

NEW COURSES

EYE OF
AFRICA



SHARK'S FIRST

Greg Norman's Eye of Africa design is instantly likeable, memorable and infused

THE SOUTHERN REGIONS OF Johannesburg have down the years had a somewhat unfair reputation for being unfashionable.

The "South" is mentioned with a certain disdain in the toffee-nosed circles of the "North" but in golfing

terms that could change with the opening for play of a superb new golf course bearing the name of a new major man in golf.

Greg Norman is the latest famous signature to be attached to a local layout – the most impressive Eye of

Africa Golf & Leisure Club course (to use its full name) 17 kilometres due south of the city of Johannesburg.

Norman's involvement reveals the Australian link to what is an enormous R1,5-billion project. The estate is being developed by a company called

Sprawling foothills to the south of Johannesburg provide a backdrop to the 17th hole at Eye of Africa. Note the contentious "Norman's Nob" in the middle of the fairway.



IS A JEWEL

with that quality that makes you want to return. But it is private. By Dan Retief

Medallist, a joint venture between the Macquarie Group and the golfer's Great White Shark Enterprises. The South African partner is Pixley World Investments headed by Dr Rui Graca.

One has long felt the rolling hills and waving grasslands to the south of Egoli

offer perfect golfing territory and Norman and his designers were suitably inspired by the course they have laid upon this piece of Africa.

Unlike one of the other "big name" new offerings in Gauteng, Jack Nicklaus' Serengeti with its tumultuous

greens north of O R Tambo Airport, where one comes away thinking, "now what to make of that," the Eye of Africa is instantly likeable, memorable and infused with that quality that makes you want to return.

Like the exclusive Blair Atholl estate

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Hills, bunkers and veld grass frame the 15th hole.

with its Gary Player design, "The Eye" is played in a continuous loop – much to the approval of this grumpy old golfer who would happily do away with the halfway house! – with a refreshment kiosk after the ninth, and describes an upward route between the hills to a stunning high point at the seventh. It drops back into a valley, and then emerges again between the "koppies" with the skyline of the city a spectacular backdrop to the 17th and 18th holes on the downhill run for home.

Surprisingly, given how many Highveld courses have given up the fight against invasive kikuyu grass, Norman has opted for fine cynodon fairway grass in the interest of water preservation, and you have to say that it provides a beautiful playing surface. The greens are bent, prepared in the now preferred way – hard and firm and resistant to spin.

The fairways are incredibly generous, once you know the best lines to hit on, and they need to be because the long grass surrounding them is of the "don't-even-bother-to-look" variety if

you stray off line – quickly reaffirmed by the many "Beware of Snakes" signs.

There is also a nod to the Great White Shark himself. A rocky outcrop in the middle of the par-five 17th fairway, in the landing area of the second shot, which I fear is going to be one of those impediments that bothers a weaker player and a good one not at all, has been christened "Norman's Nob!"

Of course, we were playing the course "raw," when it is always difficult to imagine how the construction of houses will impact on its future look and playability. Judging from the pegs, however, liberal spaces have been left and it appears Norman and his designers have struck the perfect balance – a friendly course off the forward tees and a real tiger off the back.

There is as yet no clubhouse – although a luxurious "lifestyle" complex is planned for completion by 2012 – but the temporary arrangement of converting old stables overlooking a superb practice green and tee into a Spartan spot to have a shower and something to drink supported my view

Greg Norman is the seventh major champion to have designed a golf course in South Africa open for play. Gary Player was the first, and he has subsequently been followed by Jack Nicklaus (six courses), Tom Weiskopf (Zimbali), Ernie Els (two so far opened for play), Annika Sorenstam (Euphoria) and Nick Price (Vaal de Grace). Waiting in the wings are Retief Goosen, Nick Faldo and Trevor Immelman, who have projects on hold.

that not much more is needed.

Dave Usendorff, golf pro, trick shot artist, TV commentator and raconteur, has been appointed as the estate's consultant in all golfing matters and says there has been "an amazing response" to the launch. The initial aim is to secure a critical number of home owner members but the master plan caters for over 1 200 freehold stands, 2 000 townhouses/clusters, plus commercial and recreational elements to complete the "lifestyle" tag.

An interesting departure from the usual marketing norm is that at present you can't "turn up, pay, and play." ■