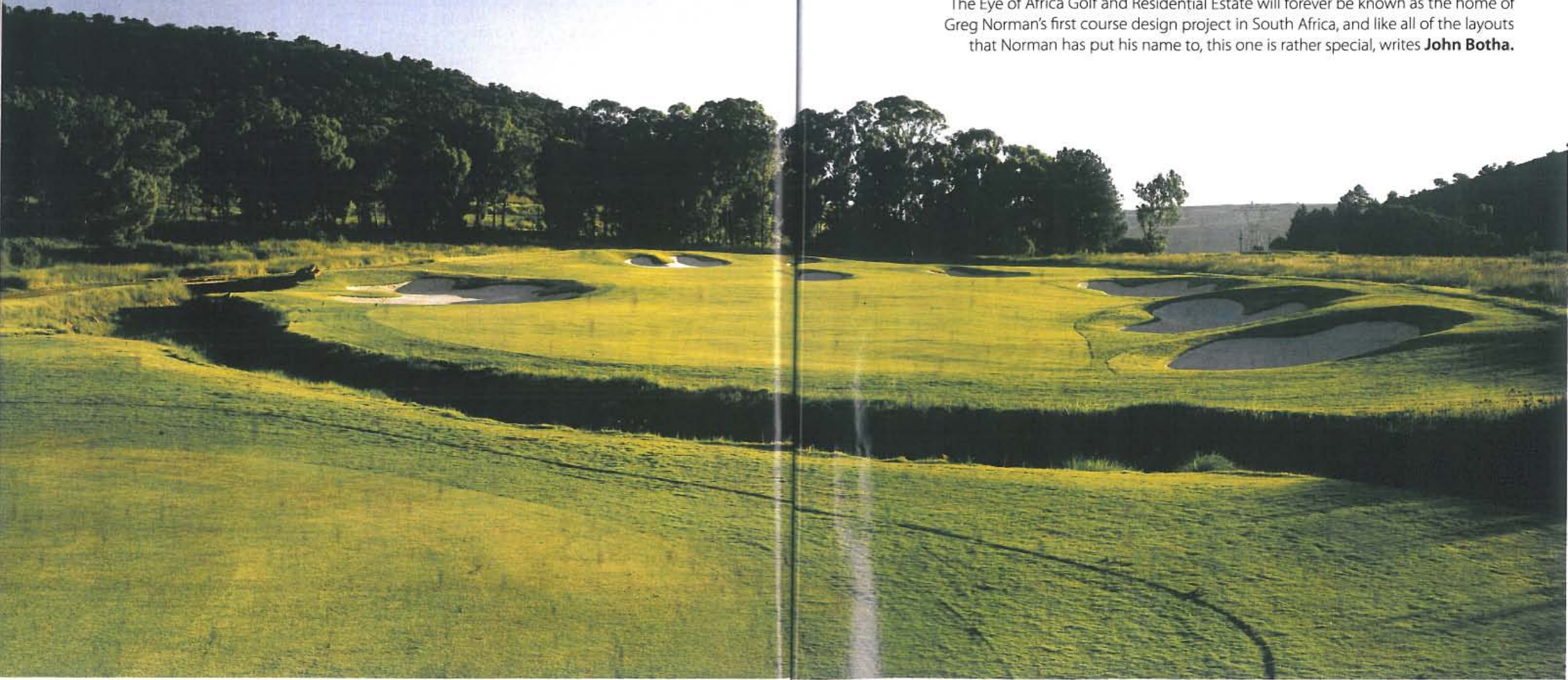


The SHARK'S work in CARP COUNTRY

The Eye of Africa Golf and Residential Estate will forever be known as the home of Greg Norman's first course design project in South Africa, and like all of the layouts that Norman has put his name to, this one is rather special, writes **John Botha**.



B·O·E
PRIVATE CLIENTS



**Eye of Africa
18TH HOLE**
403m par 4
Stroke 2

I must admit that I had my doubts when I heard that Medallist Developments (a joint venture between Greg Norman's Great White Shark Enterprises and the Australian Macquarie Group) would be creating an upmarket estate to the south of Johannesburg.

One had to wonder how successful this would be among the well-heeled golf estate types; this hardly seemed the 'right address,' and admittedly, due to my igno-

rance at the time, I assumed that the site would be rather flat and featureless. I was wrong on both counts.

Soon after the project was launched (at obviously the wrong time for the depressed property market), the stands were selling quite briskly, and more than 400 home sites were sold at an average price of R800 000. The building of homes has been somewhat more sluggish, and about 35 have currently been completed. But during my first visit to Eye of Africa I was

struck by the beauty of the area – dominated by classic Highveld koppies with beautiful rocky outcrops (a total of 677 hectares with 1 200 freehold title stands), and it was clear at first glance that this was a proper golf course built on terrain that is anything but flat.

Wide, undulating fairways, large multi-teeing areas and huge, interesting greens (very much the hallmark of the 'Great White Shark's' designs) greet the player, and it is clear that no expense was

PREVIOUS PAGE: Good course management is required on the par-five 2nd hole. The fairway might be wide, but is surrounded by enough hazards to make you think twice about going for the green in two.

THIS PAGE: The par-four 18th hole may not be that long at 403 metres off the club tee, but there is a reason why it is rated as the second-hardest hole on the course. Driver may not be the smartest option off the tee.

spared in constructing what is a serious test of golf from the tips.

