

De Turfvaert, The Netherlands: or how to pass Alister Mackenzie's test



The Netherlands is a country that exhibits a of these endeavours will have to make do with split personality when it comes to golf. It is a flat, agricultural land on clay or peat. country in which golf is relatively new, even

Frank Pont

To be fair, the likes of Colt, and other

courses—most, built in the last twenty years.

Golf in the Netherlands is growing at a though the sport has been played here for sufficiently fast pace to ensure that most more than a hundred years. It is also a country golfers are relative newcomers to the game. that has several world-class courses, designed Many of these golfers have little understanding by classic golf architects such as Harry of the game's history, its nuances and course Colt and Frank Pennink. Unfortunately, it variety. Not surprisingly, many have never the Netherlands, or the British Isles.

early twentieth-century designers, had several years ago to build a golf course in the years. One of his key initiatives was a highly land bordering the North Sea, while De Pan the eighteen-hole course had to be built the retreating glaciers of the last Ice Age construction budget was rather tight; and the deposited large amounts of pure sand. But, layout faced competition from ten existing those areas are now completely off-limits courses in the area. The site, however, did when it comes to building new courses. Most have two very important assets: its sandy soil,

and the prevalence of large trees.

the owner of the land and the developer of the course. Although he had no background in golf, he was willing to think 'outside the square' and make choices many of the more experienced golf developers would inherently shy away from. He understood clearly that houses an abundance of rather mediocre golf played on a really good golf course—be it in the Netherlands needed a fresh approach to golf design, and management, to break the Enter Turfvaert, a project I embarked upon stalemate that had existed for the last twenty fantastic land to work with: Royal Hague south of the Netherlands. At first glance, the flexible club structure to accommodate the and Kennemer lie in the spectacular dunes project's prospects screamed of low potential: full spectrum—from full-time members, to green-fee players. He did this by introducing and Eindhoven lie in heathland areas where on just 125 acres of flat pasture land; the around twenty categories of membership, varying from full-time membership, monthly memberships, and various frequent-use green-fee models.

Another important asset was Ad Jacobs,

The De Turfvaert project was underpinned

OPPOSITE

Turfvaert's back-nine commences with an interesting par-5 of 485 metres, being the second par-5 in the layout. While the tenth hole presents golfers with little concern from the tee, it demands, thereafter, sound golf to record a decent score. The green encompasses a wide range of available pin positions, golfers find difficult and perplexing. A concealed water hazard waits behind the long, semi-'blind' green, so one mustn't overshoot the



At 139 metres, the thirteenth hole is not only one of Turfvaert's prettiest par-3s, but also one of its hardest holes. Primarily, this arises from the uncertainty in judging the distance to the green. Moreover, the predominance of a head-wind adds to the challenge. The safest teeshot strategy is to aim for the open, left-side of the green, and then take your chances with the 'short' stick. Photograph by Frank Pont.

erage Dutch golfer to classic design elements ing elements. and playing characteristics; and to ensure that the course had the fundamentals to become Wide fairways, plus asymmetrical greens with a lower cost base.

early in the process to incorporate many of to avoid the hazards due to the wide fair- yielding difficult lines. This applies even on the design principles from the Golden Age ways, although their detours will cost them short puts and subtle double or triple breaks of golf architecture. Specifically, I wanted to strokes.

by two overarching goals: to introduce the av-

commercially successful. Both Ad Jacobs and Wide fairways can lull many players into I understood very well that to succeed we had a false sense of security; to score well at De teen of them slope away from the usual apto achieve the ultimate form of competitive Turfvaert you need to be in the right part advantage; namely, to create a better product of the fairway to attack when the pins are frequent use of bump-and-run shots rather stuck in the difficult positions on the greens. than pitches to get the ball close to the pins. To achieve these ends, a decision was made Less-powerful players will always be able The greens have very gently undulations

Limited length, a creative routing and great variety in the individual holes

The decision was made to design a course that wouldn't be long. Indeed, peeling back the years, the par-70 layout is just 5,900 yards. The dual focus lies in the approach shots to the green and short-game shots around it. This allowed me to utilise six par-3s, to create added variety and, ironically, orchestrate an enhanced challenge for the better players. It would force them to hit several longer irons into greens, something they don't often encounter on par-4s and 5s.

Moderately undulating greens, many backwards sloping, allowing both very difficult and easy pin positions

The greens are atypical when pitted against most of those built in recent years. Thirproach directions, thereby necessitating the on longer puts.



