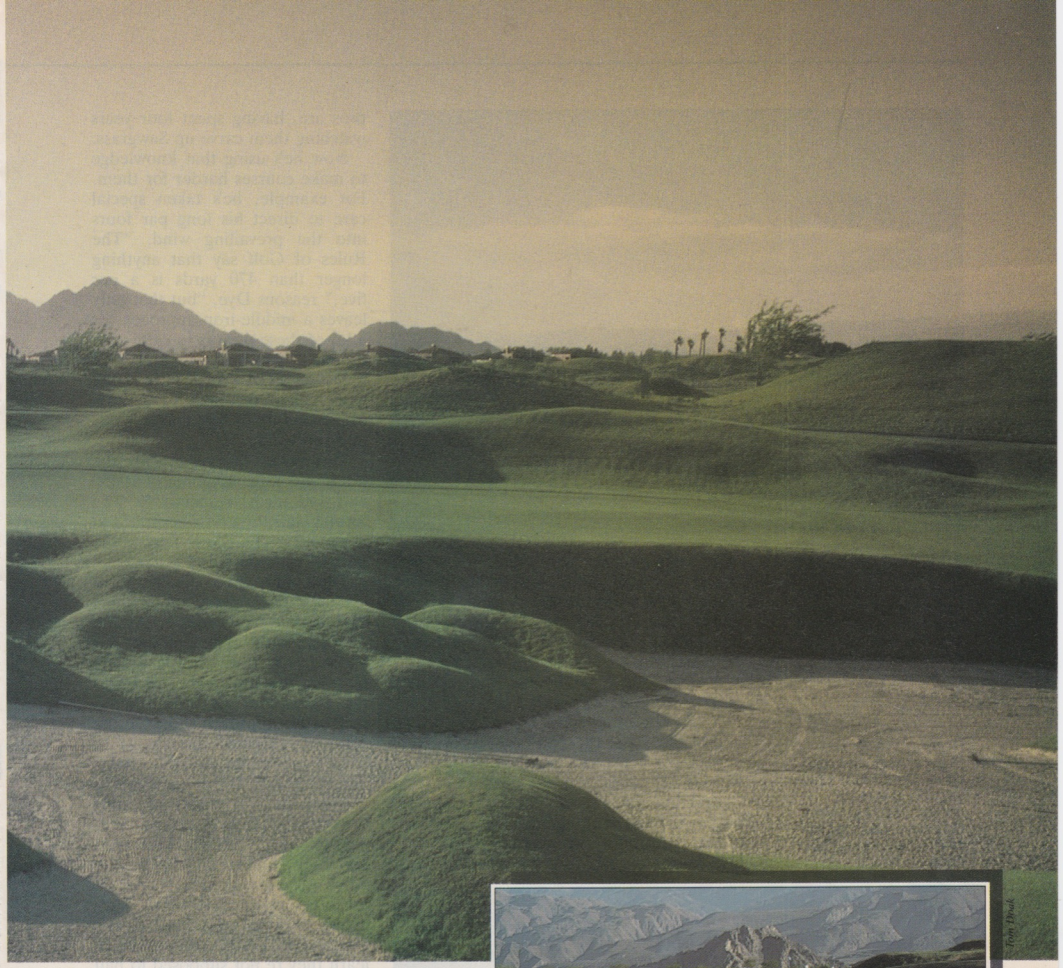


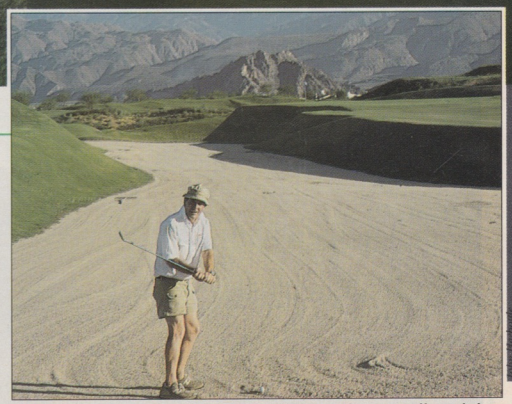
Architecture

Is This the Toughest Course on Earth?

This month's Skins Game at PGA West should provide the answer

by TOM DOAK
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR





Above: Number three plays to 470 yards as well as into the wind. Below: Designer Dye finds the trouble he made.

Lee Trevino joins Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus and Fuzzy Zoeller for the fourth edition of the Skins Game this Thanksgiving weekend, but he'll share the spotlight with the tournament's new venue—Pete Dye's Stadium Course at PGA West, a course so difficult that the players had better watch out for their *own* skins.

Less than three years ago, the Stadium Course was just another flat expanse of scrubby desert real estate when Joe Walser and Ernie Vossler of the Landmark Land Company approached Dye and told him,

continued



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An 18-foot deep bunker runs from fairway to green down the left side of the par-five 16th hole, awaiting the player who goes for it in two.

