

10 GOLDEN RULES • BEST RANGEFINDERS • MR. OLYMPICS

# LINKS

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## The Classics

Alps Biarritz Cape Eden Punchbowl Redan Road Short

EIGHT HOLES THAT SET THE PATH  
OF GOLF COURSE DESIGN

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# *The* CLASSICS

These eight iconic hole designs arose more than a century ago,  
but their challenge and charm is undiminished BY THOMAS DUNNE







**THE SUCCESSFUL DEBUT** of Tom Doak and Jim Urbina's Old Macdonald, the latest course at Bandon Dunes, has brought classic design principles back into the limelight. More than a century ago, Charles Blair Macdonald, a Chicagoan who had studied at the University of St. Andrews in the 1870s, set out to build the "ideal" course at the National Golf Links of America in Southampton, New York. His idea, in an age when golf in America was in its infancy, was to study the best and most strategic holes of Great Britain and not just reproduce them, but improve upon them, along the sandy shores of Peconic Bay.

Macdonald's ambitious plan came off so well that he and his design cohorts, Seth Raynor and Charles Banks, continued to employ these "templates" throughout the rest of their careers. These holes are among those that form the foundation of strategic design. In reviewing their principles, we also took a quick look at the various ways in which the templates have migrated into the contemporary era of design.

## 1 Punchbowl

*"If you have a good sporting game, for heaven's sake don't try too much to improve it. Your business is not to improve the game but to improve your play."*

— CHARLES BLAIR MACDONALD

**THE PUNCHBOWL** is more of a building block than a full-on template hole, but encountering such a green on any course—classic or modern—is always a delight. Though some of the most dramatic bowls (the fourth at **Fishers Island**, **Sleepy Hollow's** 15th) are the clear product of engineering muscle, the roots of the form are in ancient necessity: "In the days before artificial irrigation," writes Tom Doak in *The Anatomy of a Golf Course*, "greens were often located in hollows because they held water to nurture the green."

Punchbowl greens have drawn criticism over the years for their capricious nature (it's not uncommon to see a woeful hosel rocket meet a better result than a perfectly struck wedge), but that is a sporting quality—and the source of their beauty. After all, both players still have to putt the ball, and such greens frequently feature both subtle borrows—when two sides of the bowl compete for influence—and sweeping breaks.

The green complex of the 16th at the **National Golf Links of America** (left) is a masterpiece of composition, with the club's iconic windmill looking down on a punchbowl guarded by artfully sculpted bunkers. But these features are not for the copyist—most current architects use the form creatively, connecting punchbowl greens to holes of all shapes and sizes. At his Seth Raynor-inspired **Black Creek Club** in Tennessee, Brian Silva created a fun, reachable par five on the sixth hole by using a natural ridge as the front edge of the bowl, then moving the earth behind it to shape the side walls.



## 2

## Eden

*"In brief, the Strath and the Hill [bunkers] provide a perfect illustration of the mythological Scylla and Charybdis—the rock and the whirlpool which terrorized ancient sailors—adapted to terrorize modern golfers."*

— HERBERT WARREN WIND

THE EDEN IS ONE OF THE FEW classic holes where the brilliance of the original, in this case the 11th at the **Old Course**, is yet to be matched. Its formula seems simple, but in practice a great Eden can be maddeningly difficult to produce. Says Tom Doak, who recently created perhaps the finest modern example of the hole, the second, at **Old Macdonald** (below): "In some respects, there are a thousand Edens—any par three with a bunker front right-center and another along the left flank sort of captures the style. But it only registers as an Eden hole when the option of

steering the ball through the green entrance is more than a matter of just flying it pin high left, and of course most American courses aren't set up for the running approach."

This element is just one of many, though—the dramatic back-to-front pitch of the green, the gathering nature of the fronting Strath bunker, and the mortal fear of missing long also play their roles. Even Eden-inspired greats like Alister MacKenzie's fifth at **Royal Melbourne (West)** and Walter Travis's 18th at **Garden City** can't quite capture the unique "spirit of St. Andrews."







