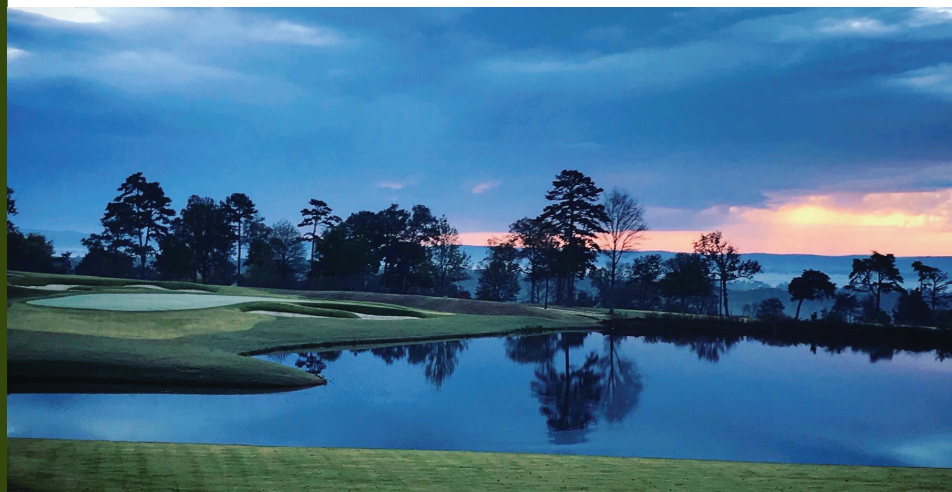


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Vestavia Country Club reopens course to deserved acclaim



Wow! The new seventh hole.



A spectacular view of the new golf patio.

I’ve been following the complete overhaul and redesign of Vestavia Country Club’s course with keen interest and it was my joy to play it a couple of weeks ago.

The course closed Jan. 9, 2017 and reopened the beginning of June. Thus it was closed almost 18 months and the results are incredible, with the new routing bearing minimal resemblance to the original George Cobb design.

Lester George, a Virginia-based golf course architect, took the Cobb layout, which opened for play in 1951, after being incorporated in 1948, and has had a number of re-dos over the years, but nothing approaching the scope and scale of the work spearheaded by George and his George Golf Design Inc. group, along with a construction crew from industry leaders Landscapes Unlimited, and basically started over. It has been grown in by long-time course superintendent Owen Coulson and his crew.

Make no mistake, this is a brand-new course.

“A lot of my success,” George, a 30-plus year veteran of the industry, who I found to be equal parts engaging and straight-shooter, said, when I visited with him earlier this year, “has been taking older, elite courses with classic designs and giving them a new look. I’ve built my reputation on many renovations and restorations by implementing strategy, fun and playability into my designs.”

This rebuild has been a long time coming. A long range architectural

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The new third hole.



No. 9 features a cavernous bunker in front of the green on this short par 4.

golf course committee was established way back in 2006 and was headed by Chairman Alan Coshatt all the way through to fruition.

Coshatt, a fine player with a keen eye for detail, was my ongoing liaison with George and one of my recent playing partners, along with head golf professional Blanton Tessin and my son Colin.

Interviews for prospective architects began in 2010.

"We contacted 12 (potential architects) and interviewed five," Coshatt said. "Lester's name kept coming up and we were blown away by his submission of plans for one hole."

The hole in question is No. 3, which bears little to no resemblance to what came before it.

"Lester had a reputation for handling big renovations at big clubs," Coshatt continued. "We offered him a blank canvas and asked him what was possible."

The process continued on and George was formally hired in 2011.

"It's like I was pregnant for 58 months (from the time of being hired to getting started)," George said.

Fast forward to my visit and the work done by all involved is significant and substantial.

"Fun is the word that comes up time after time," Coshatt said. "The distance Lester has taken us as a course is amazing. For him to see the potential and then deliver us the final product is really very cool indeed. He had zero fear, saw his vision and delivered. I know he has blown the minds of so many of our members."

There isn't a single hole that didn't receive sizable attention and changes, with all but holes 1 and 9 on the front nine significantly different and not a single hole on the back nine remotely the same. Indeed, the back nine routing is changed



Looking down the new 12th.



The "Principal's Nose" bunker dominates the 11th fairway.

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No. 16 under construction.



No. 16, the finished product.

beyond comprehension, with, for example, the new 10th hole moving in the opposite direction over a lot of what was the 18th hole.

One very special addition is that No. 17 features A and B options. Let me explain. The green on this par 3 is in essentially the same location as the old 14th green (it was also a par 3), with the A tee similar in locale to old 14th tee, but the new B tee is from an entirely different direction cut out of what was once a densely wooded and overgrown area close to multiple residences. The hole will play from the two different sets of tees as determined by Coulson and Tessin.

And so it goes. The zoysia fairways and surrounds are exquisite to hit approach shots and chips from, with the AU Victory bent grass greens coming along nicely.

George has incorporated a number of specific and classic design features including the "Principal's Nose" bunker in the 11th fairway; "Punchbowl"



A schematic of the new layout.

green on No. 5; Redan green on No. 13; and a Biarritz green on the 15th, with the putting surface measuring fully 69 yards long and is close to 12,000 square feet!

A new golf patio has also been built adjacent to the first, 10th and 13th tees and it is beautifully appointed with gazebos, fire pits, seating, recirculating stream and waterfall, and fescue areas. Sure to be a focal point for members.

I'll let George have the final say...

"Although the golf course can challenge the elite player, it was also designed to be fun, sustainable, and playable for all skill levels of members and guests. The comments I received from members during the opening weekend made it clear we had accomplished all those goals. Members were particularly pleased with multiple teeing locations, strategy, the introduction of water features, and vistas created by removing trees throughout the property."



Lester George, the golf course's architect, in his element out in the field.

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