



# Welcome to the House of Stuart

You read it (and saw the pictures) here first: Castle Stuart is destined to become one of the best courses in the world, and our man in Scotland drove up from St. Andrews to give you a sneak peek

BY George Peper  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY Iain M. Lowe

Both the 2nd (foreground) and 3rd greens sit hard by Moray Firth.



# W

ith 2009 shaping up as a financially challenging year, your planned trip to Scotland may be in limbo. Perhaps at the very least you need a strong reason or two to justify it. Well, start packing your bags—18 absolutely compelling reasons have just arrived in the form of Castle Stuart.

Succinctly put, Castle Stuart will be the most significant British Isles debut since Loch Lomond in 1993. In one of those blessed melds of nature and nurture—think Pebble Beach, Pacific Dunes, Royal County Down—restrained, insightful design has combined with a breathtakingly beautiful site to the good fortune of us all.

Castle Stuart's managing partner and co-designer, Mark Parsinen, has literally outdone himself. It was Parsinen who nine years ago, along with Kyle Phillips, transformed an abandoned farm seven miles from St. Andrews into Kingsbarns, which drew instant acclaim.

Kingsbarns had barely grown in when Parsinen began to scour the Caledonian coastline for a similar opportunity. He found it in the Highlands, a 430-acre property stretched dramatically along the south shore of the Moray Firth, five minutes from the Inverness airport.

For the better part of five years Parsinen and Gil Hanse applied the same near-manic attention to detail that marks Kingsbarns. Now Parsinen's encore is complete. Castle Stuart will open officially in July, and by that time it should be well on its way to the top echelon of the world rankings. Yes, it is that good.

I caught it on a wet, blustery afternoon last October. The greens were knitting in and a few patches of rough were being tweaked for length and thickness, but the course



was eminently playable. Joining me during my preview round were Fraser Cromarty, Castle Stuart's director of sales and marketing, and John Cornish, a five-handicap Australian banker who was scouting the course for a golf tour operator. Sidelined by an injury, Parsinen walked with us, supplying yardages from a hand-held GPS device while offering insights on the design strategy.

## Wuthering heights

Parsinen's words were valuable, but this is a course that also speaks very clearly for itself. "A golfer should be able to stand on the tee, look at the fairway and green, and use his intuition to choose the best angle of attack for his game," he says.

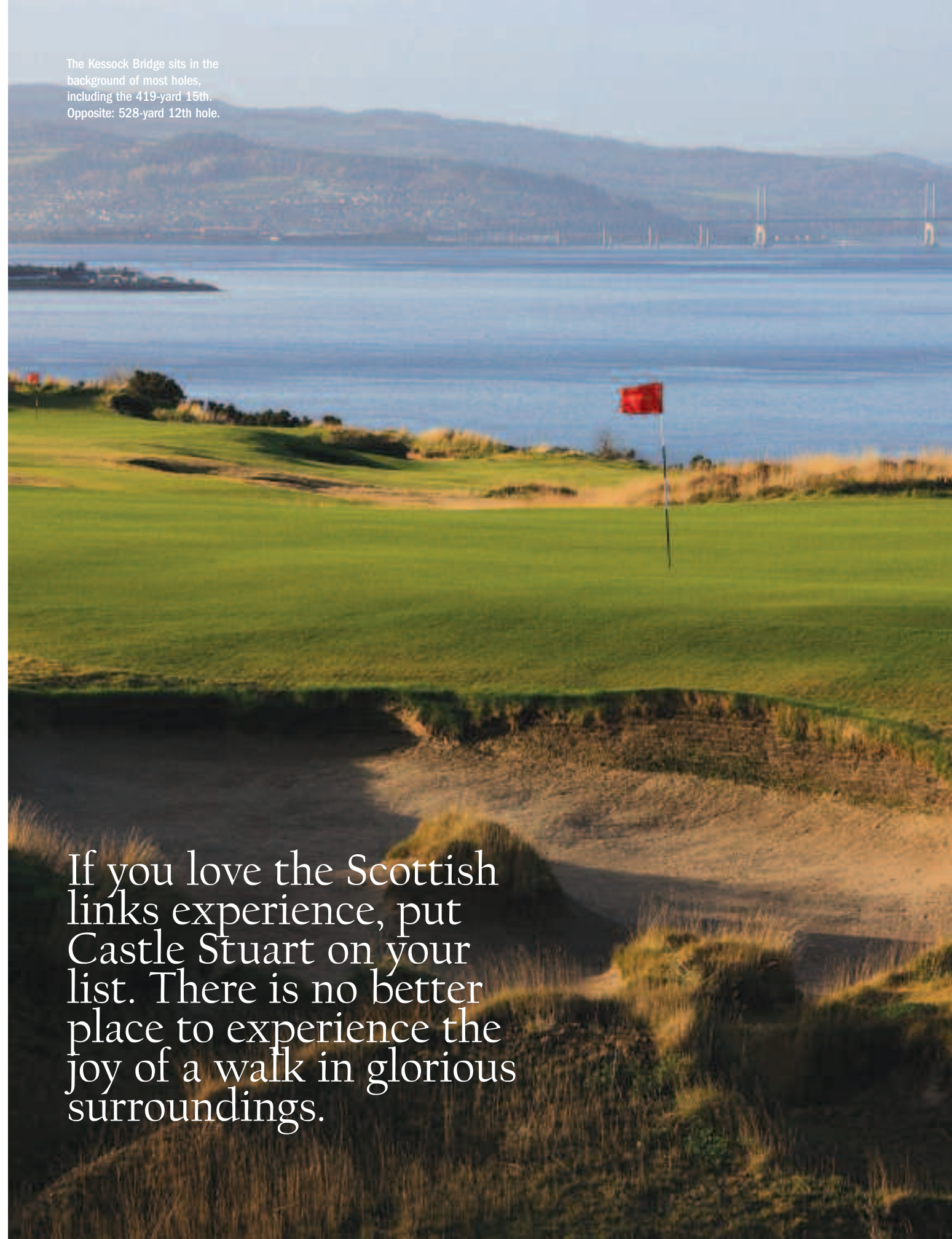
Few holes in the world are more completely visible than the 1st at Castle Stuart—especially from the back tee, which sits atop a cliff, one hundred feet above the fairway. The jaw-dropping view includes the 2nd and 3rd holes, a 180-degree panorama of the Moray Firth, and in the distance the Kessock Bridge that links Inverness to the north of Scotland.

