

Elysium Fields Country Club

Welcome to my interpretation and design of what have been voted the 18 greatest holes in golf.

Hole No. 1 Pine Valley

Pine Valley, New Jersey

15th hole; par 5, 591 yards

On a course infamous for forced carries over punishing sand features (like "Hell's Half Acre," and the "Devil's A-----"), the 15th seems comparatively tame, rather like the eye of a hurricane. It's an uncomplicated tee shot over a pond, but get narrower and tougher as it climbs uphill to the green. The risk/reward balance is ingenious. Those who choose to blast away on the second will find a fairway that shrinks to no more than 20 feet wide close to the green, and which cants insidiously left to right. Laying back brings its own peril: the green has a pronounced false front, so anything less than a full-blooded approach might trundle right back down the fairway.

Hole No. 2 Muirfield Village

Dublin, Ohio

14th hole, par 4, 363 yards

This is a stellar little par-4 that offers birdies and double bogeys in equal measure. A creek starts intruding on the left edge of the fairway around 245 yards from the back tee and cuts in on the right side of the green. Miss the slender, angled green short right and you're wet, but bail long-left and you face a terrifying downhill shot from sand or rough with water beyond.

Hole No. 03 Riviera

Pacific Palisades, California

10th hole; par 4, 315 yards

The beauty in this remarkable hole is that mere hackers can make birdie and the game's greatest can make bogies and doubles in a heartbeat. Jack Nicklaus said Riviera's 10th presents more options than any short hole in the world. It requires discipline to approach the green from the proper angle: that means laying-up off the tee to the far left side of the fairway. But when the pin is on the left, unprotected by the fronting bunker, the temptation is to go straight at it. But that open portion of the green slopes off the back. No matter how you approach the hole, it's an exquisite test of nerve.

Hole No. 4 Shadow Creek

North Las Vegas, Nevada

18th hole; par 5, 527 yards

Architect Tom Fazio once said that today's designers can do anything with money and imagination. The ultimate proof is Shadow Creek's stunning, reachable par-5 18th. What started as a poker table-flat site in the desert north of The Strip was transformed into this rollicking closing hole. From an elevated tee, ambitious players will challenge a water carry on both shots via a series of three lakes separated by waterfalls. Opt for the three-shot route and you'll still have to fly water. The beauty factor is striking, but the strategy demands are even stronger.

Hole No. 5 TPC Sawgrass (Stadium)

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida

17th hole; par 3, 137 yards

From the moment you step onto the first tee, you're thinking about this one shot. No par-3 anywhere demands such perfection with club selection and ball flight. Because the tee isn't elevated, the apple-shaped island green isn't framed particularly well and so looks much smaller than it really is. Persistent breezes and a pot bunker jabbed into the front-right of the green complicate matters. Just tell yourself this: No. 5 is the shortest hole on the course and has the largest green.

Hole No. 06 Pebble Beach
Pebble Beach, California
8th hole; par 4, 416 yards

Jack Nicklaus has long proclaimed this to be the greatest second shot-par-4 in golf. Who are we to argue? Of course, it's also home to one of the least inspiring tee shots in golf, but it is still one of the greatest holes in the game thanks to that stunning approach. From a tee perched by the Pacific, the drive is blind and must be struck no more than 240 yards to hold up short of a gaping abyss. That leaves a 175-to-190-yard shot over an ocean-battered gap in the cliffs to a small green ringed with five bunkers. Yeah, good luck with that!

Hole No. 07 Cypress Point
Pebble Beach, California
16th hole; par 3, 231 yards

Merely getting access to play Cypress Point is the toughest challenge in golf, but the test offered at the 16th is a close second. This is macho golf at its finest, demanding a gut-busting rip with anything from a hybrid to a driver, depending on the wind—anything that will carry your ball more than 200 yards over the crashing waves of the Pacific to a green guarded by a charm bracelet of five bunkers. A strip of fairway 140 yards away offers a conservative route for the less skilled

Hole No. 8 Royal Melbourne (West)
Melbourne, Australia 6th hole; par 4, 428 yards

Designer Alister MacKenzie placed a nest of artfully sculpted bunkers fringed in heather on the inside elbow of this sharp dogleg right. Carry them (220-240 yards) and you're rewarded with a straightforward approach shot. Tee shots played cautiously to the left leave a lengthy approach from a hanging lie to an elevated green tilted audaciously from back to front. Playing from above the hole in the 1959 Canada Cup, Sam Snead putted off the green into a bunker.

Hole No. 09 Ballyunion (Old)
Ballyunion, Ireland
11th hole; par 4, 451 yards

This one holds its own with any hole on the planet, despite the absence of any formal bunkers. The back tee is wedged between dunes to the left and the beach to the right, and hovers 60 feet above the sea. It's more than 200 yards to reach the fairway, which itself is twice interrupted by broken ground on its downhill journey to the green. With the Atlantic Ocean on the right for the entire length of the hole, pushed shots are punished harshly, but the matted dunes to the left can be equally unforgiving. All that's left to do is locate an alarmingly small, kidney-shaped green positioned beyond two tall dunes.

