

Jacobsen Hardy to reopen revamped, renamed Wanderers Club

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WELLINGTON, Fla. -- The routing remains the same, but that is the only holdover at The Wanderers Club at Wellington, where the course architects at Houston-based Jacobsen Hardy Golf Design will unveil its latest renovation project.

The private Wanderers Club (formerly Wellington Golf & Country Club) is scheduled to reopen with considerable fanfare Feb. 29. The golf course renovation is just one part of the club's overall improvement plan: The clubhouse interior has been transformed by Marcel Maison of the West Palm Beach-based Artmosphere. But the golf course is the main attraction. Legendary golfer Peter Jacobsen, partner Jim Hardy and Senior Vice President/Managing Architect Rex VanHoose will preside alongside club owner John Goodman and the hundreds of members eager to see their completely reimagined, retooled golf course.

"Jim and Peter's vision and enthusiasm for the Wanderers Club is evident in the finished product," said Goodman, a Houston businessman who owns The Wanderers Club and the world-renowned International Polo Club Palm Beach located nearby.



"They were very hands-on throughout the entire process. We were not just another golf course to them and that was very important to me. We discussed the project at length many times. They understood my vision and transformed Wanderers Club into a first-class golf club."

This is horse country, and so the most unusual feature at The Wanderers Club isn't so unusual: Jacobsen Hardy's addition of an intimate, slightly-smaller-than-regulation polo field that management can transform into a golf practice facility when a polo match is not in progress. Running alongside the polo pitch is an opening golf hole designers ingeniously crafted to play as a 420-yard, par-4 on non-polo days; it converts to a 180-yard, par-3 when the ponies are running.

"The polo field turned out fabulous and it makes a wonderful golf practice facility," Jacobsen explained. "It has a very grand feel to it. What makes it unique is how it is tied into the 1st hole. We have a hazard that acts as an aiming and turning bunker on the right side of the golf hole — that provides a bit of definition and contrast with its gleaming bunker sand. On the left-hand side of the polo field and adjacent to the 1st hole are the polo field boards that add some character.

"We could not build target greens on the practice facility since they would occasionally be playing polo there. So we used polo goal posts as targets. It has a very elegant, one-of-a-kind look and feel."

The Wanderers Club was renamed for the winning side at the very first U.S. Polo Open Championship, in 1904, and as pleased as it is with the new polo field/practice facility, the Jacobsen Hardy team is equally proud of the overall course renovation, which touched every aspect of the layout. The prevalence of housing within the development required the designers to use the existing routing. The overall goal was to allow homeowners to keep their course vistas but minimize golfers' views of said housing.

"To accomplish that," VanHoose explained, "required a tree plan to shield the housing, an under-story shrubbery plan intended to minimize views of patio furniture, and a low-profile landscaping of clumpgrasses, railroad vine and firecracker to provide contrast and color."

The owner wanted to reverse the two nines, meaning what had been the 10th hole is now the 1st. The tees are mowed tightly, like greens. "You are starting to see that more often in South Florida. It's a cool feeling," VanHoose continued. "Everything is tied together as you work your way from the practice area, to the putting green to the first tee. In fact, the putting green flows directly into the back of the first tee. Mr. Goodman wanted that sort of flow. He prefers to hit golf balls, putt, then head right to the first tee."

VanHoose admits to several favorites holes at the new Wanderers Club at Wellington:

- No. 2 is a 580-yard, par-5 that was formerly a quirky three-shotter requiring a short 3-wood or long iron off the tee because of a blind lake cutting through the landing area. Jacobsen Hardy solved that challenge by filling the portion of the lake that cut across the

fairway to expand the landing area and allow players to hit driver. The designers also stretched the lake back toward the tees along the right side to maintain the needed water-storage capacity. The team also extended a waste bunker back along the right side then passed it in front of landing area. "The members have spoken very positively about the hole," VanHoose said. "It is a beauty shot, kind of a throwback to the old classics that had lots of cross bunkers."

- No. 8 is a drivable par-4. The best play is up the narrow right side that, if found off the tee, kicks balls off a slope and down into the green. The safer drive is left, but leaves an approach over a large, green-side bunker into a very narrow putting surface that falls away toward the rear left, where a saving bunker will keep the ball out of further trouble.
- No. 15 is a 225-yard par-3 from the tips playing over a waste bunker to a 9,000-square-foot green, the largest on the course. The waste bunker crawls from the front of the tee complex along the right side all the way to the putting surface. There is a bunker on the right and another one left of the green opening. The putting surface itself oriented short left to long right, one of the toughest schemes in golf. "People generally miss greens long left or short right," VanHoose said. "You have to be able to really strike a long, accurate fade or stop a hook, and I don't know anyone who can do that. The large green gives you a lot of opportunity to hit the putting surface, but can leave a very long putt."
- The facility now has two short-game areas. One features two greens with four bunkers and takes up about 1.5 acres. A second putting and chipping area is located between the 15th green and 18th tee. "You have to drive a ways to get to it," VanHoose said. "But it gives the teaching staff a private area to give lessons. Or members can just get away from everyone and work on their short game there."

Waste bunkers at the Wanderers are of two types. Some contain regular, fine-grain bunker sand. Others hold a product called "gazina," an orange-ish mixture of coarser concrete screenings and red clay that plays much like the coquina shell waste bunkers that have become increasingly popular in the Southeast. "We have about 20 acres of gazina on the course with plantings in many of them," VanHoose said. "That allowed us to cut down the amount of irrigated turf and give the course almost a desert feel since players hit over vegetated waste areas. The owner didn't want concrete or asphalt cart paths, but players can drive into the gazina areas."

The waste bunkers, a new irrigation system, replanted Tifway 419 fairways and roughs and Tifeagle greens and tees combine to require far less water than the old course, an important benefit in the drought-sensitive Southeast.

Jacobsen Hardy is also proud of meeting the project's tight construction schedule. "The challenge in building courses today is the shorter time periods available," VanHoose said. "We started construction by spraying out the existing turf in March 2007 and building commenced April 1. The course was done in late September, about six months later."

Jacobsen Hardy Golf Course Design is one of course architecture's most sought-after practitioners. In addition to its renovation of The Wanderers Club, JH will unveil another comprehensive redesign this year at the Galveston (Texas) Municipal Golf Course, with its many holes perched along the Gulf of Mexico.

Starting with its design of The Oregon Golf Club in 1992, Jacobsen Hardy has produced a succession of award-winning original designs, including Moorpark CC north of Los Angeles — named to Golf Magazine's "Top 10 New Courses You Can Play" for 2003; Houston's Redstone Golf Club, site of the PGA Tour's Shell Houston Open; and Hammock Bay Golf & Country Club in Naples, Fla., listed among Travel+Leisure Golf's Top 10 Private Clubs to debut in 2004. The firm's 2007 openings include The Club at Gray's Crossing, a private track serving Tahoe Mountain Club members in Truckee, Calif., and the acclaimed Club at Brasada Canyons, which opened last fall in Bend, Ore.

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