



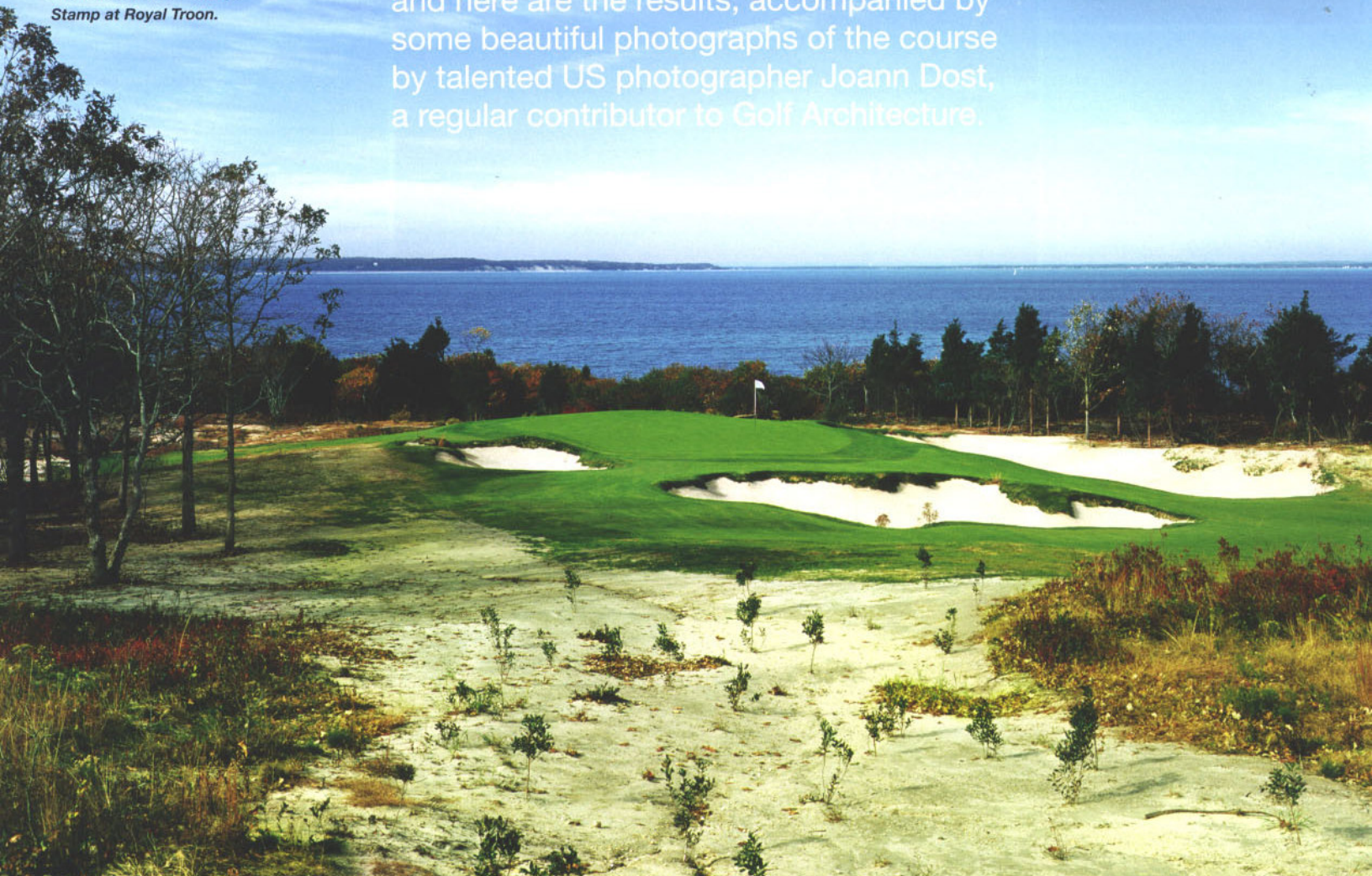
SEBONACK

A COLLABORATION

Above: On a chilly day at Sebonack, from left, client Michael Pascucci, Tom Doak, Jack Nicklaus and Jim Urbina.

