

GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTURE

THE GLOBAL JOURNAL OF GOLF DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

October 2010, Issue 22, £4.95
www.golfcoursearchitecture.net



Celtic Manor: The complicated design history of the Twenty Ten course
Plus: **Seth Raynor**, the accidental architect; **Aberdeenshire**, Scotland's new golf hotspot; **The origins of the Biarritz**



Toscana Resort Castelfalfi

Tuscany, Italy

Adam Lawrence is pleased to see golf development moving forward in a beautiful part of Italy

One of the great problems of golf development is the industry's obsession with high-end products. When every course or resort in an area aspires to be five star plus, it creates an unbalanced market. Even though golfers are, as a breed, generally more affluent than society as a whole, and golf travellers in particular are known for spending decent money on their holidays, a destination that only offers luxury options is at risk.

That's why the new Castelfalfi resort in Tuscany is such an interesting development. A picture-postcard Tuscan hilltop village with hundreds of acres of land surrounding it would seem, to most developers, an ideal opportunity to create a very exclusive destination, aimed at the international super-rich (which is essentially the goal at another Tuscan development, Castiglion del Bosco).

German tour operator TUI, though, has a rather different business model. After its

first successful investment in a golf resort, at Fleesensee in Germany, which opened in the year 2000, the group is making its biggest ever investment in a destination at Castelfalfi. And that means the resort must offer a range of products, suitable for travellers at different levels.

Italy's hilltop villages are beautiful to us now, but they speak of a more brutal time. Why, in times past, would people build their homes on the highest ground in a district, where water is likely to be scarce, and the fields on which they depend are a steep walk away? The answer, of course is protection. Now that the Italian countryside is populated with tourists in SUVs rather than bandits on horseback, the purpose of many of these villages has gone. They are still beautiful, but their lack of practicality has driven many of the residents away, to modern homes in more accessible locations.

That's what happened at Castelfalfi. Most of the residents moved out, so TUI was able

to buy up essentially the whole village — a perfect location for a holiday resort. The old castle is being turned into apartments, the church will be a visitors' centre, while the existing hotel is being renovated, and two more will be built. On the estate are a number of old farm buildings in varied states of decay; these are to be sold as villas. So Castelfalfi will offer a range of accommodation options from four star hotel to very upmarket villas. It will not be dependent for its success on a small, vulnerable niche of the market.

There was a golf course at Castelfalfi already, but the scale of the new development demands more. So the developers resolved to rebuild the existing course, and to add another. The challenge, though, was to make 36 holes work on the property, with a clubhouse in the valley below the village. Step up a German/Italian team: golf architects Rainer Preissmann and Wilfried Moroder, who have paired

up to work on this project; and another multinational pairing in German contractor Brehmer Golfplatzbau and Italian builder Fratelli Bruno, who have shared the golf construction work between them.

Moroder and Preissmann's task in designing Castelfalfi's golf was to find a routing that could produce two eighteen hole courses, both with returning nines, on a heavily undulating piece of property, with the clubhouse located on a small hill below the main village itself. They solved this problem, but it's true that the solution was not without its compromises. The golf courses are known as the Mountain course, which largely occupies the land on which the old course sat, and the Lake course, which explores more gentle land among vineyards and olive trees. Mountain has been built first – and is now open – while the first nine holes of the Lake course are done; TUI plans to delay the second nine until the resort is fully up and running.

The architects cracked the returning nines problem by making use of some steep, previously untouched land near the clubhouse. The Mountain's eighth hole takes golfers up a small hill to the tee for the ninth, which is a steeply downhill par three to a green set on a peninsula in a lake. It's spectacular, but it does mean that for most, the course will be a very tough walk. This is counterbalanced, though, by some very strong, solid holes – I particularly liked the long par five fifth, which offers longer hitters the chance to get home, or at least close, in two by making a heroic carry over scrub to an additional area of fairway set to the right. The course's most controversial hole will be the twelfth, which demands an accurate drive up a valley that narrows the further the ball is hit, and then an all or nothing uphill second to the well protected green. It's actually very strategic, as the golfer who is brave enough to hit driver off the tee will be rewarded with a much easier second, but the tightness of the fairway and the severity of the approach will prove too difficult for many.

The Lake course, in some ways, has the better land for golf, as it is less severe. Of the holes that have been constructed, I especially liked the second, which has an appealing drive over a valley and a fun second to a green tucked to the left and well defended by bunkers and topography. But the land at the so far untouched end of the property is close to ideal, undulating but not too steep, and with excellent natural feature. When both courses are complete, Castelfalfi will be a fine addition to Tuscany's many splendours. **GCA**



CASTELFALFI

Golf course architects: Wilfried Moroder and Rainer Preissmann

Golf course contractors: Brehmer Golfplatzbau and Fratelli Bruno

Castelfalfi's golf courses are built on an undulating piece of property below the hilltop village. The Mountain course lives up to its name, but the land for the Lake course is probably more naturally suitable for golf