

## THE ARCHITECTURE ISSUE



Sweetens Cove

# Cloud Nine

## A Short Course Brings Renown To Two Designers

A decade ago Rob Collins was out of work, living in his mother's house in Chattanooga, Tenn., with his wife and young daughter. He had been toiling on a project for Gary Player's design firm in British Columbia when the North American housing market crashed in 2008 and the Great Recession took hold. Like a lot of people in golf, he suddenly found himself without a job – and without a clue of what he was going to do next.

A lot can change in a short period of time, however, and these days, Collins is one of the hottest course designers in the country. What has suddenly brought him and his business partner, Tad King, to prominence is a nine-hole track they built outside Chattanooga. Called Sweetens Cove, it opened in 2014 and has come to be so well regarded that it is ranked No. 49 on one national golf publication's list of the best courses in America built after 1960. That's an impressive feat for any new layout and downright remarkable when one also considers that Sweetens Cove is a short course – and one of only two of that size on that roster.

"Our goal when we did Sweetens was to break the mold and change the way people looked at nine-hole courses as we also gave golfers something fun and different to play," says Collins, a lanky lad in his mid-40s who stands 6 feet 6.

They certainly did that, and Sweetens Cove has become one of the most talked-about new courses in America. It also has brought Collins and King, whose specialty is course construction, some exciting new work. Such as fashioning a yet-to-be-named nine-holer in the upstate New York town of Accord that is due to open next summer. And crafting a new 18-hole track, dubbed the Landmand Golf Club, in Homer, Neb. They also have signed on with PGA Tour professional Zac Blair to co-design and build his much-discussed Buck Club course in the wilds of Utah.

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After things fell apart in 2008, Collins was not sure if and when he would climb onto a backhoe again. But then he began talking with King, an old friend who also had been working in golf. They long had shared similar philosophies when it came to architecture and how most new layouts were too hard, took far too long to build and then to play and were too expensive to maintain.

Those discussions in the midst of the economic turmoil a decade ago led them in 2010 to form their own firm. They called it King-Collins Golf Course Design and Construction, and their first project was Sweetens Cove, which entailed revamping a rather uninteresting and insolvent course in South Pittsburg, Tenn. Built on only 72 acres, it combined many of their favorite architectural characteristics. And because money was so tight, it was utterly without frills, with no bar service, a cramped, metal shed serving as a pro shop and a blue portalet the only bathroom facility.

But none of that seemed to matter to the golfers who made the trek there, and they raved about the design and routing, the quick 90-minute rounds and the fact that it cost only \$40 for a walker to play it twice. As a result, Sweetens Cove became an immediate hit, even among sports-celebrity golfers like Peyton Manning and Andy Roddick, who were so smitten with the place that they became part of the ownership group.

"The idea was to build an inland links that evoked Pine Valley as well as Pinehurst No. 2, and

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