

**GOLF  
WORLD**

LES BORDES (NEW)  
ORLEANS, FRANCE

# TOP 100

**COURSES**  
CONTINENTAL  
EUROPE

**EPIC NEW  
ENTRY**

Where will Gil  
Hanse's new Les  
Bordes feature?

**HENRIK  
STENSON**

**EXCLUSIVE:** The former Open  
champion on his ambitions in  
course design

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# WELCOME

This was one of the first Top 100s I compiled for *Golf World*, just over a decade ago now.

I'd played a fair bit on the continent and we had a wide array of correspondents in each country who would feed back their views on the best courses on their doorstep.

Comparing that list with the one over the next 60 pages is chalk and cheese, however. There are courses in the 2012 list that really aren't anywhere near being contenders now.

So what's changed? Well, a few things, actually.

First, not only have several outstanding courses opened in the last 10 years, many historic courses have also undergone thorough and highly successful restorations.

Second, not only have I travelled extremely widely in search of the best

of continental golf, I've also been fortunate enough to put together a panel who have done similarly.

Third, I also think what constitutes 'good' to us (and I naturally include myself here) is also a bit different now; we have moved away from perfectly nice, manicured parklands with a few holes being made dramatic by water as being good enough for this list. Rightly or wrongly, we now tend to reward courses that are a bit different over more standard fare. We aren't intentionally contrarian or provocative, but distinctive courses are doing well in this and our other rankings.

That means some big names from the past miss out altogether or are much lower down the list than they are used to. It also means tremendous variety within the 100, so there is plenty for golfers of all tastes to enjoy.

Well, I hope so anyway, because identifying the best courses around – whether those in continental Europe, in Scotland, for £60 & Under, or that offer the most fun – is the entire point of us producing these Top 100s.

As I've said before, every place in every ranking is decided with one motivation in mind; that what you find when you play a course we have included tallies with where we have ranked it and how we've described it.

I've played 91 of this 100 and 26 of the 40 that also got down to the final cut – it would have been more but for Covid – and I'm confident that we are identifying the very best of continental Europe, but I'd really love to hear your views on where we've gone wrong – as well as what we've got right.

**Chris Bertram, Top 100 Editor**



Praia D'El Rey, Portugal



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# HOW THE LIST WAS CREATED

It's our most competitive continental European Top 100 ever – but who decided which courses got in and what criteria did we use?

This continental European Top 100 follows the format of the English, Scottish, Irish and Welsh equivalents from earlier this year. But there is no harm in recapping the methodology used in creating this refreshed ranking of the elite courses on the continent.

A panel of readers and experts continues to rank the contenders. We started this approach in 2015 and remain certain that it offers the most accurate reflection of the best courses for you to play.

Of course it's still acutely subjective, but we believe the cross-section of views we get from golfers – of all tastes and abilities – who have

travelled so widely, is priceless. In addition to their extensive knowledge, the fact they've paid their own way round all these great courses and are thus not beholden to any club should not be underestimated.

Each course is 'marked', which we believe adds ballast to the ranking by explaining more clearly how we arrived at our decisions and highlighting a course's relative strengths and weaknesses more effectively to you.

We have simplified the marks by dispensing with decimals and rounding up instead. It means many more 'ties' – and thus positions decided by the Top 100 editor – but it feels easier to digest that way.

## THE CRITERIA USED TO ASSESS EACH COURSE

### Design: 40 marks

The key category, split into three sub-sections: Does the course take advantage of its landscape? (20); the green complexes (10); the routing (10).

### Setting: 15 marks

The aesthetic value of the surrounding views and the course itself. And the overall 'atmosphere' of the course – not the club.

### Memorability: 15 marks

How easy it is to recall holes? Are they distinctive, varied and interesting. Are they strategic and heroic?

### Playability: 10 marks

Is it just too tough, possibly even unfair, for the majority to cope with? Or is it easily enjoyed by all levels?

### Consistency: 10 marks

Does the course deliver all of the qualities in the aforementioned categories hole after hole, or is it let down by a few poor ones?

### Presentation: 10 marks

Is maintenance at ease with its surroundings? And the condition of tees, fairways, bunkers and greens. Naturally we are sympathetic to and acknowledge seasonal variations and greenkeeping routines on visits.

### Answers to FAQs

■ In the event of a tie, the Top 100 editor adjudicates based on breadth and strength of opinion across the panel.

■ Off-course facilities, customer service or tournament pedigree play no part in the ranking. Neither do green fee cost or value.

■ Videaun would be a contender but we do not feel enough panellists have played it to rank it properly. This will be rectified for 2022. We don't like to guess about courses...

■ We did not consider Lykia Links due to operational issues we are uncertain of – under normal circumstances it's a Top 100 course.



Penha Longa, Portugal



## THE PANEL WHO COMPILED THE LIST

We assembled an exceptional panel with a vast knowledge of continental Europe's courses. In addition to this panel, which marked courses across the continent, we have also leaned for years on the insight of experts in all the key countries to ensure we left no stone unturned.

These included: Spain, Alfonso Erhardt; Portugal, Sean Corte-Real; Netherlands, Ruben van der Zaag; France, Jean-Francois Bosse; Sweden, Olle Dahlgren; Denmark, Thomas Vennekilde; Finland & Estonia, Teemu Tyru and Switzerland, Franco Carabelli.

### CHRIS BERTRAM

GW's Top 100 editor has played 91 of the 100 and 26 of the 40 contenders.

### JOERG BERINGER

The German is a travel industry professional and has played more than 60 of the 100.

### PETER B.JERKESETH

The Norwegian is a Scandinavian expert but travels widely to southern Europe too.

### NIGEL & SUZANNE BUTLER

Brussels-based duo run Where2Golf.com and have played more than 80 of the 100 courses.

### XAVIER CHAMPAGNE

The Belgian has played almost all of the top 50 – plus has the best name!

### PETER GAMMIE

Lives in France and is an expert on its courses in addition to the key contenders in Spain and Portugal.

### DAVID JONES

Well-travelled Scotsman with specific expertise in France, Portugal, Germany, Switzerland and Netherlands. Also Twitter's UK Golf Guy.

### DARIUS OLIVER

Australian architect and writer who has been to almost every corner of the continent.

### DIRK SCHAEFFER

A German who loves travelling to Europe's lesser-trodden courses.

### HANS-JOACHIM WALTER

Another German, who has played 95 of the 100 and is an assiduous documenter of his verdicts.



1

## MORFONTAINE (GRAND PARCOURS)

PARIS, FRANCE

Design **37** Setting **12** Memorability **14** Playability **8**  
Consistency **10** Presentation **8** **TOTAL 89**

New ranking, same No.1. It might feel unimaginative and predictable, but we aren't here to make startling changes for the sake of it; we're here to identify the finest courses, and in continental Europe, Morfontaine's 'Big Course' is the very best.

There is a wonderful course over the page at No.2, an exquisite one at No.3 which with continuing restoration could be a threat, and a new course later in the top 10 that we feel will garner increasing appeal, but it feels as if this Parisian masterpiece will be very difficult to shift.

The work of eccentric Englishman Tom Simpson, with some sympathetic input this millennium by Kyle Phillips, has created a beguiling heathland that oozes strategy and a peerless ambiance. Vintage Simpson green complexes and holes of infinite variety characterise a wonderful all-round course at a private club of inimitable character.

## IS MORFONTAINE AS GOOD AS ENGLAND'S FINEST HEATHLANDS?

Architect and writer Darius Oliver assesses how the No.1 stacks up against Sunningdale, Swinley, Woking and co...

The Morfontaine versus Surrey/Berkshire heathlands comparison is an interesting one, because they obviously share similarities, but the best courses around London certainly have their own character and style – just like Morfontaine. I'm a little biased toward Morfontaine as a club in some ways, simply because it has that outrageously contoured short course (Valliere) which none of the Surrey/Berkshire courses have.

So as a prospective member, if they were all accessible and a similar distance from home I would probably lean towards Sunningdale firstly because it has two courses – but then it's between Morfontaine and St George's Hill because they're beautiful and have 27 holes. Morfontaine might just get the nod though, because of the Valliere.

Swinley Forest is up there as well and a wonderful experience in part because it's so exclusive, like Morfontaine. I'm also a huge fan of Woking.

Tom Simpson is a link between some of the English heathlands and Morfontaine. So many of his courses have been altered over the years, and much of what I've seen were redesigns of older courses anyway so perhaps not truly reflective of his overall portfolio. But I really enjoyed his drawings and the work I've seen that remains is great, and original, so I admire him more than most from the Golden Age.