Given the severity of the headwind, we walked forward to a tee set in the hillside. The opening par 4 was now down to 368 yards—but what an assignment that still loomed. The green seemed perched at the very edge of the water, and to get there we would need to find a billowing fairway between the firth on the right and the cliff, grown thick with gorse, on the left. As if that weren't sufficient intimidation, staring at us from the right foreground was a massive waste bunker.

This, however, would turn out to be the most daunting drive we faced. Castle Stuart's fairways are generous, partly because this is an exposed, windy site and partly because two of Parsinen's favorite courses are the Old Course at St. Andrews and Augusta National ("as it was originally designed—not now"), where the targets are broad but an advantage goes to the player who can find the side of the fairway that offers the most propitious angle of approach.

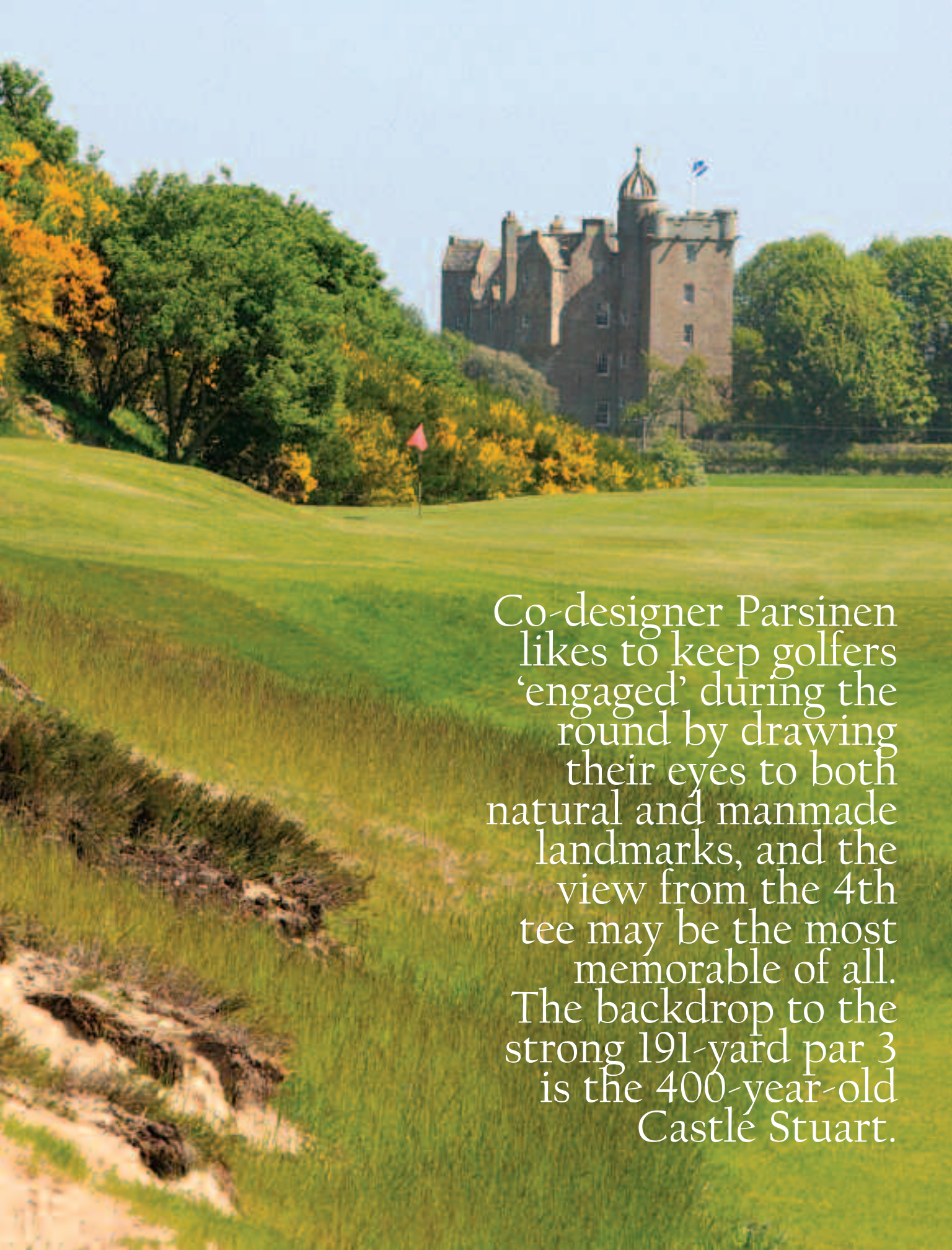
The 2nd hole—a 550-yard par 5—offers a split fairway: higher on the left than the right. Parsinen and Hanse

The Kessock Bridge sits in the background of most holes, including the 419-yard 15th. Opposite: 528-yard 12th hole.



If you love the Scottish links experience, put Castle Stuart on your list. There is no better place to experience the joy of a walk in glorious surroundings.





Co-designer Parsinen likes to keep golfers ‘engaged’ during the round by drawing their eyes to both natural and manmade landmarks, and the view from the 4th tee may be the most memorable of all. The backdrop to the strong 191-yard par 3 is the 400-year-old Castle Stuart.

Approach shots to the 366-yard 9th need to be judged precisely.



took pains to sculpt the fairways, creating rumples and hollows, in contrast to the broad Indy-turn swoops at Kingsbarns. The result is a layout that constantly engages both the eye and mind.

