



Dr. Alister MacKenzie's Most Personal Legacy

By Paul Prendergast • Photo Credit: Rob Babcock/Pasatiempo Golf Club

The multi-layered 'Sitwell' green at the 16th.

When I commented to friends and fellow golfers in Australia, professionals and single figure amateurs among them, that I was champing at the bit at the opportunity to visit Pasatiempo Golf Club in Santa Cruz, California this past June, I invariably drew a blank. "You're doing what, at where?"

They could be excused I guess, given the tyranny of distance and a saturation of mainstream golf media that focusses heavily on professional tours and personalities and less so, not nearly enough, on the game's history

and course architecture.

When I pointed out that this storied masterpiece was designed by Dr. Alister MacKenzie, the creator of Cypress Point, Royal Melbourne West, Augusta National and countless others, their interest was piqued.

I drew satisfaction from challenging them to do a little research on the course for themselves and once doing so, their envy of me was soon palpable. I'm convinced some new love affairs for Pasatiempo have now been established from afar.

Pasatiempo grew from the vision

of a remarkable woman in Marion Hollins, a U.S. Women's Amateur champion and entrepreneur who was a driving force in the founding of the iconic Cypress Point Club nearby on the Monterey Peninsula.

Hollins brought MacKenzie to America to design Cypress Point and in 1928, secured his services again to design her next major project, Pasatiempo. Such was the Scotsman's love for the course and the area that he lived in a house adjacent to the 6th hole for the final four years of his life.

With MacKenzie watching on from a sizeable gallery, Pasatiempo's official opening day on September 8, 1929 featured a match consisting of Hollins, the great Bobby Jones – a nine-time Major champion at the time and a year shy of his famous Grand Slam of 1930 – reigning U.S. Women's Amateur Champion Glenna Collett and reigning British Amateur Champion Cyril Tolley.

The significance of MacKenzie's work at Cypress Point and Pasatiempo was not lost on Jones. The pair had met at St Andrews some years earlier and so taken was he by the quality of these Northern California golf courses, he lured MacKenzie east to his home state of Georgia to co-design a golf course on a promising piece of land called Fruitlands that he had purchased in 1931.

The pair's collaboration opened for play in 1933 and is familiar to even my aforementioned friends back home – the Augusta National Golf Club.

From Bob Jones to Tiger Woods, the greats of the game have trodden the fairways of Pasatiempo over the years, accompanied in time by captains

of industry and Hollywood legends. Images from their visits are framed in Hollins House, a property built in 1929 by Marion Hollins in a commanding high point just up from the clubhouse looking down to Monterey Bay.

Pasatiempo is considered by many to be one of 'the great walks in golf' and likewise, Hollins House would have to be regarded as one of the premium post-round 'reclines' that the game has to offer.

Sitting on the verandah, enjoying Pork Belly Chicharones, Little Neck Clams and Blue Point Oysters among other delights from the 'Tapas Tuesday' menu, as the sun slipped slowly into the Pacific, made prising ourselves away from Pasatiempo to head back home excruciatingly difficult.

Course designer and MacKenzie aficionado Tom Doak was engaged by Pasatiempo to create a masterplan for the 'Preservation and Enhancement' of Dr. MacKenzie's creation, based on the discovery of some long-lost photographs and slides from the club's early history that had been unearthed by club historian, Robert Beck.



One of the great long par-3s in golf – No. 3.



The green at the par-5 13th.

Good golfers consider the second nine holes at Pasatiempo the finest in existence. The short holes are 'specially good, and I think the sixteenth hole is the best two-shot hole I know.'

Dr. Alister MacKenzie, *The Spirit of St Andrews*

"With a course of such historic significance and recognised quality of design, our mission in formulating a master plan is simple: to preserve the MacKenzie legacy as well as possible, considering the modern realities of golf," Doak said.

"Our guiding principles have been, first, to add nothing foreign to the original design, and, second, to enhance the 'pleasurable excitement' that the architect sought to provide."

The results of Doak and his team's undertaking, completed in 2007 but carried out with reverential care and attention over a number of years, has been stunning. Pictorially and visually when playing the course, the vistas on each and every hole around this undulating terrain are spectacular.

The bunkering and green complexes are classic MacKenzie and Doak has restored them to their original glory – gaping faces of white taunting you from tees and fairways, subtle to wildly undulating greens of superb quality to test the nerve and short game prowess of even the very best.

The opening tee shot from the atop of the hill by the clubhouse to an inviting fairway of emerald green, with the town of Santa Cruz beyond and Monterey Bay glistening in the background, sets the early scene for a playing experience of a lifetime.

