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# King of the Castle

With the new Castle Stuart Links course due to open this summer, Malcolm Campbell goes and has a sneak peek at this new Scottish gem from Mark Parsinen

Ever since I first met him I have been an admirer of Mark Parsinen, not only as someone who loves the game of golf but also for his detailed and painstaking contribution to the design and development of one of my favourite courses, the tantalising Kingsbarns Links just outside St Andrews.

Parsinen is a very personable man, single minded in everything he does almost to the point of intensity but imbued with remarkable vision and understanding. He is also one of the few Americans I have met in my life who understands – truly understands – what golf in its purest form is all about.

links turf – into lush meadows.

But that is an argument for another time and another place. The point here is that Mark Parsinen does understand links golf and when word was out that he was planning a sequel to Kingsbarns, I for one couldn't wait to see it.

Well, now he's almost finished and I travelled up the A9 to take a first look at it. In a few weeks time Castle Stuart, just outside Inverness, will open its gates and another new links golf course will be added to Scotland's Highland links heritage.



could easily have been around when Old Tom was a lad.

Unlike Kingsbarns, Castle Stuart owes very little to the march of the bulldozer; the natural contours, nooks and crannies and changes in elevation of the site make it what it appears to be and in fact what it is – a layout as bespoke for the land it sits on as a suit from a Saville Row tailor.

No frills, no gimmicks, no artificially revetted bunkers, no frippery – just honest-to-goodness links golf, but with a fully-leaded dash of the subtlety that Parsinen somehow manages to mould in to give it that old traditional feel that very few can recreate. It's no secret that he is a lover of the Old Course at St Andrews from where he takes a lot of his inspiration. No surprise then that there are wide fairways, several lines of attack and major up-and-down problems if you miss a green.

My forecast is that we are going to hear a lot more about Castle Stuart and this overlooked Moray coastline of Scotland, which so many miss on their dash to Royal Dornoch.

Castle Stuart will encourage us to hang around a while and if we care to stay close by, at the historic and welcoming Culloden House where Bonnie Prince Charlie changed his spikes immediately before his altercation with the Duke of Cumberland, then take it from me, you will not be disappointed. **GM**

## NO GIMMICKS, NO ARTIFICIALLY REVETTED BUNKERS, NO FRIPPERY JUST HONEST-TO-GOODNESS LINKS GOLF

Mark Parsinen is a links man. And that of course makes him a rarity indeed in his homeland where his countrymen profess undying love for the links, while usually totally missing the point by reason of their lack of any exposure to it.

If they really had any serious mind to play the game on the ground from tight lies and not from lush overwatered fairways as they do, they wouldn't spend millions every winter over-seeding fairways all across their country turning perfectly playable Bermuda grass – the closest surface they ever get to

Comparisons with Kingsbarns are inevitable, but irrelevant. Castle Stuart presented a different site with a different set of criteria. He wanted an authentic links golf course and, with the help of architect Gil Hanse, he has one.

Castle Stuart is already teetering under the weight of accolades from many whose views command respect. Those of us who have been lucky enough to see it have been impressed by the staggering splendour of the site, the cascading views across the Firth and a sense that even though it might be new, it

### FIVE GREAT 21ST-CENTURY LINKS

■ **DOONBEG (2002)**

Greg Norman's design (right) hugs 1.5 miles of beach washed by the Atlantic.

■ **SANDY HILLS (2003)**

Pat Ruddy designed a second 18-hole course at Rosapenna to complement the 19th-Century Old Tom Morris Links.



■ **DUNDONALD (2004)**

Kyle Phillips laid out this track on the site of a course which was abandoned after it became an army camp in World War II.

■ **ASKERNISH (2008)**

The aim was to produce "the most natural links course in the world" in retracing and reviving

the 1891 Old Tom Morris layout which once lay across this land.

■ **MACHRIHANISH DUNES (2009)**

The first 18-hole links course to be built on the west coast of Scotland in 100 years, it will open this July, a neighbour to the Machrihanish links crafted by Old Tom Morris in 1879.

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