# The Design Genius of Robert Trent Jones Sr.

A Course Appreciation Guide



## 66

The Sun Never Sets on the Robert Trent Jones Empire

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Hole #16, Firestone Country Club A kron, O H Robert Trent Jones (RTJ) was more than a designer. In the post-war era he revolutionized how we see and play golf — from the ground, in the air, and even as we watched from our living rooms. He embraced modern construction techniques to change and advance the game. His work extends around the globe, from elite, championship quality private courses, to improved municipal play for everyday golfers, to resort destinations and across all climates and soil conditions.

Through a series of interviews with those who knew him best, along with respected journalists and design aficionados from member courses, the Robert Trent Jones Society has identified design characteristics and examples of his work to educate golfers of all abilities to better appreciate his contribution to the game.

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# Robert Trent Jones Biographical Timeline

### **1906**:

Born in Ince-in-Makerfield, England, Robert Trent Jones accompanied his parents to the United States at the age of five. The family settled in East Rochester, New York.

## **1930**:

While competing for work at Midvale G&CC, Stanley Thompson and Jones form a partnership that allows Jones to learn from the Canadian master.

#### 1938:

Mature in his design philosophies, Jones dissolves his partnership with Thompson. This year he publishes his landmark manifesto titled "Golf Course Architecture."

GOLF COURSE

ABCRITECTURE

#### **1947:**

The American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA) is founded with Jones as its youngest charter member. The ASGCA elevates golf design to a true profession.



#### **1948**:

RTJ reinvents the par 3 16th at Augusta by damming Rae's Creek and lengthening the hole. This redesign and changes to #11 become part of the heroics on Master's Sunday in the televised era.

## **1928**:

Jones attended Cornell University, where he designed his own course of study to become a professional golf course designer. While at Cornell, Jones meets Ione Tefft Davis. They would marry in 1934.

## 1934:

Throughout the Depression, Jones pitches and lands projects to build public golf courses using public work funds. This effort starts a trend towards more professionally designed public golf for the post-war masses.

## **1945**:

RTJ is introduced to Bobby Jones, becoming lifelong friends. Their collaboration led to the design of Peachtree, a perennial Top 100 classic.

## **1949**:

Heroic signature holes come into vogue with designs like the par 5 13th at the Dunes Golf and Beach Club in Myrtle Beach. The Dunes propels RTJ's reputation in the advent of golf tourism.



#### **1950**:

After the 1948 death of Donald Ross, Jones offered his services to update Oakland Hills. Scrapping Ross' remodeling plans, Jones created the monster course "conquered" by Ben Hogan in the 1951 U.S. Open.

#### **1964**:

RTI builds Mauna Kea over lava wasteland on the island of Hawaiianother first. He invents new methods to grow and maintain turf to create the jewel of the Hawaiian coastline.

## yglassHill Golf Course PEBBLE BEACH"

### **1966**:

Spyglass Hill opens to immediate acclaim along the Monterey coast. Featuring some of the best opening holes in golf, Spyglass remains a perennial Top 10 public access course alongside Pebble Beach.

#### **1987**:

Jones is inducted in the World Golf Hall of Fame, the first living architect to be honored. He joins Donald Ross.



#### **1990s**:

Roger Rulewich and RTJ work with the state of Alabama to create the largest golf construction project ever- the RTJ Trail. The Trail provides Alabama with a huge economic impact and revolutionizes golf tourism - again.

## 1950s:

As the decade draws to a close, Jones singlehandedly created a new class of championship-ready courses with Point O'Woods, Old Warson, Bellerive, Tanglewood, Congressional and Firestone.

## **1965**:

Jones enters the European market with Sotogrande using revolutionary irrigation systems and new turf grasses to withstand the dry coastal climate. Valderrama would follow becoming the premier venue in Europe.

## **1970s**

Sons Bobby and Rees start their own design firms, extending the Jones legacy with gems such as Cascata, Poppy Hills, Chambers Bay and numerous RTJ Sr. redesigns.



## 2000:

RTJ dies in Ft. Lauderdale on June 14, 2000, having drawn his final sketch: #12 at Southern Highlands, NV while collaborating with his son Bobby.

For a full biographical timeline please visit: RobertTrentJonesSociety.com





# Routing

"The characteristics of the land do dictate, to a great degree, the way holes are designed. You have to adapt what is there to the shot values you want to build into a hole."