Parsinen also likes holes that offer the potential for a wide disparity of scores. A fine example is the 3rd. Barely 300 yards, it can be reached easily off the tee, especially with a tailwind. But the raised target is small and sits against the firth in the manner of an infinity-edge pool, and a steep slope leading to shadows on the left side suggests the presence of deep bunkers. It’s a hole where only fools rush in with a driver.

Fools and writers. After my companions played safely short, I gave it a rip. For a moment I thought I had pulled it off. After climbing briefly toward the putting surface, my ball toppled toward those ominous shadows.

“You’re fine there,” said Parsinen, “but wait until you see the shot you’re facing.” Those shadows weren’t actual bunkers but “faux abandoned bunkers.” Imagine a revetted sod-face bunker that has been allowed to grow in with grass until only the top two feet or so of bulkheading is visible. Two of those creatures lurk to the left of the 3rd green.

“It is a way to add some interest to the greenside shot, while also giving the course a bit of instant aging,” says Parsinen. “This way, you can’t just putt it up there; you have to create something.”

## Views spew firth

After the 3rd hole, the course turns briefly away from the water (15 holes play toward or along the firth) but the view from the tee at No. 4 may be the most memorable of all, for the backdrop to this 191-yard par 3 is the 400-year-old castle for which the course is named. Castle Stuart was recently renovated and is now a bed and break-

fast. It may at some point become part of the golf complex.

Another spectacular vista awaits at the 6th, a par 5 that tumbles to a firchside green set between two bunkers that look as if they’ve been there since Mary Queen of Scots owned the land.