Having designed the course couldn't save Dye from finding his share of sand. Still, he managed to get out in one from this 10th-hole bunker.

"We want you to build the hardest golf course in the world." Added Vossler, "Don't you worry about us changing our minds later. In fact, if the players don't moan about our course from here to Japan, we may have to go in and make it harder."

A close look at the course, with the help of Dye himself (see photographs), reveals that it's not impossible. At least not *too* impossible. Take the first hole: a relatively benign par four, just a driver and 7-iron. But it's 440 yards from the back tees. "In a warm climate where the ball carries slightly farther than normal," argues Dye, "that is a driver, 7-iron for the average Tour pro." Dye knows exactly how good today's Tour pros are, having spent four years watching them carve up Sawgrass.

Now he's using that knowledge to make courses harder for them. For example, he's taken special care to direct his long par fours into the prevailing wind. "The Rules of Golf say that anything longer than 470 yards is a par five," reasons Dye, "but that only leaves a middle-iron approach for a lot of these players in calm conditions." So the third and 15th holes at PGA West have been stretched to the limit (470 yards each) and both head due west, into the wind.

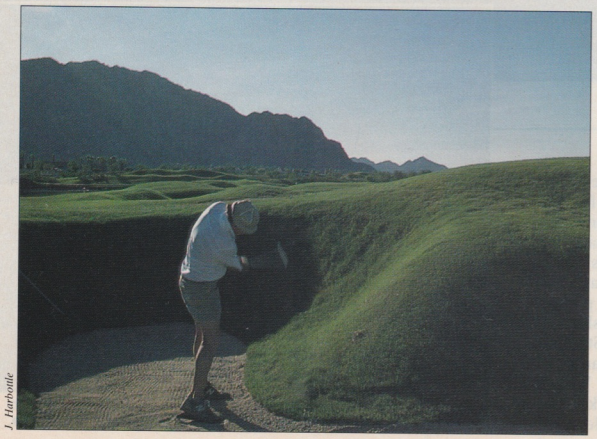
Two more heavyweights are the ninth and 18th, weighing in at 450 and 440 yards, respectively. The former calls for a long approach to a low-lying green offset from the fairway near sand and water.

The course isn't only for gorillas. Dye has included four short par fours to test finesse. At the 12th and 14th holes (360 and 390 yards, respectively), only a long tee shot down the right minimizes the uncertainty of a half-blind, half-wedge approach shot. On the 350-yard seventh, there's water from tee to green down the right, and a fairway bunker on the left.

The 10th (414 yards) is almost the opposite, with water and boulders to the left and a severe bunker right, of which Dye's wife Alice (also an architect) says, "I asked Pete what someone was supposed to do if they drove in the bunker. He said, 'Well, they'll learn they're not supposed to bail out to the right of the tee.'"

These short par fours play an additional part in Dye's overall strategy: They *frustrate* the players. "Most pros expect to make birdie on holes this short," Dye maintains, "but they won't necessarily do it here, and that makes them mad. Then their swings start to suffer. I should have made the 12th and 14th the first two holes on the course because then the players might get so mad, none of them would finish."

The par-three holes range from a 255 yarder across water and another of 230 yards, down to the



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Taking a page from his own book, Dye built a 17th-hole island par-three in the desert. Boulders in the water surrounding the green add to the fun.

166-yard island 17th. The latest version of the 17th at Sawgrass is surrounded by huge boulders.

But the key to the course's difficulty could lie in the four par-five holes, which are usually the soft underbelly of any course since Tour players routinely get home in two. Not at PGA West. Even the 16th hole, which was originally intended to be a short par five, was stretched out to 571 yards. "I don't mind if they get home in two," says Dye. "But they'll have to pull out the hickory to do it."

Two woods probably won't be enough on the 618-yard 11th. And the players will have to take care to avoid a blind approach from a deep hollow below the green. "I don't understand that hole at all," says Scott Verplank. He's not alone.

None of this is likely to bother Dye. In fact, it's part of his game plan. The more the players try to figure out his motives, the less they concentrate on playing the shots required. Call it "guerrilla" architecture. "These young men all have such solid swings," says Dye, "that the only way to really get at them is inside their heads."

So is the Stadium Course the toughest on earth? It depends on the individual. Carnoustie's probably tougher if you can't abide the wind; Olympic if trees are your nemesis; or perhaps Oakmont if you suffer from the yips. But no matter the weakness, somewhere it's sure to come out. That 77.1 course rating, the highest in the West, does not lie. And the course won't get any easier. Dye's landscaping plans call for the planting of some 300,000 small desert shrubs to create all kinds of lost-ball country.

As for Dye, he plans to spend Thanksgiving weekend in the Dominican Republic. He won't win any $35,000 skins that way, but at least Trevino, Nicklaus, Palmer and Zoeller won't be able to get at his.■



T. Doak

The tee shot off number nine should finish left of the water and sand. Golfers hope the nearby Santa Rosa Mountains won't influence Dye's future designs.