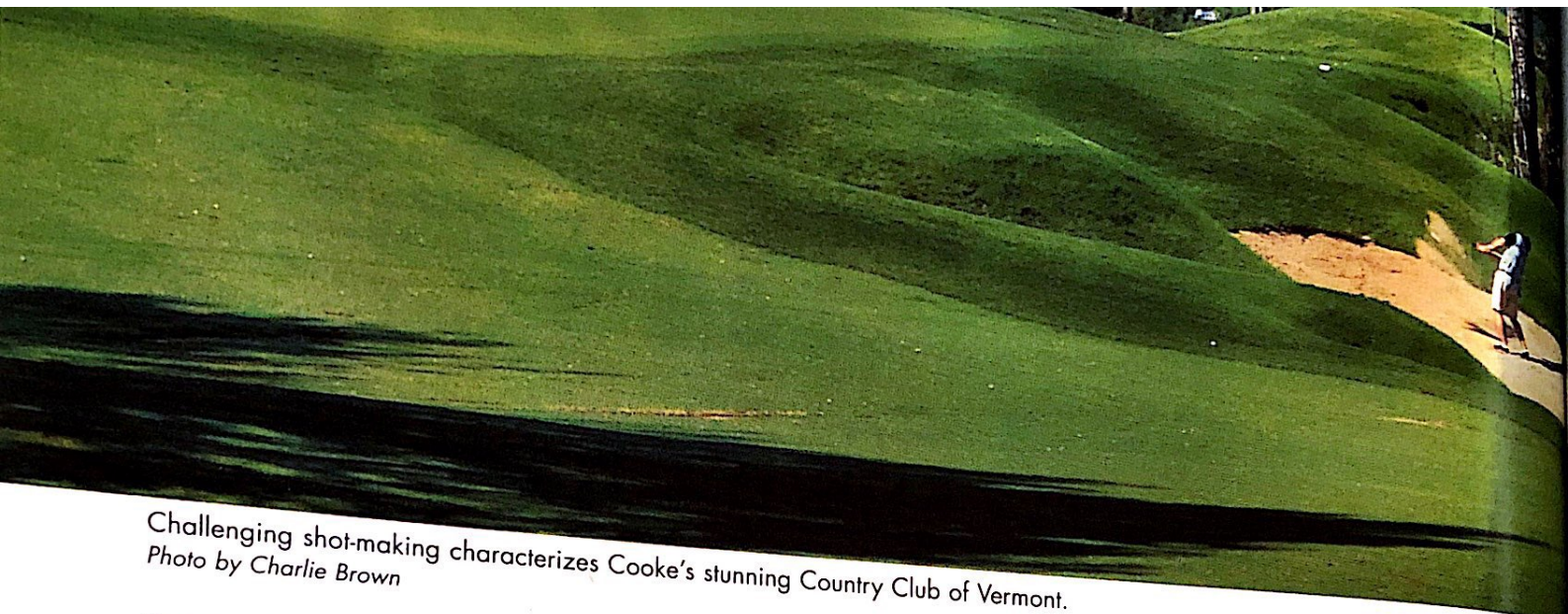


Montreal-based golf course architect Graham Cooke has created a masterpiece in Waterbury.

It was the fall of 1996 and Canadian golf course architect Graham Cooke was combing the hills of central Vermont with a prospective client. "We'd looked at many sites for the group and we hadn't really found a property that we felt had the expression they were looking for," recalls Cooke. "They wanted a really high-end product," he continued. "And when I first saw that property in Waterbury all doubts were erased very quickly because *that* was what we were

looking for. I could hardly wait to sit down with my team and get working on route plans."

What Cooke had found was the site for the new Country Club of Vermont—a stunning piece of land in the shadow of the Worcester Range with perpetual panoramas of Camel's Hump and Mount Mansfield. "The site was large enough that we could use the beauty of the wetlands and their uniqueness. It also had a good balance of open land and treed land, and



Challenging shot-making characterizes Cooke's stunning Country Club of Vermont.
Photo by Charlie Brown

the treed land was mature wood lots with large pine trees and maple trees, so it was ideal in that sense. Then there were the rolling hills—you just don't get many sites that have that much movement and provide those long panoramic views of the hillsides—those sites are few and far between.”

