

PROPERTY & TRAVEL IRIE FIELDS, ST KITTS

A NEW PLACE IN THE SUN

Brand new golf course openings have been relatively rare of late, so Gi was delighted to be invited to St Kitts for a sneak preview of Ian Woosnam's Irie Fields layout, opening this November. Our man in the Caribbean sun, **Peter Swain**, got the gig



Not only is this course 'edible', I can also report it's a belter. Part of the Kittitian Hill hotel and residential development on the northwestern side of St. Kitts, in the sun-drenched Leeward Islands, Irie Fields has been designed by Gary Johnston of European Golf Design in

association with Ian Woosnam.

In practice, that means Woosie and Gary came up with the overall concept while the EDG man, after initial shaping, did most of the hard graft on the ground. And wonderful ground it is too.

"It's high up on a steeply sloping hillside, criss-crossed by ghauts [small val-

Sympathetically styled to blend in with its glorious habitat, Irie Fields is a sun-drenched gem

leys down which streams run in the rainy season], with big elevation changes and dramatic ocean views from just about every hole," reports Johnston. "The owner is a big believer in sustainability, so we've created a set-up that can be managed organically. It's an approach that creates its own complexi-





GREEN MONKEY BARBADOS

"You need two things to make a great course – dollars and dynamite," quipped Tom Fazio after creating this 7,343-yard masterpiece at the ultra-exclusive Sandy Lane resort. Parts of the course were carved from an old limestone quarry (as evident in the photograph above), the exposed rock creating a number of dramatic holes – a real once-in-a-lifetime experience

CASA DA CAMPO ('TEETH OF THE DOG') DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Ranked at 43 in the world by Golf Magazine US, the 'Teeth of the Dog' is the best of several Pete Dye layouts on the island. Several of the holes were 'created by God', wrote Dye in his book *Bury Me in a Pot Bunker*, insisting he was responsible only for the other 11

THE FOUR SEASONS NEVIS

The mountainous Robert Trent Jones II track is a challenging gem with stunning views of Nevis Peak, a dormant volcano towering some 3,232 feet above the Caribbean. A verdant playground with some of the trickiest greens in the West Indies

ABACO BAHAMAS

The Abaco Club at Winding Bay, Bahamas (below), is a tropical paradise with a licence to thrill, and the island's links – designed by Donald Steel and Tom Mackenzie – is Sean Connery's favourite Bahamian course. Firm and fast with a Scottish feel thanks to the rippling fairways, pot bunkers and undulating greens.



THE TRYALL CLUB

MONTEGO BAY, JAMAICA

The nine spectacular oceanside and nine inland holes regularly hosted the Johnnie Walker World Championship in the '90s, testing the likes of Nick Faldo, Woosie, Bernhard Langer, Ernie Els and Seve Ballesteros in their prime.

PORT ROYAL

BERMUDA

The home of the PGA 'Grand Slam', contested between the year's major championship winners, Port Royal has been ranked by Golf Digest among the world's premier public courses. Designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr in 1970, the course features one of the most dramatic par threes in golf – the 235 yard crescent-shaped 16th, with nothing but the shimmering waters of the Atlantic between tee and green.

EAST COURSE AT TPC, DORADO BEACH PUERTO RICO

Robert Trent Jones Jr's restoration of his father's original and classic design at Dorado Beach has brought this challenging layout into the 21st century. Original sight lines have been restored, sand harvested from local beaches to renovate contoured bunker complexes and ultra-fast Bermuda greens. A subtle rebirth as a modern masterpiece.

PUNTA ESPADA AT CAP CANA DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Jack Nicklaus's best course in the region is a scenic palm tree and white sand affair with stunning views of the beaches, cliffs and waterfalls all par for the course. Eight holes play out spectacularly alongside the ocean, with warm sea breezes adding to the challenge.

OCEAN CLUB, NASSAU BAHAMAS

Part of the One&Only resort, this Tom Weiskopf course is designed for both weekend warriors and serious golfers. The par 72 layout winds its way around Paradise Island's peninsular, with uninterrupted views of the Bahamian coastline.

ROYAL WESTMORELAND BARBADOS

Despite being surrounded by celebrity-owned colonial-style mansions, this is another Caribbean beauty. Designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr, the course revels in its lush tropical setting.

* *Irie Fields* could soon be joining this list

TOP 10* CARIBBEAN COURSES

ties, but it's been a hugely rewarding project to work on."

