

FREELANCE WRITER DARRYL WEE ENJOYED A RARE OPPORTUNITY TO TEE UP AT CYPRESS POINT AND TELLS IT ALL



Darryl and wife, Collidear, sharing a moment at Cypress Point.

Ranked third in Golf Digest's America's 100 Greatest Golf Courses, Cypress Point is set in beautiful surroundings woven through the Del Monte forest.

It was against this backdrop that Dr. Alister McKenzie, with the help of Robert Hunter, built this hallowed ground in 1928.

Throughout its 90-year history, other designers have dabbled with it, notably, Robert Trent Jones Snr, followed by Trent Jones Jnr, and most recently, by Jeff Markow, course superintendent at the club for the past 25 years.

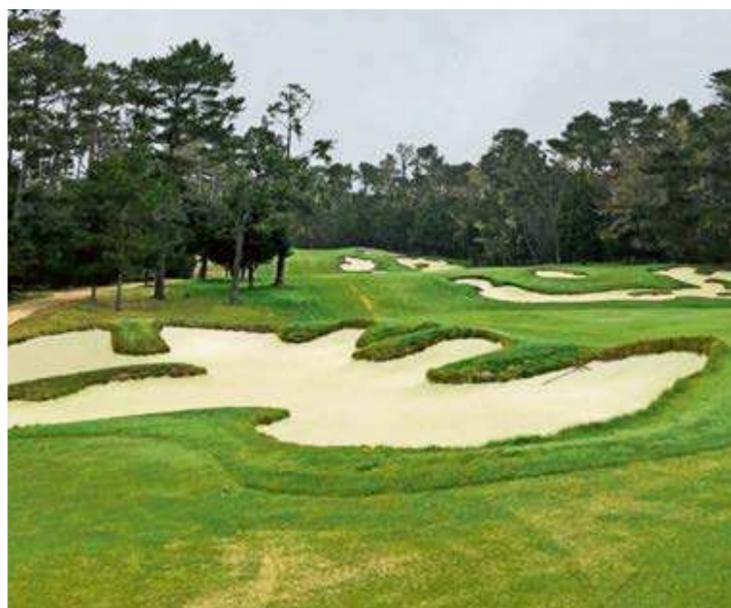
This latest work by Markow began in 2002 and was completed in 2004. It brought back the course's unique bunkering with the help of old photographs of Mackenzie's original design, which helped reestablish the charm of 1930s America.

During a monthly golf get together, Ben (not his real name) pulled out some tees from Cypress Point and casually mentioned that he played there the week before. He then proceeded to pass over a few tees and said, "Go ahead, keep these as a memento."

To his kind gesture, my reply was, "I only want these tees if I've actually played there", as this was one course I have always dreamed of playing.

Later, while having dinner, our conversation went to another mutual friend I had met in Hong Kong who played both Cypress Point and Augusta National, and had commented that Cypress was better.

To my chagrin, Ben promptly agreed, having played both as well. But then, these magical words came after, "Let me see if I can make your



The first six holes weave through the Del Monte forest.



View from 17th tee.



An island green makes the 17th a tough hole to approach.

dream come true. When do you want to go?" I was bowled over.

Fast forward six months and I am sitting at Roy's at Spanish Bay, a popular restaurant known for its Hawaiian fusion fare by chef Roy Yamaguchi, and meeting a member of Cypress Point who was connected by Ben.

We talked about our round and just before a dessert of Roy's famous mud pie, I started to ask about etiquette at the club of less than 300 members.

I found out that the main clubhouse was off limits to guests unless we were accompanied by a member. Dress code was traditional with players required to be in long pants and shorts were not allowed.

As our tee time was at 8.00am, we were asked to arrive earlier to check in and to ensure we had a hearty breakfast as there would be no food on the course.

After a restless night, my wife and I decided to head to the club well before our appointed tee time at 7.10am to find the first tee already teeming with players.

A gentleman in red cap and matching jumpers named Kevin quickly came to our car to help us with our bags and whisked us to the starter to check in. He was to be our caddie for the round.

With much excitement, I walked to the man with a large clipboard with our names. I was welcomed warmly and then told, "Mr. Wee, you are first off the tee."

I shot him a quizzical look and reminded him that my tee time was 45 minutes away.

"Yes, it is sir," replied the starter. "However, we have a tradition here of twosomes teeing off before the four-somes."

In the mad rush, we wondered about our golf bags and were thankfully met by Kevin, who obviously al-

ready knew of the practice and calmly gave us the line off the first tee.

The first three holes were a blur. Visibly awestruck at actually being here and still trying to get over the earlier haste, we were simply trying to take everything in, especially knowing it was unlikely that we would ever return again.

As we traversed across the landscape, we realised that Cypress Point is split into three main segments consisting of six holes each.

The first six holes plays through a densely forested parkland that swerves in and out of majestic cypress trees before stumbling upon sandy dunes in the next six.

The final sextuple meanders along the craggy Pacific coast with a series of three dramatic holes namely, the 15th, 16th and 17th, responsible in large part for its top billing.

The 16th, in particular, is a long par-three that plays over the ocean. Stretching 239 yards from the back tees, the green sits on a cliff beautifully framed by the Pacific Ocean.

Requiring a 200-yard carry, the club you choose depends on the wind. Kevin looked at me and simply said, "Driver".

For the ladies, this hole is played as a par-four with a bailout area to the left of the cliff.

This spectacular hole, together with the Lone Cypress that resides along the 17-Mile drive between here and another famous track, Pebble Beach Golf Links, is the most photographed phenomenon in the region.

Then, there is the par-four, 17th hole. The tee shot requires a well-struck drive over a cliff.

The fairway is flanked by two large cypress trees and a landing zone that rests between them.

At the flowering shrubs near the teebox sits Boney's Pulpit, which is

a stone plague set upon the ground that reads: "Gentlemen, I suggest that we pause for a moment, admire the beautiful view, count our blessings. Very few of us are privileged to pass this way."

This thought provoking message came from long-time member Clarke W. Bearden, who passed away in 1998.

As we finished the round, the clubhouse lies ahead. A nondescript two-storey building, we could not enter as we did not have an accompanying member. Proceeding to a cluster of buildings by the first tee instead, we found the lockers rooms and pro shop.

Within the men's locker room is a sitting area with historic photos of key figures who have visited and events that had happened at the club. There was also a section that displayed memorabilia from the book "The Match: The Day The Game of Golf Changed Forever", authored by Mark Frost.

The legendary match that pitched amateur golfers Harvie Ward and Ken Venturi against Ben Hogan and Byron Nelson was held at Cypress Point and the items from that match are proudly on display here.

Walking past and entering the actual locker room are rows of wooden doors and seats.

An interesting fact about the club is that members actually shared lockers with each other. When I was brought to the locker of my host, I discovered two other names on the door, and I could see all the things they jointly left behind.

I spent as much time as I politely could soaking up the experience but as most good things in life, it soon came to an end.

Now, I just need to find out if it is truly more enticing than Augusta National. Time I called my friend, Ben.