In keeping with the 1920s look sought by the designers, the bunkering at Castle Stuart is schizophrenic. The predominant look is raw edged or “chunked,” as Parsinen and Hanse call it. Borrowing a technique first used at Merion Golf Club, they ripped up chunks of thick fescue sod and dropped them into sandy areas, simulating the erose look of original links bunkers.

In general, the greens at Castle Stuart are not overly large, and they’re softly contoured rather than severely sloped. Where the architects have added challenge is at the edges of the greens in the form of numerous humps and bumps. As at the Old Course, the same slope can be your friend or foe—in Parsinen’s words, “supportive or confounding”—depending on the angle of your approach.

The 9th is another short par 4 that entices stronger players into having a go at the green. But those who fail to get home will face a semi-blind slippery approach with peril left and beyond. The alternative is to play safely to a patch of fairway on the left, and the proper strategy can shift with each change in the wind.

Hole after hole at Castle *(continued on page 104)*

## Storming the Castle Course

Last June another Castle course opened, right in my backyard. Amid much fanfare, the Castle at St. Andrews became the seventh course under the banner of the St. Andrews Links Trust. The views at this Castle are just as marvelous as at Castle Stuart, but thereafter the similarity ends.

In contrast to the openness of Castle Stuart, David McLay Kidd’s Castle offers only three or four holes where you can see your tee shot land. You are all but deprived of what Alister MacKenzie called “the pleasurable excitement of links golf,” watching your ball bound and roll with the contours of the land.

In contrast to the rumpled fairways of Castle Stuart, the Castle’s fairways are marked by fall-away slopes and chocolate-drop mounds capped with thick shocks of fescue that have been dubbed “Don Kings.” A strong drive down the center of the fairway may find one of these with the result that the second shot is all but unplayable.

In contrast to the broad entries and gentle contours of the greens at Castle Stuart, the green fronts at the Castle are about as friendly as a French waiter, while the surfaces are roller coasters. For the average player, hitting and holding a green can require as much luck as skill, and depending on the hole location, two-putting will be somewhere between a miracle and an accident. In a stiff wind, this course becomes well nigh unplayable.

The Castle is five minutes from my home; Castle Stuart is about two hours and 45 minutes. It gives me much sadness to say this, but given the choice, I’ll make the drive north every time. —G.P.



*The Original by Donald Ross*

In 1925, Donald Ross was commissioned to design a golf course on a prime location just minutes from downtown Sarasota, Florida. He ingeniously created a layout that was both challenging and fun... the layout was meant to be played. Many of that park-like heritage, our venerable clubhouse recently completed an extensive conservation, which included the conversion of the putting surface to TIFEys. Membership at Sara Bay is more than just belonging to a country club... it is a privilege distinguished by long-standing traditions.

For membership information or to arrange a personal inspection, please call (941) 365-7998. You can learn more about the club on our website at [www.sarasbaycc.org](http://www.sarasbaycc.org).

**Sara Bay Country Club**

*Refreshing. Relaxing. Unconditionally Unforgettable.*

At the AAA Four-Diamond Villas of Grand Cypress, you'll enjoy original accommodations in fully furnished villas. Enjoy a golf top-notch experience at our Academy of Golf... and so much more.

THE VILLAS OF GRAND CYPRESS

Experience world-class Southern golf. Each villa is fully furnished and includes a full kitchen, washer/dryer, and more. From \$199 per night, per villa.

For more information, please call 800-775-3171 or visit [www.villasofgrandcypress.com](http://www.villasofgrandcypress.com).

**VILLAS OF GRAND CYPRESS**  
THE VILLAS OF GRAND CYPRESS  
ONE/THREE/FOUR/SEVEN  
OWENSON • FL 32814  
[www.villasofgrandcypress.com](http://www.villasofgrandcypress.com)

There are still a few villas left and they are going fast. Call today to reserve yours. Don't miss out on this opportunity. Only 30 villas left.

**CASTLE STUART**  
*(continued from page 39)*

Stuart works this way: teasing and tempting, coaxing and cajoling its assailants to make a choice. It's a course that exhorts you not only to play well but also to think well.

## Heading home

As on the front nine, the first three holes of the back play along the firch. Like the 1st, the 10th unfurls completely from the cliff-top championship tee.

If you've played Royal Dornoch you know that one of the distinguishing features of the course is the immense hill of gorse that looms over the front nine. Doubling that wall in height, breadth and steepness will offer an idea of the rampart that dominates the start of each nine at Castle Stuart.

I said, "wow" several times, but nowhere more reverently than when we exited the 10th green and hole number 11 suddenly revealed itself.

