

GREENER PASTURES

From Tee to Glass

EAST OF THE CITY OF BORDEAUX, SAINT-ÉMILION IS HOME TO MORE THAN GRANDS CRUS. JOHN HOPKINS VISITS FRANCE'S LATEST WORLD-CLASS GOLF COURSE

As you meander through the countryside in Saint-Émilion, in southwest France, you'd be forgiven for thinking only about wine. As one honey-hued building follows another, so one vineyard sits beside the next. There's Château Cheval-Blanc, and then right there are Château Pavie and Château Canon.

Yet, if it is not too heretical to suggest, you would do well to look for a round of golf at one of France's newest and best golf courses. Grand Saint-Émilionnais Golf Club is the first in France by the famous American Tom Doak (*see Q&A overleaf*), who has designed acclaimed golf courses around the world including Barnbougle Dunes in Tasmania, Cape Kidnappers in New Zealand and Pacific Dunes in Oregon.

He has good news for golfers who feel too many of today's new golf courses are too penal for the average player. "I have a general philosophy that says, 'Make it playable and fun for everyone,'" Doak states. And it is indeed playable and fun. Grand Saint-Émilionnais Golf Club opened last year no more than a few hefty drives from St Émilion itself and within sight of the chateau of Michel de Montaigne, the 16th-century essayist.

It is the brainchild of one of France's most aristocratic golf families, the Mourgue d'Algues, who bought the site 12 years ago and have spent €8m on it to date. Gaëtan Mourgue d'Algue, the paterfamilias, is a past French amateur champion

and has 30 French titles to his name. In the early 1970s he founded the Trophée Lancôme, an autumn spectacular on the European Tour that was staged for 30 years with French élan at St Nom-la-Bretèche outside Paris. Cecilia, his Swedish-born wife, has 45 titles.

André and Kristel, their two children, are both scratch golfers. And marrying the vineyard to the golf club is Pierre Lawton, Kristel's husband, a respected wine expert in Bordeaux. He's the man who pointed out that Phil Mickelson had committed a slight *faux pas* when, in celebrating his victory in the 2013 Open Championship, Mickelson filled the trophy known as the claret jug with a Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, a world-class burgundy.

Saint-Émilionnais is set discreetly in 100 hectares of soft, rolling countryside thick with oak trees, land that needed very little shaping, according to Doak. There is water only on one hole and four holes have no bunkers at all. The remaining 14 have just 32.

And unlike many modern courses, the tees for each hole are near the greens of the preceding hole. "The fewer interruptions [for a golfer] the better," Doak says. "It helps the golfer stay in the flow." It's hard to imagine something more appealing – a welcoming golf course set in the heart of France's wine country. *Très bon, non?* segolfclub.com ■



© SAINT-ÉMILIONNAIS GOLF CLUB

Refined course
Stone buildings and oak trees frame the fairways and greens of Grand Saint-Emilionnais Golf Club





TALKING GOLF WITH

Tom Doak

THE NOTED ARCHITECT DISCUSSES HIS LATEST EUROPEAN BRAINCHILD WITH FARHAD HEYDARI

What makes the new course stand out? Though I believe the golfing features of the course are its main highlight, for me what makes the project unique is the sustainability of it. The course is located in a long valley with an irrigation holding pond at the bottom, and all of the water supply for the course is derived from the natural runoff of what falls onto the site. There are no wells or bores to take water out of the ground, which is forbidden in the viticulture of Bordeaux; instead, we created a few small “streams” to help collect the water and bring it down to the pond. Golf courses around the world are now having to answer for their water consumption, and the Saint-Émilion course is one that can proudly respond to those questions.

How about the golfer’s experience? All of my courses are predicated on two ideas: that we try to use the natural contours of the ground as the main source of interest for the play from tee to green, and that we try to create contours in the greens that affect not only putting, but recovery play and the ideal angle of approach. Because of the relatively heavy soil in Saint-Émilion, we built fewer bunkers than usual [because the sand can easily get contaminated

with silt], and instead relied on our first two lines of defence. There are a lot of downhill and sidehill stances for approach shots, rewarding the player who is fully in control of his trajectory.

What are the course’s most challenging features? The greens are more challenging than most European golfers are used to seeing, which balances out the wider-than-normal fairways and the relative scarcity of bunkers. There are a couple of really wild greens, like the par-3 3rd hole which is divided into quadrants by a steep slope and a swale, or the short par-5 10th; while others are relatively small and just tilted to one side or another. But in every case, the golfer who can position his ball for an uphill chip or putt will usually have the advantage over an opponent who has not been so careful. In fact, with so much short grass mowed around the greens, sometimes it is better to miss the green entirely [but on the correct side] than to be putting from above the hole.

Any last tips? The slopes coming into the greens reward players who know to play just a bit to the high side of the hole, and let gravity do its work once the ball lands. ■



TOUGH PUTTING
Doak has designed challenging greens for his new course



Lofoten
THE COURSE
TO PLAY IN 2017

A lot of courses seem like they are at the edge of the Earth, but Lofoten really is: perched in Norway's Viking-inflected northern isles at 68.3° latitude – above Iceland – the stunning seaside par-71 layout, managed by Troon Golf, is a two-hour flight from Oslo but seems a different planet. The northern lights make regular appearances and rounds from late May through July take place 24 hours each day. The championship course, measuring 6,687 yards from the tips, has beachside lodges nearby with cosy fireplaces and endless North Sea views. lofotenlinks.no

✈️ *Evenes 102miles/170km*

“ Courses around the world are now having to answer for their water consumption, and Saint-Émilionnais is one that can proudly respond to those questions ”



Futuristic Foursome

TECH-INFUSED NEWCOMERS THAT STRESS FORGIVENESS

Callaway

BIG BERTHA FUSION
Made with ultra-light triaxial carbon, the new-gen big stick features an elongated, triangular head that raises the MOI to make it tremendously forgiving while reducing drag to ensure the bombs carry those extra yards. callawaygolf.com

Mizuno

JPX EZ FORGED
The latest iteration of the Japanese clubmaker's boron-infused irons features variable face thicknesses, meaning better weight distribution and forgiveness while maintaining the immediate feedback of the blade. mizuno.com

Cleveland Golf

RTX-3
A micro-cavity and shorter hosel on these groundbreaking wedges – the brand calls it Feel Balancing – shifts the sweetspot to the centre of the club (most wedges err toward the hosel) for more consistent strikes. clevelandgolf.com

Cameron & Crown

FUTURA X5R
Purpose-built at 33 inches, the new wingback mallet putter by Titleist takes Scotty Cameron's multi-material philosophy to extremes without sacrificing feel and offers the brand's most stable face-balanced design yet. scottycameron.com