Below: Looking out across sandy waste and bracken to the green at the par three 12th to Peconic Bay beyond - this tiny green was modelled on the Postage Stamp at Royal Troon.

An Architect's question and answer with Jack Nicklaus and Tom Doak: The new Sebonack course on Long Island is a modern day collaboration between two renowned architects - Jack Nicklaus and Tom Doak. Golf Architecture posed them a few questions about the making of the course and the nature of their collaboration - and here are the results, accompanied by some beautiful photographs of the course by talented US photographer Joann Dost, a regular contributor to Golf Architecture.



Golf Architecture: How did your collaboration come about?

Jack Nicklaus: Michael Pascucci and I have been friends for a long time, and, in fact, he is a member at Muirfield Village Golf Club and a founding member at The Bear's Club, my current home club in Jupiter, Florida. When Michael purchased this piece of property in Southampton, he came to me about doing the design for a private golf club he wanted to build. We were delighted to be involved. Then, during the early stages of the project, Michael had the opportunity to play a couple

GA: What was the mission statement from your client?

JN: Michael never really said too much about his goals, but I think I know what they were. He wanted to produce a golf course that was very playable, a golf course the members are going to play, but at the same time, produce something very special. It is a fantastic piece of property, and I think he wanted a golf course that would show it off well. I think he wanted to take that area of Long Island and the people that are going to come there, and essentially knock them back on their ears with

to pay two design fees as insurance. He said he wanted 18 good holes that were challenging for a good player but fun for the average member, and if we managed to do that, the site would take care of the rest.

GA: What was Michael Pascucci like compared to your other clients?

JN: I have always believed that the best projects, the best golf courses are when the owner is very much involved in the design process. And Mike was very much involved in this golf course. Every time I was there, he was there.

Pascucci wants on that piece of property that will service his membership and what he wants, not something that would benefit our reputation as a designer. I'm well past that, and I think Tom is in that same position. Our job was to do what Michael wanted, and we did that. After all, haven't you seen his hat - the one that has Nicklaus-Doak-Pascucci on the back?

TD: Michael was a hoot, and he kept the process fun. Jack and I are both pretty focused on problem-solving the design when we are out

The opening hole is a short par four that culminates in an undulating green right on the waters edge - a precise wedge approach is called for, or even a well executed run-up shot.



of courses designed by Tom Doak - or at least the design he did at Pacific Dunes - and he liked the look and feel of Tom's work. So he asked Tom to get involved in Sebonack. Tom had a great deal of input in the overall look, and my greatest input was from a strategy standpoint - how the golf course plays, the quality of the golf shots.

Tom Doak: I came into the process a bit late. The client Michael Pascucci went out to Pacific Dunes and loved the routing and the shaping, and asked if I would be interested in becoming involved, collaborating with Jack. At the time, I didn't think it was realistic that Jack would consider it, but I underestimated his relationship with Michael.

something quite special. Michael has a substantial financial investment, and I am certain he wanted a means to get a return on that investment. But more important, Michael has an emotional investment in this project. This was personal to him. This was about leaving a legacy. This was, at its essence, a labor of love. I think I have been at this long enough and involved in enough projects to understand what he needs and what has to be done to accomplish all those goals.

TD: He said that we might get to build great courses all the time, but for him, this property was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and he didn't want to make any mistakes, so he was willing

I don't believe there was ever a decision made without saying, "Michael, do you like that? Michael, what do you think?" And there's times he said, "I don't like it." So, Tom and I got together and decided on the best way to do something else. So, I think Michael's input was great. I mean, every time that I've done a project, be it with Hall Thompson at Shoal Creek, Jack Vickers at Castle Pines or Lyle Anderson at Desert Mountain - and I could go through probably a dozen owners of golf courses - every time the owner gets involved and every time he has a sense of what he wants, our job is to meet his expectations. Our job is not to do something for our ego. Our job is to do something that Mike

on site, but having Michael as a 'third wheel' helped keep us talking instead of getting stuck on our differences. A couple of times, Jack handed his pencil and clipboard to Michael as a subtle way of telling him to quiet down, but Michael would just take the pencil and start sketching his own idea, as if he didn't understand the underlying message.

