

MACKENZIE'S LOST DESIGNS

EVERYBODY WHO PLAYS THIS GAME HAS HEARD OF DR ALISTER MACKENZIE. HARDLY ANYONE HAS HEARD OF DAVID EDEL. BUT A THROWAWAY LINE OVER A POST-ROUND DRINK IN ARGENTINA A DECADE AGO COULD SEE THE NAMES OF THESE TWO INEXTRICABLY LINKED FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.

WORDS: ROD MORRI

At first, David Edel couldn't believe what he had just heard. He had just finished playing Argentina's famed layout the Jockey Club, a Dr Alister MacKenzie design, with good friend Enrique Hernandez. The two were discussing the good doctor's design concepts over a post-round refreshment when Hernandez casually mentioned he knew someone who owned a set of MacKenzie plans for a course that had never been built.

It's the sort of throwaway line which can: a) cause a bloke to gag on his drink (which Edel very nearly did); and b) sound suspiciously untrue.

"I was a bit shocked at first," Edel says with a hint of understatement now. "But the guy he was talking about was part of a very wealthy family and it was certainly conceivable that they had commissioned MacKenzie to design a course for them at some stage.

"I knew MacKenzie had spent time in Argentina because we had just walked off one of the courses he designed at the Jockey Club. So I believed what he was telling me but it was still unbelievable."

Edel's immediate reaction, after recovering his breath, was to suggest setting up a meeting with the man in question, Jaime Zuberbuhler, to see if they could look at the plans and maybe even buy them.

"Enrique told me there was no way Jaime would sell them and to be honest, I wasn't in a position at the time to do anything about it so we kind of left it at that."

But Edel never forgot the conversation.

A self-confessed MacKenzie nut from his younger years (Edel grew up in Oregon but regularly travelled to California and played many of MacKenzie's best-known works, including Cypress Point), the thought of an unbuilt MacKenzie just lying around ate at him.

In his spare moments he did a bit of research about the proposed course, El Boqueron, and the more he dug the more fascinated he became.

The land where the course was proposed to be built was a

750 acre private estate belonging to one of Argentina's richest men, Enrique Anchorena.

Anchorena had plans to turn the estate into the grandest private park in all of South America and had hired some of the world's top designers for various aspects of the work from the landscaping of the grounds to the architecture of the buildings.

As fate would have it Anchorena also wanted a golf course – and his timing was perfect. It was 1930 and MacKenzie, already with a reputation as being one of the best in his field, was on an extended trip to Argentina to design several courses including the Jockey Club.

"The plan was to build a private course on the estate for Anchorena and his friends to enjoy," says Edel, "and MacKenzie was summoned to do the plans."

Given the nature of the course and its clientele MacKenzie was allowed somewhat more freedom than otherwise might have been the case and the plan he came up with was truly unique.

A keen student and fan of the Old Course at St Andrews, Mackenzie produced drawings for a golf course that featured nine double greens, something which had never been done before and Edel believes it still hasn't to this day.

"Because it was a private course with only a small number of people expected to be playing it at any given time there was scope to do things that might not have worked at a busier member-based or public facility," says Edel.

"The course he proposed was truly something special, even by his standards, and would no doubt have been revered had it been built."

Alas, that never happened. With the tentacles of the Great Depression spreading around the world, MacKenzie's golf course at El Boqueron was never constructed.

His drawings, however, remained in the possession of the Anchorena family and, in fact, hung above the fireplace at the



Jaime Zuberbuhler (left) and David Edel seal their deal beneath a famous portrait of MacKenzie at the Jockey Club.

home of Anchorena's son for six decades.

Then, in the early 1990's Jaime Zuberbuhler asked his uncle, Enrique Anchorena Jr, if he could make a copy of the plans he had grown up looking at above the fireplace.

"But his uncle just told him to take them, he could have them," says Edel. "So he did."

Fast forward to 2006 and Edel was again in Argentina visiting with his friend Enrique Hernandez. The two had become close when Edel, a PGA professional, spent his winters in South America teaching while the weather in the United States didn't allow such luxuries.

Again, Edel raised the possibility of buying the MacKenzie plan and bringing El Boqueron to life. This time, Hernandez agreed to set up a meeting to see if Edel's dream could be brought to fruition.

"For Jaime, the man who owned the drawings, it was a very important part of his family's history and I thought if we could build something that would respect and recognise that then he might be more

inclined to let us buy them," says Edel.

"So a meeting was organised and that was the proposition I put to him, that we wouldn't just be building the golf course to make money but as a legacy to MacKenzie, to Argentine golf and to Jaime's family.

"Thankfully, he loved the idea and agreed to sell me the plans."

(A small section of the El Boqueron plan, which Edel paid a not insignificant amount of money for, appears on the opposite page. Under the circumstances, Edel was not keen to have the plan reproduced in its entirety, a decision this magazine respects, and so an edited version appears here.)

