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Feature TLD No 2

Drawings Became Dunes

The story of how Scotland's newest true links came to life

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The story of how Scotland's newest true links came to life.

The conversation with Clive Clark, whose grandparents came from Aberdeen, began with an interesting fact. Of the nearly thirty-four thousand golf courses in the world, there are only around two hundred and fifty true links and only a fraction of these are truly regarded as 'world class'. Genuine links are indeed a very rare breed! This is why Clive Clark was so excited by this project from the very outset and why he dedicated seven years to put his vision together. The story of how Scotland's newest true links came to life "You only need three things to build a golf course. The land, the money, and the permits. It sounds simple but believe me, it isn't". Clark was not mincing his words and wanted me to know just how difficult obtaining these three things can be. He continued, "Any developer will confirm that it's never a 'walk in the park'. I was very fortunate to find 14 friends who trusted my judgment and they joined me as investors in the project."

Dumbarnie Links, the captivating modern genuine links course that has recently rocketed to the top of many a golfer's bucket-list of courses, took a team of twenty-four consultants and fifteen investors in order to obtain the planning permit. The 345-acre site was to become the newest links in the "Home of Golf", lying just eleven miles from St Andrews.

This is the story of how it came to be and why there is much more to Dumbarnie Links than first meets the eye.

Two dunes and grand ideas, Dumbarnie Links comes to life.

Having studied to become an architect (of buildings) at London University before becoming a successful European Tour golfer, Clive Clark can truly draw. This is one of the reasons he is able to create such intricate golf courses. "I have a real advantage in that I am able to draw my plans myself by hand," says Clark. "This includes layouts, master plans, grading plans, green plans, perspective sketches, computerised renderings, etc." Few of today's professional golfers-turned architects have this ability.

At 345-acres, the large site is more than double the size of many golf course plots and this gave Clark a lot of choice to sculpt the land. Like many artists - and make no mistake about it, Clive Clark is a true artist - one of the challenges is knowing when to stop tweaking your creation. "This comes down to experience. You just know when it is done", he said. He knew the moment when he was happy to put his signature to the completed course design at Dumbarnie Links.



The uncut golfing diamond that became Dumbarnie Links is owned by Lord Balniel and the land forms part of his 5000-acre Balcarres Estate. Clark's good friend, Malcolm Campbell, co-author with George Peper of the coffee table book, "True Links", told Clark he should consider building a world class course on this genuine links land. On a trip to Scotland from his current home in Southern California Clark visited the site in 2013 with Campbell, when it was home to just two dunes and some grazing cattle. Clark immediately agreed with Campbell that this was a perfect site for a genuine links course, but permission would need to be obtained from Lord Balniel.

"There was an air of uncertainty when my family was first approached about building a golf course on our land," said Lord Anthony Balniel, whose family has owned the Balcarres Estate since the 16th Century. "Fast forward several years and we simply could not be more pleased. What Clive Clark and his team have done is nothing short of outstanding. I have been struck not only by the beauty of what has been created and by the focus on the wildlife, plants and birds. It has been a joy to see the project unfold."

Looking from ninety feet above sea level, where the clubhouse now sits, there are panoramic views across the golf course to the Firth of Forth and beyond. On a clear day you can see Edinburgh, Muirfield, North Berwick and Gullane. The first thing visitors will notice about Dumbarnie Links is that the course has some truly breathtaking views. The course has been designed to take in as much of the panoramic setting as possible and indeed all the holes have water views.

The site had only two dunes and an escarpment that created a natural split in the property. There was certainly huge potential for this piece of land, but two dunes would certainly not suffice for the design Clark had in mind. There would need to be some earth moving in order to sculpt and create the links golf course that Clark was envisioning.