GA: How did Michael's input impact the golf course?

JN: Tom and I sat down with Michael and we said that if we can't agree, Michael was the deciding vote. Well, Tom and I decided that there was never going to be a deciding vote by

Michael.... except the 18th hole. Well, the 18th was probably his greatest input. Tom and I wanted a par 4, and Michael said, "No, it's a par 5." Okay, we'll make it a 5. He won that one because it's his golf course.

TD: The only concrete example is the 18th hole. At the start, both Jack and I visualized it as a long par four, the proverbial tough finishing hole along the water, but Michael insisted that it would still be easy for the Tour pros [since it plays downwind] and that a good par five would be a much more enjoyable finish for the members. So we moved both tee and green back a bit, which brought a cross-bunker more into play on the second shot, as well as an elm tree to the right of the green if you block your second shot to the right. It might be the best hole on the course now.

GA: What was the most remarkable feature of the property?

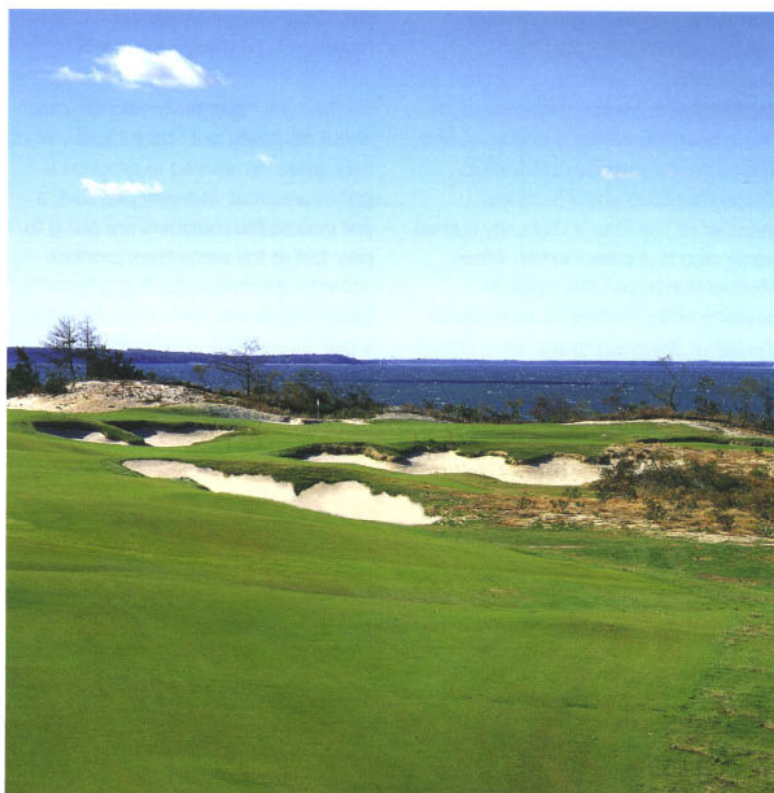
J/N: It's hard not to simply say it was the property itself. First of all, the location is spectacular. There are wonderful, subtle changes in elevation - less than 100 feet of elevation change. When the clubhouse is done at Sebonack, I think you can probably go to it and almost see the whole golf course or a very large part of it. Certainly, you will have a great view out over the bay. You'll see half a dozen holes down in front of you; you'll see half a dozen holes behind you. It's a dramatic setting. But then you have to talk about what the site really is - sand, or sand dunes to be exact. The actual form of the property was, in some ways, a bit awkward. But, because of what you could do to and with the property and how you could play with it, you could easily take any awkwardness out of it. You can give me a dead-flat piece of property, or you can give me a mountain that goes straight up and down, but if you give it to me in the sand, I can change it and do about anything I want to it. The land at Sebonack was about what you could do with it. And I think that a lot was done with it. It turned out to be really nice.

TD: Three-quarters of a mile of frontage on Peconic Bay is a pretty good start, especially with the range of elevations we had - the eighteenth tee is 70 feet above the water, but the twelfth green is just fourteen feet above sea level.

