

DESIGN NOTES

# Gil Hanse digs dirt at Omni La Costa

**Mike Young tweaks a Tennessee Tillinghast; Carrick and McBroom add a new nine at Nova Scotia's Fox Harb'r; Wannamoisett drops a video; and what in the name of Old Tom Morris?**

BY THE FIRST CALL STAFF | FEB 06, 2023



Course architect Gil Hanse's work on Omni La Costa Resort and Spa's Champions Course will be done in time for the first of three successive NCAA Division I Women's and Men's Golf Championships beginning in May 2024. (Photo: Brian Walters)

Omni La Costa Resort and Spa has broken ground on the renovation of its famed Champions Course, one of its two 18-hole courses, as it prepares to host three consecutive NCAA Division I Women's and Men's Golf Championships beginning in May 2024.

The renovation and ensuing NCAA Championships mark the beginning of a new chapter at one of the country's most iconic golf resorts, located in Carlsbad, California. The golf course work will be led by [Hanse Golf Course Design](#), founded by acclaimed architect [Gil Hanse](#), who recently designed Fields Ranch East at the soon-to-open Omni PGA Frisco Resort in Frisco, Texas.

"We are excited to officially kick off this work with Gil Hanse, Jim Wagner and the rest of their team," says Kurt Alexander, president of Omni Hotels & Resorts. "We believe that the Champions Course will be one of the marquee courses available to the public in Southern California after this renovation, and is another example of Omni's commitment to elevating the experience across our golf portfolio nationwide."

Hanse and his team will implement significant design changes with the NCAA's match-play format in mind — chief among them will be challenging players with more risk-reward decisions throughout their rounds. Further inspiration for the work will be drawn from classic Southern California courses, as aesthetics are tweaked to give the Champions Course a more proper sense of scale and place.

Specific changes planned include the creation of a drivable par-4 on No. 11, a repositioned green on the par-3 16th hole that is reminiscent of Augusta National's 12th hole, and a reachable par-5 on No. 18 with its putting surface brought closer to the existing creek. The course will play as a par-72 and have the flexibility to play from 4,300 yards to 7,500 yards, in order to accommodate players of all skill levels.

Other considerations in this project are environmental in nature. For example, transitioning irrigation lines that will continue to use reclaimed water, removing man-made ponds, and reintroducing natural barrancas composed of drought tolerant and native species.

"The setting and surrounds of the Champions Course lend themselves to a golf experience that looks and feels authentic to Southern California," Hanse said. "Our design work will bring a bit more simplicity and elegance to course aesthetics. This will be accompanied by a strategic focus balancing enjoyment for everyday play by members and resort guests, with shot-making requirements that test the best of collegiate golf."

The golf course work at Omni La Costa is planned to be joined in the coming months by another project focused on reimagining the resort's golf practice facility. This project will be led by [Beau Welling](#), and his firm, Beau Welling Design. The focus will be on elevating the practice experience with a newly lengthened driving range and expanded short-game area.

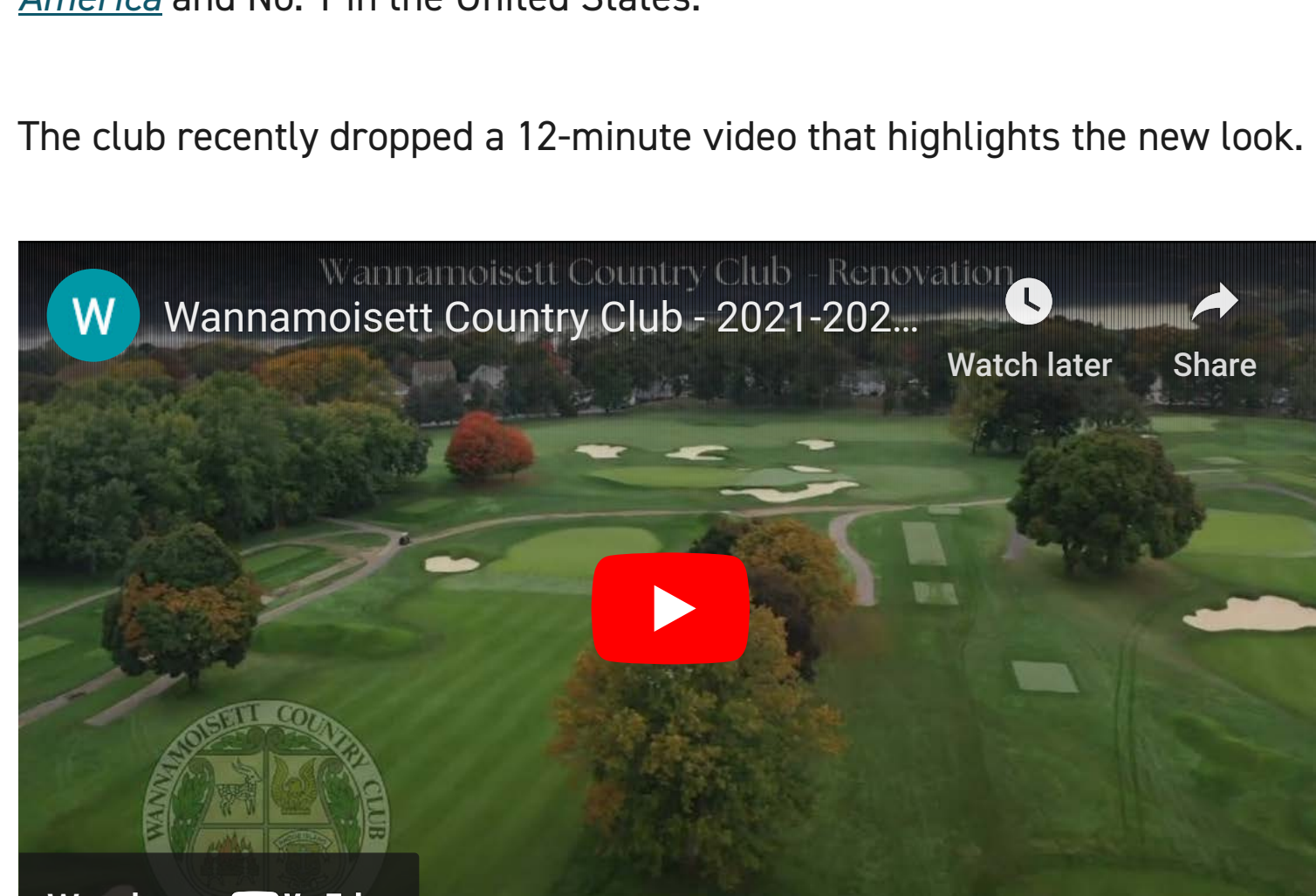
Like the golf course project, the practice range upgrades would incorporate a new state-of-the-art irrigation system that will allow the facility to maintain efficient usage of water for sustainability considerations while still exhibiting the highest maintenance standards.