I'm sure he would be right up there with Harry Colt and Dr MacKenzie had the likes of Chiberta, Spa (Royal Fagnes) and Ravenstein, for example, been restored when I played them. Hardelet too, which looks great in photos now but was a shadow of its former self when I was there 15 years ago.

In terms of how many continental European courses would get in a Top 100 alongside GB&I courses, that's a hard one to answer because there are probably 15-20 British courses in that bottom rung that I haven't seen so can't properly compare – but I would say there would likely be seven continental European courses in my collated Top 100.

Morfontaine, Chantilly, Royal Hague, Kennemer and De Pan would certainly make the list, and I suspect that I would sneak Fontainebleau and Falkenstein in as well. Falkenstein needs a serious restoration, but still beats some of the UK courses I've seen near the bottom of those Top 100 lists.

I know I've rated it much higher than others and can see all its faults, but in my view a course with a few great holes beats a course that has few weaknesses but few out and out highlights. From what I remember, if Falkenstein was sensitively restored – which I believe is now happening – and able to play firm and fast, it would be amazing.





## UTRECHT DE PAN

UTRECHT, NETHERLANDS

Design **35** Setting **12** Memorability **14** Playability **8**  
Consistency **10** Presentation **8** **TOTAL 87**

No.2 again for 'De Pan', but what a runner-up it is. It's superior to courses that have held the honour of being our No.1 – all of whom are now behind it in our list – but has the mighty Morfontaine ahead of it, and that's a significant hurdle to overcome. As the marks confirm, this Harry Colt heathland is by clear distance the No.2 and closer to the top spot than third.

Heather, pines, gorgeous turf that is sandy and firm... De Pan has a tangible 'glad to be alive' feeling. The routing and individual holes are Colt at his best. De Pan is a traditional club but is a welcoming one, and that means with a bit of advanced planning you can enjoy this masterful heathland for yourself.

## THE JOY OF 'DE PAN'

Chris Bertram attempts to encapsulate the excellence and ambiance of this enchanting Dutch heathland

"All players whose interest in the game extends beyond an unending and unequal contest with 'par' have at one time or another conjured a vision of their ideal inland course. A course that shall incorporate all the fine features of a links but with the light and shade, the aromatic scents, and vistas and backgrounds of red-boled, green-headed pines. A course where fairways are spacious, where an erring short will not be lost... De Pan had every one of these rare qualities; indeed, as a dream course, it fills the bill."

I hesitated to use those words by Guy Campbell because having read it, what follows now will indubitably seem disappointingly inferior in comparison. But I included them because the words of the man who designed Royal Cinque Ports and West Sussex, sum up De Pan so beautifully and accurately. It has what all my favourite courses possess in abundance; charm, atmosphere and class. It has just the right amount of forgiveness and just the right amount of quirk.

It's far from a short course where visitors can expect to comfortably play to their handicap, but it's anything but a slog. De Pan is all about inspiration not perspiration.

Harry Colt was less eccentric than Tom Simpson – who has our No.1 and No.3 entries – but he knew how to make a landscape come alive, to test and tease the golfer with effortlessly entertaining holes.

There are many examples of Colt's brilliance in Britain and Ireland, some of which are possibly better than De Pan, but as you walk around the side of its characterful, alluring clubhouse and survey the 1st and 18th holes, you'd rather be precisely nowhere else. Even a member at the most revered of the Surrey or Berkshire

heathlands would feel a tingle of excitement at the scene before their delighted eyes.

The names of De Pan's opening two holes give an accurate, enticing description of what you can expect here: the 1st is called 'Zandverstuiving', which translates to English as sand drift; and the 2nd is named 'Pijpestrootje' – which is purple moor grass, or, to us, heather. Later, the 13th is 'Grove Den', or Scots Pine in English.

Sand, heather and pines – Colt will not have needed much encouragement to start work on this site in 1928. He began with nine holes and routed them so masterfully over terrain that is unusually hilly for the Netherlands due to Ice Age residues that left a sandy ridge on which a second nine was

soon added. It remains largely as he left it, although Frank Pont, the revered renovator of Colt work and a member at De Pan, is quietly restoring it here and there.

Quiet is a felicitous word, because the De Pan experience is a gloriously tranquil one; only the rustle of deer, foxes and rabbits disturbing the leaf and pine-needle floor are heard as you play here.

My favourite holes would be the 6th and especially the 10th (above), a predictable choice. The former has a blind drive and a blind approach and even if you don't especially like blind shots I'm certain you can't dislike it. There are actually four holes at De Pan with a blind shot of some sort.

The 10th is a sporty two-shotter of barely

370 yards – yet even off the elevated backs you'll take a long iron or fairway wood because of the bottleneck that appears down the undulating fairway that runs between pine and heather-strewn hills which create a glorious heathland scene. The bottleneck means you may well not have a view of the flag for your mid-iron approach. I find it impossible to believe anyone would not be entertained by this hole. Some may not love 5, 7 and 11 – especially the par-5 former, as it's not the original routing and has been further altered by tree growth – but they are a minor lowering of quality. I simply could not agree more with Guy Campbell... he simply expressed his affection for this heathland utopia more eloquently than I.





**MONTE REI**  
GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB



# THE #1 GOLF COURSE IN PORTUGAL FOR THE LAST 10 YEARS

**3** HIGHEST POSITION  
**FONTAINEBLEAU**  
PARIS, FRANCE

Design **33** Setting **12** Memorability **13**  
Playability **7** Consistency **9** Presentation **8**  
**TOTAL 82**

The highest position this characterful heathland south of Paris has reached in our listing, recognition of the woodland management the club has undertaken to preserve its living, breathing showcase of Tom Simpson genius. Here, the Englishman crafted a work of art on to a natural landscape that was perfect for engaging golf. The exciting thing is, Fontainebleau could keep getting better, with ongoing restoration. It is, however, already an enchanting, spellbinding course draped over undulating land lined by pine, birch, beech and oak and decorated by rocks, bracken and heather. The moment you step on to the 1st tee, in the shadow of the old-world, Norman-style clubhouse, you're taken in by Fontainebleau, a boulder-studded hill towering over the green in the distance. It's a thrilling start and the pace is

maintained at the long 3rd, whose panoramic view of the royal forest – where King Francis I used to hunt – from an elevated tee is even more breathtaking. Hardly any hole resembles another, and many force you to make tough tactical choices. Should you lay up with your second at the short par-5 12th – or attack the green and risk your shot rebounding into the trees off the intimidating rocks occupying its approaches? Late in the round comes the outstanding 16th, which European Tour winner Gregory Havret says is the best par 4 in France. It's short by today's standards, but is exacting as a result of the trees, 100+ bunkers and greens with plenty of movement in them – they were, after all, designed by the eccentric Simpson. This beauty is not easily seduced, and is bettered by only two on the continent.

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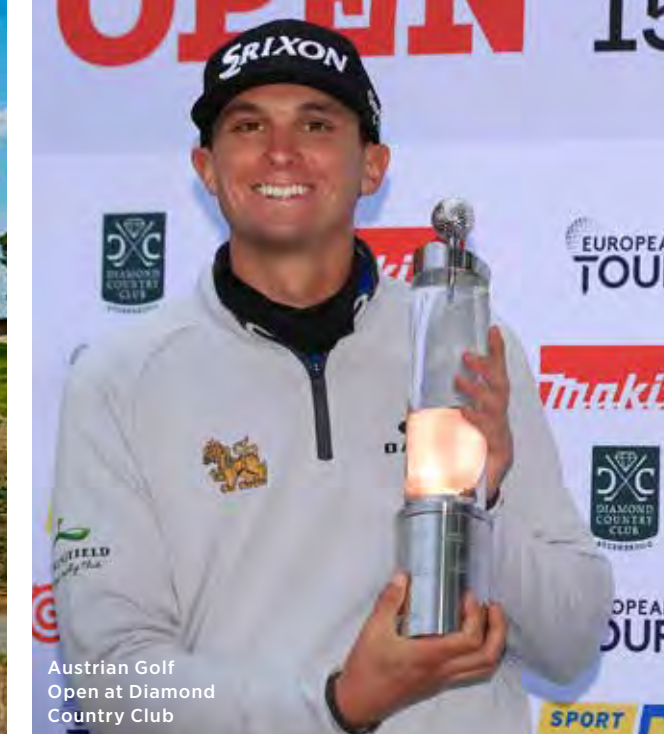
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# 4

## ROYAL HAGUE

 THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS

Design **33** Setting **12** Memorability **12** Playability **7**  
Consistency **9** Presentation **9** **TOTAL 82**

A course that bears the Dutch master Harry Colt's name but where his associate Charles Alison did much of the work – and which has now been restored by Frank Pont. So what can you expect? A seaside course that is demanding to all who tackle her, whether that be long game or short game. Beautifully presented with panoramic views from fairways that rise and fall to a surprising extent – this is the supposedly flat Netherlands, after all.