With 3,792ft Mount Liamuiga towering above, most holes run sideways along the hillside, so sloping lies are the norm. At about 6,600 yards, par-71, the course isn't long, but when the wind blows it's tough. "Ian wanted wide fairways and large greens," says Johnston. "After all, this is principally a high-end resort course. But the ghauts create forced carries on both drives and approaches, and we've put fairway bunkers in all the right places, so it's a very strategic set-up."

The designers have also created green complexes to test even the scratch golfer. Severely contoured greens, surrounded by steep run-offs and large bunkers, mean holding the ball on the putting surface with anything longer than a mid-iron can be difficult.

Fairways are easy to hit, but being in the right place on them is crucial.

On such an exposed site, the wind is the joker in the playing pack. Most holes have it either directly behind or against, so if it's strong you'll need courage and a low ball flight to negotiate the carries and blind shots. "We also set out to create a course that's visually intimidating, so it really benefits from playing several times," thinks Johnston.

I particularly enjoyed the last three holes. Sixteen is a drivable par four; 17 is a shortish par three over a ghaut straight into the wind; and 18 is a real classic. At 520 yards, it's short by modern standards, but into the prevailing wind, with an angled green protected by four cloverleaf-shaped bunkers, it's almost impossible for ordinary mortals to reach in two. "We didn't want a card wrecker to finish," says Johnston. "But it's a great-looking hole, and games will

A CARIBBEAN BOLT-HOLE?

On St. Kitts, property ranges in price from \$472,000 for a one-bed condo at Kittitian Hill, to \$775,000 for a 3-bed Sunrise Hill Villa overlooking the golf course, and \$3.5m for a marina-side mansion at Christophe Harbour where Ian Botham has recently bought.

kittitianhill.com,
sunrisehillvillasstkitts.com, christopheharbour.com

On Nevis, \$550,000 buys you a 3-bed villa with a pool, on an acre of land. At the Four Seasons, you can spend \$4.85m on Sugarbird, a designer palace up the hill, or about \$400,000 on a one tenth fraction of a 3-bed villa facing the 3rd green, 100 yards from Pinney's Beach, with a month's usage a year. nevishouses.com, fsrenevis.com



be won and lost here.”

One clever innovation I rather like is the choice of tee players are invited to use. “In a competition, obviously everyone uses the same tees. But for players just enjoying a friendly round, the wind can be a huge factor. So we suggest they might want to use a forward tee when playing straight into the wind, and the Tiger tee when it’s behind them.” Imaginative – I like it.

Oh yes, and what does ‘edible’ mean? “Hundreds of fruit trees (mango, banana, pineapple and avocado, amongst others) are being planted, and golfers are encouraged to walk the course [rare in the Caribbean]. So, in theory, players could feed themselves as they go!” OK, so that won’t actually happen too often, but the fruit goes to the on-site five star hotel, Belle Mont Farm, and the notion of respecting the local environment to create an ecologically sympathetic set-up has to

be right approach.

Wild bermuda grasses were already growing on the hillside, so Riviera bermuda was an obvious choice on the fairways and TifEagle on the greens. The enterprise is still evolving, with a new clubhouse being built and the landscaping growing in, but in time, Irie Fields will undoubtedly become one of the Caribbean’s must-play challenges. I’ll certainly be back before Christmas. www.kittitianhill.com

* Irie: Jamaican patois for ‘alright’. Locally on St. Kitts, it also translates as ‘ganja’, suggesting the crop that once flourished at Irie Fields. The club emblem...is a pineapple.

With three 18-hole courses (including Woosie’s Irie Fields) and a fourth, designed by Tom Fazio, under construction at Christophe Harbour, St. Kitts and Nevis – a 10-minute boat ride away – is fast becoming a golf destination to rival Barbados and the Dominican Republic.

TWO FURTHER COURSES ON THIS TWO-ISLAND NATION...

Royal St. Kitts

Along Frigate Bay, close to the Marriott on St. Kitts, this club was established in the 1970s, then revamped in 2003-4. Ideal for the first day of any golf trip to these islands, it plays close to 6,900 yards, with the opening 14 holes inland followed by a spectacular closing stretch, reminiscent of Pebble Beach, along the ocean. www.royalstkittsgolfclub.com



RTJ II at the Four Seasons

The undulating Robert Trent Jones II masterpiece on Nevis is demanding, in pristine condition, and features dramatic views of the forested 3,232ft Peak above and the cerulean ocean below. Built in 1991, the surprisingly mountainous 6,766-yard set-up winds up steep slopes and across jungle-engorged ravines before plunging back down to finish 10 yards from the beach. Putt out, go for a dip. www.fourseasons.com/nevis

