



BACK TO

NATURE

BY ASHLEY MEAD

↘ Sympathetic treatment for Royal Queensland

AUSTRALIA'S great courses give the player a feeling he is competing against nature. Melbourne's sandbelt has indigenous heathlands; New South Wales has ocean and cliff tops and Royal Adelaide orange sand dunes. In mid-2005 Michael Clayton Golf Design was commissioned to reconstruct the Royal Queensland Golf Club located at Eagle Farm in Brisbane. The course has had various architects over the years, with Alister MacKenzie making a short visit and offering his course recommendations in 1926 as part of his Australian tour. The original course at Royal Queensland was extremely attractive, with pockets of large fig trees and views of the Brisbane River – but there's no doubt it lacked a "natural" feel.

The reconstruction works were brought about by the duplication of the Gateway Motorway that dissects the course into two parts as the bridge rises over the Brisbane River. Construction of the duplication was to take many years and the club would no longer be able to cross underneath the bridge. Consequently an agreement was reached to relocate the entire course on the western side of the bridge. The

club was fortunate to have enough vacant land to allow for this to occur, given some of it had previously been reclaimed from the river system.

We felt as a part of the reconstruction works that a natural theme needed to be created in all the water hazards, bunkering and sandy wastes. These hazards had to appear as though they evolved from the natural features that had originally occupied the area.

Water Hazards

Of the many requirements of the planning permit, one was that a water body/habitat zone had to be created in an area that had once been reclaimed from the Brisbane River. It would have been quite easy to construct a large water body that consisted of riparian plantings; this would have achieved a habitat, satisfied the local authorities and created sufficient cut-and-fill to construct nearby holes.

The concern, though, was that it wouldn't have looked natural or complemented the low-profile nature of the landscape. (One of the most natural-looking water hazards is positioned along the left-hand side of the 16th hole at Commonwealth Golf Club in Melbourne. This hazard doesn't have any visibly raised banks or bunds, the fairway flows continuously to its edge and indigenous wetland plants have colonised randomly.)

The site in which the water hazard was to be located at Royal Queensland had an open trench nearby that had been cut some years ago; this adjoined the Brisbane River and would regularly fill with tidal water. Such an area is commonly known as a salt marsh or intertidal zone. During this flooding process several local plant species had colonised on the banks closest to river. This was mainly a small stand of mangroves and low-growing species such as Samphire (*Suaeda australis*), Salt couch (*Sporobolus virginicus*) and Sea purslane (*Sesuvium portulacastrum*).

For inspiration it was beneficial to scour the river banks of several local marine/national parks to witness first-hand what type of hazard could be integrated into the course.



LEFT: Rugged surrounds at the 125-metre 8th. BELOW: Aerial view during construction, 2006.

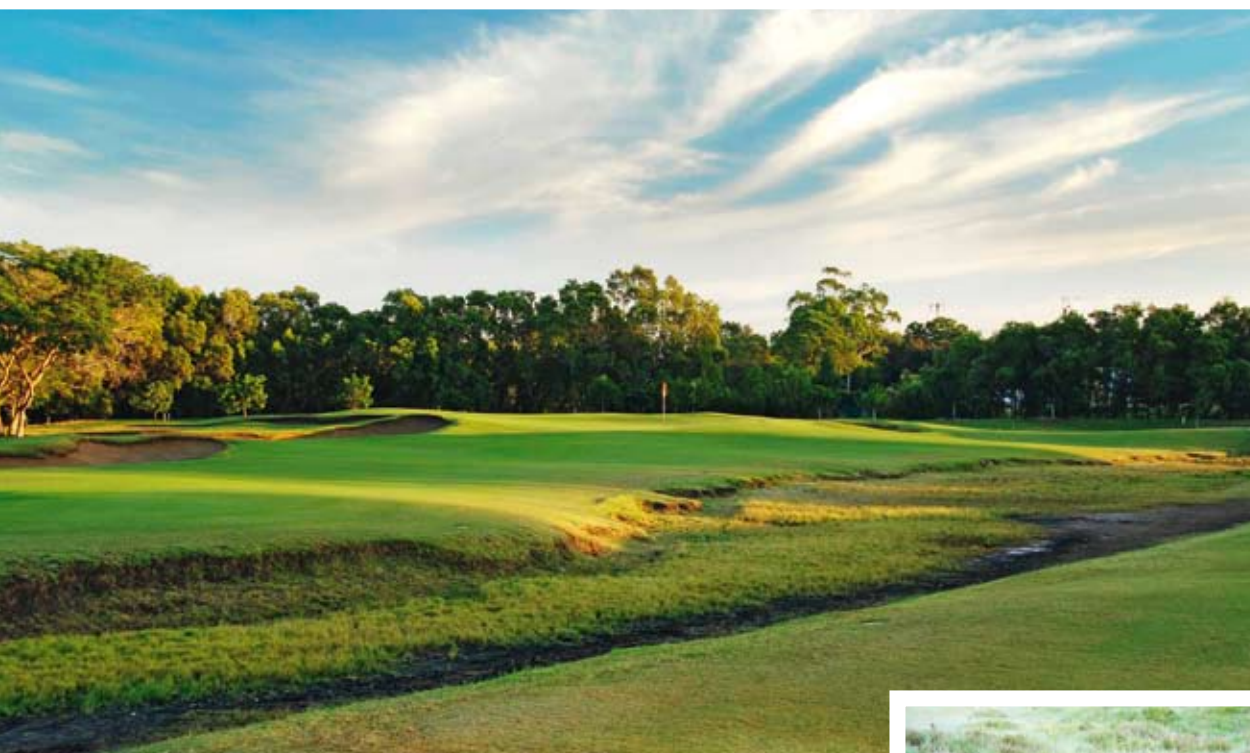


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It was pleasantly surprising to see how these plants species appeared in their natural state nestled amongst the river banks. Some species had a low, clumping nature while others crept along the surface creating a dense mat that often displayed a pink flower. This clumping nature looked similar to species established in the heathlands of the Victorian sandbelt and also in the United Kingdom.