## WHY I LOVE VALDERRAMA

By Sergio Garcia

I absolutely love Valderrama. I really enjoy taking on what that golf course asks of you.

I think it's the kind of golf course that asks you to hit pretty much every shot in your bag, pretty much every club in your bag. That's something not many courses can do these days. Even though it's not a long golf course at all, it still manages to play difficult.

If you ever play it when it's firm and in a wind... it's a real challenge.

It's difficult. But at the same time, it's fun. It's fun to test yourself on a difficult golf course in really tough conditions and see what you can do.

There's going to be holes out there that are going to make you look silly.

You're going to hit a good shot and you're going to make a bogey, and then there's the situation where you're going to hit a bad shot because you can't help it.

The back nine is probably the harder but there is definitely a mix of good, tough holes out there.

We have a lot of good golf courses in Spain, from the many in the Costa del Sol into the middle of the country in Madrid and Valencia and up to the north.

# 5

## VALDERRAMA

 SOTOGRANDE, SPAIN

Design **30** Setting **12** Memorability **15**  
Playability **6** Consistency **8** Presentation **10**  
**TOTAL 81**



## 6 LOFOTEN LINKS

 GIMSOYSAND, NORWAY

Design **30** Setting **15** Memorability **15** Playability **6**  
Consistency **8** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 81**

Six years ago Lofoten wasn't in the 100, so this may seem punchy. Some holes are less than classic, but many, many more you will remember for the rest of your life. The setting is the biggest lure – and is peerless – but it is more than that. So many holes carved out in this utopia are world-class.

A former No.1 in this ranking and some would have it back there. There is no doubt Valderrama is a special day out and while it may have its critics, sometimes with good reason, a game here is one to anticipate with relish and savour forever. Nowhere is manicured more flawlessly on the continent and there is huge X Factor as a result of the Ryder Cup, Tour events and colourful former owner Jaime Ortiz-Patino. So tight among the cork oaks and there is an unfair/frustrating element – but embrace the challenge and you will adore it.



## 7 CHANTILLY (VINEUIL)

 PARIS, FRANCE

Design **34** Setting **12** Memorability **12** Playability **7**  
Consistency **8** Presentation **8** **TOTAL 81**

Chantilly was the first course Tom Simpson designed outside Britain and he made his mark in predictably elegant fashion in this fêted north Parisian suburb. A real English parkland feel to this course, which was always a favoured Tour stop of players in the know back in the day.







## MY VISION FOR LES BORDES NEW

By architect Gil Hanse

We've never built anything in continental Europe and we wanted to make sure that our first project was going to be something special. Les Bordes gave us that opportunity. I've always loved visiting France, and to have the chance to create this course and leave a lasting legacy in such a beautiful part of the world makes me particularly proud.

There are elements of a number of courses in the New including a lot of the great heathland courses around London and Paris. I think that I'm always influenced by Pine Valley, which is very near to my home, and I think that some of the scale of National Golf Links is apparent out there too. If you roll all of those into one, I think that's a pretty good recipe.

Anyone who plays it can expect fun golf in a natural, perfect setting. We were given the opportunity by the ownership to build some interesting golf holes; stylistically, it was fun for all of us to focus on Tom Simpson and some of his beautiful creations and some of his inspired designs, not that we copied him stylistically or design-wise, but we were certainly influenced by him and that was a treat for us.

The scale of his bunkering was something that we really paid attention to, with clusters or rows of bunkers, and that was interesting. From our perspective, it was just the way that they blended into the landscape that was amazing. Some of the green complexes that he built were fairly eccentric and so we felt that we could create a few on the golf course like that, but then he also built some greens that were simple in their presentation yet complex in their subtlety, and a lot of those things fed into what we did at Les Bordes.

The 15th hole, a short par 4, would be one of the stand-out holes for me. There's a lot of character and interest in that hole. When we were working on it we talked through the philosophy and then (design partner) Jim Wagner shaped and executed it wonderfully and added some tremendous character to it. On the front nine, I've always liked the sixth hole, just the way it flows through the landscape and the different breaks. Trying to be a little bit reminiscent of Tom Simpson, with segmented fairways and the way the green lays so simply on the ground.

# 8

## LES BORDES (NEW) FRANCE

Design 33 Setting 12 Memorability 13 Playability 7  
Consistency 8 Presentation 8 **TOTAL 81**

The position of this course has been on our minds for 18 months. We knew it would be finished in time for this ranking and we expected it to be good, but we needed several pairs of eyes to see it in order to rank it. Covid travel restrictions delayed our visits until late in the process, but as you can see from this position, it was well worth the wait.

The New is, as this top 10 slot makes clear, instantly one of the elite courses in continental Europe. This Gil Hanse design is already, in our eyes, superior to its sister course, the Old, which is a former Europe No.1 in this ranking.

It sits at No.8 now but we firmly expect it to rise not fall in future lists as it settles further into its landscape. It's already a wonderful playing experience though. There are so many impressive aspects to this new course and they start with how mature it already looks; it's weathering so well and has been beautifully blended into the nature of the Sologne Forest.

In common with his work elsewhere, notably in Europe at Castle Stuart, Hanse's emphasis on angles is a prominent aspect of the New.

The long holes, the par 4s and par 5s, are especially strong and get the New off to a

strong start; the approaches to the terrific par-5 2nd and the two-shot 4th, in addition to the thoughtful 5th and funky 6th, give you instant affection for this new course. Hanse spent a lot of months in France to get this right and he has clearly sweated the detail in moments such as the 8th, using the hollow in the fairway so well with the protruding green.

On the back nine, the sporty par-4 15th is likely to be a big hit, although the connoisseur may prefer the simplicity of the following hole. The 12th, with its gorgeous green complex, and 13th are also easy to enjoy, but the nine ends with a hole that's likely to split opinion, the green sitting beyond an irrigation pond.

The greens throughout are a mix of delightful undulating complexes that flow from the fairway and some which are 'pushed up' a little more.

The carries – over largely broom rather than heather – look the part but are already intimidating at times and could get penal if broom and tree management is not consciously tended to. Make no mistake though, having been gifted this world-class course by Hanse, we expect Les Bordes to improve as it matures, not falter. Eighth is likely to be just the start for it.



# 11

## MONTE REI

🇵🇹 TAVIRA, PORTUGAL

Design **29** Setting **12** Memorability **11** Playability **7**  
Consistency **10** Presentation **10** **TOTAL 79**

Portugal's No.1 and some panellists would have it in the top 10, as we have had previously. But with one outstanding new entry and with others such as Lofoten and Chantilly finding favour, Monte Rei is just outside. Make no mistake though, if it was five places higher and you went to play it, you would not be wondering why it was so high. Flawless conditioning and an exceptionally strong test of golf.



### 9 KENNEMER

🇳🇱 HAARLEM, NETHERLANDS

Design **33** Setting **12** Memorability **12** Playability **7**  
Consistency **8** Presentation **8** **TOTAL 80**

The work of Harry Colt and Frank Pennink squeezes into our top 10 at a time when it has never been more competitive. More hilly than some classic links – which the panel welcomed – and some woodland framing, so this is a distinctive, traditional seaside course presented as it should be.



### 10 LES BORDES (OLD)

🇫🇷 ORLEANS, FRANCE

Design **31** Setting **12** Memorability **13** Playability **5**  
Consistency **9** Presentation **10** **TOTAL 80**

Usurped by its baby sister, but for Les Bordes have two courses in the top 10 is a remarkable achievement. This Robert von Hagge-Rick Baril creation is one of the most exacting long game examinations in Europe. In immaculate condition and with a feeling of playing somewhere special.



### 12 TROIA

🇵🇹 SETUBAL, PORTUGAL

Design **32** Setting **13** Memorability **13** Playability **6**  
Consistency **8** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 79**

Some on the panel would have Troia a handful of places higher as Portugal's No.1. The bones of a truly great course are there and with a little investment and TLC, Troia will challenge for the top five. An exhilarating setting, enjoyable variety and memorable moments. Oh, and it's tough!