Having overcome the first hurdle, the real work was just about to begin. Firstly, Edel needed a golf course architect to bring the drawings to life. Enter Mike DeVries, an American course architect whose personal and professional passion has been studying MacKenzie's work.

"It's the sort of opportunity you don't even dare to

dream about," says DeVries of his involvement in the project. "The rarest thing in the world is a once in a lifetime opportunity and this is certainly one of those."

While some would argue that any third party couldn't possibly interpret what MacKenzie envisioned, Edel rightly points out that the man himself rarely saw his finished courses. Which means getting El Boqueron in the ground more than 75 years after MacKenzie's death is simply maintaining the status quo.

"One of the things that is so right about this project is that MacKenzie ISN'T here to oversee it," he says.

"The reality of most of his work is that he would walk the land, draw up the plans and then leave. Somebody else almost always oversaw the actual construction.

"You only have to look what he did in Australia and the courses he was responsible for there to know that. MacKenzie never saw Royal Melbourne as a completed course and it's still regarded as one of the best in the world.

"So if we can get this course in the ground, as long as we have the right architect who understands MacKenzie's work, it will be a faithful reproduction of how the man himself did most of his work."

Next, he needed some land that would suit the project and he found it in, of all places, Texas.

"I found a piece of property in Austin, Texas, which is almost exactly the same as the original site in Argentina," says Edel.

"The slope of the land, the size ... even the prevailing winds are almost the same. So it's absolutely perfect in every way."

Lastly, and most importantly, he needs some money and ironically, just as the Great Depression scuttled the building of the original course, the world's recent financial problems are having an adverse effect on its second incarnation.

"Golf is kind of a dirty word in the finance industry at the moment so it's proving a little difficult to get the course underway," says Edel.

"Which is funny, really, because the plan MacKenzie drew is really a plan for the time of the Depression. There are many things about this course which make it economically feasible and sustainable.

"It's almost as though when he did the plans MacKenzie had in the back of his mind that golf courses needed to be cheaper to build and maintain than they were at that time and here we are, 80 years later, in exactly the same position."

Edel now lives on the property where he is hoping to build the course and his frustration when discussing the difficulty of raising the finances for the project is obvious.

But he remains as optimistic as he is enthusiastic, believing what he will eventually achieve will be something truly special.

"What I'm trying to build here is not just a golf course but a club," he says. "And not a club as many of us have come to know them but a proper club, a place where the membership feel a real connection and sense of ownership of the place."



MACKENZIE'S MASTER PLAN

David Edel is understandably protective of the El Boqueron plans mapped out by Alister MacKenzie. So much so, we can only print a small section of the sketched plans created 80 years ago.

However, from this brief snippet (signed by MacKenzie at the bottom) you can get a feel for the highlights including the double green complexes and the use of gorse, which are represented by shaded patches on the plan.

1st hole - A mid-length par-4 opening hole with two playing lines to the double green shared with the 17th.

4th hole - The first par-3 at El Boqueron. Look at the classic bunkering short of the double green shared with the 14th hole.

14th hole - A short driveable par-4 that plays all downhill but beware the bunker short right of the green.

Pencil sketch adaptations of MacKenzie's El Boqueron plan by US course designer Mike DeVries showcase the fantastic double green complexes and bunkering the Good Doctor had foreseen.



PHOTOS & DRAWINGS: SUPPLIED BY DAVID EDEL

"The Jockey Club, where this whole thing began, is one of the world's great clubs for that very reason. You walk into the clubhouse and there are spike marks in the floor which have been there for god knows how long.

"It's a place where the members really belong and you can sense that. It's almost tangible."

To many, Edel would seem an idealist, a hopeless romantic who has sunk his life savings into a dream that has little chance of ever seeing the light of day.

But on his travels his infectious passion and unwavering belief in what he is trying to do have convinced others to come along for the ride.

And, although well aware of the personal risk he is taking, he has a genuine desire to make a lasting contribution to the game.

"Golf is my life," he says. "I love the game and its history and everything it stands for.