GA: How did the fact that the course is next door to National Golf Links and Shinnecock Hills factor into your design?

J/N: As I said, it's a great spot, a great location. It's not unlike National from that standpoint. National sits on top of the hill, views out over the 18th hole and to the water and views back over its golf course. It sits on the same ridge the clubhouse does. If I am not mistaken, the Sebonack site was the property CB Macdonald first preferred to do the golf course at National, but he couldn't get it, so he went to the other piece of land. I may be wrong, but I think that is accurate. So, the site Michael has is a very lively piece of property, from an interest and historical standpoint. Sebonack really is very dramatic. And now that the golf course is completed, I think if you go to Sebonack, you're going to find a golf course that looks like it's been there as long as National and Shinnecock. While you do have two neighboring courses that are steeped in tradition and respected around the world, you don't want to replicate them. You want to do something that is unique, has its own character, and complements those courses. I think we accomplished that.

TD: I have great respect for both of those courses, and the way to honor that is not to copy them but to do something different, though at the beginning of the job I wasn't sure what that would be. As soon as we got the holes cleared, I realized that the character of Sebonack would be defined by its water views, and I stopped worrying that it would look anything like its neighbors. One unexpected feature of our design are a couple of borrowed views of National Golf Links ... from our ninth tee you look back up their third fairway toward Macdonald's famous windmill, and their huge flagpole stands right back behind our 18th green... we shifted the green subtly so the flagpole would be dead-center over the green as you stand on the tee.



GA: What factors allowed the co-design to work well?

J/N: Obviously, I am sure there was some skepticism from both sides. But it's not because I haven't worked with a co-designer before. I'm used to working as a team. I've done close to 20 co-designs with my sons. I've worked with Pete Dye, Desmond Muirhead, Gene Sarazen, and Arnold Palmer. The only difference was that in most of those golf courses, we took the lead. That was an initial concern, but in the end, I was most interested in making sure that whatever product we did was a quality product. There's a lot of Tom Doak out there and there's a lot of Jack Nicklaus out there. And, frankly, I had a good time. I learned a lot from Tom, and I hope Tom learned a lot from me. We both do things in different ways, and to me, I enjoy learning and doing things in different ways. It's fun. I have said this before, we each would have done a nice job on the course if we had done it on our own, but I think Michael got a better product because we did work together. I think Tom and I will be friends for a very long time because of this experience.

The approach to the first green from the right side of the fairway. The hole plays along the boundary shared with the National Golf Links of America - the professional's shop at the National is about 65 metres to the right, through a thicket of trees.

TD: We are both comfortable making decisions in the field, and I made it a point to be on site whenever Jack was there, so we'd sort out our differences of opinion quickly and wouldn't have any disagreement that dragged out. And though some people thought our two companies would clash, it actually helped that they are organized so differently, because everyone had a different job to do. Jack's associates, Jim Lipe and Chris Rule, handled the drawing end and kept him informed of the progress we were making while he was away. My associate Jim Urbina ran the construction project and worked with the superintendent and the shapers (and whispered in my ear more than a few times about the design), while the rest of my team contributed from the seat of the equipment, creating greens and bunkers that are sculpturally beautiful on top of being interesting to play.



The green for the second hole is tucked between large sand dunes.

But we didn't divide up the design work in any way - everyone had their say on every hole.

GA: What was the hardest part of the process?

J/N: I think egos and any personality differences were put to the side, and it worked well. We both have very talented teams. I had my Senior Design Associate Jim Lipe and Design Coordinator Chris Rule, and they were very important to me. And Tom had Jim Urbina and other staff members, all of whom were very important to him. In the end, I think both teams worked well together. Obviously, there are some philosophical differences in our design approach, but that only made the situation that much more interesting. Tom has a great appreciation for the older, more classic designs, and I think he tries at times to replicate some of those. That's fine. I like the older designs, too, but I use them more as a concept. You always have to keep today's game in mind, and keep your approach modern from a shot-value and distance standpoint. Again, I think we accomplished that at Sebonack.

