



U.S.  
Open  
SPECIAL SECTION



No. 18: A new dawn breaks on the 450-yard home hole, revealing the green's treacherous false front.



# Let the Sun Shine In

*Winged Foot's West Course  
has undergone  
substantive changes  
that have made it  
fairer, harder – and  
better than ever*

BY STEPHEN GOODWIN

When the curtain rises on the 2006 U.S. Open, the galleries and players are in for a surprise. They are going to see – emphasis on *see* – Winged Foot's famously difficult West Course in a whole new light. Sunlight, that is. Like a man who has long worn a luxuriant beard, Winged Foot has given itself a major shave, and its stern face is now more visible than at any time in the last half century.



**No. 9: Played as a 514-yard par four during the Open, its large green is ringed by deep bunkers.**

Several hundred trees have been removed from the course that has hosted four previous U.S. Opens and a PGA Championship. There are still many stately, deciduous trees on the golf course, but nearly all of the mature evergreens are gone. While these trees, which were largely planted in the 1950s and 60's, had lent a certain character to Winged Foot, it came at the expense of playability – and sunlight. Over the years, the dense evergreens had blocked views and isolated holes from one another, enclosing them in green walls.

“Now you can see Tillinghast’s original design,” says Tom Marzolf, a senior design associate in the office of Tom Fazio, the architect who has overseen the changes. Since 1987, Marzolf has been Fazio’s point man at Winged Foot; though he has been involved in the design of many new courses, his focus has been on renovations of classic layouts (Riviera, Oakmont, Merion, Oak Hill) with a record of major tournament golf.

Marzolf attended the 1997 PGA at Winged Foot and noted how members of the gallery struggled to catch glimpses of golf through the trees, and how the trees adversely affected play. “The trees had encroached on the playing areas,” he says. “Literally every hole was affected. Like that of a lot of clubs, Winged

Foot’s planting program was well intended, but many of the species chosen – Norway spruce, Colorado blue spruce, and Douglas fir – were non-native evergreens that retain their lower branches. These trees are serious hazards on a golf course, since a player who hits into them has little chance to recover, even if he finds his ball. And for a while, the club had a consultant who wanted to plant ornamental trees so that there would be different colors in different seasons. Basically, he was trying to decorate the golf course.”

Marzolf describes these efforts with patience, but you can hear the edge in his voice when he says, “A golf course is a playing field, like a baseball field. You wouldn’t plant a tree in Shea Stadium. On a golf course, the golf ball should have the right of way.”

After that 1997 PGA, Winged Foot decided that it was time for a shave – er, time to thin out the trees. The decision was accompanied by some remorse, since trees are always an emotional issue for club members, and the club had just lost to disease the historic, beloved elm that was a signature feature of the East course’s 10th hole. Many members who were involved with the planting of the trees in earlier decades were strongly opposed to clearing them out. But in the end, the advocates



**No. 2: A back hole location will bring the towering elm into play on this difficult par four.**

**Course Superintendent Eric Greytok (right) has supervised Winged Foot's agronomy upgrades.**



of tree removal were able to implement their changes. This master plan included many other course modifications as well, and, Marzolf emphasizes, was not done specifically to get ready for an Open. He says, "The goal at Winged Foot was never to attract major championships. We knew that if we kept doing the right things, the championships would come. The goal was member benefit."

Fewer trees brought dramatically increased light and air circulation to many areas of the course that had been sorely lacking this crucial ventilation. To help implement the remaining parts of the course renovation,

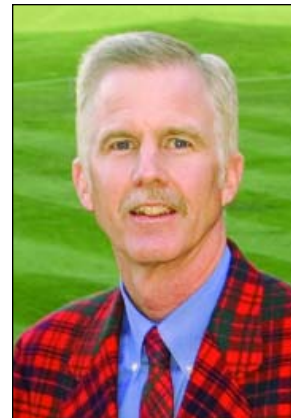


required a rock hammer to break up the bedrock beneath the sand), and refurbish the drainage system – not to mention replanting the grass that had long been covered by trees and expanding the putting surfaces of a number of greens. Furthermore, the work on the West Course was only the half of it. The East Course has been undergoing a similar renovation, and Greytok was charged with keeping both courses open for play during the process.

