

PACIFIC DUNES

GOLF CLUB • NSW



A wasteland bunker and pond have been added to the 7th hole (MAIN); your strategy on the short par-4 3rd must be decisive (BELOW LEFT); the par-3 8th demands a well-struck tee shot to avoid sand (BELOW RIGHT).

STRATEGY-INSPIRED DESIGN AND FIVE-STAR CONDITIONING MAKE PACIFIC DUNES A MUST-PLAY COURSE FOR 2010.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: **BRENDAN JAMES**

One by-product of the advancement in club and ball technology has been its effect on golf course architecture during the past 15 years.

The designers of most new golf courses since the mid-90s have been urged by the developer to come up with a layout that fits the 'championship' tag and, part of that criteria, means stretching the course in excess of 6,400 metres (7,000 yards) from the tips to combat the greater distances players hit the ball these days. While this may be true for pros and elite amateurs, most of us haven't improved dramatically with all the new gear, which is a story for another day.

This push for longer courses, with some now getting closer to 7,000 metres, has almost seen the extinction of one of the most enjoyable and interesting holes for all golfers – the short par-4. It is a tough ask to be able to include these holes – any length between 250 and 330 metres – in any course design where the underlying motive is to create a lengthy course.

One course designer who believes the short par-4 is making a comeback is James Wilcher who, in recent years, has created several highly acclaimed layouts including Pacific Dunes, near Port Stephens on NSW's lower north coast.

"I would like to think the short par-4 isn't dead and its possibly the case here in Australia but in places like China and other developing golf countries the brief is generally to build long championship courses where length seems to be all important and short par 4's get left out," Wilcher told Golf Australia. "I think, generally, golf architecture has lacked subtlety over the last two decades (particularly in America) but I think its making a comeback and short par-4s should be part of that movement. I certainly try and make sure there are a couple per course that I work on."

Wilcher said short par-4s are enjoyed by all golfers.

"I think short par-4 holes should tempt the longer hitters to take driver in the belief that par or better is only one decent drive away," he said. "Otherwise an iron to safety and short pitch is possible for all when conservatism takes over.

"I love the idea of 3 or 6+ being scored on the same hole with



