

BY ED VYEDA • PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC BAKKE

JIM ENGH IS UNCOMFORTABLE BEING CENTER-STAGE. He's the last guy you'd find at a local nightclub back home in Castle Rock, Colo., belting out any of the Van Morrison tunes he knows by heart. Although he is one of the most acclaimed golf course architects of his era, Engh remains a somewhat private man, in his element wearing denims and work boots, or just horsing around in the yard with his young son and daughter.

However, Engh will come out of his shell when talking about golf - or his library of nearly 50 Van Morrison recordings, from the eras of vinyl to tapes and discs. And there seems to be a corresponding energy between Engh's music collection and his golf course designs: a reverence for heritage, which no doubt will unveil itself in The Creek Club, the first members-only course at Reynolds Plantation that Engh is on schedule to open in 2007. Just as he treasures his vintage 1970s vinyl records, respecting their contribution to the evolution of the music industry, Engh is forever inspired by the centuries-old golf courses that have withstood the test of time in the rugged coastal countryside of Ireland.

"You can't help but be affected by it," says Engh, 47, who for years has visited Ireland regularly and is in the process of building an additional nine holes at the community-owned Carne Golf Links in County Mayo, Ireland. "That is where golf was created on such wonderful settings. You played the terrain. That was part of the game."

That was before massive bulldozers and computer technology expanded the possibilities of the golf course design business, allowing courses to be built over pieces of property that the Tillinghasts and Raynors never would have dreamed of exploring.

"But to go back to Ireland and see what is out there," says Engh, who cut his course design teeth with land in Great Britain, "you see where golf started, and see the art of randomness. It doesn't have a rhyme, doesn't have a reason. Golf is still so natural there. Very, very, very rarely are you given a site or setting where you can take that philosophy of leaving all the natural terrain and let nature take its course with golf. You can bring back bite-size pieces of it. You can have the consciousness about those ideas. And if you bring them back in their purest form, it might be over the top for the American golfing public."

BEAUTIFUL VISION

Beautiful Vision
Stay with me all the time
Beautiful vision
Stay ever on my mind with your beautiful...

Van Morrison, 1982

James Jeffrey Engh grew up in Dickinson, N.D., where he was an outstanding all-around athlete. Football, basketball, golf and skiing were all on his list, and he was a competitive swimmer, as well. A childhood accident—involving a golf cart turnover, of all things—left him with only one kidney, and when he ruptured that lone kidney playing football in junior high, doctors ordered him off the field. No matter, Engh just found other ways to release his adrenaline: In college he joined a group of cliff divers who plunged into Colorado mountain lakes—Engh's personal high being from about 90 feet.

