

The pentimenti of Miromar Lakes

Drew Rogers describes the brush strokes he has applied to a fading canvas



“Our approach has been to follow the imprint of the original canvas, but to add bold brush strokes to give the course a strong, new identity”

In art, a pentimento (the Italian word for repentance – plural: pentimenti) is an alteration in a painting, evidenced by traces of previous work.

Though the layout at Miromar Lakes is not that old (the course opened in 2001), it does feature some classic lines, like an antique painting – but a work of art where colours and textures had dulled. And from a golf architecture standpoint, the angles and edges had become less apparent. Opportunities to redefine strategic sharpness and definition were obvious.

The club hired me in 2016 to develop a new roadmap for the course, with intentions of a lighter footprint of turf and reduction of intensely maintained areas – all while greatly enhancing the validity and visual impact of the property’s character.

As we’ve gone along, our approach has been to follow the imprint of the original canvas, but to add bold brush strokes to give the course a strong, new identity.

Working together with Miromar’s director of golf, Ken McMaster, we took inspiration from CB Macdonald and Seth Raynor on the new greens and surrounds. Strong lines and well-defined shot values were primary to our vision.

Combined with more varied, but classic, rectilinear teeing grounds, especially in the forward positions, the personality of the site has been reawakened and strategic elements are now more fully employed.

Fundamental to the plan was the use of more natural materials such as pine straw, native sand and plants that more effectively blend the holes into their South Florida environment, while simultaneously reducing the need for water and chemicals.

Also part of the plan is the repurposing of thousands of native cord grass plants and hundreds of young sabal palms and saw palmetto into the landscape. These enhancements have been sensibly paired with the existing course fabric to better



Greens and surrounds at Miromar Lakes have been improved, including here on the par four ninth hole, which has a false front and ‘Valley of Sighs’



The seventh green at Miromar Lakes has been redeveloped in the Biarritz style. It is 60 yards long with a four-and-a-half foot swale separating the front and back plateaus. Below, the eleventh, with a two-sided, multi-level green, guarded by a deep 'Lion's Mouth' bunker

balance scale and proportion within the wide, well-framed corridors.

Above all, the real focus of this initial phase of work at Miromar was the redevelopment of the greens and their immediate surrounds. Having aged quickly since the original build in 2001, the greens had become as much as 25 per cent smaller, full of surface and edge imperfections and a heavy build-up of organic matter within the subsurface profile that prevented optimal drainage.

Over that same time, the bunkers had eroded as well. Our plan detailed the reduction of the greenside bunkers (roughly twenty in all), while refining, repositioning and redeveloping others to be more functional and purposeful within the strategic design. The results should yield much greater variety around the greens, thereby affording the golfer the use of the ground game via wider entries, expanded areas of short turf and more varied angles of approach. The more rigid, almost geometric, bunkering motif conjures images of days gone by.

According to CB Macdonald, the purpose of a bunker is “not to simply punish a golfer’s lack of control, but rather to tempt his ego and punish his pride.” As such, the bunkers have more direct purpose and they evoke greater sensual trepidation. Although a ‘less is more’ approach was taken with respect to the number of bunkers, those that remain are more effective, and now very much part of Miromar’s revamped identity.

The new TiffEagle greens, however, are now truly the star of the show. The seventh, for example, has been redeveloped into a true and rare Biarritz-style surface, measuring 60 yards from front to back and sporting a very broad, pinnable swale, some four and a half feet below the back and



front plateaus. The long par four second features a scaled down but distinctive Redan-style green and on the par three third, my version of ‘Short’ functions as three small greens within an enlarged 7,500 square foot putting surface.

The surrounds are just as interesting, as extensions of the greens themselves. On the par four ninth, for example, a false front peels into a broad ‘Valley of Sighs’ swale where miscalculated shots gather agonisingly below the green. Overall, the greens now offer more variety for hole locations, greater variation in shot selection and wider appeal to players of all levels.

It’s been incredibly rewarding to hear McMaster say: “There’s not a weak one in the bunch. They’re all so much more inspiring and distinctive, not to mention intensely memorable”.

The club has taken a phased approach to the renovation, choosing to address the tee and green complexes first, with fairway feature work and remaining grass conversion to follow.

Initial works were completed over the spring/summer season and the course is due to reopen for play in November.

The result so far is a transformation that is visually distinctive, offers a variety of set-up alternatives, more dynamic recovery options, and a significant new emphasis placed on strategy to heighten the playing experience.

It’s been a pleasure to add my penitenti to this beautiful canvas. **GCA**

Drew Rogers is a golf course architect based in Toledo, Ohio