TD: Everyone involved from both firms had to check their egos and take a step back down the chain of command, but in doing so, we had a ridiculous number of talented and experienced people handling even the smallest details of the design. For me personally, sometimes I felt I had less time to be creative on this project than on others, because we were always going back over decisions to be sure they were right, instead of moving on to the next hole. But there are a bunch of places that we improved the design by taking a second or even third look at some small detail.

GA: What surprised you most about your co-designer's input?

J/N: We actually did a routing and Tom did a routing, and we used more of Tom's routing than we did ours. I think we adjusted the holes as we went on because I don't think any first routing ever works perfectly. You've got to adjust. But I think the routing worked out quite well. To be honest, I knew very little about Tom before this project. I had not had a chance to read any of his articles, and I had not had a chance to see any of his golf courses.

So, I took Tom Doak for the person I met and how we worked together. And I found Tom to be a very nice young man and very bright. We had a great time, and I think we produced a nice product.

TD: I knew Jack would be very particular about the strategy of holes and about the distances of carries and the size of greens, but I was surprised how concerned he was about visual elements... the shaping of the background to the green, being able to see into the depth of the bunkers, and so forth.

GA: How is the course different from one you would design on your own?

J/N: Each project is different, whether it's the owner you are working with, or the site itself. With Sebonack, the biggest difference was melding two different design philosophies into one very good golf course. Tom focuses a great deal on the look, and I made certain to weave in good golf shots and strategy. So, I think the balance of that working relationship played out well in the end result.

TD: Normally I wouldn't build a course which is so long and difficult from the back tees; less than one percent of golfers are going to have fun playing Sebonack from all the way back. But even though Michael is a 14 handicap, he plays golf with a lot of great players, and it was important to him that they respected his course as a test of their ability.

GA: What is a favorite feature of the course that your co-designer suggested?

J/N: As I said before, Tom's team did a nice job with the routing, and he had a great influence on the look of the course. I had seldom done the seaside-look bunkering prior to this. Since Sebonack, I've probably done about 10 golf courses this way, because I enjoyed doing it and it was something I had rarely done.

TD: One of my favorite holes is the short par-4 fifth, which is based on a hole Jack saw at Rhode Island Country Club. It's a tiny green and the approach from the right is almost impossible because the green is tilted away from there, so you have to fit your tee shot between a bunch of bunkers on the left and a couple in the middle of the fairway. It's the sort of hole lots of modern architects have forgotten to include in their latest 7,500 yard designs.

GA: What will be the most important club in the bag at Sebonack?

J/N: If we did our job properly, you hope that every club in the bag will come into play at Sebonack. But the clubs used will vary from day to day, depending on conditions. The driver will be very important, because you want to put the ball in play in the right areas. You will also have a variety of irons shots, but how you play those iron shots will depend greatly on conditions. Around the greens, you will pitch the ball sometimes, and other times play a Texas wedge or putt the ball. The greens have enough spice in them that you better be on your putting game.



GA: What hole will take the members longest to figure out how to play?

JN: Probably number 2. The second hole has a tee shot that you can challenge, but you could be uncertain how much you should challenge it and how much you should bite off. When you do bite it off, I'm not sure you are really gaining a lot. We have a mound about halfway between the second shot and the green that blinds the visibility of the green, which is a swaled approach. You're not sure whether to play it low or play it high, or play it right or left, draw it or fade it. You'll find that people will play it a lot of different ways.

TD: For me, it will be the Texas wedge from off the green. The greens are so small that I'm guaranteed to miss a lot of them, and though there are a lot of chipping areas around the greens, the grass is so tight that I'll prefer to use a putter.

Above: *Playing downhill to a tiny green, the 5th hole is protected by a cluster of bunkers and sandy waste areas.*

GA: What is the one shot you most look forward to playing?

JN: The opening tee shot, on opening day. I always get a tremendous kick out of doing the openings after we've spent so much time working on the project. To be able to stand on the first tee and see the fruits of your labor is very gratifying. As it relates to specific shots, they all should be fun after that. We went through the golf course, shot for shot, and there is not a bad one out there. They're all good golf shots and you look forward to them all.

