Designer dream team putting a shine on Nova Scotia's fab Fox Harb'r

More spectacular seaside golf in Nova Scotia awaits

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Rob Longley

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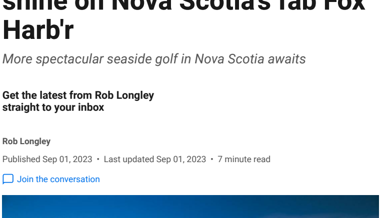

The spectacular coastline along Nova Scotia's Northumberland Strait will remain the focal point for Fox Harb'r's thorough redesign. Handout/Fox Harb'r

WALLACE, N.S. — It's a near-perfect sunny summer day on the shores of the Northumberland Strait, but there is a blemish to the clear blue skies bathing the brilliant Fox Harb'r resort.

We're standing alongside two of Canada's most accomplished golf course architects and plumes of dirt are swirling from the ocean breeze.

But while the view for the rest of us is altered by wafts of reddish brown, Doug Carrick and Tom McBroom see mostly green as they verbally paint the picture of what awaits. And with even the most rudimentary eye for golf course design, it isn't difficult to envision the new Ocean nine at the Nova Scotia playground coming to life.

For decades they separately have crafted some of Canada's finest stretches of golfing brilliance, renowned for their work with reputations well earned. And now Carrick and McBroom are united in the task of creating what they hope will be the latest sensational links land in the country.

So how have the innovative design minds of the two ultra-successful designers meshed on a potentially sensational reboot to Fox Harb'r?

"It starts with the coastline and taking advantage of that as much as possible," says Carrick, the softer spoken of a twosome that collectively has designed many of the top layouts in the land. "We're taking advantage of some of these high points where you can really give golfers a great backdrop."

We're standing on one of those spots as we talk (and gawk), the elevated tee of what will be the sixth hole, a challenging enough Par 4 with a vista that will delight.

"This is perfect," McBroom says, his eye drifting to the north and the salt water glimmering in the distance. "We're a half mile from the ocean but it feels like we're right there. The clever part of the design is we make sure you feel like you're on the ocean the whole time.

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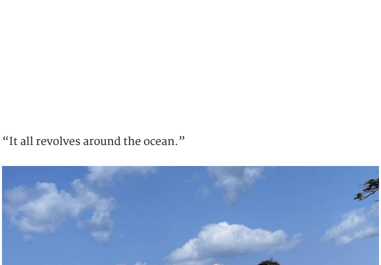
"It all revolves around the ocean."



From left, course architects Doug Carrick and Tom McBroom are joined by Fox Harb'r CEO Steven Joyce on one of the new oceanside holes under construction. ROB LONGLEY/TORONTO SUN

It is a work in progress for now as Fox Harb'r CEO Steven Joyce — son of the late Tim Hortons magnate Ron Joyce — digs in to further his father's legacy. A first-class facility from the time it opened in 2000, critics often wondered why the golf course wasn't always viewed as elite as the five-star resort at the heart of it.

Despite unused coastline that stretched far beyond the main resort buildings, original designer Graham Cooke, in consult with Ron Joyce, opted for the current configuration of nine along the water and nine parkland style holes to open on the inland side of the property.

Now, as the blueprint is about to turn green and more shoreline is put in play, plans will veer more towards the spectacular.

How Joyce and Fox Harb'r president Kevin Toth convinced the country's two elite designers to collaborate was the product of a bold move and one that could pay off handsomely when the finished product shines the way they expect.

After fielding proposals from a number of top North American architects, Joyce came up with the brilliant thought of approaching McBroom and Carrick to work together.

So far, the partnership has flourished thanks to a shared vision on a potentially special parcel of land.

The spectacular coastline along Nova Scotia's Northumberland Strait will remain the focal point for Fox Harb'r's thorough redesign. Handout/Fox Harb'r

When completed, the Ocean Course at Fox Harb'r will be rugged in its own way, but a distinctly different experience than the critically acclaimed (and spectacular) Cabot Cliffs and Cabot Links located some 300 kilometres away on the shores of Cape Breton Island.

"It will be quite different from Cabot, something more refined," McBroom said. "Cabot is selling that old world links course. This is going to be a fun course to play in its own way."

And certainly dramatically different than the original incarnation as the new 18-hole Ocean and Vineyard layouts will be positioned to complement that terrific high-end resort.

Shortly after opening, Fox Harb'r was named the top new Canadian course by Golf Digest. In 2004, it was as high as 12th on the SCOREGolf top 100 rankings but has now slipped out to honourable mention status. While such lists are subjective, there is some cache to them as well, a reality not lost on the Fox Harb'r crew.

"It's important for our team to be recognized — our turf team, our golf team — for all the great work that they do in maintaining and servicing our golf clientele," Toth said. "Does it make any difference on the business level? Sure. It certainly doesn't hurt.