From the very base of the cliff, it plays 144 yards straight at the water with the Fortrose lighthouse staring back from the opposite shore. (One of Parsinen's mantras is to keep golfers "engaged" by drawing their eyes to landmarks, both natural and manmade.)

As we exited the front-right of the green, Parsinen pulled me over. "This little area is sort of my baby," he said. "I spent several days here with a wheelbarrow and shovel, shaping these humps and hollows. When a tee shot falls short of this green, I want the golfer to have to work hard to earn his par."

In contrast to Kingsbarns, where bulldozers had a major role in creating the course, relatively little earthmoving was done at Castle Stuart except in one area—holes 12 and 13—where the literally uphill battle was to transport golfers from the shores of the firch back to the top of the cliff.

Part of the solution was to carve a sort of mountain pass where the architects sited the 13th tee while using the earth and sand from that excavation to construct the 12th hole, a par 5 that climbs 528 yards to another green silhouetted against the sky.

The next stage of the ascent is a long uphill walk from the 12th green to the 13th tee, similar to the slog from the 8th green to the 9th tee at Cruden Bay. The assignment is physically taxing, the course's only real weakness.

The remainder of the climb is accomplished via the tee shot at No. 13, a par 4 that swoops

uphill and to the right in a manner reminiscent of the 1st hole at Augusta National.

At the entrance to the 13th green Parsinen committed topographic plagiarism. "I have always loved the crazy mounding in front of the 2nd green at the Old Course," he says, "so we actually measured all those humps and reproduced them exactly."

From our tees, about 6,800 yards, the downwind holes on this day played short. (The back tees are 7,007 yards and there is room to stretch the course to 7,400 yards.) But whenever we turned back into the breeze, we had our hands full. At the 224-yard 17th, at the very height of the property, I pulled out my driver, hit it solidly, and came up well short of the green.

What a quartet of par 3s: each a different length, direction and wind. I hit a full 7-iron, running 4-iron, punch 9-iron and driver. It's hard to think of a finer collection of short holes on any course in the British Isles.

The home hole is a par 5 of 595 yards that plays downhill and is reachable with a tailwind. Similarly to the 2nd hole, the bold player can gun down the right side and have a slightly shorter second shot, but it will have to be played over a vast area of sand and scrub, whereas the left side allows for a roll-on entry.

When I plucked my ball out of the hole at 18 I had the same feeling I get each time I play the Old Course: I couldn't wait to play it again.

## Future plans

After the round, I was surprised to see the plans for the clubhouse. It's similar to that of Royal Birkdale—a circular, white walled Art Deco design.

"We wanted to take advantage of the broad views," says Parsinen, "but when we tried to incorporate rounded picture windows into a traditional clubhouse it looked kind of silly. I got the idea while watching an episode of *Poirot* [the British TV series set in the 1930s]. It reinforces our desire for the project to reflect the feel of that era."

Along with the clubhouse will be a spa and a boutique hotel, as well as a series of resort-ownership lodges and apartments slotted into the site so as not to impinge on the golf. Down the road, there are plans for a second course on the banks of the firch.

So even if you don't get to Scotland this year, put this course on your list. If you love the Scottish links experience—and the joy of a walk in glorious surroundings—there is no better place to find it than Castle Stuart. **1**

some choices in life are perfectly clear...



Indulge. Unwind. Relax



Full Service Accommodations with 2 to 5 bedrooms. Body & Soul Spa, Gym and Beauty Salon "Award Winning" Ventanas del Mar Homes for Sale from US \$550,000.00  
Telephone: (297) 586-7800 • Fax: (297) 586-4970 • Toll free: 866-978-5158 • Email: [tierra.rent@setamet.com](mailto:tierra.rent@setamet.com) • Web page: [www.tierradelosol.com](http://www.tierradelosol.com)

**IF YOU CAN'T PLAY ST. ANDREWS IN SCOTLAND, TAKE ON TETHEROW IN YOUR OWN BACK YARD.**

Tetherow is the ideal destination of renowned golf course designer David Mulvaney. Like the rolling greens at Royal Dornoch and the nearby coastal Castle Dornoch, Tetherow makes world-class golf available to you in your own back yard.

TETHEROW GOLF CLUB • 18 HOLES • 6,800 YARDS • 13TH HOLE • 595 YARDS

CONTACT: TETHEROW GOLF CLUB • 18 HOLES • 6,800 YARDS • 13TH HOLE • 595 YARDS • 13TH HOLE • 595 YARDS • 13TH HOLE • 595 YARDS