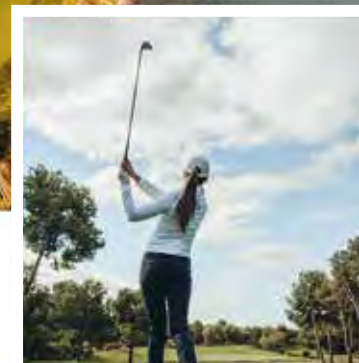
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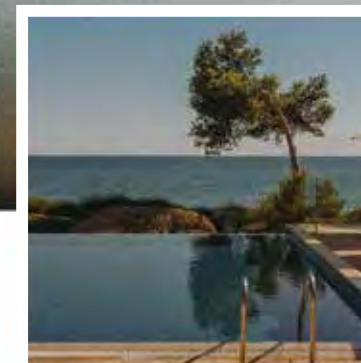
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# IS THIS EUROPE'S NEXT SUPERSTAR?

Comporta Dunes has taken nearly a decade longer to finish than planned, but it promises to be spectacular. Architect David McLay Kidd explains what we can expect...

**W**e have unveiled a new 'must play' on the continent in this ranking in the shape of Les Bordes (New) and in two years' time there is every chance we'll do something very similar with Comporta Dunes. This new seaside course is poised to open on the same peninsula as Troia, our continental European No.12... and word is it could be even better than its neighbour.

A consequence of the banking crisis of 2008 was that Comporta Dunes was mothballed for six years until new owners re-engaged David McLay Kidd in 2020 to finish what he'd started. With Oregon-based McLay Kidd stranded in the USA owing to the pandemic, his former shaper Conor Walsh – who worked on the original site (and will, wait for it, also work on the Sergio Garcia design next to it that will start soon) – took the hands-on role on site in Portugal.

It's finished, and will now grow in over the next few months with a summer 2022 opening planned. McLay Kidd gave us some insight into a course that feels destined for the Top 100.

## Is there a course in GB&I or Continental Europe Comporta resembles?

There's nothing in Portugal for sure that it resembles. The closest thing we've done would be Mammoth Dunes in Wisconsin.

## Is it predominantly 'friendly' resort golf or does it have ambitions to test the very best?

It could test the best but it's meant to test the most. It's a playable, fun adventure in the seashore pines and rolling sand dunes of the Portuguese Atlantic coast.

## How close/often does it get to the sea?

The course gets as close to the sea as regulations would allow – 1,000m from the shoreline – but there's nothing between the golf and the breakers.

## It's been a long while in the making for various reasons... how much, if anything, changed about the course in that time?

The six-plus years it took to finish allowed

all the scars of construction to heal and the native plants to regenerate, so it looks mature already.

## This is your first design in continental Europe – how pleased are you to add that area to your portfolio and with the finished article?

It's pretty hard to find a better site than this... I'd say it rivals my first course in the USA (Bandon Dunes).

## Can you pick out a hole or two that you especially like?

Eighteen is a peach, playing from an elevated tee to a slightly uphill fairway – a big diagonal hero tee shot, visually stunning, confidence-inspiring. And eight is a massively wide, drivable par 4 that begs you to try and smash it down the left, catch a ridge and chase it on the green for an eagle putt. But if you slice it wide right you still find fairway and have a blind wedge into the largest green on the course.

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The facility comprises the world renowned 18-hole King's Course and the nine-hole Lake's Course. Together with world-class practice facilities, a superb restaurant, boutique accommodation and set apart by its unique location, overlooked by the highest of the Slovenian Alps, with the wonderful countryside embracing it, Royal Bled provides the ultimate golfing experience.

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Located only 30 minutes from Helsinki's international airport, Kytjä Golf offers two award-winning courses in a natural lake and forest setting. The South East is ranked unanimously as

the number one course in Finland and is also featured in many Top 100 rankings in continental Europe, including our own Top 100 Resorts of Continental Europe. But you cannot leave Kytjä without also playing the North West course. Both Thomas McBroom-designed layouts include wide fairways, deep bunkers and challenging greens – they meander through a spacious forest landscape with fantastic elevation changes. Several holes run alongside Lake Kytjä.

Kytjä's clubhouse architecture is absolutely stunning and the building is one of the main features within the resort. The clubhouse restaurant offers unique views to the lake and the menu has been carefully created, taking good advantage of the delicious local ingredients.

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# MIKLAGARD GOLF

A spectacular Robert Trent Jones track in the land of the Vikings.

Designed by Robert Trent Jones Jnr, Miklagard was the first club in Norway to join the IMG Prestige network.

Located only 20 minutes from Oslo and 10 minutes from the international airport, the club has been ranked Best Golf Course in Norway by Rolex Golf Guide and Top 100 Golf Courses since 2003. Its clubhouse was built in a traditional Norwegian style, offering an exciting and cultural experience to anyone visiting the club.

Miklagard is located in Ullensaker – a beautiful region with strong historical traditions dating back to the Viking age. The club has hosted multiple professional events and presents an extremely challenging layout, kept in pristine conditions throughout the season.

**GOLF** Miklagard Golf features a stunning 18-hole championship course designed by the legendary Robert Trent Jones Jnr. and Christian Lundin.

In 2019, six holes of the course were completely renovated and the club has also built a new extensive practice area with multiple putting greens, a world-class driving range and fantastic short game area. Miklagard has recently hosted the Norwegian Golf Championship.

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# BRO HOF SLOTT

Home to two of the finest golf courses anywhere in Europe.

Bro Hof Slott is a world-class golf club with two courses designed by Robert Trent Jones Jnr, one of the world's top architects. The club is stunningly beautiful and situated in an old cultural landscape, right next to Lake Mälaren, and is crowned by the clubhouse situated in a 19th century castle. Every detail has been tuned to absolute perfection.

The Stadium Course is a challenging affair with long holes, wide fairways, well-placed bunkers, and water that runs alongside many holes. The Stadium has been highly ranked worldwide since the opening in 2007 and has hosted the European Tour and its star names on several occasions. "The holes are longer, the greens are bigger, the course has more water, and the bunkers are larger and well placed," says its creator, Robert Trent Jones Jnr. "Besides which, the wind is always



part of the game."

The Castle Course is a beautiful links course with big waste areas. The course is less affected by the wind, but has narrower fairways, more trees, and smaller but tougher bunkers than its sister course.

Two courses with different characters, both in perfect condition! Welcome to Bro Hof Slott Golf Club.

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# BELAS CLUBE DE CAMPO

Panoramic views over Portugal's breathtaking Sintra Mountains.

Belas Clube de Campo features a championship golf course designed by the highly respected American architect, Rocky Roquemore. Recently named as 'Europe's Best Golf Destination', Portugal is home to a number of outstanding courses and Belas is internationally recognised as being one of its best.

The layout is extraordinary, with its fairways threading their way through deep valleys yet affording unforgettable panoramic views over the Sintra Mountains. Laid out in two loops of nine, the variety of holes and the challenges provided make it a pleasure to play for all golfers, from amateur to tour player.

Testament to its quality, Belas Clube de Campo has also hosted both the European Challenge Tour Grand Final in 1998 and the Portugal Senior Open in 2011.

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# REAL CLUB DE GOLF EL PRAT

A world-class resort with a royal seal of approval.

Real Club de Golf El Prat is regarded as one of the finest golf clubs in Spain, having hosted more than 250 top-level national and international championships, including the Spanish Open on 10 occasions.

The world-renowned course, which is just 35 minutes from the centre of beautiful Barcelona, is steeped in history, with its roots dating back to 1912, while it is one of the few clubs to have been granted 'Real' (Royal) status by King Alfonso XIII after his visit.

Set across the 518-acre estate of Bon Vilar, El Prat makes clever use of its 45 Greg Norman-designed holes, set down over an exciting, varied mix of three highly acclaimed courses: the Pink – ranked the best course in Barcelona by *Golf World* – Yellow and Green. The prestigious club is home to a modern and lively clubhouse and top-quality practice facilities, as well as a 300m driving range and a host of specialist short-game areas.

Real Club de Golf El Prat has played host to some of the biggest names in the game, with top stars such as Spanish legends Severiano Ballesteros, José María Olazábal and Sergio Garcia, eight-time Major winner Tom Watson, and Tommy Fleetwood having featured there in various tournaments. Masters champion Garcia and European Tour star Pablo Larrazábal are both members.

The multi-award-winning El Prat was



The on-site La Mola Hotel



named as one of the 125 Platinum Clubs of the World – Five-star Private Club – in recognition of attaining a standard of excellence by an international panel of experts, historians and connoisseurs in a confidential ballot, as well as being granted the Golden Plaque of the Royal Order of Sporting Merit.

Real Club de Golf El Prat has carefully chosen a selection of hotel partners to create a variety of stay-and-play packages to suit everyone, and each option ensures visitors have the perfect base from which to experience its fabulous courses and the historic and cultural sights Barcelona and its surroundings have to offer.