The rolling terrain provides for great variety in the routing of holes, as do the integration into the design of the deep ravines or 'barancas' that

crisscross the property. Playing along and across these unkempt natural areas are a feature at Pasatiempo and Doak's team and the club's maintenance practices have restored and reinforced their jagged, menacing appearance, based on the images of the course from early years.

Some of the course's most photogenic holes feature these deep barancas, none more so than the tee shot from the 10th and the par-4 11th hole, arguably the most exacting hole on the course.

The tee shot needs to avoid the deep baranca running parallel along the left, before the hole turns left and uphill to a severely undulating and well bunkered green with a sizeable false front. The same ravine runs diagonally

across to the right of the green with intimidating bunkers cut into the front right, which I suspect gobble up many an approach.

The short par-3 15th is a hauntingly beautiful short hole that can bare teeth, especially with a pin located on the sliver of green to the left between bunkers and ravines front and back as it was on the day we played. Rarely have I held my breath in fear, and exhilaration, over the fate of a soft 9-iron in my memory.

A rarity in modern design, the famous finishing hole is a visually striking, medium length par-3 in an amphitheatre setting that requires a very well struck tee shot to carry

another deep gorge fronting the green. This hole must have really been a fearsome proposition in the early years with the equipment of the day but then and now, two putts are absolutely no guarantee on a wickedly tilted green that has more nuance and deception to it than meets the eye.

Aside from the ‘baranca holes’, Pasatiempo’s remaining collection of par-3s are magnificent in design and diversity.

Doak said of the par-3 3rd: “Combining its actual length (214 yards), uphill grade, and severity of hazards around the green, this hole must rank right up with the 5th at

Pine Valley as the longest playing par-3 we have seen.”

Pasatiempo also boasts some of the most strategically challenging par-4 holes but the 16th lays claim to being possibly the finest. The tee shot bends slightly left over a crowned fairway to a downhill landing area, adding to the acute demands of the second shot.

The green, however, beggars belief in terms of its length and multi-layered design where seemingly, only the back of three separate tiers allows for reasonably flat pin locations. MacKenzie’s famous yet controversial 12th green, cut into a large hill at Sitwell Park Golf Club in England, is re-created here and the Pasatiempo

How often do we play golf on courses where the game is to hit the greens and it is dull and straightforward? Not so at Pasatiempo where there exists a collection of 18 of the finest, most interesting greens which I have ever seen on one golf course. It is more interesting than Cypress Point or Royal Melbourne. The first green at the Old Course at St. Andrews is not so interesting as the 12th at Pasatiempo.

Michael Wolveridge, Course Designer



The opening tee shot with Monterey Bay in the distance.



The treacherous, short par-3 15th.

version is close to 60 paces from false-front to back.

Built in an era when walking was ‘*le mode de golf*’, the fairly small tract of land in the sandy Santa Cruz forest area with tees and greens built very close to each other is an intrinsic element of Pasatiempo’s timeless appeal. Not surprisingly, the golf course reminds of other classic golf courses of the time that have been constructed on similarly restricted acreage compared to their modern day cousins.

Venerable Merion in suburban Philadelphia, host to five U.S. Opens, occupies just 125 acres (50 hectares) while Kingston Heath on the Melbourne sandbelt is regarded as brilliantly routed on approximately 160 acres, not all of which are playing surfaces which wind between tracts of sand and native vegetation.

By contrast, Pasatiempo provides its fascinating and challenging test of golf – a par-70 of ‘only’ 6,500 yards at full stretch but with the undulation and coastal sea air, a far sterner examination than the yardage might suggest – from a canvass of just 66 acres of irrigated turf.

Mitigating against California’s

prevailing drought conditions, the club has cut back substantially on the irrigation of natural roughs and waste areas, resulting in a brilliant contrast with the pristine fairways and greens and gleaming bunkering.

Pasatiempo was an absolute joy and honour to play and if you subscribe to the modern phenomena of a golfing ‘bucket list’, then this is an experience that needs to be savoured as much as any of the courses in the neighbouring Monterey and San Francisco Bay Areas that might enjoy greater prominence. ●

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Tee Times

Website: www.pasatiempo.com

Other Pasatiempo facts

***Par-70 Course Record:**

62 — Shawn McEntee (March 19, 2001)

Par-71 Course Record:

63 — Ken Venturi (November 2, 1953)

63 — Forrest Fezler (March 6, 1969)

63 — Brian Pini (November 27, 1980)

LPGA Touring professional:

Juli Inkster — World Golf Hall of Fame member