Opinion is divided on which par-4 is the hardest on the course; but the 411-metre ninth hole is a sure contender. The hole has a relatively narrow fairway, which is guarded on its right side by a well-placed bunker. Indeed, most players are better served by treating this hole as a short par-5, especially with water stationed in front (and left) of the green. Clearly, a golfer's outward nine can easily come unstuck at Turfvaert. Photograph by Frank Pont.

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TOP: Although short, the 115-metre second hole is a trickier proposition than its length may suggest. The assertion is made on two counts: the prevailing wind whistles at the players' back on the tee, while the putting surface falls away at its rear. These factors serve to scrutinise any golfer's control of distance and their nerves. Photograph by Frank Pont.

BOTTOM: Turfvaert's first hole, a 490-metre par-5, follows a storied Harry S Colt tradition: commence the round with a relatively easy and forgiving par-5, where the real challenge only starts with the shot into the green. Players should take advantage of the fact that this green is one of the few sloping towards them; however, they shouldn't be too aggressive on account of the 00B that lurks behind the green. Photograph by Frank Pont.

RIGHT: A relatively short par-4 of 322 metres, Turfvaert's fourth hole embodies fine risk-and-reward principles. Basically, there are two tee-shot strategies: adopt the 'safe' route over the right side of the fairway, or try to carry the large, menacing fairway bunker on the left. The green is saddle-shaped, and it accommodates some potentially tricky pin positions at the rear. Photograph by Frank Pont.





A view of Turfvaert's lengthy par-4 ninth hole, captured from the teeing ground. The large fairway bunkers guard the ideal spot for an approach to the green. Photograph by Frank Pont.

Generous areas of firm, short-cut grass before, around and behind the greens to stimulate the 'ground' game

The frequent use of grassy hollows behind, and next to, the greens creates a wide variety of short game shots that have to be addressed by players who have missed the greens on their approach. This element of the game is further amplified by cutting the grass of large areas before and around the greens to a height from which putting is possible.

Rough-edged bunkers, with highly visible flashed sand-faces The bunker style adopted lies somewhere be-

tween that routinely used by Tom Simpson and Alister Mackenzie. The rough-edged design was chosen to avoid the need for high maintenance. The experience, to date, has shown that even though there are significant sand faces the number of wash-outs has been minimal.

A limited amount of water and no forced carries

On the basis of wanting the course to be playable for golfers of all skill levels, no forced carries over water are present. This design aspect, coupled to the wide fairways, explains why very few golf balls are lost during a round at De Turfvaert.

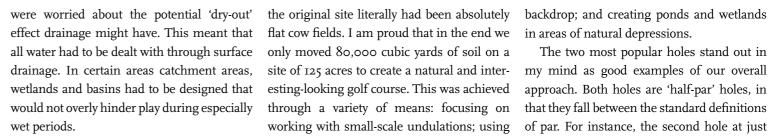
Focus on matchplay

De Turfvaert has been specifically set up as a matchplay course. Through their design, many of the holes give the shorter accurate player an even, or better, chance of beating the somewhat erratic long-hitter. Another classic matchplay element was having the holes, sixteenth through eighteenth, as a three-hole loop beginning and returning at the clubhouse. To paraphrase Harry S Colt, it is a course that would be a stern test for the scratch player, but at the same time sympathetic for the bogey shooter.

Minimal irrigation

To comply with the tight budget on the cost side, we chose to use minimal irrigation for the fairways, limit the number of bunkers and only use two to three tees per hole. A significant cost saving was achieved by keeping earthmoving to a bare minimum.

There was, however, a complicating factor: on slightly more than half the site no drainage was allowed. This was due to the golf course being situated next to a wetland nature preserve; the authorities, therefore,



Minimising earth movement, while allow-

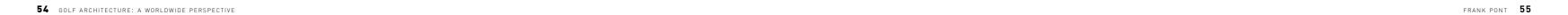
effect drainage might have. This meant that flat cow fields. I am proud that in the end we all water had to be dealt with through surface only moved 80,000 cubic yards of soil on a drainage. In certain areas catchment areas, site of 125 acres to create a natural and interesting-looking golf course. This was achieved the width of the fairways to create water run-

in areas of natural depressions.