Golfers can enjoy a complete resort

experience by booking the on-site La Mola – listed as the #1 Resort in Barcelona and in the top 20 in *Golf World's* Continental Europe ranking – with the freedom afforded by close proximity to the courses. Visitors can also enjoy preferred rates at one of the other partner hotels: the Attica 21 Valles, Hotel Sant Cugat and Gran Hotel La Florida – all within easy reach of the golf club and the city centre.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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The Top 100-ranked Pink course



## THE NEXT 40

The courses that got to the final reckoning, ranked in order of how close to inclusion they were...

- Granville, France**  
Crans sur Sierre, Switzerland
- Esbjerg (Marbæk), Denmark**  
Adamstal, Austria
- Castelconturbia (Blue & Yellow), Italy**  
Royal Waterloo (La Marache), Belgium
- Anfi Tauro, Spain**  
Sevilla, Spain
- Royal Fagnes, Belgium**  
Quinta do Lago (North), Portugal
- Moliets, France**  
Sperone, France
- Mill Creek, Russia**  
Oporto, Portugal
- Gorki Golf, Russia**  
Dreamland, Azerbaijan
- Joyenval (Marly), France**  
Pestovo, Russia
- Fontana, Austria**  
Sporting Club Berlin, Germany
- La Manga (West), Spain**  
Montgomerie Maxx, Turkey
- La Moraleja No.4, Spain**  
Lyon, France
- Kristianstad, Sweden**  
Tseleevo, Russia
- Miklagard, Norway**  
Winston (Championship), Germany
- Kytaja (North West), Finland**  
Tbilisi Hills, Georgia
- Zala Springs, Hungary**  
Diamond, Austria
- Quinta do Lago (Laranjal), Portugal**  
PGA National, Czech Rep
- Zurich, Switzerland**  
Albatross, Czech Rep
- BlackSeaRama, Bulgaria**  
Taulane, France
- Estonian G&CC, Estonia**  
Pirin, Bulgaria

# 16

BALTIC CLASSIC

## PARNU BAY

PARNU, ESTONIA

Design **31** Setting **13** Memorability **8** Playability **9**  
Consistency **9** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 77**

Lassi Pekka Tilander is probably the finest modern architect you don't know huge amounts about. The Finn has proved himself adept at working modest sites, but even he admits he lucked out with Parnu. It sits on the edge of the Baltic, is sandy and has elegant mature pines, used as he saw fit.

That does not guarantee a classic course, needless to say, but Tilander has created exactly that. It entered our Top 100 at No.45 six years ago and has been climbing ever since, a delightful mix of strategic and scenic holes and a feeling of tranquillity throughout. Parnu is forgiving off the tee, but challenges – and entertains – around the green. This is a worthy place in the top 20 of this ranking.



## 13 EL SALER

VALENCIA, SPAIN

Design **34** Setting **13** Memorability **12** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **6** **TOTAL 79**

We've said it before; El Saler's conditioning is less pristine than others in the high end of the list. We repeat it now because it's true and ought to be made plain – but if classic architecture and captivating sea views trump immaculate tees, you'll love it. A Javier Arana masterpiece, especially around the greens.



## 14 HAMBURGER

HAMBURG, GERMANY

Design **33** Setting **11** Memorability **12** Playability **7**  
Consistency **8** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 78**

'Falkenstein' is comfortably Germany's No.1 for us now, helped by the continuing restoration of this Colt-Alison-Morrison course by Frank Pont and Hendrik Hilgert. A heathland from 1928, it oozes charm and character. Increasingly a panel favourite, a top 10 spot is very possible in two years' time.



## 15 WEST CLIFFS

OBIDOS, PORTUGAL

Design **30** Setting **14** Memorability **14** Playability **5**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 77**

West Cliffs was our big splash entry in 2017 and its position here, now 10 places higher, suggests we got that initial ranking about right. Cynthia Dye's creation is demanding off the tee, costing it playability marks, but it has an epic setting and is a thoughtful piece of architecture. Many memorable moments.



# 19

## FALSTERBO

🇸🇪 MALMO, SWEDEN

Design **32** Setting **13** Memorability **12** Playability **7**  
Consistency **6** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 77**

The arrival at this historic club sets the scene for the enjoyment that is to follow; there's sand blowing about everywhere and if finding seaside, characterful golf appeals to you, Falsterbo should be on your wishlist. It starts with some more modest holes, with more of an inland feel, but eventually opens out onto invigorating linksland. The holes around the lighthouse are screensaver quality as well as being a thorough test of your game.



### 17 PGA CATALUNYA (STADIUM)

🇪🇸 GIRONA, SPAIN

Design **29** Setting **12** Memorability **11** Playability **7**  
Consistency **9** Presentation **9** **TOTAL 77**

This was one of those positions that didn't feel especially good when it came out, as the Stadium has been more than a handful of places higher in previous lists. This panel just didn't feel it had quite the charm and nuance but, make no mistake, this is a high-calibre modern championship course.



### 18 GOLF DU MEDOC (CHATEAUX)

🇫🇷 BORDEAUX, FRANCE

Design **33** Setting **11** Memorability **11** Playability **7**  
Consistency **8** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 77**

This Bill Coore course from the '90s – before he hit the big time with Ben Crenshaw – has many of the hallmarks of his work with the Masters champion. It is also extremely reminiscent of Walton Heath's pair of heathland classics, with fairways sweeping between heather and pines.



### 20 SAINT-GERMAIN

🇫🇷 PARIS, FRANCE

Design **34** Setting **11** Memorability **11** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 77**

Harry Colt made a wonderful job of producing an entertaining and intriguing course on what was a dull site. This traditional club loves its Colt legacy and has been restoring the course in-house to let it breathe. Some of the list's most interesting green complexes and par 3s.



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# FALLING IN LOVE WITH ARCHITECTURE

Henrik Stenson has completed his first 18-hole project as a designer – and the 2016 Open champion enjoyed it so much, he wants more

**H**e has a glittering playing CV headlined by an Open Championship win and while Henrik Stenson isn't hanging up his spikes just yet, the Swede has already taken his first steps into a potential future career... course design.

Henrik Stenson Golf Design has finished renovating one of Stockholm club Osterakers' 18-hole courses, with work on its poised to begin. He has professional architect Christian Lundin working with him, but don't for a second think Stenson is doing little more than putting his famous name to the work – he couldn't have been more involved.

Here, he talks with passion about his work at Osterakers, his plans for a future in architecture and his design philosophy...

**I really enjoyed the work at Osterakers, it was fun.** It's something I'll enjoy more and more when I'm not spending so much time on the range. I definitely don't want to just put my name on something, I want to be involved in it. I'd rather do just five courses in my life and make sure I'm 100 percent behind them than 10 or 20 that I've not really been a part of. I'd like to do more, find a few more nice projects and, more than anything, deliver the best possible results to the client. You get hired more in the future if you deliver good results rather than rush many projects at the same time.

**I've played some of the best courses in the world... and some of the worst.** You pick up things you like – and things you dislike – and you carry that forward. A lot of good design, I think, is plain and simple planning beforehand: what sort of land do you have, who is this golf course for, what are the usual weather conditions? There's no point trying to make a links that you aren't going to be able to get firm and fast. People do try that! And you're like, 'What were they thinking?' Being organised, being detailed – these are things that are essential to have a good start point. Plus, it helps I have a great team in Christian (Lundin) and Sarah (Skonby).

**Osterakers had 45 holes, sold off some land and wanted to invest all the profit back into the club.** We got hired in 2015 to look at the whole project. The second 18 holes will follow soon. You can't be a magician in every sense, you work with what you have, but we're pleased with what we've done. We've had positive feedback on it but any time I go back I always think, with my designer's hat on, 'Oh we could have done that a bit differently!' But it's turned out well.

**There are some specific aspects of design that impress me.** I like routings that make a

course play differently every day, so a slight wind change makes holes really different. I've certainly played courses where you think no matter what that it's a 5-wood off the 3rd and a driver off the 6th and so on. And you want holes you remember; it's never great when you come off a course and someone says to you, 'What did you think of the 13th?' And you can't even remember it.

**We wanted to make a course that everyone could play.** I like the Gary Player course at Sun City, which you can quite easily trick up with pin positions, narrowing fairways and so on, to make it challenging for us, but it can also be the resort course and members' course that it needs to be for almost all of the year. We are only there for a week, remember. The rest of the time you want to make it playable for everyone... So, I want to get everyone away off the tee and give everyone a route in to the green, even if it might not always be the best way to access a certain pin position. And if you want to run it in you can, because it's not bunkered or with water all the way round. We want to get away from those killer parts of design for the amateur golfer.

