



THE SWEET SPOT

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Going from a quarry to an iconic golf course

NOTHING beats the view from a helicopter to truly appreciate the scale of a golf course.

The view of the new Steyn City Golf Course is an incredible testament to the transformation of what was once a disused quarry.

There has been so much anticipation about this golf course just north of Johannesburg. My first look at it this week confirmed why.

The Nicklaus Design, brought to fruition under the ever-watchful eyes of the Golf Data team of Robbie Marshall and Gary Waage, is everything you'd expect from them. Nicklaus excels in his ability to present a golfer with a pleasing sight off the tee, and this course is indeed a visual experience as it unfolds before you.

It's also been designed with the aim of being highly playable by the recreational golfers who will make up the bulk of rounds here.

As golf director Ken Payet said at the launch this week: "We want the average golfer to have a good time and to come back."

Giuseppe Plumari, the chief executive of the Steyn City development that frames this course, says there was a definite desire to make a statement with this course.

"Douw Steyn put a huge amount of resources into this to make the statement of delivering something unique to the public," said Plumari.

"He wanted it not to be just a dream, but a reality."

There's no doubt that this golf course will set a new benchmark in terms of conditioning as well as the clubhouse facilities.

The clubhouse has been designed to blend with the surroundings, and its green footprint is maximised by a so-called living roof with plants growing on it.

It has already won two awards for its design and the architect had just stepped off the plane from Europe after collecting the second of these.

But perhaps the most impressive aspect of this entire course is its timing.

It's no secret that the South African golf industry is facing challenges brought on by the tough global economic climate.

To launch a golf course of this scale and stature in these times is exactly the kind of boost the local industry needs.

You can argue till the cows come home about whether this country needs another golf course or not.

The point is that this country does need employment opportunities, which a facility such as this provides.

It does need upgraded infrastructure, which this development is providing at private cost but for obvious public benefit.

You may even dislike golf entirely, but you cannot fail to appreciate a piece of land that was barren to the point of being dead for any other use being transformed into a green space on which 1 million trees will eventually be planted.

And you can be as cynical as you want, but you cannot miss the point that a man as wealthy as Douw Steyn could have taken his money and spent it anywhere in the world.

"But he's decided to invest in his home country," said Plumari.

"We should encourage more of this. We should be saying, 'Come back and invest in your country of birth'."

And that's when a golf course becomes a symbol of so much more that can be good for this country.

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