RTJ was a master at routing options for a particular piece of land. Based on careful examination of topographical maps and especially on-site visits, Jones and his construction crews would find the best routing options for a given property and budget. This often meant four or five plans before construction even began!

While today optionality is commonplace, pre-war designs were often simple back-and-forth exercises. Early designers rarely invested the time for client input, the realities of the ground, and even simple enjoyment.

RTJ quotes taken from Golf's Magnificent Challenge



#### Spyglass Hill Golf Course Pebble Beach, CA

Year Designed: 1966



Photo Credit: Spyglass Hill

A perennial Top 50 course on anyone's list, RTJ took a minimalist approach to routing Spyglass, built for less than \$500,000. Winding through coastline and woods on the Monterey Peninsula, it remains a worthy complement to its older siblings Pebble Beach and Cypress Point.

"An extraordinary gift of land, my father paid homage to both Pine Valley on the first five holes and then Augusta as the course moves through the tall pines. He created inland water features that appear natural, which was unique to California at that time "

**Robert Trent Jones Jr.** 

#### Bellerive Country Club St. Louis, MO Year Designed: 1960

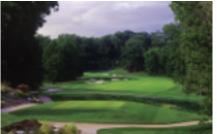


Photo Credit: Bellerive Country Club

Despite the pastoral setting, Bellerive is a bold Jones design using the property's many features to maximum effect. He incorporated the winding creek and added ponds while utilizing the elevations to perfection. His green contouring has challenged the best for 60+ years.

"When Bellerive moved its facility, Club officials and my father found an ideal site to create a routing of natural minimalist holes that provide a perfect ebb and flow for member and championship golf."

**Rees Jones** 

Firestone Country Club, South Course, Akron, OH Year Redesigned: 1959



Photo Credit: Firestone Country Club

While constrained by much of the original layout, Jones' subtle changes brought new teeth to the South course. Jones added 400 yards while adapting greens, bunkers and ponds to his unique style. His routing and diversity of design remains a favorite championship venue.

"I'm always amazed at how well designed the South Course is. Jones' routing allows for both challenging golf, adjustments in length as the game evolves and viewing by patrons. He made full use of the available elevations to create exciting holes that never age"

Jay Walkinshaw, General Manager

Valencia Country Club Valencia, CA Year Designed: 1965



Photo Credit: Valencia Country Club

An early example of master planning, Valencia winds through suboptimal land. Despite this, the thoughtful routing provides an amazing variety of holes, shot values and conditions.

"Valencia is not prime land – flat in places and hemmed in by roads and homes. Yet Jones created a masterful routing using hole sequences and incorporating challenges such as water, bunkering, false fronts and runoffs that require focus. It is hard to imagine a more enjoyable course for this kind of property."

Jim Johnston, Club Delegate









# Green Complexes

"The green itself should be designed to provide a variety of options. It should be divided into areas, each with a different problem that requires a controlled stroke to overcome."

Jones revolutionized green contouring. He would hand sketch large green complexes and have his expert "shapers" craft his vision into four or five distinct putting areas. He would frame these hole locations with mounding and bunkering, giving each green complex distinct visual appeal and excitement for the player's approach shot. Better ball strikers could go for the pin, while still offering a large target for regular players. Subtle mounding in and around the green also created a myriad of tests to achieve a "hard par."

In addition to providing a variety of hole locations for everyday enjoyment, these large-shaped greens had a practical benefit: they help spread traffic, thereby reducing maintenance.



Hole #4, Old Warson Golf Club St. Louis, MO Year Designed: 1955



Photo Credit: Old Warson Golf Club

The 4th at Old Warson is a bottle-shaped green that is slightly elevated above the fairway. Its narrow opening allows a player to run an approach shot onto the green. It widens at the middle and back allowing for different elevations and contours. Mounding adjacent to the back left bunker protects a shot from running down a steep embankment.

"The variety of pin positions and defenses posed by the contours and mounding on #4 provide endless thought and expert shot making."

Jerry Freeland, Club Champion

Hole #9, Mission Viejo Country Club Mission Viejo, CA Year Designed: 1966



Photo Credit: Mission Viejo Country Club

The 9th green complex exemplifies RTJ providing options for all skill levels. The green is divided into three sections: a narrow front pin area with a false front, a middle-left area that sharply slopes from right to left and an up-slope back right section. All three require a precise shot to achieve birdies. Higher handicappers can reach any portion of the green and have a difficult but fair opportunity for their par.

