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Tobiano: Stroke of art

Kamloops track a challenging masterpiece

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Scores of pundits consider it a masterpiece on B.C.'s rugged landscape.

Enough, in fact, that Tobiano Golf Club was named Canada's best new course last year by two of the country's premier publications.

It's simply a work of art among golf designs, a top creation by one of the planet's most celebrated architects.

The 7,367-yard challenge carefully painted by Thomas McBroom on the natural rock and sand surface 20 minutes west of Kamloops is truly a piece de resistance.

But don't just take the word of Golf Digest and SCOREGolf Magazine.

"I would certainly say that this is probably top three, and I wouldn't rule it out as the best one I've ever had," Mc-Broom said. "It is multi-dimensional with the desert landscape, the lake, the mountains, the fissures, the gullies, the hoodoos ... It's very powerful.

"There's no place like it in Canada."

Those who play the track can hardly argue.

The eco-friendly links-style course is stunning in design, because of how it was laid -- gently and with little altering done to the terrain -- atop and around high bluffs and hoodoos overlooking scenic Kamloops Lake.

"Just the way it sits in there against the lake make the property just a totally unique piece of land," McBroom said. "Before we routed the course, it was just a dramatic piece of terrain with a rumped topography, a fissured landscape with gullies.

"It all made for a golf course I knew was going to be good right out of the gate because I had the perfect pallet to lay out that golf course on."

It's a track with an unusual dispersal of par values, including five par 3s and five par 5s.

The back half of the front nine features an especially memorable mix.

The 480-yard No. 5 moves downhill into a gully that McBroom calls "a drop-dead gorgeous golf hole.

"I was stunned when I saw that hole and how closely it paralleled some of the great holes I've seen in Scotland and Ireland," McBroom said. "I don't think there's anything close to that kind of look anywhere in B.C."

Two holes later, the par-3 seventh hole forces you to hit over a gully to a green perched atop a razor-back knoll.

To follow, the par-5 No. 8 is a picturesque play, with a forced tee-shot over a ravine onto a fairway that slides down to a green 589 yards away.

On the back nine, Tobiano's showcase -- and most serene -- hole is No. 14, with a fairway that plays right at the water of Kamloops Lake.

"The memorability factor is very high," said McBroom of his course. "I know it sounds cliched, but every hole is a signature hole."

The end result is a can't-miss play in the B.C. Interior.

Whether you feel that way once your round is finished may depend on your frustration level.

Its monster length and hazards testing every stroke -- including forced carries off tee-boxes, 1920s style-bunkers and natural grass and shrubs hugging each fairway -- demand a mix of power and pinpoint accuracy, creating the ultimate golf test.

But odds are you'll love the round of desert golf in dry, hot, bright conditions -- a typical day around Kamloops.

And if you must, it's just a 5,358-yard test from the front tees.

From whatever distance, you'll love Tobiano.

"I think one of the reactions will be -- and I hope it's one of their first reactions -- is that it may be one of the most unique golf experiences they've ever had in their lives," McBroom added. "I think the property is that strong and that unique. "They will have real trouble trying to think of a comparable facility that they have ever played in their lives."

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