“Winged Foot is a progressive club,” he says, “and we were building a foundation for the future. *Golf Digest* ranks the West Course at No. 8 in the country, and the East Course is ranked in the top 50. No other club has two courses ranked that high. The philosophy of the club, and the philosophy of the architect, wasn’t to restore but to take technology into account.”

When it comes to design, talk about “technology” usually means a significant lengthening of the golf course – but Winged Foot has always had plenty of length. For the 1929 U.S. Open, won by Bobby Jones with a score of 294, the West Course played at 6,786 yards; for the 1974 Open, won by Hale Irwin with a 7-over score of 287 (in a tournament infamous as “The Massacre at Winged Foot”) it played at 6,961 yards; for the 2006 Open, the West will top out at 7,244 yards – considerably less than the yardage at several recent majors, but not short by any means.

In fact, the nearly 300 yards that has been



**Course renovations were led by Tom Marzolf, a leading architect in Tom Fazio’s design firm.**

---

*“A golf course is a playing field, like a baseball field. You wouldn’t plant a tree in Shea Stadium. On a golf course, the golf ball should have the right of way.”*

**–Tom Marzolf**

---

Winged Foot hired superintendent Eric Greytok in 2001. He came with impressive credentials, having worked as an assistant at Congressional, Riviera, and Merion. In 1999, at the age of 26, he got his first head superintendent job – at none other than Pebble Beach, where he ran the show at the 2000 U.S. Open and for the PGA Tour’s AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am.

Much of Greytok’s work at Winged Foot has been anything but glamorous. Indeed, much of it has been underground. He has supervised efforts to replace a patchwork irrigation system, rebuild old bunkers (this often

added for this year’s Open comes at just a few holes. The fact is that Winged Foot – with its narrow fairways, demanding par fours, tiny pedestal greens and deep bunkers – has always been a prototype Open golf course. It requires straight driving and, in Tillinghast’s words, approach shots of “rifle accuracy.” And Tillinghast himself was especially proud of the undulating greens he built at Winged Foot. “The holes,” he wrote, “are like men, rather similar from foot to neck, but with the greens showing the same varying characters as human faces.”

To give an overview of the changes on Winged Foot's West Course, Greytok – along with Gene Westmoreland, the tournament director of the MGA and a member of the Winged Foot Green Committee – gave *The Met Golfer* a tour of the course on a crisp April morning. Here is a hole-by-hole account.

**No. 1, 450 yards, par 4.** This opener throws down the gauntlet and shows golfers exactly what to expect on the West Course: long, strong doglegs and fiendish greens. The wall of evergreens down the left side of the hole is gone.

The green, especially its front third, is one of the most severely sloped and contoured on the course. In 1974, Jack Nicklaus was above the hole with his approach shot and putted off the green. While nothing has been done to the central portion of the green, it has been pushed back around the edges to temper its severity and create new hole locations. Greytok walks along the edges, pointing out the previous boundaries of the green. “The rough had grown closer in over time,” he says. “We could see in old pictures how much more the greens had extended.”

**No. 2, 453 yards, par 4.** The principal change here is a new teeing ground that adds 40 yards. This hole is called “Elm,” named for the magnificent elm that still stands at the left rear of the green. The club has treated it with

**No. 11: Though relatively short at 396 yards, a narrow landing area will challenge the Open field.**



every kind of TLC imaginable to keep it alive; now that the landmark elm by the 10th hole on the East Course has been removed, this elm is perhaps the most symbolic, venerable tree on the club grounds.