"In addition to offering a variety of pin positions, the left side and middle right bunkering add to both the beauty and thought that goes into tackling #9." David Cardwell, Club Delegate Hole #7, Point O'Woods Golf Club Benton Harbor, MI Year Designed: 1958

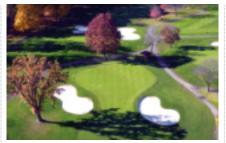


Photo Credit: Point O'Woods Golf Club

The 7th is a breathtaking example of green-complex architecture. While a daunting 458 yards, the primary challenge is imposed by the diabolical green with three distinct zones. A narrow front half is guarded on both sides while there are major contrasts between a back-right pin and a back-left pin. Only the most precise shots favoring the center of the green will hold.

"After a strong drive into the fairway, a player's strategy on the approach shot will be dramatically different depending on which zone the pin resides that day." Alex Craig, Club Delegate Hole #2, Pauma Valley Golf Club Pauma Valley, CA Year Designed: 1960



Photo Credit: Pauma Valley Golf Club

A great example of Robert Trent Jones genius comes with the second hole's green complex. The green has two different identities, split right down the middle. The left side is subtle with break while the right side has significant slope from left to right. Most players will favor the "safe" middle but will likely face a challenging downhill putt.

"The second hole at Pauma exemplifies RTJ's genius with its green within a green. It never leaves a player with an easy, mindless, two putt."

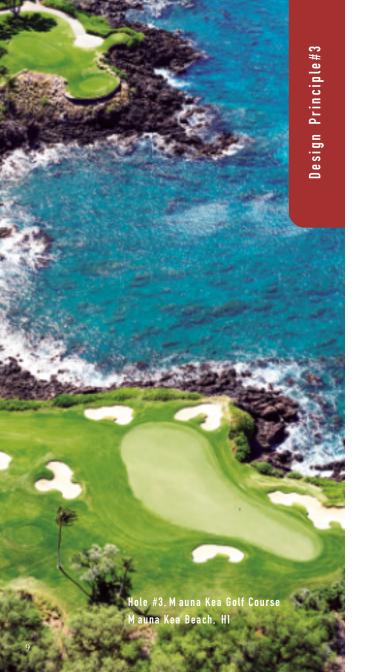
#### Jordan Masciorini, Club Delegate







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# Heroic Shot Values

"There must be a just reward for those attempting the heroic carry, and there must be a way around for those unwilling to take the risk."

Like the great designers before him such as Tillinghast and MacKenzie, RTJ popularized heroic shots on his courses, usually in carefully designed par fives, short par fours and over water. What makes golf fun is the opportunity to hit that one special shot, ideally in a close match.

As his son Bob put it, it is the tension between attacker (the golfer) and defender (the architect) that makes a great golf course or hole. An expert golfer himself, RTJ embraced input from the likes of Bobby Jones, Gene Sarazen and Sam Snead, and was the first to incorporate modern club distances and ball flight in his designs.



Hole #13, The Dunes Golf and Beach Club, Myrtle Beach, SC Year Designed: 1949



Photo Credit: The Dunes

Even after 70+ years, Waterloo remains the archetype of heroic golf holes. Angling around a large lake, the par 5 requires both an accurate drive and a heroic second shot for any hope of a short iron into the green. Players can bite off as much or as little to set up their approach.

"The Dunes Club remains the crown jewel in Myrtle Beach and #13 is its ultimate test. No one can "just play" Waterloo: It takes careful thought from tee to green and steely nerves to execute a most difficult par."

**Dennis Nicholl**, Head Professional

Hole #16, Augusta National Golf Club, Augusta, GA Hole Designed: 1947



Photo Credit: Augusta National

Invited by the immortal Bobby Jones to enhance MacKenzie's design, RTJ reoriented and lengthened the hole across a newly dammed Rae's Creek. As seen by millions every spring, his iconic 16th stirs the souls of golfers and viewers alike.

"The greatest memories of golf, both heroic and tragic, are defined by Masters' Sunday and the excitement of #16."

**Dave Leigh** 

Hole #3, Mauna Kea Golf Course Mauna Kea Beach, HI Year Designed: 1964



Photo Credit: Mauna Key Beach Hotel

RTJ built famous resort courses around the world on unique property. Perhaps no piece of land was more daunting for spectacular golf than Mauna Kea. Built on the Big Island on soil converted from lava rock, it is an engineering marvel. The par 3 third hole utilizes a beautiful ocean inlet to maximum sensory effect.

