

# Golf's resurrection in Israel

A few days in the Holy Land enables **Richard Wax** to gain a great appreciation for the way in which Pete Dye is setting about reviving golf in that country

**B**aggage handlers at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport are in for a surprise next spring. For the first time in 5,000 years, golf connoisseurs will be heading to Israel, which is on the verge of making a spectacular entry into the list of global golf destinations with a course created by a much-coveted signature, Pete Dye, creator of the TPC at Sawgrass, Whistling Straits, Casa de Campo, Harbour Town and some 80 others of the world's finest golf courses.

Dye's last incursion into what we might term the Greater European area was at Domaine Imperiale, on Lake Geneva, which was completed in 1987. Administrative and planning problems drove him to distraction and he vowed never to cross the Atlantic again. But at the Caesarea Golf Club in Israel, founded by the Rothschild Foundation and dedicated to charitable and research objectives, the developer is looking after all the admin side of the operation. This leaves Dye in a designer's heaven – focusing solely on the sand dunes set just back from the Mediterranean, in a location resembling the classic links at Royal Lytham & St Annes.

Dye is not as prolific as some of the other golf course architects. He takes on perhaps two or three new courses a year. He travels lightly, not being weighed down by laptop computers or even a mobile phone. For him, a blackberry is a fruit. He doesn't have a website or a company brochure, the usual accoutrements of the golf business. He is exclusively focused on spending time on site. Not for Dye the comforts of cruising around in an air-conditioned Range Rover. He, quite literally, feels the land through the soles of his comfy walking boots.

The client in this instance had organised a schedule of visits to Israel's many fascinating tourist spots. Dye may take these in once the course is in play, but on the circumstance of his first trip to the area, they were nowhere to be found on his list of priorities. The same went for lunches with visiting dignitaries, whom he greeted with a jaunty "I'm out of here in 25 minutes."

This was a week-long visit to Israel. Dye's remit there is to completely rebuild the outdated and technically malfunctioning golf

course laid out at Caesarea in 1961. He and his team of associate designer Tim Liddy, site foreman Abe Wilson, together with shapers Phil and Sonny, are early birds. One morning he set off to walk the course at 7.30 and finished at sunset. He resembles a human advert for long-lasting batteries.



"This is the first time I've worked in conditions of pure sand. Kiawah Island was a mixture of earth, clay and silt. This is the greatest high I've been on for years. Whereas normally I'm designing for a client, here in Israel this is the only course for seven million people. I'm designing for a country!"

**Pete Dye**

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Dye is focused on making the walking distances for the average player as short as possible, which harks back to the origins of the game on the dunes of Eastern Scotland, where the tee was a couple of paces from the preceding hole. He is also extremely aware of the future playing experience on his course. The grass on the 1961 layout was a golf ball-hostile kikuyu, which eliminated the pitch-

and-run shot. Links golf in the coastal winds calls for this creative style of play, so Dye has recommended the paspalum strain of grass, which will enhance the enjoyment of the game and, as a bonus, will call for less irrigation – a powerful incentive in a country where water is a scarce commodity.

Dye was selected from a shortlist of 'signature designers' because his personal commitment to the project far outstripped that shown by other contenders. Caesarea felt that their timeless location in an area of great historical antiquity was more than just another job. Dye has repaid the developer's confidence by displaying his contagious enthusiasm. When asked when he was returning to oversee the fine-tuning of the shaping, he replied: "In six weeks, whether or not you invite me."

Alice Dye said: "We had no idea how beautiful this country was. The new course is going to be a great asset for Israel and we believe that it will change the thinking about the game of golf in this country." Dye's first course in the Dominican Republic, the Teeth of the Dog, followed his visit in 1968 and was created 30 miles from the nearest paved road. Now 40,000 jobs in tourism have been generated by the game of golf and Dye is building his fifth course on the island.

I have been privileged to see many architects at work during my 25 years as golf consultant. This was the first time I had witnessed Pete Dye at close quarters. He is indeed a one-off. I've no doubt that his somewhat eccentric, perhaps unique, way of going about the creation of his courses helps to imbue them with rich golfing intrigue that explains the lasting fascination of the end result. It's why his courses are invariably those which the connoisseur will travel the globe to play and relive in retrospect for many years thereafter. I'm sure the same will be true of Caesarea.



One of the game's most respected and accomplished architects, Pete Dye has embraced the challenge of updating the layout at Caesarea, which dates back to 1961.