## 4 Biarritz

*"From a strictly golfing standpoint, [the chasm] has always been a hazard of no importance, provided a man hit his tee shot even moderately. But this proviso is a large one, especially when the tee is on the edge of a precipice, with the Atlantic thundering at the base."*

— HORACE HUTCHINSON

THE BIARRITZ is one of only a handful of classic hole types where the original no longer exists—except, that is, in grainy 19th-century photographs. Indeed, the majestic chasm-crossing third at the eponymous club in the south of France was already on the outs when Horace Hutchinson published *British Golf Links* (one of golf's first coffee table books) in 1897. But architects and golfers ever since have been enthralled by the idea of watching a well-struck ball land short of the flag, vanish into a swale, and then reappear moments later, climbing Orpheus-like from the depths to settle near the target. Some debate exists as to whether the approach area should be fairway (as at the fifth at **Fishers Island** and **Mid Ocean's** 13th) or putting surface (as at the sixth at **Shoreacres** and the **Course at Yale's** ninth, above left). The latter is preferable, but provided a running shot can find the back section of green, either is acceptable. As the longest of the one-shot templates, the true measure of a Biarritz is how well it tests a player's courage with a long iron or fairway wood.

Biarritz greens don't often fit seamlessly into a natural landscape, so they can be difficult to render, but the hole has nevertheless experienced something of a mini-renaissance in recent years, popping up in designs by Bobby Weed (**Glen Mills'** par-five 15th in Pennsylvania), Lester George (the eighth on the Huguenot nine at **Salisbury Country Club**), and others. At 152 yards, the late Mike Strantz's third hole at **Tobacco Road** is on the short side, but its wild and woozy green is the real deal.

## 3 Cape

*"Mid Ocean's version of the Cape hole...was unforgettable. It was tightly bordered by water on the left as it swung in a crescent from tee to green. It is still being rebuilt many times a year by the best modern architects."*

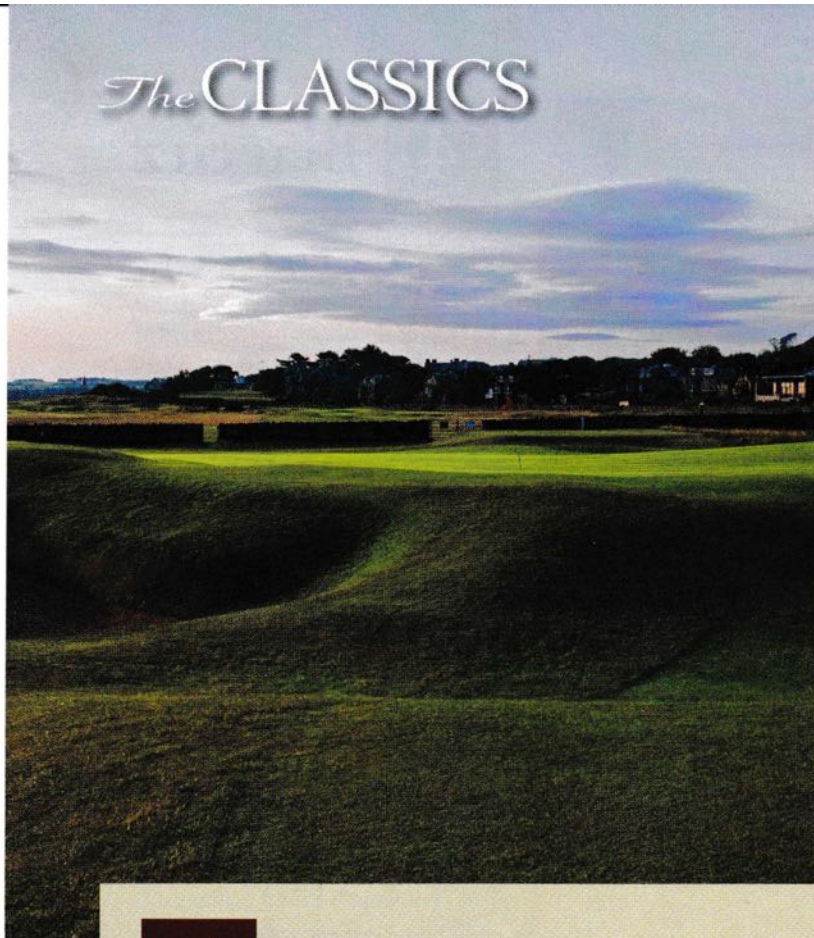
— HERBERT WARREN WIND

DECADES LATER, Wind's words continue to ring true: It seems like practically every other week on the PGA Tour, players are confronted with a finishing hole that traces a long arc against a lake, demanding a heroic, "bite off as much as you can chew" drive. Such holes are usually referred to as Capes, though the tee shot is only part of the equation. Of equal importance is the approach, which plays toward a green that extends out into the same hazard and features a mound or sideboard that will either work for or against the golfer, depending on the angle one achieves by either flirting with or shying away from the hazard on the first shot.

