

The Club at Black Rock
A stunning Jim Engh
design alongside Idaho's
Lake Coeur d'Alene.
Here, the 150-yard 13th.

America's Best New Courses

From Idaho
to New Mexico
to Michigan,
this year's top
young tracks
are loaded with
surprises

By Ron Whitten

Photographs by
Stephen Szurlej

Best New Private

1

The Club at Black Rock
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
7,130 yards, par 72.*
Jim Engh, designer.
Initiation fee:
\$100,000 plus prop-
erty ownership.
www.blackrockidaho.com

2

Dallas National G.C.
Dallas
7,326 yards, par 72.*
Tom Fazio.
Fee: \$175,000.
www.dallasnationalgolfclub.com

3

Friar's Head G.C.
Baiting Hollow, N.Y.
6,950 yards, par 71.*
Bill Coore and Ben
Crenshaw.
Fee: \$250,000.
www.friarshead.org

4

Spanish Oaks G.C.
Bee Cave, Tex.
6,930 yards, par 71.*
Bobby Weed.
Fee: \$80,000, resi-
dent; \$30,000, non-
resident.
www.spanish-oaks.com

5

Squire Creek C.C.
Choudrant, La.
7,105 yards, par 72.*
Tom Fazio.
Fee: \$15,000, resi-
dent; \$4,500-\$10,000,
nonresident.
www.squirecreek.com

6

The Ridge at Back Brook
Ringoes, N.J.
7,156 yards, par 72.*
Tom Fazio.
Fee: \$115,000.
www.theridgegc.com

7

The Club at Seven Canyons
Sedona, Ariz.
6,746 yards, par 70.*
Tom Weiskopf.
Fee: \$125,000.
www.sevencanyons.com

8

The Dalhousie G.C.
Cape Girardeau, Mo.
7,299 yards, par 72.
Gary Nicklaus.
Fee: \$7,500, resident;
\$3,750-\$6,500, non-
resident.
www.dalhousiegolfclub.com

9

Baker Hill G.C.
Newbury, N.H.
7,171 yards, par 72.*
Rees Jones.
Fee: \$70,000 equity,
partially refundable.
www.bakerhill.org

10

The Reserve Club at Woodside Plantation
Aiken, S.C.
6,957 yards, par 72.*
Steve Nicklaus.
Fee: \$25,000 plus
property ownership.
www.thereserveclubatwoodside.com

*Walking allowed anytime

Win, place & show

Meet the top three finalists in each category— Private, Affordable and Upscale Public

Golf is in a slump? If so, it hasn't been reflected in Golf Digest's Annual Best New Courses survey. The competition among 2003's 163 candidates was strong as ever, especially in Canada, and the winning courses are so visually appealing and architecturally intriguing that they might prompt some golfers to dust off their clubs and nongolfers to take up the game.

Best New Private: The Magic Formula

With the selection of The Club at Black Rock as 2003's Best New Private Course, architect Jim Engh completes a three-year hat trick of Best New wins—one in each category, no less. (*For more on Engh, see "Grand Designer" on page 5.*)

What magic formula, if any, does Engh have in his architecture? The answer is the element of surprise. Built on a high plateau overlooking Idaho's Lake Coeur d'Alene, Black Rock contains all the now-familiar Engh trademarks: player-friendly recessed fairways, ball-collecting punch-bowl greens and steep-edged serpentine bunkers. But it also contains a few holes with features you've probably never seen before. Engh likes to call them "trapdoors and hidden staircases," unexpected aspects of his funhouses that delight us when we stumble upon them.

Thus, after a pair of conventional (for Engh) opening holes, we face the 611-yard third, which drops 180 feet from tee to green, down an extraordinarily narrow, twisting fairway between two mountain slopes. It's part ski jump, part slalom slope and pure Engh. For added thrills, he placed the wide-but-shallow green on the far side of a gorge. Imagine the 12th at Augusta National with Rae's Creek as a 30-foot-deep ravine.

An even bigger hoot is the 398-yard 10th, with its green far downhill from the landing area, fronted by a squiggly little bobsled run of a bent-grass fairway, curving around a lonesome pine. If you judge the bank shot correctly, you can use a putter from 120 yards away and have it bound onto the green. It's Engh at his Rube Goldberg best.

Yet that hole is topped by the 413-yard 11th, downhill off the tee to a tabletop fairway (with a steep drop-off on the right), then left and uphill, over a pond and a pair of waterfalls to a perched green tucked behind and between huge mushroom-shaped outcroppings of black basalt rock. In appearance and strategy, the 11th is the closest thing golf has to a giant pin-ball machine.

With its immense diversity of meadow, lakefront, wetland and pine-lined holes, and with periodic panoramas of Lake Coeur d'Alene, Black Rock is a slick presentation. If there's a flaw, it's that three of its five par 5s are of a similar configuration, double-doglegs that move right, then left. But Jim Engh's magical architecture is such that few will notice.

Runner-up Dallas National Golf Club, Tom Fazio's highest-ranked new course since 1999, is hands down the finest layout in Dallas. Southwest of downtown, on unusually hilly terrain, this is an exclusive club aimed at reinvigorating a depressed neighborhood, much as East Lake did for Atlanta.

Third-place Friar's Head, on sandy bluffs along Long Island's North Shore, is an ode to architectural antiquity from Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw. It's one of the Northeast's best oceanside courses, on a par with Maidstone on Long Island and Kittansett in Marion, Mass.