**At Osterakers we give so many options with tee boxes.** Hopefully you will choose the one that suits you and your game. Of course, if you play a course that is way too long for your capacity it's going to be tough. We do want the player to be challenged though, so I like to have some holes where they'll do well to make a par but also others where we give a chance to make a birdie.

**As a designer, I want to give you options.** I don't want to tell the golfer, 'You must hit this club off this tee'. There's going to be a plus and a minus, some give and take, on the choices they make. The most obvious example is if you choose a safer option off the tee you will get a longer second shot in, or a less attractive angle of approach. But if you take bunkers or water into play and you pull it off, you deserve a shorter second shot or the best angle. That just seems to make sense to me.

**Less is more as far as slopes and bumps in greens are concerned.** I don't mind lots of humps and

hollows around the greens but when they're on the greens, that's not something I'm keen on. I go for smaller greens and fewer undulations rather than the dead elephants or forgotten bulldozers under them.

**Drivable par 4s are great fun – preferably in the middle of the back nine.** Whether it's a tour event or a club championship, it's a great time for one. It's fun to give players a chance for eagle or birdie... but also double bogey. A lot of things happening and it's exciting for players at any level. At Osterakers we threw the 16th in there as exactly that opportunity – there are just so many ways to play it.



Left: Stenson with Christian Lundin (centre) at Osterakers





# 22

## LE TOUQUET (LA MER)

FRANCE

Design **31** Setting **13** Memorability **12** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 77**

COLT  
CLASSIC

Another Harry Colt course that is being restored, this time again by Frank Pont. The programme has made significant inroads, not least on the wonderful short 16th, but we are excited to see where it ends up... because we are convinced there is a top 20 course here if the restoration work can be thorough while being

sensitive to the environment. As it is now, it is a fabulous seaside experience with a glad-to-be-a-golfer feeling to it. Some dramatic holes and some stringent ones, played out with elegance and interest over undulating seaside terrain. A game on the Mer at Le Touquet is an essential part of a travelling British golfer's CV.



## 21 SOTOGRANDE

SPAIN

Design **32** Setting **11** Memorability **11** Playability **6**  
Consistency **9** Presentation **8** **TOTAL 77**

The most prominent spot Sotogrande has occupied since the very early days of this ranking. As our list began to experience more courses, the club began to look a bit tired. Not now. The refurbishment was a huge success and this Trent Jones Snr design indubitably has top 20 class.



## 23 BRO HOF SLOTT (STADIUM)

SWEDEN

Design **28** Setting **14** Memorability **13** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 77**

If you love drama, excitement and jaw-dropping scenery, you'll enjoy it here. What the Stadium lacks in subtlety it more than makes up for with thrilling holes and Insta-worthy moments. Water dominates numerous holes, notably a closing stretch that you need flippers for.



## 24 ROYAL ZOUTE

BELGIUM

Design **32** Setting **11** Memorability **12** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 76**

This grand old club is aptly named – Zoute means salt and the winds that blow across it certainly have a taste of the sea. Just a few miles from the port of Knokke – the club's affectionate name – it is a stern test, as befits an ex-Tour venue. Restoration could see it climb as many as 15 spots.



## 25 HARDELOT (LESPINS)

FRANCE

Design **32** Setting **11** Memorability **12** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 76**

A top 25 position for a course we fell out of love with a decade ago, but which we now dream about following the Frank Pont-Patrice Boissonas refurbishment. Out went the claustrophobic feel and poor turf of Les Pins, in came light, air and reinvigorated Tom Simpson greens.



## 26 ROYAL BLEĐ

SLOVENIA

Design **28** Setting **13** Memorability **11** Playability **9**  
Consistency **6** Presentation **9** **TOTAL 76**

This section of the ranking is all about renovations; those that have and those that should. Royal Bled did, Howard Swan and son undertaking a long-intended overhaul, with the results as spectacular as the setting. It bites off the backs but off sensible tees is just the most lovely day in the mountains.



## 27 EINDHOVEN

NETHERLANDS

Design **31** Setting **11** Memorability **12** Playability **7**  
Consistency **8** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 76**

A notable position for Eindhoven; this is the first time it has been ranked above one of the three seaside courses in the Netherlands in our ranking. This heathland is all about fun. Playable, varied and always interesting, don't expect this to be a one-off top 30 slot. This is an effortlessly charming course.





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## 28 NOORDWIJKSE

 NOORDWIJK, NETHERLANDS

Design **32** Setting **12** Memorability **12** Playability **7**  
Consistency **6** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 76**

Some question Noordwijkse's fall in the ranking over the last decade, but our panel feel it needs a thorough not superficial overhaul to reach its full potential. The seaside holes could be absolutely spectacular, the woodland ones need a lot of tree management. It really *could* be wonderful.



## 29 TERREBLANCHE (CHATEAU)

 BORDEAUX, FRANCE

Design **29** Setting **12** Memorability **11** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **10** **TOTAL 76**

The work of Dave Thomas, the prolific designer behind The Belfry and Spey Valley, the Chateau – at our No.1 continental resort – is routed sympathetically among the rolling hills of Provence. In magnificent condition, it blends seamlessly with existing trees, fauna and terrain.



## 30 PRAIA D'EL REY

 OBIDOS, PORTUGAL

Design **28** Setting **14** Memorability **14** Playability **7**  
Consistency **6** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 76**

A course of two halves, both of which have so much to commend them. Yes, it is the seaside stretch for which this Cabel Robinson design is best known – and even with residences on the right as you play these holes, they have real X Factor – but those among the pines still have plenty of merit.



# 36

## DOM PEDRO (OLD)

 VILAMOURA, PORTUGAL

Design **29** Setting **11** Memorability **11** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **9** **TOTAL 74**

For a while, as new courses grabbed the attention in Portugal and elsewhere across the continent, the Old was perhaps not an especially fashionable option.

That was a mistake. Arrive at the Old, set a few minutes' drive inland from Vilamoura's marina and beach, and you immediately know you are somewhere classy. The view down the gentle downhill 1st assures you the next few hours will be entirely pleasant, not least due to the lack of housing on show.

That scene is a common theme here, because while there are more villas in your

sightline on the next two holes, there is much less residential development here than almost anywhere else in the region. Quality holes come at regular intervals; the short 4th over water and up and over umbrella pines, then another terrific par 3 at the 6th. This nine ends with a really classy, tranquil par 4 then a short two-shotter.

The cool par-3 10th over a valley to a plateau green enclosed by trees, the high-calibre 14th and, perhaps, the pick of the par 3s that follows are all effortlessly good.



## 31 HILVERSUMSCHE

 HILVERSUM, NETHERLANDS

Design **33** Setting **11** Memorability **10** Playability **6**  
Consistency **8** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 75**

The most stringent of the Dutch heathlands we feature, Hilversumsche was modernised astutely by Kyle Phillips in the past decade. It's characterised by exacting two-shot holes, this is a course to play off a suitable tee in order to get the most from it; do that, and you will lap up its pine, heather and sand.



## 32 SAINT-EMILIONNAIS

 BORDEAUX, FRANCE

Design **32** Setting **10** Memorability **12** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 75**

Tom Doak's first imprint on continental Europe moves to the cusp of the top 30, four years after entering the list. It is, naturally, a well-conceived course both in its routing and individual holes – we can recall right now how enamoured we were by the sporty opening trio that set the tone.



## 33 ROSENDAELSCHÉ

 ARNHEM, NETHERLANDS

Design **31** Setting **11** Memorability **12** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 75**

A fixture in the top 40 of our list since we made an all-encompassing trip to the Netherlands in 2016. Anyone who doesn't think this is one of the continent's Top 100 courses won't agree with us on courses a great deal. New holes have blended in well and this is simply a high-class heathland.



## 34 BUDERSAND

 SYLT, GERMANY

Design **29** Setting **13** Memorability **12** Playability **7**  
Consistency **6** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 74**

Split opinion on the panel a little, with some raving about it and others less taken with this links on the island of Sylt. Designed by Rolf-Stephan Hansen on a disused military base, it features rippling seaside terrain and pot bunkers, as well as an element of escapism that's hard to define.



## 35 CARYA

 BELEK, TURKEY

Design **30** Setting **11** Memorability **12** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 74**

Our No.1 in Belek for the third list in a row, this Thomson, Perrett and Lobb design is established as one of the continent's finest. Enjoys a heathland feel with its white sand bunkers, tall pines and purple heather, even if the grass is lush and less firm. Tim Lobb made a nice job of rerouting some holes.



