

LAKESIDE GOLF CLUB CAMDEN, SYDNEY

# CONSTANT CRAVING

Lakeside Golf Club Camden has been rekindled to its former glory as a much-loved Sydney course.  
**By Rohan Clarke**

**T**HOSE old enough to remember El Caballo Blanco can recall how its Andalusian stallions put south-west Sydney on the map in the 1980s.

Sydneysiders who never visited the equine theme park off Camden Valley Way were familiar with the dancing white horses from television commercials lauding their artistic feats.

While El Caballo Blanco closed its doors after 35 years in 2007, the surrounding countryside has turned into a teeming metropolis. Master-planned communities have sprung up at Willowdale, Emerald Hills, Gledswood Hills, The Hermitage, Gregory Hills, Oran Park, Catherine Field and Harrington Park.

Meanwhile, the most iconic golf course in the Macarthur region has undergone a dramatic facelift. Lakeside Golf Club Camden has flourished off the back of new management by Wests Group Macarthur along with a course reconfiguration precipitated by housing development at the adjacent Gledswood Hills residential estate.

## A MODERN LINKS

Camden Lakeside Golf Resort – as it was first known – felt like a breath of fresh air for the Sydney golf scene upon its opening in 1993. The Peter Thomson/Mike Wolveridge/Ross Perrett layout had been designed as a pay-to-play resort for a Japanese consortium – an unfamiliar



THE GREEN FEE TO PLAY LAKESIDE GOLF CLUB CAMDEN IS \$85 ON WEEKENDS WITH CART AND \$70 ON WEEKDAYS WITH CART.



concept for the Harbour City.

Set among rolling countryside in the Macarthur region, Camden Lakeside featured the pot-style bunkers synonymous with five-time Open champion Thomson. Fairways were generous while the push-up greens resembled tabletop surfaces, such was their flatness.

Camden Lakeside had many admirers, however the location proved challenging given a sparse population base and competition with Camden Valley Golf Resort (née Rugby League Country Club), which was initially owned by prominent New South Wales leagues clubs. When those leagues clubs sold off their shares in the 27-hole facility to a residential developer, Camden Valley members

relocated down the road into a merged entity that became known as Lakeside Golf Club Camden.

However, Lakeside struggled in the aftermath of the 2007-2008 global financial crisis. In 2012, Wests Group Macarthur took over management of Lakeside, raising its portfolio to four clubs. Wests Group Macarthur ploughed almost \$3 million into a clubhouse extension. It also co-funded a \$5 million redesign of the entire golf course in conjunction with developer Sekisui House. Recognition of its assistance came in 2019 when Lakeside received Golf NSW's Metropolitan Golf Club of the Year award.

When it took over management of Lakeside, Wests Group Macarthur

inherited the land-swap agreement that allowed for residential development by Sekisui House (and now Stockland). The agreement allowed for alterations to the existing course to optimise land sales.

That meant reconfiguring a golf course with Thomson's imprimatur. Such a shame. In stepped James Wilcher (Golf By Design), who has acquired a reputation as a Mr Fix It across Sydney. The touches he's added to Lakeside are some of his best redesign work. The new T-1 Creeping Bentgrass putting surfaces are a significant improvement from the original, flat, tabletop greens. A couple of greens perhaps have a tad too much movement, but that comes with the territory of providing a challenge for more accomplished golfers. Wilcher

says the movement means that simply hitting greens doesn't lead to pars and a golfer's IQ is called upon to ensure optimal scoring.

Lakeside's new pot bunkers are impressive in their strategic placement. Wilcher has avoided the temptation to saturate the green complexes with sand. And the exquisite shaping of the bunkering by Daniel Scott of Flemming Golf would fit seamlessly into any one of Thomson's links-style courses.

The new Lakeside is a real treat to play. Its firm, fast-running couch fairways are a rarity in Sydney where kikuyu is prevalent. The couch fairways and approaches are superbly maintained to provide a genuine linksy golf experience.

The maintenance crew has also taken to spraying colour into the dormant couch playing surfaces during autumn and winter. It's a brilliant initiative as it provides a vivid contrast between the emerald fairways and the straw colour of the rough. From an aesthetic perspective, Lakeside will continue to improve as residential construction and landscaping draws to a conclusion in the next two years.

"I used to play here when it was a resort-style course. And loved it. It was your special treat to come out and play an upmarket course without having to travel to Sydney," says Lakeside general manager Greg Field.

"Certainly now it's getting back to that level of presentation... I'm very excited about this spring. We'll see it in its absolute peak with the condition of the new holes settled in."

### POCKETS OF INTRIGUE

The first four holes at Lakeside respect the original Thomson/Wolveridge/Perrett routing. Only the green of the par-5 second has been relocated to accommodate a forthcoming residential precinct.

The fifth hole rises into the hillside where Greg Norman Golf Course Design/Atlas Golf Services constructed four new holes (the fifth to eighth) after the leagues clubs struck a land-swap deal with the developer of Camden Valley. They lie in Cumberland Plain Woodland, a savanna of low-lying groundcover with scattered eucalypts listed as an endangered ecological community. That posed limitations on the design, however they've been cleverly laid out in the form of a long par 4, short 5, short 4 and driveable 4.

Holes nine to 12 revert to the original layout (previously known as holes five,



SEVEN-DAY MEMBERSHIP IS \$1,650  
 (MIDWEEK MEMBERSHIP IS \$1,050).  
 THERE IS NO JOINING FEE AT PRESENT.

nine, 10 and 11). However, they feature new putting surfaces – as do all 14 green complexes that have been modified as part of Wilcher’s refurbishment.

At the 13th and 14th, Wilcher created two new holes framed by a residential precinct where blocks with golf-course frontage are selling for as much as \$1 million. The par-4 13th is a delightful drive-and-pitch hole while the par-3 14th is unusual for its vast putting surface and absence of bunkers.

The closing quartet is a mix of old and new holes. The par-5 15th plays down a similar corridor to the old 17th

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by Thomson/Wolveridge/Perrett. Holes 16 and 17 are new additions by Wilcher. The green of the driveable par-4 16th is protected by a lateral wetland on the left and a large mound on the front right. The par-3 17th has been skilfully

integrated into the routing given the amount of land lost to residential redevelopment. The 18th is improved immeasurably by opening the vista from the newly located tees. It’s a cracking dogleg left around a water hazard, offering a teasing dilemma of how much to bite off from the tee.

The old adage says, ‘Too many cooks spoil the broth.’ Yet in the case of Lakeside Golf Club Camden, too many golf course architects hasn’t so much left a mess. Rather it’s a kaleidoscopic journey traversing different pockets of an intriguing layout in Macarthur’s burgeoning south-west growth corridor. **G**



**THE DETAILS**  
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