**No. 3, 250 yards, par 3.** This already intimidating par three plays uphill, and the USGA has said that they will not use its full length for more than one day during the U.S. Open. Even at its standard length of 216 yards it was, in Billy Casper's estimation, one of the most dangerous shots on the golf course. En route to winning the 1959 Open, Casper laid up all four times he played this hole – and made par every time.

**No. 4, 469 yards, par 4.** No changes were made to No. 4, and it didn't need any. Though it plays downhill, the long second shot must be struck precisely to hold the difficult, small-ish green, with OB lurking close behind.

**No. 5, 515 yards, par 5.** Trees have been removed from near the landing zone of this short par five, but the fairway bunker on the right side of the fairway has been repositioned to make it more threatening to long hitters – it takes a blow of 315 yards to fly past it. Players who avoid that will be able to go for the green in two, but having an eagle putt won't be easy. Greytok cracks a smile as he looks at the small pedestal green on one of the highest spots on the course. The bunker lines swirl around it like artful calligraphy. “This is one of my favorite green complexes,” he says. “I just like the way it looks.”

**No. 6, 321 yards, par 4.** This devilish little hole plays slightly downhill to a green shaped like a chunky winter boot; most of the boot's upper is guarded by a long bunker. The USGA plans to grow the rough longer on this hole to penalize errant hitters who try to drive the green. Greytok and Westmoreland speculate about whether the pros will try, agreeing that they will probably play it as members do – lay up out of respect for the rough. Visually, though, it's tempting to pull out driver. “We took a lot of trees out on the right,” Greytok says. “They'd grown in so much that you couldn't really see the green.”

**No. 7, 162 yards, par 3.** This is the shortest hole on the course, and the last of the easiest three-hole stretch. “If there's a breather anywhere on the course,” says Westmoreland, “these three holes are it.”



RUSSELL KIRK/GOLFLINKS

**No. 10: The most beloved one-shooter at Winged Foot has an expanded green that will make two-putts even more precious.**

**No. 8, 475 yards, par 4.** “You have to drive it 300 yards if you want to see the green,” says Greytok of this formidable dogleg right. He points out how Tillinghast located the green behind a slight dip in the fairway – a tactic he used on several holes. In the Golden Age, when players used their eyes to gauge distance and were without the benefit of exact yardages, these dips played tricks with depth perception and made it hard to judge distances. Even though Open competitors will have precise measurements at their disposal, the look of this approach shot is sure to plant some small doubts in their minds.

**No. 9, 514 yards, par 4.** A par five for the members, this spectacular-looking hole points like an arrow at the clubhouse. The numerous bunkers are deep, flash-faced, clean-edged, and serpentine; some clubs have adopted a more ragged look for their bunkers,

but the flashing and clean edges, says Marzolf, “have always been the Winged Foot look.”

**No. 10, 188 yards, par 3.** Tillinghast’s favorite par three, described by Hogan as “a 3-iron into some lady’s bedroom.” Today’s players will use mid-irons, but the tee shot to this tightly guarded, severely undulating green is still demanding. Greytok explains the large amount the putting surface had shrunk over the years, and points out, with a certain glee, a new and especially dangerous back left hole location. Directly behind the gaping bunker, the landing area for this new section of the green is about the size of a mattress. “I hope they’ll use this location at least once,” he says.

**No. 11, 396 yards, par 4.** This fairway is shaped like a washboard, all ridges and valleys. It is appropriately called “Billows.” From the tee, players cannot see their ball land; and from the low places in the fairway, the approach to the small, heart-shaped green is semi-blind.

**No. 12, 640 yards, par 5.** A new tee has added more than 100 yards to this par five. In the 1997 PGA Championship, when the hole played 535 yards, some players bombed their tee shots so far that they had only short irons to the green. Others, as Marzolf observed, chose to lay up, declining to flirt with the thick evergreens around the green – many of which have now been removed.

**No. 13, 214 yards, par 3.** The last par 3 on the course, this one has a distinctly classic look with the crest of the green at the horizon line.