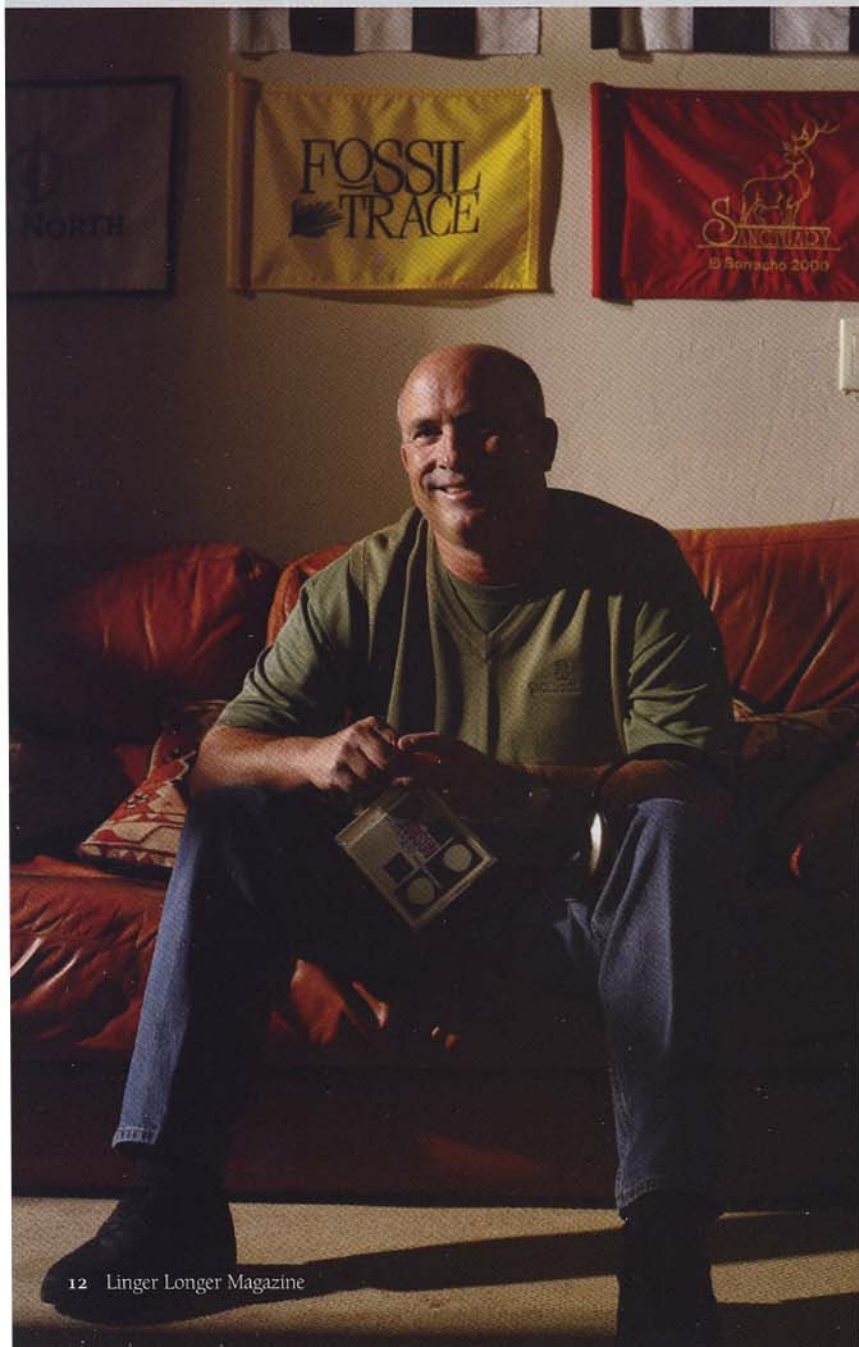
"Looking back, those little exercises were simply crazy," says Engh, who today confines his risk-taking to a newfound passion—scuba diving.