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# 42

X FACTOR  
SETTING

## THRACIAN CLIFFS

 CAPE KALIAKRA, BULGARIA

Design **26** Setting **14** Memorability **15** Playability **6**  
Consistency **6** Presentation **6** **TOTAL 73**

Will split the opinions of those who play here. If views and drama are your thing, Thracian Cliffs will absolutely wow you. If you want subtle and considered architecture, it will appeal less. There is no right or wrong, but what we can say with certainty is Thracian Cliffs is Instagram-worthy from almost every

hole. And it's tested the best players in Europe too, so it's a proper challenge. Its conditioning was its Achilles' heel for a period, but our last two visits have seen that soundly rectified. Just make sure you've charged your phone before you set off – you'll be taking plenty of pictures throughout the round...



### 37 OITAVOS DUNES

 LISBON, PORTUGAL

Design **27** Setting **14** Memorability **13** Playability **7**  
Consistency **6** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 74**

A wonderful site which it is hard not to think could have spawned an even better course, yet it remains one of the finest in Europe. Views of the Atlantic give it a fabulous setting and the piles of sand, pines and firm turf are a delight. Expect several memorable holes at Oitavos.



### 38 PALMARES

 ALGARVE, PORTUGAL

Design **31** Setting **12** Memorability **11** Playability **7**  
Consistency **6** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 74**

Thorough renovation of all 27 holes at Palmares has left this long-established favourite with three high-class nines that are hard to split. The Praia loop gets down closest to the coast for a seaside feel, but the woodland-parkland phases are as good and preferred by many.



### 39 THE SCANDINAVIAN (NEW)

 COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

Design **29** Setting **11** Memorability **11** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **9** **TOTAL 74**

Denmark's No.1... by a short head from its marginally older sister. And in all honesty there is nothing to separate them, as their rankings suggest. The New has a slight edge for us in terms of variety and memorability, but we wouldn't argue with anyone claiming otherwise. Simply a very, very fine venue.



### 40 GOLF NATIONAL (ALBATROS)

 PARIS, FRANCE

Design **29** Setting **10** Memorability **13** Playability **7**  
Consistency **6** Presentation **8** **TOTAL 73**

The Ryder Cup host doesn't attract quite the same affection as it once did but it is, without question, one of the most thrilling courses in this list. Has the X Factor in spades, by virtue of its 2018 Europe-USA hosting as well as the water hazards that dominate the conclusion in particular.



### 41 MORFONTAINE (VALLIERE)

 PARIS, MORFONTAINE

Design **28** Setting **12** Memorability **14** Playability **6**  
Consistency **6** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 73**

The most exciting and interesting greens in this list, by some distance. So much so that only nine holes are needed to get the Valliere – the only non 18-hole course in the list – to the cusp of the top 40. Short, sporty and enormous fun, its marks are diluted by it having just nine holes, or it would be top 20.



### 43 THE SCANDINAVIAN (OLD)

 COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

Design **29** Setting **11** Memorability **10** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **9** **TOTAL 73**

Like its sister, in wonderful condition, which is testament to the greens staff given it is hardly blessed with Belek's climate. Just a lovely place to play the game, from the breathtaking clubhouse to the consistently excellent courses, with the Old delivering hole after hole of high-calibre, modern golf.



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Midnight tee time, Hole 16  
(Mickael Tannus).

Hole 2 in August and with  
Northern Lights (Jacob Sjöman).

Golfing under the Northern  
Lights, hole 1 (Jaanus Ree).

# 44

**RAEVO**  
 **MOSCOW, RUSSIA**

Design **30** Setting **10** Memorability **11** Playability **6**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **9** **TOTAL 73**

We think this is Russia's No.1, although admit while our assessment of the country is vastly improved on what it was, it is still gathering pace. This Jack Nicklaus design is manicured flawlessly and is a big-boned test as almost all Russian courses are. It doesn't do 'subtle' all that well, but it does do brawny- modern-course-without-a-blade-of-grass-out-of-place superbly.



**45 LUBKER (SAND & SKY)**  
 **NIMTOFTE, DENMARK**

Design **29** Setting **11** Memorability **12** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 73**

The work of Robert Trent Jones Jnr – with Bruce Charlton doing the detail work on site – is lauded by a panel that is at times not impressed by blunt modern courses. The Sand and Sky loops (there are 27 holes) are the pick, offering a peaceful, interesting round in woodland-parkland.



**46 NEGURI**  
 **ALGORTA, SPAIN**

Design **30** Setting **11** Memorability **11** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 73**

"Javier Arana designed only good courses in his short life," writes one panellist. On the coast near Bilbao, Arana's cerebral, compact routing flows brilliantly and is enhanced by a typically intriguing set of green complexes. It's highlighted by an exacting collection of par 5s.



**47 ESTELA**  
 **PORTO, PORTUGAL**

Design **29** Setting **12** Memorability **13** Playability **6**  
Consistency **6** Presentation **6** **TOTAL 72**

It may surprise some to see Estela in the top 50 – but to a golfer we suspect they have never been. It might be little known, but this seaside course north of Porto exudes character. A proper old golf club with holes right on the edge of the coast – but get there fast because erosion is sadly taking its toll.