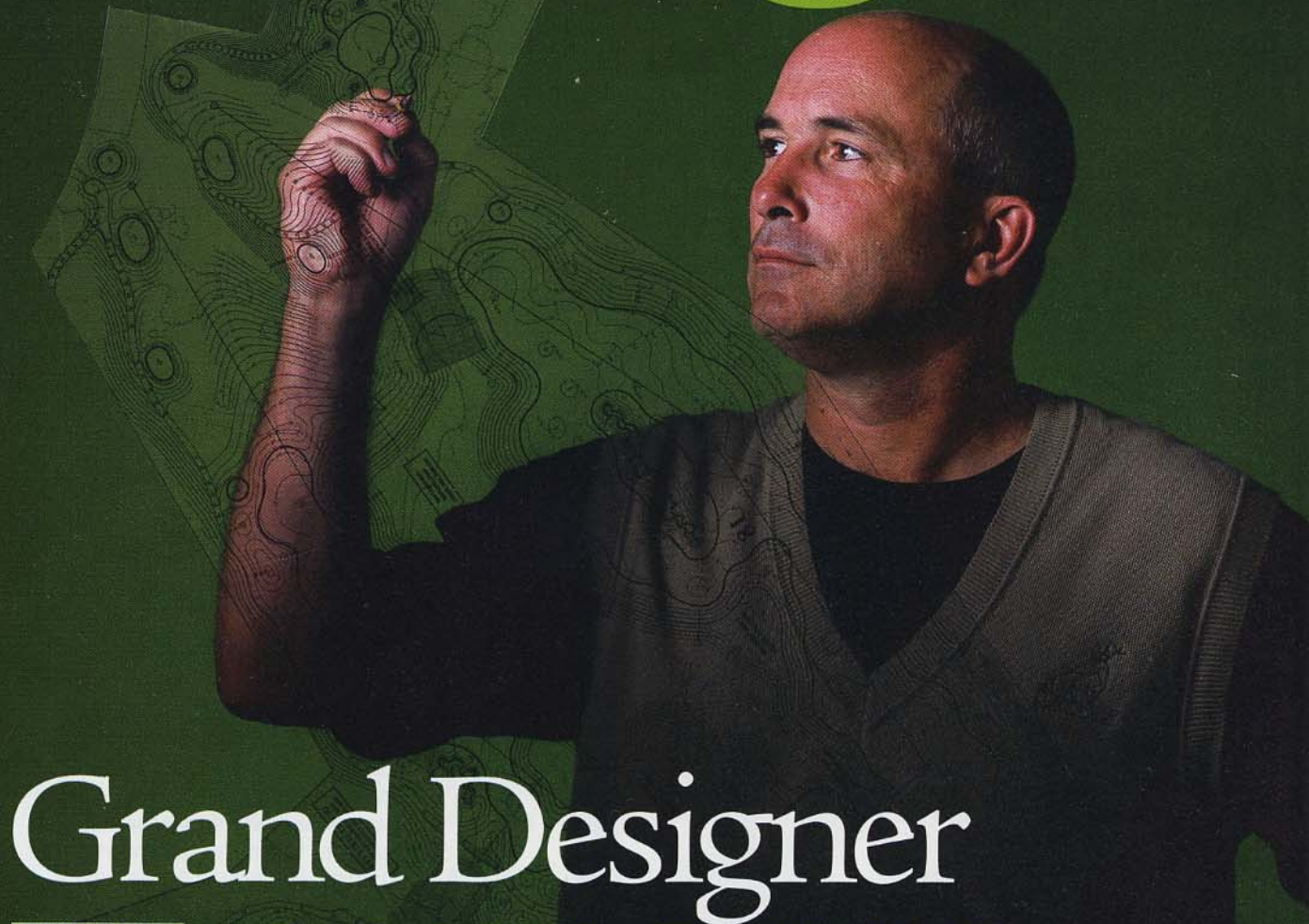
How the winners are selected

Golf Digest's panel of more than 700 low-handicap men and women choose our Best New Courses every year. When visiting potential Best New Courses across North America, they fill out a score sheet for every course they play and evaluate. To determine the winners and runners-up, we average all panelists' scores (based on a scale of 1 to 10) for each course. Their criteria: shot values, design variety, memorability and aesthetics, plus playability (for affordable and upscale public) or resistance to scoring (for private and Canadian). We total the average scores and add bonus points for walkability. The resulting highest score in each category wins.

The Digest

Edited by Ron Kaspriske

NEWS AND COMMENTARY FROM THE WORLD OF GOLF



Grand Designer

ON THE TEE ARCHITECT OF THE YEAR **JIM ENGH** AGE: 45 HOME: **CASTLE ROCK, COLO.**

When a golf course architect sits atop the charts for three years running, it's time to take notice, especially when his name isn't Tom Fazio.

Since 2001 Jim Engh has designed a trio of Golf Digest's America's Best New courses, the most by any architect. His 2003 winner (see *page 2*) makes him the hottest designer and helped earn him the honor of being named Golf Digest's first Architect of the Year.

In 2001 his Golf Club at Redlands Mesa in Grand Junction, Colo., won Best New Affordable Public. In 2002 his Tullymore Golf Club in Stanwood, Mich., won Best New Upscale Public. And in 2003 Engh earned Best New Private with The Club at Black Rock in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, edging a Tom Fazio course.

That raises Engh's total to four Best New honors

since 1997, when his first American design, Sanctuary in Sedalia, Colo., won Best New Private. Fazio leads with 10 Best New titles since 1987 and last won in 1999.

Engh, a North Dakota native who ghost-authored European designs for Bernhard Langer in the 1980s, has a vivid imagination, a technician's training and some of the most detailed blueprints in the business. Plus, the man can flat out play (2.3 Handicap Index). He's an unabashed basher who consistently drives a golf ball more than 300 yards, not just in high-altitude Colorado but in long-drive competitions.

"I know we have to please golfers the first time out," Engh says, "but I also try to design other levels into our courses so that you'll learn something new about every hole every time you play it."

Ron Whitten