When inspecting these zones, it was noticed the landforms that surrounded

After several meetings discussing these ideas with the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F), the importance of this habitat to the local environment was also becoming apparent. It is estimated that about 75 per cent (by weight) of the fish and crustaceans caught commercially in Queensland is derived from species that spend part of their life in these habitat zones. These habitats provide food, shelter and nursery areas for a wide range of fish and crustacean species (eg bream, mullet, mud crabs and prawns). Studies of old



LEFT: The 17th hole that plays across a tidal marsh.

RIGHT: Interesting bunkering at the 14th hole with Brisbane city in the background.



them had eroded edges with the native couch (*Sporobolus virginicus*) hanging over the top – very similar to an unmaintained, rugged bunker lip. The bases of the channels or trenches that the tidal water would flow along had sands deposited on them and towards the end a bunker-like structure would often appear.

Also, it was evident the plant species varied based on the amount and frequency of salt water intrusion. These observations started to lay the foundations on how similar landforms could be used in the other hazards (bunkers/wastes) planned for the course.

aerial photography also revealed that the banks of the Brisbane River had originally large areas of salt marsh, which had disappeared through development.

The hazard was planned to flank the left-hand side of the 15th hole and 16th hole; the advantage of being tidal meant that golfer would often have the opportunity of recovery, opposed to the sheer frustrations of a lost ball.

Bobby Jones was once quoted as saying: "The difference between a sand trap and water hazard is the difference



WONDERFUL DEPTH: Heather at Royal Ashdown Forest, UK (above) and the tidal species found at Royal Queensland (right).





LEFT: The bunkers guarding the short par-4 3rd hole.
BELOW: Before and after shots of the 11th hole.



between a car crash and an airplane crash. You have a chance of recovering from a car crash.”

After much discussion, it was decided that a trench-like finger would protrude from the Salt marsh and guard the left side of the fairway, it would be positioned in the range of 220 metres to 250 metres and, depending on the pin location, an advantage would be

Bunkering

The new bunkers had to capture a traditional feel but we also wanted to continue the rugged natural look inspired by the Salt marsh areas. I was keen to develop a unique bunker style that would capture these elements and ultimately settled on a thin, trench-like hazard. This style also had its advantage as Queensland is prone to



given to a player deciding to contend with it. As with natural trenches found at the local marine/National parks, it would need to turn into sand at some point and the finger would almost transcend into the appearance of a bunker. For the grounds crew it would also be important that they learn from nature and not over-maintain the hazard, or create straight-cut lines around the edge with the rough mower.

tropical thunderstorms and the small floor and bunker face area would greatly reduce the potential for storm damage. The climate dictated that warm-season turf varieties would be used, and to give a rugged appearance a paint line would be marked on the bunker edges by hand. This was then reviewed from a distance before hand cutting the sod edges with a standard plaster saw and allowing the edge to erode. Several types of bunker sands were inspected from local quarries,

although it was difficult to find sand that would match the natural river sand that a large percentage of the course sat on. After testing the local sand from an area that was to be excavated, it was decided that there was no valid reason why the local sand could not be used and sieved onsite. The other advantage was that it would give a slightly varying consistency and not give the sterile appearance that the imported white sands quite often give the resort courses. The colour of the sand also had to be consistent through-out the site as some holes where to have the exposed sand areas or wastes.

These thin bunkers in the end appear quite rugged and, surprisingly, appear visually much larger from the tee compared to their actual size; but most importantly, they continue the natural theme.

Sandy Wastes

A sandy waste was to be created in one area in particular, as it was void of any natural landforms or vegetation.

This area dissected two holes, 11 and 12. It was proposed by engineers to use this area as a drainage swale and therefore suggestions of a lake had taken place. We didn't envisage a lake working in the area, as it was quite tight and it would have had a negative influence on the player to be able to use the driver on the planned strategic short par-4 11th, and eliminated the option of a recovery shot.

After discussions with the engineers we came to an agreement that allowed the area to be drained with large catch basins. The local sand would be imported and plants that are found in close proximity to the Salt marsh used to create the required look of a large, exposed sand patch found nearby. It was also important that any areas that crept into play be similar to trench appearance of the bunkers and water hazards. These hazards should continue to evolve and, in time, hopefully resemble the similar appearance of the areas that had inspired them. Not only should the appearance improve, but the habitat should develop and continue to be a nursery for many species.

** Ashley Mead was the on-site architect during the reconstruction of the Royal Queensland Golf Club. Ashley is now a partner with the design firm Ogilvy Clayton.*