

The recently-opened Eye of Africa Golf and Residential Estate, which includes Greg Norman's first course design in South Africa, is sure to receive rave reviews. And as an example of astute and ecologically responsible planning goes, this development is as good as it gets, writes **John Botha**.

I must say, on the few occasions that I have had the pleasure of meeting Greg Norman, I felt more than a little intimidated. The Great White Shark's reputation as a no-nonsense sort of fellow, who has never suffered fools, is well-deserved. His achievements on the golf course are legendary, and the fact that he probably should have won more Majors than he has cannot detract from the reality that the Aussie was by far the best golfer in the world for an extended period through the late 1980s and into the 1990s. Norman's achievements in the boardroom are just as remarkable, and his business acumen

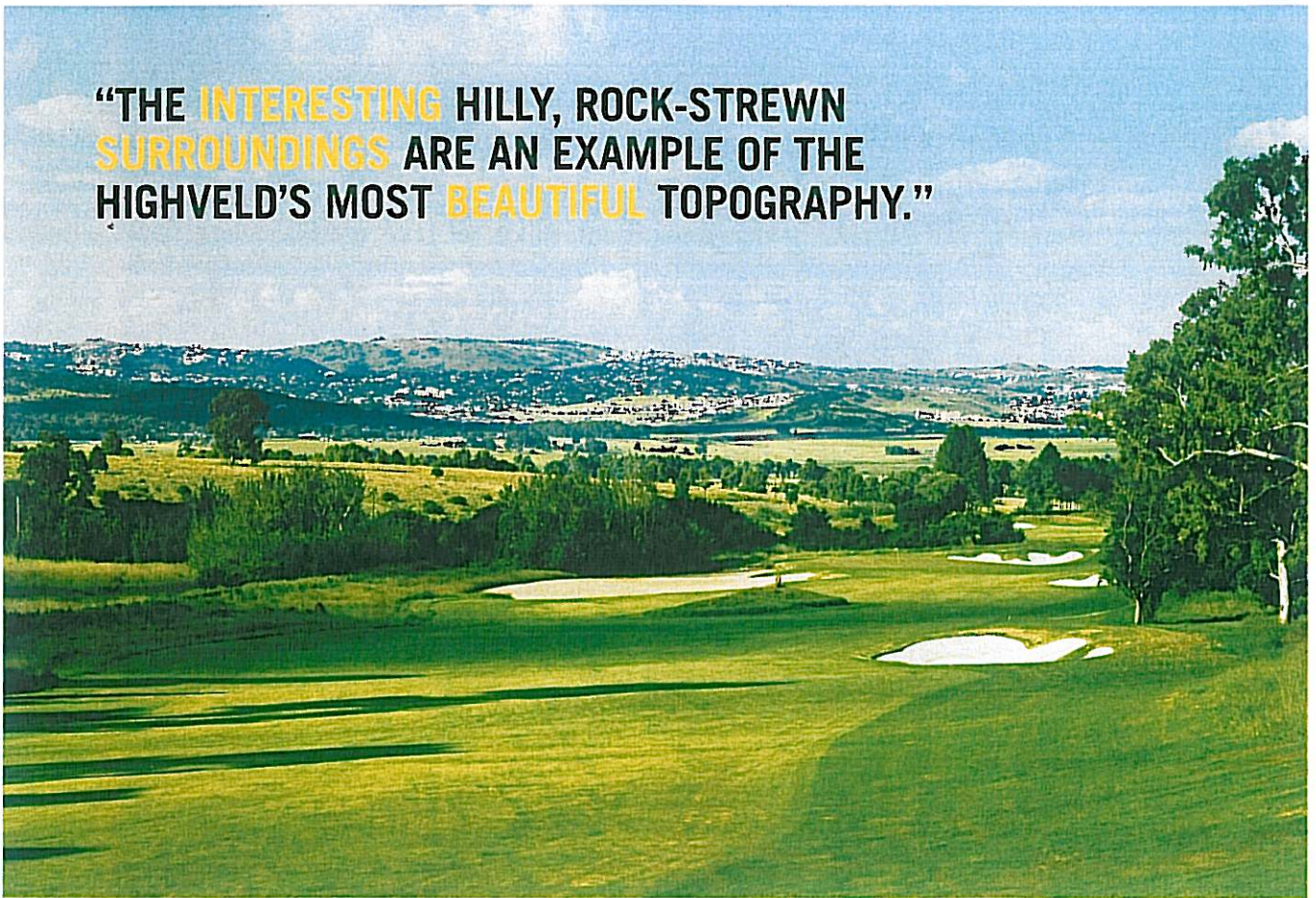
when combined with his own marketability has earned him a fortune. One of the most closely-guarded secrets is what he is really worth – I dare say if anyone had the temerity to ask Norman they would probably be told to mind their own bloody business.