Ground breaking took place on the 29th of May 2018 and by November 2018 the course had been built and completely seeded. Landscapes Unlimited were the golf course contractors who, in six months, helped to transform a relatively flat sandy piece of cattle-grazing land into a genuine links course with around six hundred dunes. These dunes create a very intimate golfing experience and they

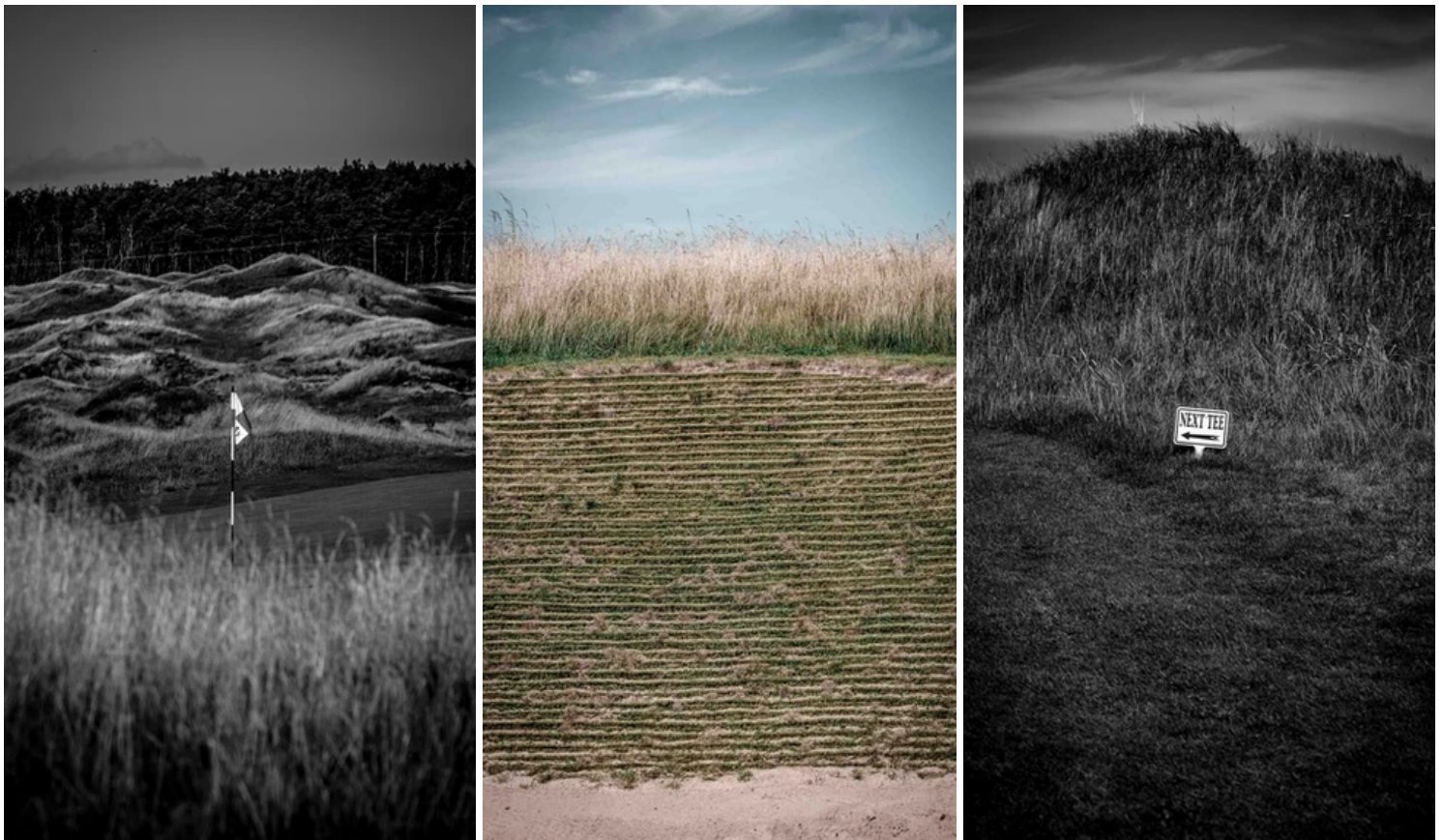
act like a cocoon to envelope the golfer as he plays each hole. It really feels like you and your playing partners are the only people on the course for much of the round.

Eighteen different experiences, one incredible round.

As you make your way around the links, it becomes very noticeable that each hole has its own distinct character and personality. Dumbarrie Links comprises eighteen individually-designed holes that feel like a game of golfing chess. This is a course that strategists will adore as the golfer will constantly be inspired by risk/reward decisions and opportunities.