Cooke made the most of what was given to him, and designed what he considers one of his best golf courses—a terrific walking course for serious players, and that shouldn't be a surprise—the archi-

tect has long been a serious player in his own right.

Cooke grew up in the Toronto area and was introduced to the game of golf by his father. “Dad played a little bit. He was always a pretty good golfer. He got me started when I was about 12 and I won the Ontario Junior when I was 17.” His school boy success quickly led to greater things.

“I got a golf scholarship to Michigan State University, and graduated in 1972. We had good success as a university team, and I

got some recognition from the NCAA and all that sort of stuff. It was good, I had a lot of fun down there,” he says modestly. Actually he starred on the golf team and was named All-American in his senior year, but by the time he graduated, his golf interests were moving away from competition and into other areas.

“They had a fully accredited Landscape Architecture department at that time and it was just starting to blossom that career. Now its really taken off, back then it was a

little unusual. I majored in landscape architecture, which I thoroughly enjoyed, and saw that there were opportunities to get into golf course design."

Fresh out of college, Cooke returned to Canada and took a job with Howard Watson, a well-known Montreal-based golf course architect who himself had apprenticed with legendary Canadian designer Stanley Thompson. Cooke's experience in those years was hands-on and in the field, but he had not yet put the hopes of a playing career to rest.

"For two years after working for Howard I thought I might turn pro

"With all the product being built in the United States, just to get on to those lists is something," says the architect. "We're the first Canadian architects to get that type of recognition in the States. I truly believe that Country Club of Vermont has a chance to get into those categories and fairly high up on the list."

and play the Tour and that sort of thing, but just didn't get the gratification from it that I was expecting. I felt that my game wasn't really set for it and my mind certainly wasn't set for it, and I was more anxious to get into my own business and start designing and building golf courses," notes Cooke.

After testing his skills in the upper echelons of amateur play and looking at the mini-tours, Cooke followed his heart. "I got right back into the business and started my own company—by 1976-77 I had started working for myself. Mostly my contacts came from the tournaments I'd been

playing in and I had a little bit of credibility in working for a recognized golf course architect."

Cooke got the kind of break that helps to ignite a career quickly. Instead of tinkering with a bunker here and a teeing ground there, he was thrown right into the blaze. "I was fortunate in that I got a big job right away—a 36-hole complex in Dorval—a big municipal course that has been very popular and done very well since. They've had the Quebec Open

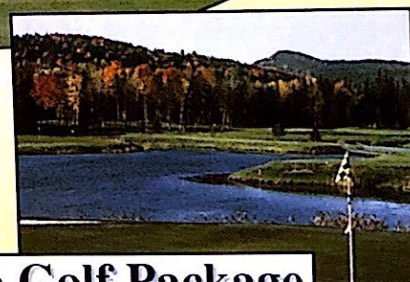
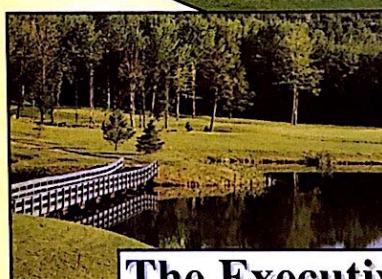
there many times. I had everything thrown at me right at the beginning, but it was fun." The layout opened in 1981 and immediately led to other work, but most of it was north of the border. Breaking into the U.S. market has taken time, but once Cooke started to find work here, the rewards have followed.