"Omni La Costa was the site of victories by a 'who's who' of all-time golf champions, such as Gary Player, Tom Watson, Phil Mickelson and Tiger Woods, and we look forward to welcoming the next generation of greatness to play on the Champions Course," said Randy Zupanski, managing director at Omni La Costa Resort and Spa. "We are thrilled to have Gil and Beau help us take our golf experience to another level and have our resort guests and club members enjoy the highly anticipated re-design."

### SEE FOR YOURSELF

In 2022, [Andrew Green](#) completed a renovation of the [Donald Ross](#)-designed Wannamoisett Country Club, a private club in Rumford, Rhode Island. The work on the course, which opened in 1914 and hosted the 1931 PGA Championship won by Tom Creavy, has been well received. [Golf Digest ranked it as the No. 2 Best Renovation in North America](#) and No. 1 in the United States.

The club recently dropped a 12-minute video that highlights the new look.



### JOHNSON CITY CC RENOVATION REFLECTIVE OF GOLDEN AGE

Athens, Georgia-based architect [Mike Young](#) is continuing renovation work in next-door Tennessee, at Johnson City Country Club, home to a rare [A.W. Tillinghast](#) design in the South. Best known for his northeast masterpieces such as Winged Foot, Baltusrol and Bethpage Black, Tilly dipped into northeast Tennessee around 1918 and crafted two courses, including an 18-hole layout for the Johnson City Country Club. Nine of those 18 (today's back nine) were built and opened in 1919.

It was a modest effort where Tillinghast was concerned, reflecting the small-town nature of the club and the members who would be playing it. Bunkering was neither severe nor dramatic, but it was a solid layout nonetheless. Three more holes were added in the 1940s and local designer Lon Mills tacked on the final six holes in the 1950s, using much of the original Tillinghast routing. At that time, the course was rerouted. [John LaFoy](#) carried out an extensive renovation in 1987 and the course was content to stand pat until 2017, when the club began three years of minor bunker renovations.

The club hired Young, a veteran architect whose work includes Catechee and Longshadow in Georgia, to renovate the 18th hole in 2021. In so doing, Young brought some recognizable Tillinghast features into play, including bunkers and grass mounds. Young continued the project that emphasized bunker renovations and tree removal. In September 2022, Young began the next phase, concentrating on bunker work at holes 11, 12 and 14, together with other tweaks at holes 2, 4, 5 and 6. Young contends that he's not wedded to any one aspect of the Tillinghast style, simply because he feels Tillinghast did different things depending on the client and the site he was given. However, his aim is to produce golf course features that reflect the period in which it was built, the dawn of the Golden Age of architecture.

### GOING SOCIAL



### FOX HARB'R GETS ANOTHER NINE

Two of Canada's premier modern architects, [Doug Carrick](#) and [Tom McBroom](#), have teamed up to create a new (fourth) nine for Nova Scotia's Fox Harb'r Resort, which will ultimately result in two distinctive 18-hole layouts.

[Carrick told golfcoursearchitecture.net](#) that "Working together, we decided that rather than just building a new course, we would instead reimagine nine of the existing holes and combine them with nine new holes, all in a links style, to create a true ocean course. Construction began in September 2022 and we hope to have it completed by fall 2023. Our next phase will be a separate 'Vineyard' course — again, rethinking the existing back nine and combining it with nine new holes. The style is going to be different from what is at Fox Harb'r now. It's a big vision and very exciting."

McBroom noted that the current Fox Harb'r course is essentially a parkland style next to the ocean — in terms of bunkering, aesthetics and playability — and that the goal would be to convert the existing layout into one that more closely resembles a seaside links. Carrick added that increased width and bumped up risk/reward options will grace the reimagined holes as well.