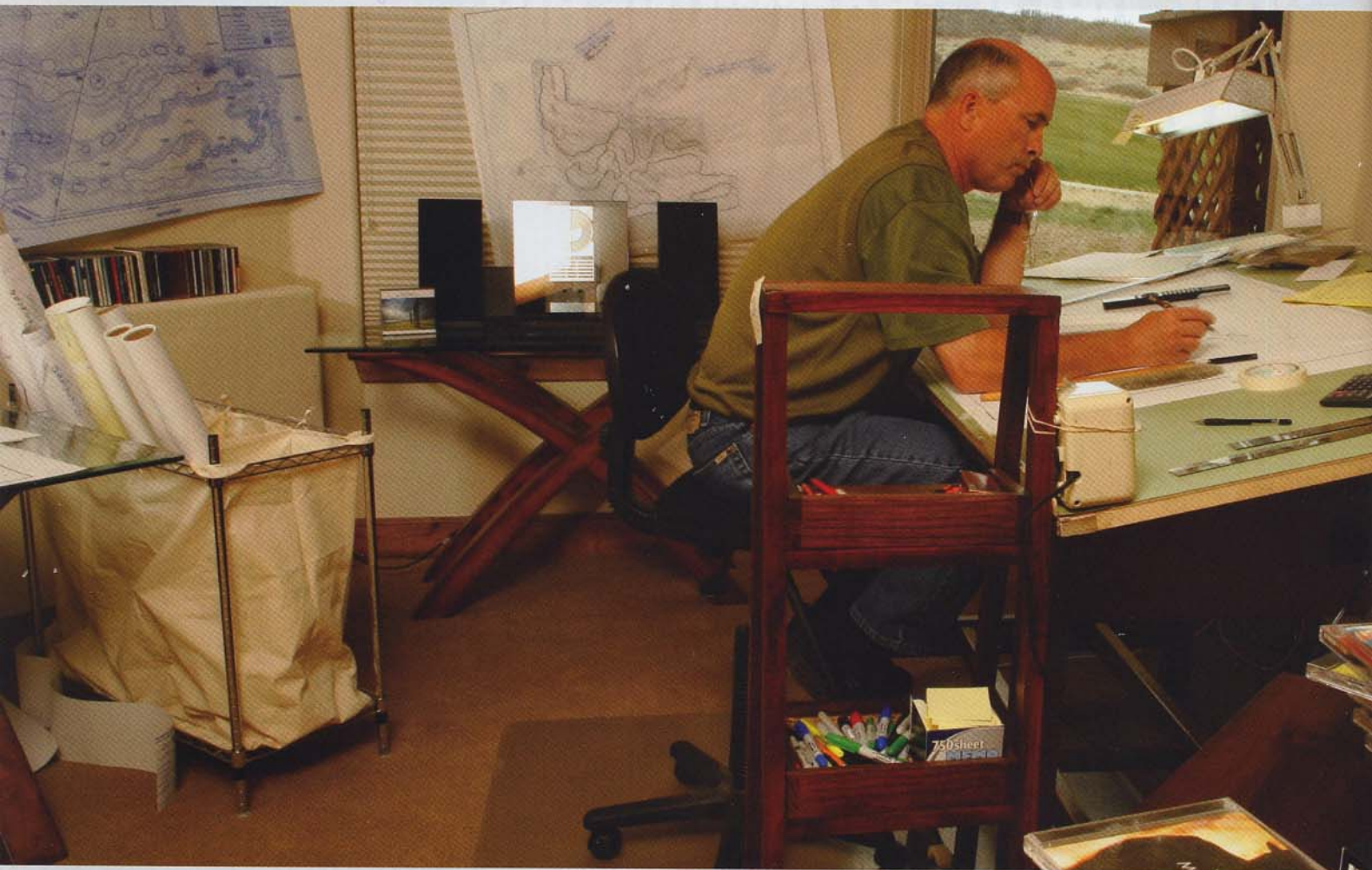
Golf always seemed to have a place in the Engh family. His father, the local John Deere dealer, helped build a nine-hole course in town. It opened about the time Engh was born, so he grew up with his father's stories about the course and how it was built. When he was old enough, Engh got a job on the maintenance crew and decided to pursue a career in golf. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Landscape Architecture, with a concentration in Turfgrass Science, at Colorado State University in 1985.

Having distinguished himself the past decade with numerous critically acclaimed golf courses west of the Mississippi—four times since 1997 topping *Golf Digest's* list of "Best New Courses" (an industry high)—Engh now is making his debut in the East, which has attracted media attention. He isn't exactly in hiding from the paparazzi—who could be forgiven for mistaking Engh for Ed Harris or Robert Duvall—but his smile indeed is appearing in more publications than in the past. Part of that may be because at Reynolds Plantation, Engh is joining the already distinguished list of architects who have assembled one of golf's most magnificent collections of courses in the country. He joins Tom Fazio (National), Jack Nicklaus (Great Waters), Bob Cupp (Plantation, Reynolds Landing) and Rees Jones (Oconee) to make up a Fab Five of their generation.

"If you can't get worked up a little bit about being part of that, something's wrong," Engh said. "You can't help but have the competitive juices flowing."

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Just to be working within the same grounds as those guys is an honor. You want to knock a home run out of there with your golf course and hope to make all those guys proud."

Always passionate about golf, Engh says he now has a "different" passion. "My biggest kicks now come from getting to see a new course—either mine, or someone else's—that inspires me. I get fired up by it. If that sounds like a kid, well, if you can't be a bit of a child in what you do for a living, it would be a long life."

Engh's youthful enthusiasm for the game emerges in both his character, as well as the character of his golf courses. And he is ecstatic about The Creek Club.

"I am pretty pleased with it. I got real lucky," Engh says. "There are just so many places left on earth that have a setting that's absolutely perfect, where we may not have to do very much. But that is very rare. The thing is, with places like that, where it's so perfect, you have to do stuff with it. You don't want to be redundant with 'perfect.' It is like having too much chocolate. At first it's perfect; then it's not as perfect after a number of times. So you have to give the golfer more variety."

