

# STRATHFIELD

## GOLF CLUB

STRATHFIELD • NEW SOUTH WALES

Golf was first played at Strathfield Golf Club in 1898. But, as the course approaches the end of its multi-million dollar redesign, there has never been a more exciting time to visit the Sydney club.

WORDS MICHAEL JONES PHOTOGRAPHY BRENDAN JAMES

**T**he train was somewhere between Central and Burwood station when the man to my left finally spoke. He adjusted his tie, finished his morning coffee, looked down at his polished shoes and proceeded to slap my golf bag: "I don't know about you," he said. "But I'm feeling bloody great today."

It was certainly a strange way to start a conversation – but he seemed friendly enough,

so I explained that my car had broken down and I was now running late for my tee time at Strathfield Golf Club. "Oh!" He shouted. "My old house is right around the corner from there, do you need help getting there?"

It turned out Gary (or "Gazza" as he preferred to be called) was absolutely rubbish at giving directions. But, before too long, Strathfield's newly constructed, multi-million dollar clubhouse came into view. The large, ▶



The short par-4 9th offers a genuine birdie chance if your wedge play is on song.



The uphill par-3 2nd hole is only 135 metres from the tips but it plays into the prevailing wind.



An interesting aspect of the redesign is the use of Zoysia grass exclusively to edge all bunkers.

contemporary building was an impressive sight – and it stood proudly above the opening nine holes of the golf course.

So too, did James Wilcher, the man responsible for the extensive redesign of the layout.

The Sydney-based architect, who founded Golf by Design in 1999, was commissioned to reconfigure all 18 holes after the club made the decision to sell portions of its land to housing developers.

Metro Property jumped at the opportunity

in 2015 and paid more than \$50 million for what used to be the clubhouse, practice area and car park – all of which has since been moved to the western side of Centenary Drive (which essentially dissects the course into two nines) and now includes an underground car park.

The initial budget of the three-year project was expected to be around the one million dollar mark – but rezoning and safety implications with nearby houses has since seen costs approach \$5.5 million. Wilcher, however,

believes every dollar has been wisely spent.

“I think the members have seen the results and are starting to realise we don’t need money left in a bank account, we need a good golf course,” Wilcher said.

It doesn’t take long to spot one of the more interesting aspects to the entire redesign: The use of Zoysia grass around the edges of bunkers. This fast-growing grass is easy to maintain and it looks superb (in my opinion). But its length and density means players are less likely to find the traps – and they could potentially find

themselves without a stance.

The grass’ visual appeal and its practicality will certainly receive mixed reviews. But surely that can only be a good thing. Golf course design is an art form and should therefore promote discussion.

“The Zoysia grass helps set the new bunkers off, it grows quickly, it’s denser and it’s structurally better,” Wilcher said. “So the maintenance associated to the bunker edges is probably a fifth to a tenth of what they would be if they were couch – and I think they play okay too.

“We’re going to keep the edges fluffy like they are. People are still going to find the bunkers. I guess it’s slightly less likely the ball will roll into them, but you’ve got to look for differences to other places. The Zoysia grass looks really smart. I’m an aestheticist. It’s one thing to have a wonderful playing golf course, but I find people tend to play better on a course that they think looks and feels good.”

The passion in Wilcher’s voice is evident – and it is reflected in the rest of his work at Strathfield, which does, indeed, look good. Each new hole possesses something different and the course demands a variety of shots to be played throughout a round.

His changes to the back nine, in particular, are to be commended and received heavy praise from the club’s General Manager, Neil Hardy.

“The back nine used to look like sausages laid down beside each other,” said Hardy, who has been at the helm for the entire project. “The holes went up and down with a river going through the middle. But now, with the

way Jim’s got it going, you actually cross the river three times. The holes are so much more interesting.”

The par-4 12th fits that description nicely. The tight tee shot demands a left-to-right ball flight – but anything blocked or sliced is fraught with danger and will find tree trouble or the aforementioned river. Good drives from the back tees (377 metres) will leave most players facing a short or mid-iron into a kidney-shaped green.

First-time visitors – particularly those who don’t always carry rangefinders or GPS units like myself – will likely see two traps parallel to each other protecting the putting surface. But, upon further inspection, players will soon realise the bunkers are actually 20 metres short of the green.

It is a visual illusion that appears constantly throughout the design and something Wilcher likes to employ on flatter holes.

“What it does is create doubt in a golfer’s mind because what they see doesn’t translate with what they know, in terms of distance, either on the card or what their measuring appliance tells them,” Wilcher said. “Doubt is a wonderful thing when strategising a golf course, so fooling a golfer’s depth perception is an interesting tool I use when designing.”

The eastern side of the course certainly boasts some quality holes and has made the most of a confined space.

The new course at Strathfield is still in its infancy and will take time to mature. But, as the major renovation nears completion, there is already plenty to suggest this proud golf club is destined to reach new heights.

At 505 metres, the par-5 3rd will be Strathfield’s second longest hole of the new layout.



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– JAMES WILCHER

## FACT FILE

### THE COURSE

**LOCATION:** Weeroona Road, Strathfield, New South Wales, 2135.

**CONTACT:** (02) 9642 0326; (02) 9053 1761 (pro shop).

**WEBSITE:** www.strathfieldgolf.com.au

**DESIGNERS:** Tom Howard (1933); Graham Papworth (1994); James Wilcher (ongoing).

**COURSE SUPERINTENDENT:** Andrew Cannon.

**PGA PROFESSIONALS:** Mark Reeve.

**SLOPE RATINGS:** TBD.

**PLAYING SURFACES:** Kikuyu/Santa Ana couchgrass (fairways); A1/A4 bentgrass (greens); Zoysia (bunker edges).

**GREEN FEES:** \$50 (18 holes for adults); \$25 (18 holes for full-time students aged 19-24); \$10 (18 holes for students aged 12-18). Student identification is required.

### THE CLUB

**MEMBERSHIPS:** Full Play memberships cost \$2,500 (\$2,200 subscription fees and \$300 house levy) and do as they suggest, providing full playing rights seven days per week. The range of Intermediate memberships cover people (through separate categories) aged between 21 to 35 and cost from \$1,185 to \$1,825, allowing full playing rights.

There are also flexible memberships for those who are time conscious, including Midweek and Limited Play memberships that range from \$1,750 to \$1,850.

For full membership categories, and their prices, visit [www.strathfield.com.au](http://www.strathfield.com.au)

**RECIPROCAL CLUBS:** ACT (Murrumbidgee Country Club); NSW (Forster Tuncurry Golf Club GC and Riverside Golf Club); Indonesia (Korma Country Club and Sedana Golf & Country Club); Japan (Koma Country Club); Malaysia (Tasik Puteri Golf Resort).

**WEDDINGS & CORPORATE GOLF:** The newly constructed clubhouse at Strathfield provides the perfect location for your wedding or corporate day. There are multiple rooms inside – and spacious outdoor areas will cater for any individual needs. Contact the club for details.