**No. 14, 458 yards, par 4.** This hole, “Shamrock,” takes its name from the shape of a bunker that hides the fairway landing area.

# G5

## THE G5™ IRON

Everything we put in the new G5 ends up on your scorecard. More forgiveness. Higher launch. Improved feel. Greater consistency. The G5. Not just a new iron. A better iron. Find out more. Visit [pinggolf.com](http://pinggolf.com) or call 1-800-4-PING-FIT.



IT'S AS IF  
THE  
**GREEN**  
ROLLED  
OUT A GIANT  
**WELCOME  
MAT.**

The carry is 270 yards, which isn't a problem for most Open competitors. However, this is the beginning of a relentless closing stretch of demanding par fours.

**No. 15, 416 yards, par 4.** Only a brave, or foolish, player will attempt to carry the brook that crosses the fairway about 300 yards from the tee. Greytok expects most players to lay up to the crest of the fairway – after that, there's a pronounced downhill slope to the brook – and leave themselves a shot of some 175 yards into the green that is situated diagonally to the approach. "When this project started in earnest," Greytok says, "there were so many trees on the right that you couldn't even see the green."

**No. 16, 487 yards, par 4.** The tee was shifted to the left on this hole, making it a sharper dogleg. The new tee has the same shape and low profile as the original tees elsewhere on the course. "One of the things I like most about this renovation," Greytok says, "is that you really can't tell that anything's been done out here. This tee looks like it's been here forever." The green used to be guarded by a pair of large trees that formed goalposts, but the one on the right – which was both loved and hated – has been removed.

**No. 17, 449 yards, par 4.** The 17th tee is one of the only places on the course where the "old" character of the course is still palpable. There are a few evergreens surrounding the tee, and a huge Norway spruce stands on the right side of the fairway, about 100 yards out. Since the hole doglegs right, that spruce tree means that no one is going to be cutting the corner. The only tee shot here is a fade. Since that is the preferred ball flight of most big hitters, expect this hole to play easier than in the past.

**No. 18, 452 yards, par 4.** On the inside corner of this dogleg left, there are still trees aplenty; the player who hits a drive into them is in jail. On the outside corner, a bunker has been relocated, enlarged, and deepened so that it now threatens any drive between 275 and 315 yards.

No one will want to play from a bunker to this topsy-turvy green. Eric points out new hole locations back left and front left, but most of the putting surface remains as it has been since the course opened. Members still like to see if they can make the slippery putt that Bobby Jones holed in 1929 to send the Open into a playoff.

Winged Foot reeks with history, and the 2006 Open promises to add another illustrious chapter. The course looks like the original Tillinghast course, and there's one other historical precedent that Eric thinks will apply. "The pros have never shot lights out here, and I don't think they will this year, either. I think par will win the Open." ■

**Stephen Goodwin** is the author of a new book entitled *Dream Golf: The Making of Bandon Dunes*. He lives in Reston, Virginia.

## Meet the Host

He has been intrinsic to Winged Foot's prosperity and success over the last 15 years, and during U.S. Open week, General Manager Colin Burns will work closely with the USGA to make sure all the logistics go smoothly. From his corner office on the second floor of the clubhouse, he'll monitor everything from the flow of spectators to food preparation to making sure Tiger Woods gets tickets to a Yankee game or a Broadway show. "If I could be up on the clubhouse roof with binoculars, I would," Burns says with a smile. His welcoming demeanor has come to be appreciated by Winged Foot members and guests. By the time a champion is crowned on U.S. Open Sunday, competitors will surely feel the same way. –Greg Midland



JEFF WEINER

## WHICH PING IRON FITS YOUR GAME?

Matching a model to your ability and preference is an important part of the custom-fitting process. Are you looking for maximum forgiveness? Try the G5. Like an iron with a more traditional, blade-like design? The S59 Tour is the one. Want something that combines the best of both? You need the i5.