I couldn't help but be amused by the architectural theme of the estate, said to be 'Afropean' (a combination of European and African styles), but what homes have been completed are certainly attractive and do fit in with the terrain. It has always struck me that the architectural theme on a golf estate is important – too many courses are spoiled by 'cookie cutter' homes that line

fairways, and others that have allowed a veritable architectural 'free for all' have resulted in some eyesores spoiling the whole effect. Not so at Eye of Africa.

It is also clear that meticulous care went into the master-planning of this estate, and the routing of the course, which the large area allowed for. On the technical side, 30-ton excavators, 20-ton articulated dump trucks and 10-cubic-metre tipper trucks joined a fleet of graders and compactors to move

and shape some 300 000 cubic metres of soil, and the result is a layout that does justice to the surrounding countryside. The fairways are planted with eco-friendly Gulf Green (the same as Cape Town's Atlantic Beach) and the greens are clad in A1/A4 bentgrass.

The course construction was done by Servest, the company that is also contracted to maintain the course. Servest's Vic van Eyk tells us that things were done properly here from the start.



The rough area on the par-five 17th fairway, known as 'Norman's Nob', paints a pretty picture, but otherwise doesn't provide too much danger.

"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," says Van Eyk. "I can imagine that golfers of all skill levels will love playing this course."

A special ceramic and silica mix forms the growing medium for the greens, which cannot be faulted.

At the moment, the course attracts around 25 000 rounds a year, which will obviously increase as the estate fills up with new homes. Dave Usendorff's Inside Right Club Management runs the golf operations, and although operating from a temporary pro shop and clubhouse (formerly stables on the original farm), there is a welcoming feel to the place, which certainly fits into the country genre even though it is not far from the Johannesburg CBD.

When Eye of Africa was first opened, there was talk of this becoming a members-only facility, but this rule has been relaxed.

The numbers also didn't quite make sense, because for R9 000 a year a member could play unlimited golf. If 1 000 golfers had joined this might have been viable, but that was never going to happen in a depressed economy.

Visitors are now welcome to play, and the rate of R350 over weekends constitutes a real bargain. Better still, on a Tuesday the club runs a special and for R250 including a cart, visitors can play a round here. (On Thursdays, another special is offered – R300 per round including a cart.) There was a problem when the facility first opened – there were only 20 golf carts available – but since then more have been added to the fleet.

It remains to be seen just how the building of homes will negatively affect the look of certain holes, but it is doubtful whether they will, because there do seem to be fair-sized buffer zones between the areas of play and the residential sites – again, the developers wisely avoided jamming too many stands into the available space.

All designers will claim to have

FACTFILE

GETTING THERE

From the M1 South, pass Gold Reef City, and turn into Klipriver Road. From there signposts will direct you. From the R59 highway, turn right into the R550. After 11 kilometres turn left into the road leading to the estate.

COURSE

Par 72, 6 934 metres

DESIGNER

Greg Norman

COURSE SUPERINTENDENT

Johan Knell

GOLF OPERATIONS MANAGER

Dave Usendorff

GREENFEES

Affiliated weekends – R350, specials on Tuesdays and Thursdays

CONTACT

On-site sales: 010 500 0405
Golf bookings: 010 500 0300
Website: www.eyeofafrica.co.za

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created a course that is both a championship layout from the back tees and a user-friendly track from the club markers, and this is certainly true here. (The course is some 800 metres shorter off the club tees.) Thankfully, the profiles of the greens, certainly compared to the likes of the new Houghton or Serengeti, are tame, and although with enough slope to make things interesting, they are unlikely to leave a suspect putter with the screaming 'yips'.

The bunkering is also both artful and practical, and adds value to both the aesthetics and the shot values of the course.

Norman was one of the greatest drivers of the ball ever to play the game, but fortunately he accepts that most golfers are neither as long nor as straight as he was. These fairways are generous, but should a player hit a truly wayward shot from the tee, it will be punished.

This is one of those courses that is likely to grow on everyone that

ABOVE: The stroke-three, 332m, par-four 6th hole demonstrates the dangers of missing the fairway, or even the short rough.

plays it – there are ideal angles from which to approach the targets that are not always obvious, but even the first-timer will surely enjoy the layout. Even missing greens leaves reasonable chances of recovery, and it must be said that for a modern course it is not ridiculously long or in any way gimmicky.

This layout will certainly age well, and a few more growing seasons will see it really come into its own, although right now there is not a lot wrong with it. Hopefully a tree-planting programme will be instituted, because strategically positioned trees will do a lot for the general look of some holes as well as adding a feeling of depth. It is worth noting that the average golfer will generally find this course set up in a way that

makes it playable – it is refreshing to find this, as the management at some new courses believe they have to show just how tough their course can be, and place the tees and pins as they might for their club championships.

One hopes that as the economy recovers, Eye of Africa will enjoy the success it deserves. In the meantime, this course is one of Gauteng's must play layouts, and if this is typical of Greg Norman's design philosophy, the golfing public will surely welcome more of his work in South Africa. The Great White Shark may have been lampooned for those Majors he might have blown, and his famous meltdown against Nick Faldo at Augusta is widely regarded as one of the great 'chokes' in championship golf. Norman still dominated the game for an extended period of time, and when it comes to course architecture he has again proven here that he knows what he's doing. Good on ya, mate! 

LIKES

- The classic Highveld feel with indigenous veld grass lining the fairways.
- The overall routing, with no cramping of holes.
- The closing three holes – a par three, a par five and a par four.

... AND DISLIKES

- Getting there can be problematic in traffic, but once there it is well worth the drive.
- The fact that the original farmhouse will be demolished – a pity as the structure oozes character.
- A rather quirky rough area in the 17th fairway known as 'Norman's Nob' – it has no value except to punish the wrong player.