

Brian Curley's Shura Links announced on Red Sea island

BY ADAM LAWRENCE



Photo: Curley-Wagner Golf Design

A sketch of the fifteenth hole of Shura Links, designed by Brian Curley and located on an island off the west coast of Saudi Arabia

Saudi developer Red Sea Global has announced that golf architect Brian Curley of Curley-Wagner Design is at work on Shura Links, a course located on an island off the west coast of the country, about six hours drive north of the city of Jeddah.

Red Sea Global is wholly owned by PIF, the Saudi sovereign wealth fund, and is a key part of the country's enormous tourism development programme, with a huge portfolio of resorts and destinations in planning. The island is connected to the Saudi mainland by a 3.5-kilometre causeway and is about half an hour

from the newly opened Red Sea International Airport.

Curley said: "There are very few places in the world that can offer year-round sunshine, stunning vermilion sunsets and a wonderfully natural design. Shura has it all. We expect everyone from professionals to beginners to be drawn to this unique course and have designed it accordingly. There's plenty to challenge the world's best, while stirring the senses of amateurs looking for the greatest playing experience."

When complete, the island will play host to eleven hotels and resorts, plus

high-end villas. There will be a marina and a beach club as well as golf. "Shura Links will provide an unparalleled golfing experience, offering a visually stunning, natural course right here on the Red Sea. As ever, it's not enough for us to provide spectacular experiences and world class playing conditions. We are committed to ensuring Shura Links aligns with our ambition to set new sustainability standards. From innovative turf management and careful foliar feeding, we're putting respect for nature above everything else," said John Pagano, group CEO of RSG.

GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTURE



Photo: Red Sea Global

The clubhouse will be designed by architecture firm Foster + Partners

The course will be developed in accordance with the OnCourse methodology created by GEO Foundation to ensure its sustainability. Water consumption will be reduced through the careful selection of turfgrass and soil sensors to understand moisture levels and minimise water use – the course is being grassed with Platinum TE paspalum, supplied from the Atlas Turf Arabia turf farm set up as a joint venture between Golf Saudi and Atlas Turf International. Curley said: “I was an early convert to paspalums, using them all over Asia in the late 1990s but the earlier versions were sometimes far from what I wanted in density and firmness. The Platinum, however, is a massive leap forward in quality and will be a huge factor in contributing to both playability and environmental stewardship.” The innovative Pogo turf management system will be used to measure key variables that influence

growth and performance, including salinity, temperature and weather, helping to inform decision making and irrigation efficiency.

The course will also use foliar feeding incorporating natural nutrients like seaweed to ensure a precision approach that maximises nutrient uptake while mitigating against nutrient runoff and maintains the quality of turfgrass and golf playing surfaces.

Of the 140-hectare site, just 20 per cent is maintained turf. The designers purposely developed a natural golf course, using irregular turf lines and transitional bunkering with outside edges that blend into the natural dunescapes. RSG is also developing a Habitat Development and Protection Plan that will explore ways to encourage the island’s wildlife to thrive.

Curley said: “The course will be minimally turfed. When you do desert golf, it’s not about what you do

in the turfed areas so much as what you do in the areas that aren’t turfed that makes the difference. When you have salt water at a zero level and your playing surface is two metres above it, the question is what do you do in between? We don’t want rock walls, so the first metre will be vegetation and the second will be bunkering, which we’re trying to keep a little irregular, rugged and natural.

“There are villas down the sides of some of the holes, but it won’t feel as though you’re playing through a housing estate, because the villas have a curvy roofline, and when combined with the dune landforms thereabouts, it will feel as though you’re playing through sand dunes. It will be very much a find your ball golf course. Seven holes look out to sea, and there are another four or five on internal water channels.”

Turfing of fairways is already under way. **GCA**