"But ratings, from a resort point of view, only tell a small portion of what the overall experience is. At the end of the day, our true north has always been the satisfaction of our guests and members. It doesn't matter how great the golf course is if the service doesn't match."

Brown for now, the new look Fox Harb'r Ocean nine will be lush green by summer 2024. ROB LONGLEY/TORONTO SUN

As much as comparisons are inevitable — the Cabot courses have elevated the global reputation of Nova Scotia golf to new heights — the Fox Harb'r braintrust prefer to eschew such talk. Ultimately, though, golfers may be the winners with 36 holes on this tucked-away spot of the province and 36 more at Cabot forging the possibility for an elite bucket-list getaway to N.S.

For their part, McBroom and Carrick are committed to sculpting their own masterpiece, a layout that will be rugged in its own way but more in keeping with the resort concept. Unlike Cabot, there will be cart paths and more lush turf to blend with the superb conditions on the existing layout.

So far, the collaboration has been a match made in creative golf heaven as the designer dream team have shared both their vision and enthusiasm on regular visits to the property. The excitement will only increase this fall when seeding begins on the new Ocean nine.

"Having two Canadian designers was important to us," Toth said. "It wasn't the overriding deciding factor, but it was important. The tie-in with the great Canadian entrepreneur in Ron Joyce and a great Canadian resort ... it just made sense."

There's more than golf to Fox Harb'r where guests can try their aim at a variety of other pursuits including sport shooting. ROB LONGLEY/TORONTO SUN

BEYOND THE GREEN

As Toth notes, Fox Harb'r is about much more than golf and has been from the start, an homage to Ron Joyce's vision. A showpiece in the part of the province he was born, Joyce wanted a full-service resort of which golf would be but one component.

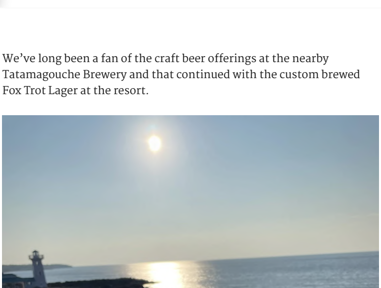
So there is sport shooting (with some savvy coaching we nailed some clay), axe throwing (couldn't get the proper spin on our try), archery, sea kayaking, trout fishing and a world-class spa and fitness facility. Fox Harb'r is anything but stagnant as it approaches a quarter century of luxurious leisure.

"Steven has always had a high level of respect for his father's legacy," Toth said. "When he makes decisions on expansion, he does it to enhance his father's legacy, not disrupt it. But those decisions are also made on how he sees the resort for the future."

Lobster is at the heart of the Atlantic Canada culinary experience and Fox Harb'r doesn't disappoint. ROB LONGLEY/TORONTO SUN

And then there is the food and drink with, as you would expect from an East Coast resort, some elite seafood options. As one member of our travelling party proved, a lobster trifecta is possible (lobster boil for dinner, lobster eggs Benedict for breakfast and lobster roll for lunch — all outstanding).

We've long been a fan of the craft beer offerings at the nearby Tatamagouche Brewery and that continued with the custom brewed Fox Trot Lager at the resort.



A cold Fox Trot Lager to wash down an outstanding East Coast meal doesn't hurt. ROB LONGLEY/TORONTO SUN

AS THEY BUILD IT

The entirety of the expanded and reconfigured 36 holes of Fox Harb'r won't be fully completed until the summer of 2025. But as construction rolls out in phases, a minimum of 18 holes will always be in play.

First up on the construction docket is the new Ocean nine that could be operational by late next summer, but if not up will be in action by spring of 2025. At that point, the Ocean back nine will be taken out of play and revamped. The final nine to be constructed will complete the Vineyard course.

Ideally, 27 holes will be in play by May 2026 with the final nine completed that summer.

Given the terrific piece of Nova Scotia coastline as the canvas, there is room for spectacular. When it comes to postcard holes, a new 184-yard Par 3 with carry over water has the potential to be a stunner.

It wouldn't be a seaside Atlantic Canada golf experience seafood. The lobster offerings are elite at Fox Harb'r. ROB LONGLEY/TORONTO SUN

LIVING LARGE

While Fox Harb'r accommodates most demographics of the golfing population, there is certainly a Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous element to the resort.

Canada's songbird, Anne Murray, is a member while Nova Scotia's own hockey superstar Sidney Crosby is an honorary member, with pictures in the clubhouse to prove it. Tiger Woods, meanwhile, holds the course record of 62.

There is a landing strip to accommodate private jets (as we did, a long story for another day) roughly a Par 4 in distance away from the current 10th tee and a deep water marina at the far end of the property if you choose to arrive by yacht.

rlongley@postmedia.com