

TALKING GOLF

The pastorally picturesque Irish countryside outside the Ritz-Carlton Powerscourt. (Inset) A panel discussion in progress (left), and an interactive audience.

GOLF'S BIG BUSINESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY (BIGGER THAN BIG, IF WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST). DOLLARS ARE SPREADING THE GAME'S GOSPEL TO NATIONS WHERE IT'S JUST A FEW DECADES (OR YEARS) OLD. GOLF HAS LONG SHED ITS HOMESPUN, ROUGH-AND-READY LINKS-WASHED ORIGINS IN THE BRITISH ISLES, BUT, AS IT CONTINUES TO CONVERT THE UNCONVERTED, IT HAS LOST NONE OF ITS CAPACITY TO CAPTIVATE. THE 5TH KPMG GOLF BUSINESS FORUM—HELD AT THE RITZ-CARLTON POWERSCOURT HOTEL, COUNTY WICKLOW, IRELAND—HAD AS ITS THEME THIS YEAR, 'GOLF RESORTS AND GOLF COMMUNITIES'. IT WAS MORE THAN A FASCINATING PEEK INTO THE GLOBAL INDUSTRY GOLF HAS BECOME. / **BY SHARAD KOHLI**



THE HARRADINE WAY

Peter Harradine, Managing Director and Chief Architect, Harradine Golf—designers of Boulder Hills Golf & Country Club, the new 18-hole championship layout in Hyderabad—has spent 40 years in his line of work. In that time, the golf course has gone from being, well, a golf course to just a bit-part player—and not necessarily the main part—in the colossal ambitions of developers.

“Golf’s no longer a game. It has become an industry, a business,” said the genial Harradine at the 5th KPMG Golf Business Forum. “In days past, golf courses were made for golfers to play golf. Now, it’s to make money. That may be good for the real estate developers but not so for the golfers.”

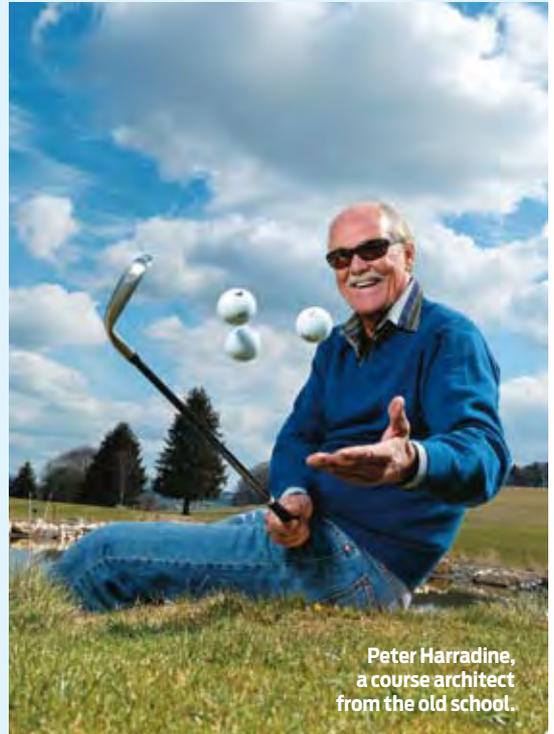
Harradine provided a quirky counterpoint to his fellow panelists in the discussion on the ‘Latest trends and concepts in golf resort and golf community masterplanning’. A gadfly in the world of course design (much like Ronald Fream of the U.S.), Harradine has, with admirable pertinacity, refused to abandon the certainties and traditions that have served golf so beautifully—because they’ve served Harradine Golf well, too.

“I’m fighting for the golfer. The developers are fighting for profit. For me, the golfer is paramount—he should have a great experience playing my course.”

Greed, believes this third generation Harradine, is the thrust behind many a ‘golf resort’ project. “For developers, the bottom line counts. The golf course actually becomes a liability once the project is finished.” Harradine feels there’s an over-obsession with building golf resorts; such a trend has drastically shortened the life-expectancy of the standalone.

“Yes, golf does sell real estate. But the golf course is just cosmetic,” Harradine contends. “It’s a bait, an accessory to the whole project to sell real estate. And it’s all profit driven. The managers, rather than the greenkeepers and course superintendents, have the say. At the end of the day, it’s a compromise between the golf course and the real estate. We want more for the golf course, the developer wants more for his villas and real estate.

“You can debate whether that’s good or bad.”



**Peter Harradine,
a course architect
from the old school.**

Harradine did not shy away from adopting a contrarian stance at the Forum. While many were sounding the death knell of standalone golf courses, the Switzerland-based architect begged to differ, insisting you don’t need real estate to bring in the dollars. “Standalone courses can and do work, even in this day and age.”

Harradine has little time for former pro-turned-course designers, or those still plying their trade but already embarked on a career in designing. “They charge huge fees for their work, and are rarely on the ground supervising.” For Harradine, these big names are lightweights in the field of golf course architecture.

“There are a lot of designers out there who do a lot of great work but you never hear of them. That’s because they don’t ever use PR.” You don’t need a marketing hot shot, says Harradine, to point out how good a golf course is. “Call me anti-marketing but your work should be able to speak for itself.”

But despite his broadsides against developers, Harradine is pragmatic enough to admit that golf resorts have contributed to the game’s health. “If we didn’t have these developers, we wouldn’t have these golf courses. I’m glad that golf does sell homes so that we can all play golf.”

But, there’s a Harradine caveat. “Keep those urban architects at a distance!”