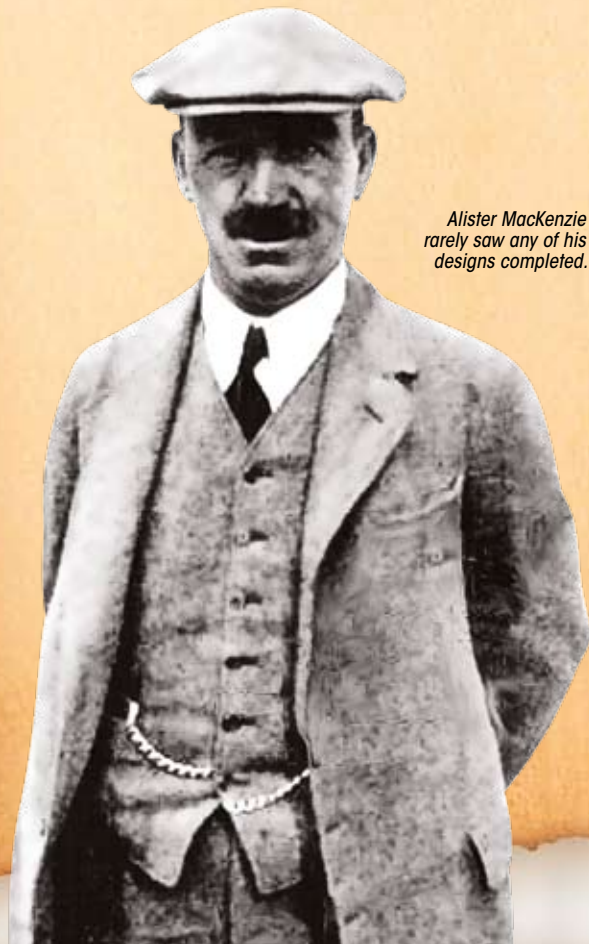
"I'm a historian and I want it to be something special to golf, to leave a legacy that means something. That is what this project is. When I finally took possession of the plans I also took possession of the responsibility to make sure this happens.

"And I refuse to be the person whose headstone reads, 'Here lies an idiot that ruined a MacKenzie' ... I'm determined not to let that happen."

The obstacles are undoubtedly many but Edel has already proved adept at overcoming adversity. His vision requires only a small number of investors with the game's history at heart to come aboard and he will be underway.

"They could be from anywhere in the world, even Australia," says Edel. "The important thing is that the integrity of what MacKenzie designed is maintained. El Boqueron will never be a housing development or have a day spa or any of that sort of thing.

"It will be a golf club, about and for golf, and that's it. And I reckon I'll eventually find enough like-minded souls to appreciate the vision and help me to make it happen." ●



Alistair MacKenzie rarely saw any of his designs completed.

BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE ...

DAVID EDEL could be forgiven for feeling he is starring in one of those bad late-night TV commercials where no matter how good the deal already is, the annoying presenter always feels the need to tell you "there's more".

Securing the plans for El Boqueron would have been ample satisfaction for the unassuming Oregonian but, as fate would have it, there was "more" in store for him.

During his time in Argentina, Edel had visited several local markets and antique stores hunting down trinkets and souvenirs both for his personal collection and as future exhibits for the El Boqueron clubhouse when it is finally built.

Among the treasures he found was a full set of the local golf magazine *El Golfer Argentino* covering the years 1931 to 1960. Inside the pages was another heaven-sent find ... another set of illustrations for a MacKenzie course that was never built and reference to the existence of a third.

"When MacKenzie travelled overseas it wasn't uncommon for him to be commissioned by a lot of different clubs to design or re-design their course but those plans weren't always acted on," says Edel.

"And that looks to be what happened in Argentina. I found an article in one of the 1931 magazines about some plans MacKenzie had done for a sailing club in Buenos Aires called Nautico San Isidro (pictured in part below).



"The club had reclaimed quite a bit of land by dredging and they were planning to re-claim more so they commissioned MacKenzie to do a plan for nine holes initially and an 18 hole master-plan for when all the dredging was complete.

"They built the first nine but there were problems with flooding in the area where the other nine were supposed to go so they never got built. The magazine had quite a large reproduction of MacKenzie's plan and the holes that weren't built were the more spectacular of the two nines so it was a real shame.

"So I got in touch with the club and at first they didn't know what I was talking about because it had all been long forgotten but eventually they found MacKenzie's plans in an office drawer somewhere and they were quite happy to sell them to me. Apparently they planned to spend the money on irrigation."

The third set of illustrations was for a golf club that still exists to this day called Mar Del Plata. Stewards of the club had apparently decided MacKenzie's presence in Argentina presented a good opportunity to perhaps make some improvements to their course so invited the doctor to make suggestions.

"But rather than suggest improvements MacKenzie's solution was to bulldoze the whole course and start again," says Edel with a laugh. "So he presented them with a plan for a completely new golf course.

"That wasn't what they wanted at all because the Depression was coming and they had no intention of spending that sort of money so again, the plans were filed away in an office and never acted upon.

"When I approached them they were quite happy to sell the plans so I now have plans for three unbuilt MacKenzie courses."

It's an embarrassment of riches Edel now finds himself in possession of and with El Boqueron taking up the bulk of his time and energy he has no clear idea if or when the other two 'lost' MacKenzie designs may be built.

"They're not really at the top of my priority list at the moment but I'd really like to see both of them built," he says. "And they could be anywhere in the world. A bit like El Boqueron all that is required is a piece of property similar in style to make it happen.

"Neither is on a particularly unique parcel of land so finding that shouldn't present a major problem. As with El Boqueron, it will really come down to finding the finance."

ROD MORRI is a regular contributor to Golf Australia. He hosts the online radio show, *TalkinGolf.com*, three days a week. If it's about golf you'll hear about it on *TalkinGolf.com*