"The third demands a true hero's choice: either courageously going over the ocean inlet with its 200+ yard carry, or simply bailing out right. Even the most accomplished are taken aback by both its beauty and challenge."

**Robert Trent Jones Jr.** 

Hole #11, Bellerive Golf Course St. Louis, MO Year Designed: 1960



Photo Credit: Bellerive Country Club

The short par 4 11th offers a true risk-reward. Players choosing to lay up short will only need a mid-iron off the tee, leaving a wedge to the long, narrow green. However, at distances of 271 to 325 yards, players can be enticed to try to go for the green.

"With the pond guarding the front and right sides of the green, #11 surrenders as many bogeys and double bogeys as it does birdies"

Tim O'Neill, Club Delegate







# Water Hazards

## "Water is my favorite hazard, for several reasons. It is the most penal hazard, and it is certainly the most dramatic."

Prior to RTJ embracing water features in his designs, it was typically relegated to bogs and the occasional stream. As golf exploded in popularity, Jones incorporated beautiful water features into his routings, creating memorable shot values over "the ultimate hazard."

Jones did not use water indiscriminately— it highlighted his routing and oriented players for the best approaches. Most importantly, it helped channel excess water off the course improving playability. Some of his best courses feature winding streams and collection ponds, leading to better land utilization, especially in parkland settings.



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#### North Hills Country Club Manhasset, NY Year Designed: 1961



Photo Credit: North Hills Country Club

Water is used to great effect on the back nine. Jones used a modest sized pond and strategically placed oak to add both challenge and beauty to holes 12 and 13. The narrow green on the par 3 12th is protected by water front and right. The elevated tee on 13 gives the option to hit driver and risk water or take your approach over the imposing tree.

"Whether you gamble or play it safe, you are always tested with water. Accuracy and thought are on full display to navigate these holes."

Vince Formato, Club Delegate

#### Crooked Oaks Golf Course Seabrook Island, SC Year Designed: 1974



Photo Credit: Crooked Oaks

The low country of South Carolina presents special challenges to water management. RTJ used a minimalist approach to accomplish needed drainage while simultaneously preserving hundreds of live oaks and thus the name Crooked Oaks. Six greenside ponds with their angled greens challenge all golfers with picturesque approach shots.

"Constant wind variations off the Atlantic mean that no two rounds are ever the same. Day in and day out, it is a pleasure to play." **Robert Fisk**, Club Champion

#### The Tuxedo Club Tuxedo Park, NY Year Designed: 1956



Photo Credit: The Tuxedo Club

Water is carefully managed throughout with ponds, and creeks always in play. After a series of water hazards on the front, it reappears with a vengeance on holes 16, 17 and 18. The tee shot on the 181-yard par 3 17th is one of the most intimidating on the course. A pond wraps around the left side of the green with bunkering requiring precise yet daring play. Certainly A Difficult Par here.

"The 17th hole is often a critical hole in a match or stroke play competition. The key to success is avoiding the watery grave that surrounds the green on three sides." Jake Lindsay, Club Delegate Greenville Country Club, Chanticleer Course, Greenville, SC Year Designed: 1969



Photo Credit: Greenville Country Club

RTJ made great use of the creek that meanders throughout the Chanticleer property, creating holes with unique character and a variety of exciting water features. The 14th is a beauty with 195 yards of forced carry. A back right pin location is hands down the toughest on the course where the green is about 5 yards deep and guarded in front by a very steep bunker.

"The 14th at the Chanticleer course is my favorite golf hole in Greenville. It is the ultimate test over water."

Lucas Glover, Tour Professional







Eisenhower Blue Golf Course Colorado Springs, CO Year Designed: 1959

"Eisenhower's runway tees provide us the opportunity to adjust not just the yardages, but also the look of the hole. W ith the diversity in ability of our members, this is a great advantage. The large tees provide easy mower access and ample space for divot healing, and with 60,000 rounds of golf in a 7 month period, having small tee boxes would be an impossible challenge."

Steve W allace, Director of Golf

# Flexible Teeing Options

"Where the land allows it, varying the placement and elevation of the tees can do much to enhance the beauty and excitement of a hole."

While runway tees are considered a Jones trademark, they really represent a simple, yet revolutionary post-war concept: different tees for different abilities. Earlier courses had limited teeing options, thereby reducing the playing enjoyment for a growing sport.

