



New golf courses have been evolving throughout Egypt but there is only one course that sits right on the foot of the only surviving structure of the Seven Wonders of the World: The Mena House Oberoi Golf Course at the Great Pyramids in Giza.

Golf course renovation begins at the Great Pyramids in Giza



Article by Bettina Schrickel (EIGCA)

PICTURED

Above:
The proposed holes (from left to right) 3 & 12, 8 and 18

Right:
Existing flood irrigation trenches

Main picture right:
Existing hole 8

Originally built in 1904 with hardly any touch-ups since, the golf course has been in dire need of renovation for many years. During various trips to Cairo during the past two years, I had discussed prospective remodeling strategies with the management of the hotel and golf course. After having introduced my design concept in a competition between seven participants, I am proud to have been chosen as the golf course architect to carry out the design for the complete renovation process.

Currently, there are 12 golf courses in Egypt and two more about to open soon. Seven of them are located in and around Cairo. The two older golf courses, Mena House Oberoi Golf Course and the Gezira Sporting Club, were built around the turn of the last century. Today, their primary benefits are their exceptional locations; otherwise they struggle to remain competitive with the modern and spacious golf courses that have been established during the past ten years as part of luxurious housing estates in the vicinity of Egypt's capital Cairo, a metropolis with 14 million inhabitants.

Even though the Mena House Oberoi Golf Course is on the cover of most Egyptian golf travel brochures due to its spectacular backdrop, the golf course itself is rather unspectacular, flat and out of shape. However, it is planned to transform it into a

true golfing landmark during the coming months.

Modern playing, irrigation and maintenance standards combined with extraordinary beauty and style will bring the golf course up to par. A treasure of beneficial existing factors like hundreds of magnificent old trees on site, the neighboring Cheops' Pyramids, the legendary Mena House Hotel across the street, and the short distance to the Cairo city center contribute to the prospective success of the project.



Interest of play, appearance, maintenance issues, safety and unnecessary long walks between greens and tees are going to be addressed. The entire golf course will be completely stripped of existing turfgrass to a depth of 30cm. New Paspallum varieties that will be sodded on the entire golf course will provide for smooth playing conditions in the future that will be irrigated with water from the river Nile. A state-of-the-art, automated irrigation system will replace the traditional flood irrigation that is currently used to maintain plant growth.

Even though the golf course site measures only 28 hectares and hundreds of old trees between fairways restrict rerouting of golf holes, the current system of 18 individual holes with 18 greens and partially shared fairways remains. It has never been the goal to compete with other golf courses in regards to shot distance. Thoughtfully placed and elegantly shaped hazards will provide for an exciting and special golfing experience.

All fairways and green complexes will be shaped in a visually attractive way and

incorporate rewards for well executed shots and punishment for less successfully hit golf balls. All new green surfaces will be spacious with sufficient pin positions for various degrees of playing difficulty and to allow turfgrass to recover sufficiently. USGA construction standards will provide for proper performance.

More than 90 percent of the existing trees will remain on the golf course due to a very sensitive design approach. Some trees had to be eliminated due to the necessity for rerouting some golf holes for safety purposes. The new layout incorporates the planting of new trees in various areas that serve ecological, playing and aesthetic purposes.

With permission of the Antiques Authority, we were able to introduce water hazards in the golf course which is a great asset to the course. Clean, sweeping mowing contours will provide for a highly aesthetic appearance of the golf course. I will personally mark the mowing contours on site during the grow-in period and record them in a plan for future reference.

The golf course will be illuminate at night to allow for an unrestricted playing experience. High daytime temperatures in the summer often exceed the human capability to play an enjoyable round of golf. Illumination also contributes to extended playing times during the winter months when daylight hours are limited.

Since the size of the golf course site does not allow for a driving range, practice facilities will consist of a putting green, chipping green with practice bunkers and an air-conditioned simulated indoor driving range.

Construction costs for the entire development will be US\$1.5 Million. General construction will be carried out by an experienced Egyptian company. The shaping however, will be done by a specialist from the US. Breaking ground is planned for later this spring. If everything goes according to plan, the new golf course will be open for play in less than a year!

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