"Loomis Trail in Blaine, Washington is now being regarded as one of the top three courses in Washington state by *Golf Digest*,"

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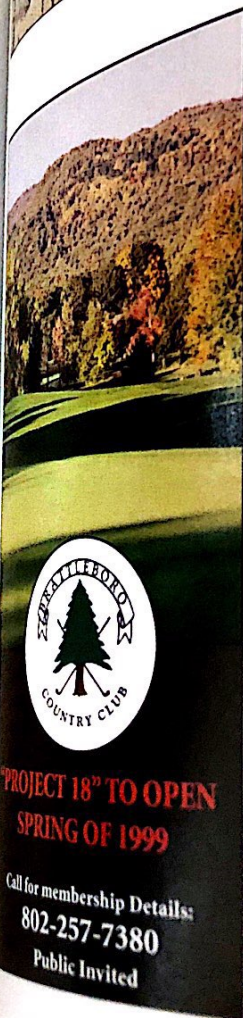
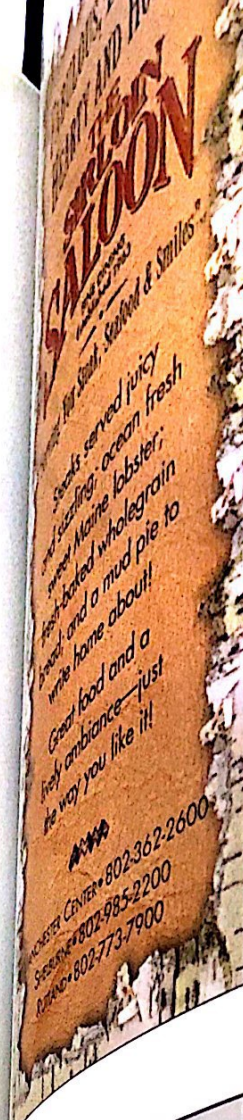
notes Cooke, "and it was named the third-best New Private Course in the United States when it opened in 1994." Just recently, Cooke added another honor to his U.S. resume, when Myrtle Creek Golf Course in Oregon was named seventh best in the New Affordable Public category.

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chance to get into those categories and fairly high up on the list. Meanwhile, we're actively looking at work in the New England area and thinking of possibly setting up an office in the New England zone in the near future and to vie for works in the area."

Cooke has refused to have his design style pigeon-holed. "I like to think of each project as an individual project, I don't like to be saddled with any particular type of format or characteristic golf design that limits you in any way. I really feel you need to pay close attention to the land, you have to determine what type of values that land is giving you and that should dictate the type of character the golf



course takes on. I feel that in every project you have to do that. If you have a formula that you utilize and your features don't have enough change or diversity, then you end up forcing a lot of design elements onto the property. I've tried not to do that."

Once he was comfortable with a design career, Cooke resumed his competitive amateur schedule and his successes have been many. He's won the Canadian Mid-Amateur four times and the individual title in the international Lesley Cup a few

times as well. However he would not have been able to concentrate on those events without an excellent staff to advance his design business. He relies heavily on the expertise of partner Darrell Huxham. "Darrell is sort of a co-designer with me. On major projects we both take a role because it gives us the opportunity of both being able to look at the property and work together to come up with exciting solutions to things, and to work on more than one or two projects at a time. We look at the rout-

ing plans in the office together, but then he's on site more than I am."

Cooke hopes that the high visibility of Country Club Of Vermont will bring him other jobs of the same magnitude, but he realizes that comparable settings are not commonplace. "It's a very powerful site and a very powerful golf course," Cooke notes. "When we first started working we realized there would be some elevational changes and grade changes that would create some wonderful holes, but would also create some fairly stiff walks in certain locations. So we tried to work the land to tame some of the grades."

The flow looks effortless now, but it was not easy doing the engineering work. "Whenever you get into earth work and you have to move a fair amount with cut and fills you want to make sure that you don't make the golf course look artificial and that was one thing we had to be very cognizant of. We were going to enhance what was there and give it some sophistication in the shaping, but we didn't want to make it look busy or too overly done."

Cooke enjoyed working for a group of clients that knew what they wanted, but had enough sense to put the course in the hands of a professional and let them make the decisions. "They gave a very clear mandate that they wanted something that was very special so they could go out there and enjoy it, and be very proud to bring their friends and guests to something people would have a lot of fun playing. Other than that they left the reins to us."

Everyone seems happy with the end result. "There's a very good diversity in the Country Club Of Vermont and that's something Darrell and I and my team really try to get so that each hole has a certain uniqueness and appeal. We try not to create one or two signature holes—we try to make each hole a standout. A compliment to us is if people say, 'I don't know which hole I like best out there.' I think we pulled it off pretty nicely." So do many others.



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