Perfection, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. One thing, however, is perfectly clear about Engh's designs: they scream out, "I did it my way." He remains unconcerned with yardage, yet committed to the preservation of quality shot making and a determination to make the game enjoyable for everyone who steps onto the tee. Rather than battle technology in the game, Engh's method engages basic human nature, not to mention Mother Nature.

"It's not about equipment, or balls going farther," Engh explains. "It's about people playing the piece of property. I design courses toward the human experience. That is the biggest issue to me. The experience can be at four or five different levels. There are the esthetics, the intrigue, the framing of things, and the ability to get the whole visual eyeful without moving your eyes."

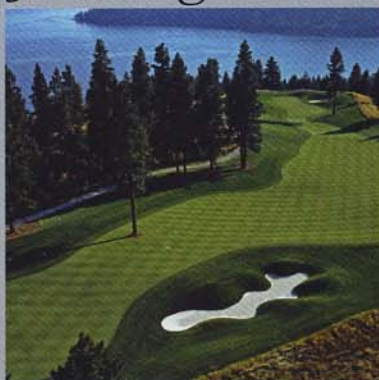
Engh's career did not benefit from a name made by winning championships; while he is a single-digit amateur and former college competitor, it's his designs, not his game that make him an extraordinary talent. Maybe it's his background—once having worked on a pipeline crew in the oil fields—that keeps Engh focused on the human element of the game.

"I don't design golf courses for those guys on tour. I couldn't care less," he says flatly. "They are just a small anomaly of golfers. Tour pros look at golf courses with only two things in mind: What did I shoot? How much money did I make? And that's how it should be because that's what they do for a living. I don't think we should be changing golf for those guys."

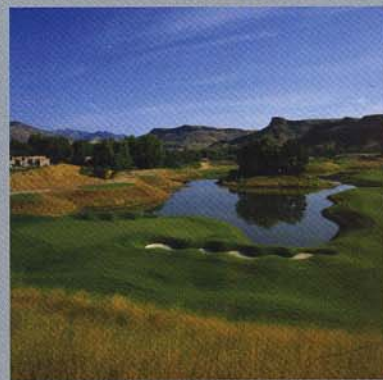
Engh has no intention to change. Just as "Van The Man" made his musical mark for being bold, unique and single-minded, Engh has stricken similar chords in his golf course designs. Many have topped the charts already, and at Reynolds Plantation there is anticipation of another hit with The Creek Club.

Engh is just thankful that in his line of work, the central focus is on the golf course, not on him. While he can't completely escape the spotlight, Engh tries to remain in the background, just where he prefers it. Off stage.

Jim Engh's Visions



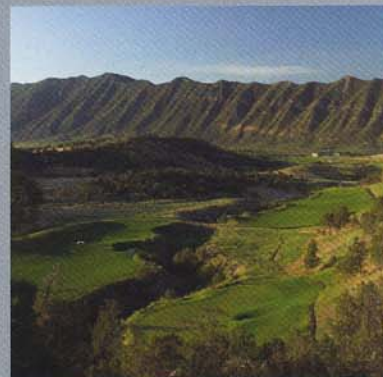
The Club at Black Rock
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho



Fossil Trace Golf Club
Golden, Colorado



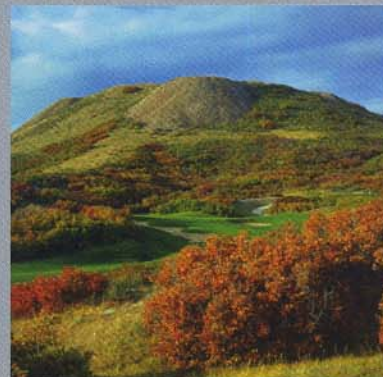
Hawktree Golf Club
Bismark, North Dakota



Lakota Canyon Golf Club
New Castle, Colorado



Pradera
Parker, Colorado



Red Hawk Ridge Golf Course
Castle Rock, Colorado



The Golf Club at Redlands Mesa
Grand Junction, Colorado



Sanctuary
Sedalia, Colorado