

BEST NEW COURSE - Best New Remodel

Brookside Country Club, Canton, Ohio

By Ron Whitten



The 17th hole at Brookside.

State-of-the-Art Classic

There are undoubtedly skeptics who will conclude that Brookside Country Club in Canton, Ohio, is our Best New Remodel of 2005 not because of anything architect Brian Silva did, but because Brookside was a classic Donald Ross course to begin with. But this Ross had lost its bloom long ago, at the hands of decades of well-meaning but mistaken green chairmen and members. Some 30 or 40 years ago, they began planting shade trees along the fairways with little or no regard to their long-term impact. The trees grew, branched out and filled in, so in recent years Brookside's fairways were as narrow as bowling lanes.

And its fairway bunkers were mostly grass gutters, because over the years any bunker that anyone found offensive was filled in and grassed over. By 1979, Brookside had lost almost 50 of its 94 bunkers, nearly all of them fairway bunkers. Many had since been reclaimed, but few looked like Ross bunkers and many were maintenance headaches. The greens remained authentic in contours, but modern mowing practices had reduced their rectangular shapes to ovals that were easier to mow.

What Silva did to reclaim the Ross design was not unroll the original blueprints and slavishly reproduce every feature in accordance with its 1922 dictates. Instead, he updated Brookside while fashioning nearly everything in the style of the original architect.

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Sometimes he did restore Ross bunkers, as on the first and 10th holes, where their outlines were still plainly visible. But Ross had a set of cross bunkers less than 150 yards off the tee on the short, uphill par-4 15th. Seeing no point in restoring bunkers that would catch only high-handicappers, Silva instead added cross bunkers farther up the hill, in the 300-yard range. But he made sure they were built in the Ross style, with geometric shapes, angular faces and canted sand bottoms. Today, most observers mistake them for genuine Ross hazards.

Silva had more than 800 trees removed, not just to improve playability but to provide more sunlight and air to tees, fairways and greens. That allowed him to widen fairways considerably and position new tees at a variety of angles. He installed five sets of tees on every hole, with new, shorter forward tees and longer back ones. (The original design had just 37 tee boxes, which had been increased over time, but the course had still played impossibly long for women.)

Silva also restored the greens to their original boundaries, reclaiming some remarkable pin positions, and he directed installation of new drainage and irrigation.

Silva's work has re-established the nuances of the original Ross design. The bend of a creek, the plunge of a fairway, the dip of a green are all back in play now. Brookside looks and feels like a state-of-the-art classic, challenging enough, dare we say it, to be the site of a major tournament. Perhaps not a U.S. Open or PGA Championship (the infrastructure just isn't there), but certainly a senior or LPGA major.



The 18th hole at Brookside.