“You pay your money and you take your choices”

is a statement that explains the philosophy and strategy of Dumbarrie and was something that Clark said when talking about the layout. With three drivable dogleg par fours, you can take on the tricky and aggressive play over trouble towards the greens, or you can play to very generous safe zones. This is part of what makes Dumbarrie Links so special. There are few courses that offer you so much choice as a golfer. These drivable par fours are rather like “shopping in the sales at Harrods!” Everyone has a chance at a bargain eagle, birdie or par depending on their skill level. In fact, since opening, Dumbarrie Links has already seen that rare bird, an albatross, when one of our guests achieved a hole-in-one at the 311-yard par four third hole. This hole plays from an elevated tee which offers amazing panoramic views of the course and out across Largo Bay.



Future-proof bunkering.

Anyone who has played Dumbarrie Links will know that there are two kinds of bunkers that decorate the course. There are the natural bunkers, these being the sandy blow-outs that give that natural links feel to the playing experience. These gnarly and raw-looking sand features sit on the perimeter of the fairways and are edged with waving fescue grass.

And then there are the revetted bunkers which are one of the classic features of links courses, and can be so troubling when your ball is unexpectedly captured by one! What you may not know is that these particular revetted bunkers have an innovative secret. The layers of sod in the face create a wall that looks great, but can cause much angst and many a dropped shot. At Dumbarnie Links, the revetted bunkers are not what they seem as the layers of sod in the bunker faces are actually artificial sod. The biggest compliment you can give to these 'EcoBunkers' is that you need to look very carefully indeed to notice any difference at all to real sod.

When discussing bunkering for the course, the team at EcoBunkers had a very interesting proposition. Comprising artificial sod taken from old football pitches, these exquisite bunkers are guaranteed to last for over twenty years. A normal sod-based bunker has a shelf-life of around three to eight years so this made it a simple decision. These bunkers capture the essence of Dumbarnie Links really well. They are undoubtedly modern, and yet they look as classic as links golf can be.

A career in golf and a career-defining creation.

Clive Clark has had an incredible life in golf, from being a multiple European Tour winner and Ryder Cup player to working alongside Peter Alliss for eighteen years in the commentary box for BBC Television. Whilst working together as a course design team, Clive and Peter designed twenty two courses in the UK and Europe. Clark's golf career had him travelling the world and playing some of the very best courses on the planet. Clive Clark has now designed 35 golf courses worldwide and his creative work has won many awards in the USA.

This experience combined with Clark's artistic talent and creative flare is what makes his design at Dumbarnie Links unique. When bringing the course to life through his sketches, digital renderings and plans, he uses a storyboard to build a round of golf that in itself feels like a journey. The course was designed with all levels of golfer in mind. Whereas many course designers may visit a site once or twice a month during construction, Clark stayed on-site for four and a half months during the 2018 construction period which allowed him to ensure that his visions came to life. This therefore meant that any adjustments and/or 'tweaks' could be easily and promptly accomplished on site.







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drivable par four offers views across the course and the Firth of Forth towards some of the greatest courses of the Lothian region. In order to drive the green on the third hole, the tee shot requires the golfer to clear a gnarly natural bunker. If the golfer takes the safe route, there is a cheeky pot bunker on the fairway which will cause the golfer to think before hitting his tee shot. It is a hole that seems to sum up the Dumbarrie Links playing experience perfectly. Beautiful vistas from every hole, exhilarating shot choices and holes that will keep you on your toes whilst at the same time making you smile. Clive Clark spoke of his golf course with warm and well-deserved pride. You can tell that he is a man who has seized on the opportunity to add something truly special to the world-leading links portfolio that Scotland offers to visitors from around the world. Many of you reading this have yet to play at Dumbarrie Links. The warm welcome that will await you, together with the excellent condition of the course, will be sure to set the stage for a memorable day.

What you have here is an instant classic and one that will become a permanent fixture of the avid golfer's dream Scottish golf trip. Dumbarrie Links is one of the most fun and enjoyable links courses you will ever play. The "new kid on the block" has arrived and it is already comfortable in the company of golfing royalty.

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