Jones not only improved playability and comradery for groups of all skill levels, but runway tees were efficient to maintain and mow. This helped reduce construction and annual maintenance costs, particularly in municipal and public play courses.



# Bunkering

## "Bunkers influence and direct play. By skillful placement of fairway bunkers, the architect literally can 'tell' the player how he wants the shot played."

RTJ used bunkering to frame his greens and defend the fairway and green targets. They enhanced the routing and highlighted the natural beauty of the land. His cloverleaf style was synonymous with post-war parkland golf vs. the kidney or pot-shape designs of an earlier era.

He used many bunkering styles throughout his career, including "Cape & Bays" for which he is perhaps best known. He rounded "face" bunkers on parkland courses to be clearly visible hazards and were more easily maintained. RTJ prided himself on his bunker designs and his shapers created bunker styles appropriate to their site, challenging longer hitters while exciting average players into skillfully navigating the hole.



# Design Principle#6

M etedeconk National Golf Club Jackson, NJ Year Designed 1987

"Jones combined the size, slopes and contours of his greens to bring the greenside bunkering into play in ever changing ways. Deep or shallow, the bunkers were an integral part of the green complex and the playability of the hole. W atching him paint the sand lines of new ly shaped bunkers in his plans, his 'capes and bays' of wind blow n links would emerge. Once I was able to replicate his technique, he let me do this."

Roger Rulew ich, Golf Architect



Port Royal Golf Course Southampton, Bermuda Year Designed:1970

'Robert Trent Jones felt strongly that golf's unique appeal was tied to the beauty and variety of its playing fields. He used his artistic eye and unparalleled design skill to illuminatea property's natural charms. Vastly underrated for the aesthetic appeal of his many designs, Jones had an eye for integrating beauty into his creations like few others in his profession. Courses such as the Dunes, M auna Kea, Spyglass Hill and Port Royal are as delightfulto look at as they are to play."

Joe Passov, Golf writer

## **Emphasis on Natural Beauty**

"Nature provides the raw material. The architect, working with that material without desecrating it, gives us the final product."

RTJ courses around the world are known for the careful balance between nature, great golf and land stewardship. Tee positions have been deliberately placed to draw attention to vistas, and greens are nestled in crafted natural settings to appear authentic.

It is that attention to detail and harmony with nature that sets Jones apart from other designers in the post-war era. As modern construction techniques, bigger budgets and bigger egos became the norm, the subtle qualities of an RTJ signature course took on more value.



# Elevations and the Aerial Game

"We're trying to force the player to stand on the tee and make a judgement, devise a strategy for playing that particular hole. And we want that strategy to have to be different on as many holes as possible through the round."

RTJ used the modern tools of his day—in terms of construction, course maintenance, coupled with an intimate knowledge of golf equipment itself—to change the fundamental nature of the game. Improved equipment and players' skills were rendering the old pre-war designs impotent, so he adapted course design with interesting elevation changes that challenged the pros and excited newcomers to the game. Larger greens and improved watering methods made for ample targets for well-pitched shots, while always mindful of offering a safe route.



# Design Principle#8

Golden Horseshoe Golf Club W illiamsburg, VA Year Designed: 1963

"The four par three holes at Golden Horseshoe Gold have been recognized as one of the best collection of par threes in the world. The natural holes all require a water carry necessitating an aerial only approach. Each hole is unique, and they all are dramatic."

Rees Jones

# A Commemorative Perspective by Ron Whitten

The sun never sets on the Robert Trent Jones empire. In a career that stretched from Presidents Coolidge to Clinton, RTJ encircled the globe with tees, fairways and greens.

The numbers are staggering. Trent had a hand in 320+ golf designs spread over 42 American states and 28 other nations. His work has hosted 79 national championships, including 20 U.S. Opens and 12 PGA Championships. In the 35-year history of Golf Digest's rankings of America's 100 Greatest Golf Courses, Jones designed 44 courses, the most of any architect.

Trent Jones had a point of view generations ahead of his time. He predicted livelier balls and clubs, improved maintenance practices and more athletic players, and designed accordingly. His remodeling of Oakland Hills for the 1951 Open gave Jones instant notoriety as an enemy of the pro. To cultivate his new image, he became a tireless self-promoter.