TD: Ever since we worked on the routing, I've been looking forward to hitting the approach shot to the eleventh. It runs downhill toward the water, and it reminds me just a bit of the eleventh at Ballybunion, which is one of my favorite shots in golf.



The sweep of Peconic Bay provides a stunning and distracting backdrop for the approach to the par four 11th green. Behind and to the left lies the green of the one shot 12th hole.

TD: Both the second and third holes are long par-fours where the members will take some time to figure out where it's best to miss the green or whether to lay up, instead of going for the green with a 3-wood with trouble all around. Scratch players may have a tougher time figuring out the par-5 13th and 18th holes, for the same reason... they may be able to reach them in two, but the greens are severe enough that missing in the wrong spot will be costly.

GA: How will your experience with each other impact the next course you design on your own?

JN: It's already impacted on me, as I mentioned before. One of the reasons I agreed to do this project is I enjoy working with other people. I am always interested in other people's ideas and

what I might glean from them. I think Tom has some great ideas on how to go about golf course design. I have my own ideas, and I would think the ideas I used have influenced him. I think the project has impacted on us both in positive ways, and it was a very pleasant experience.

TD: I'd like to design a course for a professional event someday, and I think I understand that mindset much better after working with Jack's team. In the meantime, though, I think the experience has encouraged me to be even bolder in the future. At times during Sebonack I was a little conservative in my instructions to the shapers, for fear Jack would think we were doing something too wild and 'unfair'. But most of our clients are more concerned with building courses

that are fun for people to come back and play again, and today I feel more freed up to be a little crazy again.

GA: What was the most enjoyable part of the experience for you personally?

JN: This should be no different than designing any other golf course, in that the most enjoyable aspect is seeing the golf course completed and the pleasure it brings people. There's also the satisfaction in seeing that the course has accomplished the goals of the owner, and is doing what it should for the project, facility, and the overall development. Sebonack will be a very useful addition to the great golf courses of Long Island. It should hold up well in its position there. I think it will be well accepted, and should

carry its own weight in an area highly blessed with a tradition in golf.

TD: It was nice to see Jack's sense of humor start to come out as he got to know us better. I think we were both a bit concerned about not stepping on the others' toes at first, but as we got to know each other that melted away. On our last tour around the site, I was explaining to some members that the eleventh green sits on the site of an old softball field, so we had to recontour the whole area... in the process, creating a little knob in the green that Jack has always worried was too severe. I think Jack had forgotten about the softball field by then, but as soon as I mentioned it to the members, he pointed to our green contour and said, "And this was the pitcher's mound."

GA: Should more architects do collaborative work on occasions?

JN: I think you have to remember that no matter whose name is on the course, it's always a team effort. Even on a Signature Course, we have a design team that includes a Design Associate, a Design Coordinator, and a number of production support people in our office. In addition, you work in concert with the owner, a project manager, the superintendent, and the construction team, especially the shapers. As it relates to working with other designers, I think you can learn a lot from others. I encourage my designers to visit other courses all the time. Sometimes seeing or working with other designers can provide you fresh perspective on the process, but can also validate the way you approach projects.



The teeing ground for the uphill par four 16th is set amongst natural dunes and adjoins the 12th tee.

TD: Every design is a collaboration - we work with clients and associates and contractors and shapers and engineers and other concerned parties. We usually get too much of the credit for the finished product, so it's easy over time to start believing you have it all figured out. It was an eye-opener to work with another designer, because there are always going to be differences of opinion, and here we had to think about the other's perspective and whether we were really right in our own process or not. I think the lesson is that whether or

not they have a chance to work with someone else, all architects should question what they really know, instead of just repeating the things that have worked for them in the past.

GA: You've both designed golf courses in Australia. Are there plans for any more?

JN: We are always in discussions with prospects, and we have a current prospect - in wine country - that hopefully will lead to a golf course involving me.

TD: We still have a second 18 holes to build at St. Andrews Beach in Victoria. With luck, we'll be halfway finished by the time this journal is in your readers' hands.



The layout at Sebonack includes a spare or betting hole - the par three 19th plays towards the bay with Cow Neck in the distance.