This type of hole is considered a Charles Blair Macdonald original. It was first established at the **National Golf Links**, but the original green was moved long ago to make way for the club's entrance road. Macdonald's most masterful Cape is the fifth hole at the **Mid Ocean Club** in Bermuda, where measuring one's line from the pinnacle tee and taking flight across Mangrove Lake is among the most thrilling shots in golf. The hole has become a staple in the modern architect's design vocabulary. Pete Dye is a fan, having built famous versions like the 18th at **TPC Sawgrass (Stadium)**, the 14th (right) at **Blackwolf Run (River)**, and many more. Another hole that expresses true Cape principles from tee to green is Coore & Crenshaw's 427-yard 10th at **Cuscowilla** in Georgia.







## 5 Redan

*"You cannot go wrong with a Redan hole."*

— DEVEREUX EMMET

EASILY THE MOST widely reproduced of the templates, the Redan poses strategic questions that are both timeless and technology-proof. A mid-length par three with a green set on the diagonal and running away from the player, the hole takes its name from a Crimean War fortress in Sevastopol, Ukraine, the V-shaped salient of which British forces hurled themselves against (unsuccessfully) on more than one occasion. The decision of whether to challenge a deep fronting bunker and attack the flag or play off to the right and let the contours of the green feed the ball toward the target remains one of golf's most compelling. Architect Brian Silva points out that a great Redan has the effect of "leveling the playing field," in the sense that a weaker (but clever) player can engage with the architecture to contend with his or her more skilled (but imprudent) counterpart.

Since its original iteration, the 15th at **North Berwick's West Links** (above), countless Redans and Reverse Redans (a hole suggesting a left-to-right shot shape) have taken shape around the world. The fourth at the **National Golf Links** remains the gold standard, though A.W. Tillinghast's wicked sideboard second at **Somerset Hills** places that version squarely in the conversation. Excellent examples abound in recent work, from the intimidating (Coore & Crenshaw's fourth at **Hidden Creek** in New Jersey) to the subtle (Steve Smyers's sixth at **Wolf Run** near Indianapolis) to the flashy (Robert Trent Jones Jr.'s third at **Chambers Bay**).

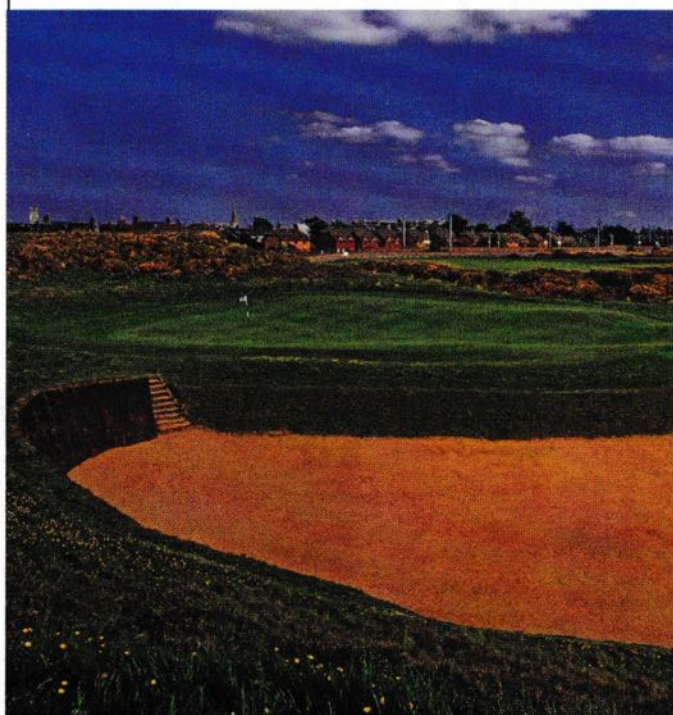
## 6 Alps

*"The popularity of the Alps is proof that not all blind holes are bad; also that if you must have a blind hole it should provide as much uncertainty as possible."*