He designed courses for presidents, kings, sheiks and titans of industry. He also worked to expand public golf and built several for military installations. He made quality golf accessible and affordable for all.

No architect had a more identifiable style. It consisted of extremely long tees, fairways pinched on one or both sides by clusters of jigsaw-piece bunkers, huge sweeping greens protected by more elaborate bunkers or by his favorite hazard, a lake. No architect used water hazards as boldly, extensively or effectively as Robert Trent Jones.

Trent was often compared to Frank Lloyd Wright, but in his heyday, he was really more like Cecil B. DeMille, orchestrating blockbuster projects in 15 spots simultaneously. His architecture was a recognizable brand, faithfully reproduced by all who worked for him.

In a sense, Robert Trent Jones started it all, the modern business of golf architect-as-celebrity producing real life calendar art. Everyone in the business, and everyone who enjoys modern architecture, ought to remember that every time the sun rises.

# Noteworthy RTJ Courses and Remodels

This short list is not meant to favor any course, but. to provide historical context on the extent of RTJ's impact on modern golf 1945-1995. Dates associated with work are taken from *A Difficult Par* – Editor

Peachtree Golf Club, Designed in 1948 (w/Robert Tyre Jones) Perennial Top 50 U.S., multiple publications

Dunes Golf and Beach Club, Designed in 1949 Perennial Top Public Access Course in the U.S., multiple publications

Oakland Hills Country Club, South Course, Redesigned in 1950 U.S. Open 1951, 1961, 1985/ PGA Championship 1972, 1979/ U.S. Senior Open 1981, 1991

Baltusrol Golf Club, Lower Course, Redesigned in 1952 U.S. Open 1954, 1967, 1980, 1993 / U.S. Women's Open 1961, 1985

Old Warson Country Club, Designed in 1954 Ryder Cup 1971

Oak HillCountry Club, East Course, Redesigned in 1956 U.S. Open 1956, 1968, 1989 / PGA Championship 1980 / U.S. Senior Open 1984 / Ryder Cup 1995

Point O'Woods Golf and Country Club, Designed in 1958 Perennial Top 100 Golf Course, various publications

Tanglewood Golf Club, Designed in 1958 PGA Championship 1974 Firestone Country Club, South Course, Redesigned in 1959 PGA Championship 1960,1966,1975/

Perennial PGA tour events

Bellerive Country Club, Designed in 1960 U.S. Open 1965/PGA Championship 1992

Hazeltine National Golf Club, Designed in 1962 U.S. Open 1970, 1991/ U.S. Women's Open 1966, 1977/ U.S. Senior Open 1983

Golden Horseshoe Golf Club, Gold Course, Designed in 1963 Perennial Top 100 Public Access Course in the U.S., multiple publications

Mauna Kea Golf Course, Designed in 1964 Perennial Top 100 Public Access Course in the U.S., multiple publications

Spyglass Hill Golf Course, Designed in 1966 Perennial Top 50 Public Access Course in the U.S., multiple publications

Greenville Country Club, Chanticleer Course, Designed in 1969 Perennial Top 100U.S., multiple publications

Valderrama Golf Club, Designed in 1975 Perennial PGA European Tour events. 1st European Ryder Cup venue

Robert Trent Jones Golf Club, Designed in 1991 1st Presidents Cup venue 1994

The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, 21 courses, Designed in 1992–1993 Largest golf course construction project in the world

# Acknowledgements

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#### David Leigh, Editor



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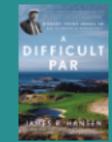


Roger Rulew ich Golf Architect, ASG CA Rulew ich & Fleury Golf Design David Leigh Editor RTJ Society

#### Key Resources



Gelf Cotese Architecture



# The Society

The Robert Trent Jones Society was created in 2004 and currently consists of 38 member clubs worldwide designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. The mission of the Society is to honor him and his work, to preserve historical information housed at the Cornell Library and member clubs along with other documents pertinent the golf courses he designed, and to encourage and support the education of member clubs on the design principles of his courses.

We have distilled RTJ's contributions to design, which have their place in the long evolution of the game. Like design masters before him, RTJ had a unique perspective that advanced golf from the late 1930's well into this new century. While this brochure focuses on golf course design, the reader is encouraged to delve deeper into his overall impact of the business of golf, golf construction and the modern game we love. Visit our website to learn more about society member clubs, news and events and of course, the genius of Robert Trent Jones.

## www.RobertTrentJonesSociety.com