The two most popular holes stand out in my mind as good examples of our overall approach. Both holes are 'half-par' holes, in through a variety of means: focusing on that they fall between the standard definitions working with small-scale undulations; using of par. For instance, the second hole at just 260 yards is a driveable par-4. From the tee ing for effective surface drainage and creating off areas that would not be in play; using the the view on the green is obscured by five a pleasing landscape, was not easy given that existing borders with tree growth as a visual large, rough-edged bunkers that confuse the

hole is often viewed as a potential 'breather'. Maybe so, but one underestimates this par-3 at their own peril, as 00B borders its left side. The green is defended by two bunkers to its left, while various short, mown grassy hollows lie behind and right of the green. Photograph by Frank Pont

The 152-metre eleventh







former approach.

doglegging par-5, is another strong riskand-reward hole. Adventurous players, via a

green. Specifically, it leads golfers into the the hole's length to as little as 460 yards. This well received, both in golfers' perceptions players will go for the green with a driver or ner and then firing one's approach directly economic front, it has performed far beyond three-metal, but untold danger lurks in the at the flag. However, a large area of wetlands expectations. Ad Jacob's vision, and the golf direct line to the flag. The smarter play might in front of the green, a narrow green sloping course, seems to have passed Alister Mackenbe a long-iron and a wedge; more often, this away from the player and deep, unforgiving zie's test: 'The real test of a good golf architect will produce a better score than the brash, grassy hollows behind the green, make this is the power of converting poor land into a a debatable strategy for a good score. Again, good course, and not the power of fashioning The fourteenth hole, a 515-yard, double- while the temptation is all too present, pa- excellent land into a mediocre one'. tience seems the advisable virtue on this hole.

Although still young, the course opened

sense of distance the player has toward the straight tee-to-green-line strategy, can reduce in the summer of 2010. It has been very belief that the green is closer than it is. Many avenue is available by cutting the dogleg cor- and in magazine reviews. Pleasingly, on the the best angle to the

The fourteenth hole is a relatively short par-5 that measures 468 metres. Being a double-dogleg, it provides the longerhitters an opportunity of reaching the green in two strokes. However, this strategy entails a water-carry of some 180 metres, where the shot is played towards a very narrow green that slopes away from the player. Deep, grassy hollows are located behind the green. Photograph by Frank Pont.

OPPOSITE:

The 378-metre twelfth hole is far from straightforward. Adoption of the 'line of charm' from the tee is non-sensical, since green is attained from the fairway's far-right side. Additionally, the OOB fence, ominously sited just left of the green, has a way of impacting negatively on a golfer's frame of mind. Photograph by Frank Pont.





Negotiation of the seventeenth hole, a short par-3 of 124 metres, invariably hinges on the pin placement. Precise shotmaking is required to create a plausible birdie chance, as this large green is characterised by numerous subtle undulations. Photograph by Frank Pont.



metres, the sixth hole doglegs vigorously to the left. The position of the flag on the green determines the ideal teeshot, as so often is the case on this layout. It is wise, therefore, to check the hole's flagstick's position when on the fifth tee. On account of the slope to the right, it is commonplace to go over the green. Photograph by Frank Pont.

The fifth green slopes away from the player, placing a premium on shotmaking accuracy from the fairway. Photograph by Frank Pont.

The second hole, a very short par-4 of just 238 metres, poses one of Turfvaert's most exciting risk-and-reward challenges. Here, any club from a driver to a short-iron can be selected on the tee. The flagstick's position on the green, plus the wind strength and its direction, help determine the tee-shot strategy. Beware of the five bunkers closely defending this hole, as they can easily turn a birdie chance into a bogie or worse. Photograph by Frank Pont.

OPPOSITE:

Although the 496-metre par-5 sixteenth hole is usually played into the prevailing wind, it provides ample opportunity to score a much-needed birdie, or par, at the 'business end' of the round. The main examination takes place during the hole's final 120 metres, as this section of fairway is strewn with bunkers. Photograph by Frank Pont.





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The eighth hole's rumpled fairway, with one of Turfvaert's largest bunkers flanking its left side. The front of the green is defended by a St Andrews-style hump, which, together with the fact that the green slopes backwards, makes the approach shot a lot more awkward than it appears on paper. Photograph by Frank Pont.

RIGHT: A view from the clubhouse terrace, looking back over Turfvaert's closing hole. A long par-4 of 378 metres, most players opt for a safety-first (three-shot) approach when tackling the eighteenth hole, in preference to the risky two-shot option. Already, many thrilling matchplay scenarios have unfolded here. Photograph by Frank Pont.



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