— CHARLES BLAIR MACDONALD

"I'LL GO ON RECORD as saying that my favorite hole at **Old Macdonald** is the Alps," says the course's co-designer, Jim Urbina, referring to the 16th hole, "because you can't build them anymore." Coincidentally, when Urbina began his career working for Pete Dye in the 1980s, the first course his boss sent him to study was **Prestwick**—home of the original Alps hole (below). With its blind approach over a high dune, not to mention a bunker short of the green deep enough to require stairs, the 17th epitomized the rugged, lay-of-the-land golf of the Victorian era. It played a pivotal role in the early days of championship golf; in 1861, Willie Park's title defense in the second Open Championship was doomed by a "daring attempt to cross the Alps in two," where he was "punished for [his] avarice and temerity."

Most course developers today, being averse either to the quirky side of golf or potential lawsuits (or both), wouldn't dream of building such a hole—though, in fairness, not every property possesses a landform that would suggest one. As a result, it remains a rare bird, largely confined to Dye designs and the Macdonald-Raynor canon (**National's** third and the fourth at **Fishers Island** the most spectacular). For many, Doak and Urbina's faithful rendition at Old Macdonald represents the best opportunity to tackle the Alps.








## 8 Short

*"On some of the best holes for the mashie pitch, the green is a small island, surrounded by either sand or water."*

— ROBERT HUNTER

**MOST GOLFERS** can likely think of plenty of modern courses where each par three calls for a similar mid-iron shot. But one of the hallmarks of Golden Age design was to test different aspects of a player's game, including short iron accuracy. Dr. Alister MacKenzie expressed it well: "There should be infinite variety in the strokes required to play the various holes—that is, interesting brassie shots, iron shots, pitch and run up shots."

The 129-yard fifth hole (present-day fourth) at **Royal West Norfolk** in England served as Macdonald's inspiration for the Short. Designed by one Holcombe Ingleby, the local Member of Parliament, the hole featured a pushed-up green guarded by sleepers and pot bunkers. Macdonald retained the principle of the "island green," but added a new wrinkle. By creating either a mound (as at **National's** sixth) or a depression in the middle, the putting surface became divided into three sections, complicating the golfer's thinking over an otherwise straightforward shot.

One of the highlights of Gil Hanse and George Bahto's recent work at **Sleepy Hollow** in New York was the restoration of that course's Short 16th, returning design integrity to one of the most visually appealing examples of the template. And while it's not usually described in the context of its forerunners, Pete Dye took the "island" concept to its logical extreme at the 17th at **TPC Sawgrass** (above left), thus creating the most-copied hole of the modern era. 

## 7 Road

*"But what is the devil in the hole is its perfect length—YOU CAN get on in two—you badly want a four—and...but I am presuming upon too brief an acquaintance. I have no doubt all kinds of other subtle horrors have escaped my notice."*

— PATRIC DICKINSON

**WHETHER ONE HAS PLAYED** the 17th at the **Old Course** (below) once or a hundred times, the "horrors"—both subtle and not-so—make themselves known in abundance. We can clang one off the railway sheds or pull the ball into oblivion, whip up simooms in Scholars or Progressing or the Road bunker. We can play two nice shots and still face a terrible scrape-chip from the road itself. The Road hole is, as James Finegan writes, "a villain of darkest hue."

The conventional wisdom is that such a hole only gets a pass because it's in St. Andrews, but the design principles of the Road continue to inspire today's architects. As Dickinson suggests above, the hole's mystique is partly based on the fact that, in the 470–480 yard range, it plays somewhere between a par four and a par five—something Macdonald and Raynor grasped at **National** (seventh), **Piping Rock** (eighth), and **Yale** (fourth), among others. Tom Doak, however, felt inspired to connect a Road green to the short par-four 14th at New Zealand's **Cape Kidnappers**. He notes that for the tour pro, the tee shot actually replicates the challenge of the second shot at St. Andrews. But for the average golfer, he adds, "It's a scary hole. You are driving diagonally over a deep ravine (which replaces the o.b. right at St. Andrews), and you have to flirt with the hazard to get it on the right side of the fairway and have any kind of decent angle to the flag. Most people bail left, and are faced with a 70–120 yard second shot across the bunker to the narrowest part of the green—with a deep pot bunker front and center and a steep slope off the back of the green down toward the ravine."

