

Gaunt builds a global reputation

British architect makes his mark with **unique, strategic designs** *By Trevor Ledger*

Jonathan Gaunt is one of those architects who just keeps cropping up. Whenever there's a review of current golf development activity around the globe, one always expects to see Gaunt loom large.

A 42-year-old originally from Yorkshire, in the United Kingdom, Gaunt is not an architect who works with the former-professional signature designers. Nor is he one to be drawn into the world of the big boys.

Gaunt is doing what he does best, working as a stand-alone, personal architect (he doesn't employ assistants to do the design work) who simply loves to design golf courses. He got to

where he is with sheer determination and plenty of hard work over the past 20 years.

"A golf course should be part of the landscape —it should be a landscape in its own right and yet still allow for a sporting challenge, a game of golf where the shots are not just counted but considered carefully," Gaunt, said from his Derbyshire, England, base. Not surprisingly, Gaunt is also a keen chess player—strategy is an important aspect of his approach to design.

It's an ethos that has led Gaunt to work throughout Europe and now all over the globe, from leafy Surrey to sandy North Africa, from the Emerald

Isle of Ireland to the former eastern-bloc Czech Republic.

Gaunt does have a certain sense of style in his designs, but where he scores so highly is that his personal approach to any given project is individuality applied to the site in question.

There's no Gaunt trademark bunkering or instantly recognizable green complexes.

"It's become a bit hackneyed to say that I treat every site on its merits," he said. "Every architect says that nowadays. But with me it's true. There was an architect—and I use the term warily—some years ago



British architect Jonathan Gaunt's work illustrates his strategic design philosophy.

who used to drive round a site with a book of formulaic green designs and call to his assistant: 'A number three there, I think' or maybe even 'a nine and a forty-seven joined together, that'll make 'em think.'

"That's an extreme example and he's not designing courses anymore but certainly there are designers out there who think that a trademark style can be applied to any course and thus give it his own style—it's just a big ego trip," he said. "This is rubbish, moreover it's insulting to the client and an example of laziness and lack of imagination."

Gaunt graduated from the Leeds Metropolitan University Landscape Architecture course back in the mid-1980s and gained valuable golf construction experience with Brian Pierson Constructors and Golf Landscapes as a contracts manager. He worked at, among others, The Jubilee Course at St. Andrews until he broke free in 1990 and developed his own golf course architecture firm. It enjoyed immediate success with the design of the acclaimed Magnolia Park in Oxfordshire and, soon after, Redlibbets in Kent.

"Making my mark with new, 18-hole courses was a big thrill and a big compliment," Gaunt said. "To let me loose with a lot of money and a big chunk of ground, the clients showed faith in me and I really appreciate the opportunity they offered me. But, to be honest, I've got just as much enjoyment renovating and updating the classic courses of the early 20th Century."

Gaunt has been able to work on such courses as West Hill and Worplesdon and others designed

by the game's greats: Harry S. Colt, Alister MacKenzie, Tom Simpson, Herbert Fowler, Willie Auchterlonie, John Abercrombie, Willie Park and Mackenzie Ross.

"These were proper giants of golf course architecture and I was able to study their designs and work with them nearly 100 years after they did," he said. "[It was] magical."



That experience is a lot of what Gaunt is all about. Certainly he wants to earn the money that goes with golf course architecture. And he cites the respected Castleknock in Dublin as a thrill, in part because of the big budget that he had to work with.

But that is far from everything for Gaunt. The privilege of being involved in a sport that he loves and a profession that he feels he was born to practice is what really gives him satisfaction.

That approach might explain in part why he joined up with Steve Marnoch to form a successful partnership at the turn of this century, only to split in

2005 and go their separate ways.

Gaunt is tight-lipped about the split.

"We got a professional divorce and that's that," he said. "Suffice to say, I'm delighted with the outcome."

Gaunt is a much happier man now that he is out on his own again and basking in the glory of his first foray into the Czech Republic—the Kaskada Golf Resort in Brno that opened last year.

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He also is investing in desert-boots and sun cream for the Oued Fes and the Tetouan developments in Morocco that are following the ubiquitous real-estate model for sun-seeking Europeans. Each 18-hole course will cost an estimated £4 million to build.

Not that Gaunt is that bothered about the total cost and associated backslapping.

"It's Africa...it's a new challenge and I can't wait to see them all finished and play them myself," he said. "I expect there will be a few tantrums and sleepless nights but if there wasn't, then it would all be a bit dull, wouldn't it?" 🇺🇸