Hole No. 10 St. Andrews (Old Course)
St. Andrews, Scotland
17th hole; par 4, 455 yards

The most famous hole in the world, and arguably the best 'quirky' hole in the game. The tee shot calls for a 180-yard carry over dark green sheds, though your aiming point is right over the "Old Course Hotel" sign. To the right is out of bounds, but the risky play down the right earns a much better angle into the green. Timid souls who play down the left side bring the Road Bunker into play, a frighteningly deep, stacked sod monstrosity that guards the left front of the green. Overcook your approach and a pebble road—and a stone wall—will likely come into play. This unique hole has no parallel anywhere.

Hole No. 11 Royal Portrush (Dunluce)
Portrush, Northern Ireland
14th hole; par 3, 213 yards

The most aptly named hole on the Dream 18 is "Calamity"—the stomach-churning signature hole at Royal Portrush. It's all carry to the green over a yawning, 75-foot chasm. A "safe" play to the left could leave you buried in heather-choked hillocks. The innocent-looking, flattish green holds its own brand of terrors.

Hole No. 12 Pacific Dunes
Bandon, Oregon
13th hole; par 4, 444 yards

The youngest hole on our Dream 18 dates to 2001, but fits so majestically into the terrain that it looks a century older. Architect Tom Doak routed this hole into the prevailing wind, so on many days the par of 4 is a joke. A gigantic natural dune flanks the fairway to the right, while the Pacific Ocean looms below the cliffs on the left. Scattered blown-out bunkers lend add more beauty and menace on the right side. With distractions and hazards a-plenty, Doak crafted a deep, modestly elevated green to give you a fighting chance at par.

Hole No. 13 Turnberry (Ailsa)
Turnberry, Scotland
9th hole; par 4, 454 yards

This is about as thrilling a setting for a links hole as you'll find anywhere. The back tee is set on an isolated rocky promontory, where just keeping your balance in a gale can be a challenge. What awaits is a drive that must carry 200 yards of rocks, sea and beach and an ornery landing area that deflects balls with utter disdain for the quality of the tee shot. With a lighthouse to the left and the ruins of Robert the Bruce's Castle nearby, it's hard to top this hole for lore and shot-making demands.

Hole No. 14 Royal County Down
Newcastle, Northern Ireland
9th hole; par 4, 486 yards

Rising in the backdrop beyond the red brick steeple of the Slieve Donard Hotel are the Mountains of Mourne, while to the left sits Dundrum Bay and the Irish Sea. The daunting tee shot is to a blind fairway that is framed with gorse bushes 80 feet below you. The approach is only marginally easier, with a pair of bunkers etched into a slope 25 yards short of the elevated green. Three more whiskered traps stand guard closer to the surface. In the wind, no hole on earth better combines beauty and brawn.

Hole No. 15 Augusta National
Augusta, Georgia
12th hole; par 3, 155 yards

Jack Nicklaus calls it "the most demanding par-3 in the world." Not convinced? Ask Tom Weiskopf, who took 13 shots here in the 1980 Masters. With the unpredictable swirling winds down in Amen Corner, club selection is often pure guesswork. Couple that with a slender, diagonal green that arcs from front-left to back-right, plus a scary downhill chip, sand shot or chop out from the azaleas for those who hit it a shade too long. The 12th is the prettiest nightmare in golf.

Hole No. 16 Augusta National
Augusta, Georgia
13th hole; par 5, 510 yards

Perhaps the world's most beautiful inland hole, this is also one of its most strategic, encapsulating co-designer Bobby Jones' fondness for the par 4-and-a-half hole. The green is easily reachable in two for a low-handicapper, but distance alone is not the sole criterion. The tee shot must curve hard from right-to-left to avoid running through the fairway onto pine straw. Those who find the short grass still face a lengthy second from a tight, side hill lie, over Rae's Creek to a green with more movement than a Shakira video. The four bunkers beyond the green serve as little more than eye candy, but they complete a picture that's as sweet as they come.

Hole No. 17 Merion (East)
Ardmore, Pennsylvania
16th hole; par 4, 430 yards

Known since its inception as the "Quarry Hole," this legendary two-shotter begins our incoming nine on the Dream 18. Roughly 300 yards from the tee, the sunken fairway stops cold at an old limestone quarry. This vast pit is choked with impenetrable scotch broom, wild sand splashes and gnarled rough. For those who can't handle the carry, a fish hook-shaped sliver of fairway allows passage to the right. The sprawling green features a lower tier, raised up some 50 feet above the quarry, and a huge upper tier where the pin is most often placed.

Hole No. 18 Pebble Beach

Pebble Beach, California

18th hole; par 5, 543 yards

There may be tougher finishing holes out there, but none are as dramatic. Arcing to the left along Carmel Bay, Pebble's 18th is a better hole today than it was years ago, because modern equipment allows the majority of bold hitters to challenge the green in two. But to succeed your drive has to hug the ocean, well to the left of the tall tree, a gigantic bunker and OB stakes that line the right side. An approach from the right, whether on the second or the third shot, must avoid a tall Monterey pine and a large bunker fronting the right side of the green. While the beauty is overwhelming here, the strategy is what elevates the hole, thanks to its simple risk/reward sensibility: How close to water's edge do you dare play?