Norman, as a course architect, is highly respected – and for good reason. Among his 70-odd completed layouts there are some exceptional courses – and there are another 50 in various stages of planning and construction. Of the few I have personally visited, including The Tournament Players course at Sugarloaf near Atlanta in

Georgia, all are of the highest quality, and one would expect nothing else of anything Greg Norman might put his name to.

When news first broke that Norman would be designing a course south of Johannesburg in the Eikenhof area, I had my doubts; this hardly seemed the place where the terrain would lend itself to the construction of the most spectacular layout. Well I got that wrong. My visions of rather flat, uninteresting terrain couldn't have been further off the mark. The 677 hectares upon which this estate has been created is dominated by a large 'koppie' and the interesting hilly, rock-

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strewn surroundings are an example of the Highveld's most beautiful topography.

At a time when the golf estate market has been battered by a shaky economy, investors in this development can rest assured that Medallist Developments (with a double 'l'), a joint venture between Norman's Great White Shark Enterprises and the Australian Macquarie Group, has an enviable track record of successful, high-end projects worldwide, and the financial muscle to ride out recessionary times. For this project they have teamed up with Pixley World Investments and recent sales, even in the current economic climate, have exceeded expectations. Certainly no expense has been spared at the Eye of Africa estate, and it will not be surprising to see this turn out to be one of the most successful in South Africa. Medallist has shown that its philosophy of committing to the preservation of natural fauna and flora is combined with best practice urban planning standards.

The architectural theme, a combination of European and African styles quaintly called 'Afropean', features a mixture of un-

finished and untreated surfaces, textures and light. Homes are envisaged as being naturally integrated with the surroundings. At the time of going to print, more than 400 stands had been sold at an average price of R800 000.

But it is the quality of the golf course that truly impressed me – much like a Jack Nicklaus design, the course features generous fairways, and it is clear that Norman's shaper is a dab hand behind the controls of a D6 bulldozer. The bulk earthworks were done by Ruthcon Civil Contractors, using 30-ton excavators, 20-ton articulated dump trucks, 10-cubic-metre tippers and a fleet of graders and compactors. A total of 300 000 cubic metres of soil was moved, yet the end result is a natural, flowing layout that fits beautifully with the surroundings.

The course construction was done by Golftek, and Vic van Eyk is justifiably proud of the end result: "Working to the most stringent ecological and safety standards, for which Medallist is known, was both challenging and enlightening, but the final product speaks for itself," he says. "These

are the first fairways in the Highveld to be planted with Gulf Green, (the same as Cape Town's Atlantic Beach), and with the large, undulating greens (A1/A4), that offer more than enough interesting pin positions, I can imagine golfers of all levels thoroughly enjoying this course," he adds.

The course is currently open to residents and their guests, and will accommodate small groups of up to 40 players. Inside Right Club Management, led by Dave Usendorff, will be running the golf operations – and Usendorff is relishing the challenge. "This facility will set new standards in South Africa and we feel privileged to have been contracted by Medallist to look after the operation. The management of the course will be based on the way they do things elsewhere in the world. For example, members will not pay greenfees, which, considering that membership is being sold for R9 000 per annum, represents excellent value."

This estate is a ten-year commitment worth R1.5 billion in capital expenditure. But then Medallist and its partner Greg Norman have never done things by halves. ■