# BEST OF THE BEST – THE

THE CONTINENT’S FINEST BY DESIGN, SETTING, MEMORABLE

# CATEGORY LEADERS

HOLES, CONSISTENCY, PLAYABILITY AND PRESENTATION



Design	Setting	Memorability	Playability	Consistency	Presentation
<b>1. Morfontaine (Grand Parours)</b> The true genius of Tom Simpson with a brilliant routing as well as his trademark wonderful greens.	<b>1. Lofoten Links</b> There can't be anywhere in the world to beat its setting. Turnberry meets Ben Nevis. Jaw-dropping.	<b>1. Lofoten Links</b> The dog-leg 1st around the sandy bay is a wow start. The short 2nd is one of the finest in all of Europe. Need we go on?	<b>1. Las Colinas</b> Cabell Robinson did something extraordinary; he built the course for the 18-handicapper, not the Ryder Cup star!	<b>1. Morfontaine (Grand Parours)</b> Try to find a weak hole among the classy selection of the Grand Parours. It's a fruitless pursuit.	<b>1. Valderrama</b> It takes the breath away. It really does. You almost don't want to take a divot. Enduring tribute to former owner Jaime Patino.
<b>2. Utrecht de Pan</b> Harry Colt at his best, with his original work restored sympathetically by Frank Pont.	<b>2. Thracian Cliffs</b> Cliff-top thrills come at you at regular intervals – can Pebble Beach really be any better than this?	<b>2. Morfontaine (Valliere)</b> Some of the most dramatic, funky greens on the continent at the end of some fun holes leave you arguing over your favourites.	<b>2. Swinkelsche</b> Frank Pont is all about width and strategy not pain and perspiration. This new Dutch entry exemplifies that ethos.	<b>2. Utrecht de Pan</b> See above for Morfontaine. The most you will find is the par-5 5th, which not everyone absolutely loves, but even so...	<b>2. Les Bordes (Old)</b> Tees that are more flawless than most course's greens. Billiard tables to drive off, never mind putt on.
<b>3. El Saler</b> A Javier Arana masterclass in terms of green complexes. Its skilful routing takes you to the sea.	<b>3. Crans-sur-Sierre</b> The alpine scenes that have us salivating every time the Tour goes there. Just a gorgeous place to play.	<b>3. Thracian Cliffs</b> Epic scenes usually (but not always) lead to memorable holes. That is definitely the case on the cliffs on the edge of the Black Sea.	<b>3. Penati (Heritage)</b> Jonathan Davison is a classical architecture fan and the Heritage is the cute little sister to Penati's beastly Legend, by Nicklaus Design.	<b>3. Les Bordes (New)</b> Gil Hanse's newcomer to the ranking doesn't 'do' weak. What it does do is hole after hole of high-calibre golf.	<b>3. Monte Rei</b> To be ranked third in this category shows just how immaculate the previous two are, because Monte Rei is exquisite.
<b>4. Saint-Germain</b> Colt made the most of an uninspiring site to produce a wonderful test with five-star green complexes.	<b>4. Praia D'El Rey</b> The Atlantic Ocean stretch is out of this world and as good as anything bar Lofoten in this list. Piles and piles of sand.	<b>4. Morfontaine (Grand Parours)</b> The Valliere might overshadow it for eccentricity, but here it is the class and elegance that live long in the memory.	<b>4. Ravenstein</b> Royal Club de Belgique is an aristocratic affair with a course to match. Tight among the trees, but anything but a slog.	<b>4. Monte Rei</b> The great strength of Monte Rei is its consistency. You won't find anything much under an 8/10 here.	<b>4. Terre Blanche (Chateau)</b> Proven weather no doubt helps, but this is a course presented exactly as you'd want it to be.
<b>5. Fontainebleau</b> Simpson again, this time on more adventurous terrain, which he worked with some effort to spare.	<b>5. Brautarholt</b> Have you seen the images? It's exactly what you'd expect of a course in Iceland... picture-perfect.	<b>5. Praia D'El Rey</b> The holes towards and alongside the Atlantic are spectacular and among the most memorable on the continent.	<b>5. Golf du Medoc (Vignes)</b> Rod Whitman made the No.2 course to the top-20 Chateaux even more playable than the Bordeaux club's main attraction.	<b>5. Royal Hague</b> Frank Pont's restoration has left this grand old lady of Dutch golf with a set of holes that are the match for almost anything.	<b>5. Dom Pedro (Old)</b> It's been around a while, but shows no signs of being remotely tired. In fact, there's not a wrinkle in sight.
<b>6. Royal Hague</b> Colt's trusted associate Charles Alison takes the plaudits here – a golfer's golf course.	<b>6. Oitavos Dunes</b> Views of the Atlantic totally make this course – it may lack a bit technically, but what a spot.	<b>6. Utrecht de Pan</b> Whether it is the short par 4s that ooze strategy or the classic Colt short holes, de Pan has so many notable moments.	<b>6. Royal Bled</b> Can be stretched to host elite amateur events, but off the daily tees it asks for just the right amount of challenge.	<b>6. Les Bordes (Old)</b> Robert von Hagge's original in the Sologne Forest is exacting verging on too hard, but weak it is not.	<b>6. Royal Hague</b> A different kind of presentation to those in this category; here it is firm seaside turf that's perfect to strike off.
<b>7. Chantilly</b> One of the great tests of golf on the continent, yet never asking you to perspire as it does so.	<b>7. Bro Hof Slott (Stadium)</b> Water, water everywhere. The Stadium winds around and across Sweden's Lake Malaren. Thrilling and dramatic.	<b>7. Fontainebleau</b> First look down the heathy fairway sets the scene for so many recognisable holes among rocks, heather, pines and bracken.	<b>7. The National</b> The original course in Belek remains one of the most enjoyable. A wonderful job by David Jones on this charming layout.	<b>7. Golf du Medoc (Chateaux)</b> It's Bill Coore, so there isn't anything bewildering here, just hole after hole of strong, heathland-style golf.	<b>7. La Reserva Club</b> New investment has meant a thorough restoration of the surfaces, and that means green, lush and beautifully groomed.
<b>8. Sotogrande</b> A Robert Trent Jones Snr classic, with architectural values that most agree are superior to Valderrama.	<b>8. West Cliffs</b> The Atlantic is a backdrop to many of the holes here, and at other times tall pines frame the scene with elegance.	<b>8. West Cliffs</b> Trying to pick your favourites here is no easy task. Other than the end to the nines, it is an impressive selection.	<b>8. Infinitum (Hills)</b> Another No.2 course that has usurped what was once known as the premier course here. Costa Dorada's Hills is playable for all.	<b>8. Parnu Bay</b> Tilander made the most of this site, using the pines to great effect, as well as the more obviously helpful seaside land.	<b>8. Son Gual</b> You could host a tour event here tomorrow, whichever day that is. How do we know? It's perfection 365 days a year.
<b>9. Kennermer</b> A stylish seaside course that does not enjoy the highs of others in Netherlands, but delivers quiet excellence.	<b>9. Royal Bled</b> It's not on the edge of staggeringly beautiful Lake Bled, but the alpine backdrop is quite superb as it is.	<b>9. Les Bordes (New)</b> It's the par 3s that are often memorable on top courses – but not on this new Gil Hanse superstar; the long holes are outstanding.	<b>9. Parnu Bay</b> Lassi Pekka Tilander's design offers lots of width off the tee, with fairways running into sandy waste areas not rough.	<b>9. Kennermer</b> Kennermer is strong across all its loops, but the two we chose are especially consistent. It never lets up in quality.	<b>9. Finca Cortesin</b> Relayed all 18 greens a couple of years ago and they are now the match of Valderrama. It's in wonderful all-round shape.
<b>10. Golf du Medoc (Chateaux)</b> Bill Coore was an inspired choice to design this heathland. He delivered an effortlessly classy routing.	<b>10. Kytaja (South East)</b> The holes on the edge of the lake are special and so are those that wind among woodland. Tranquil perfection.	<b>10. Brautarholt</b> Holes routed along the side of cliffs hardly need much hyping – this is a round you will never forget.	<b>10. PGA National (Links)</b> Kyle Phillips' modern course is firm and fast and you can hit whatever club you want off the tee as a result. We very much like that.	<b>10. Sotogrande</b> After a thorough restoration, the original course in Sotogrande is now a stripe show in terms of consistency..	<b>10. The Scandinavian (New)</b> Could have been the Old in this category too. Given the weather in Denmark, a real achievement to be so well presented.



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2019 and 2020.

With Pärnu Bay Golf Links, Estonia suddenly positions itself as a legitimate golf destination. This is a world class golf course that features a stunning stretch of finishing holes with the beautiful Pärnu Bay on the right side and dense forests hugging the left. The huge greens put a major focus on finding the proper angles from the wide fairways, as the pin position of the day can completely change the character of a hole. A birdie hole one day may be a tough par the next.

The clubhouse is also a thing of beauty, boasting 360-degree views of the sea,

expansive forests and the golf course. It's a modern building built on the highest point on the golf course and features the Golf Restaurant Eagle, a perfect place to cap off your day (or grab lunch before playing another round to improve) and survey the beautiful acreage of the site.

The 5-hole par 3 practice course is a perfect place to warm up or to settle bets after the round.

Pärnu Bay Golf Links was a new entry into *Golf World's* Top 100 Continental Europe ranking in 2017, rising in 2019 to 30th as its reputation continued to grow. And now for 2022...



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56

NEW  
COURSE

## BERNARDUS CROMVOIRT, NETHERLANDS

Design **29** Setting **10** Memorability **10** Playability **7** Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 70**

A magnificent piece of work by Kyle Phillips on what we know was an average piece of land. Phillips – who has the two at Verdura plus significant work at Valderrama, Penha Longha and Hilversumsche to his name on the continent – has really worked some magic here to produce a course already rated so highly by us. Bernardus has a

wonderful landscape character. In time, it could develop into a proper heathland and is well on the way already. The grasses and textures are wonderful and the course plays as hard as it looks. The setting and climate are different, obviously, but it is a lot like Yas Links in the challenge it sets. A notable new entry to this seriously competitive list.



## 51 VERDURA (WEST) SICILY, ITALY

Design **29** Setting **12** Memorability **11** Playability **7** Consistency **6** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 72**

We would love to have been out to Sicily to assess the new-look West before finalising this ranking, sadly the pandemic had other ideas. So this is based largely on what we knew of it before the freak flood that meant Kyle Phillips had to return to make changes. We expect him to have made a good job...



## 52 PEDRENA PEDRENA, SPAIN

Design **29** Setting **12** Memorability **11** Playability **7** Consistency **6** Presentation **6** **TOTAL 71**

Seve's home and a Harry Colt design. Sold already? Well, there are also strong short holes typical of Colt, while the par-4 14th asks for a drive into oblivion and a stunning view across to Santander when you crest the hill. The beautiful 8th also hugs a chasm. With tree removal, could be top 50.



## 53 PUERTA DE HIERRO (ARRIBA) MADRID, SPAIN

Design **30** Setting **10** Memorability **10** Playability **7** Consistency **6** Presentation **8** **TOTAL 71**

Let's start with the architects involved... Simpson, Colt, Phillips. That's what gives the Arriba such a superb routing in addition to a fine portfolio of par 3s and an excellent set of greens on undulating land. Renowned for its condition and benefitting from a restoration by Frank Pont.



## 54 LA MORALEJA (NO.3) MADRID, SPAIN

Design **29** Setting **10** Memorability **11** Playability **7** Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 71**

This parkland can stretch over 7,500 yards off the backs yet it manages the elusive skill of being long and tough enough to test elite players, but also provide a pleasant round for higher handicappers. That is down to wide fairways and greens that offer a large target. Three huge lakes are often a factor.



## 48 QUINTA DO LAGO (SOUTH) ALMANCIL, PORTUGAL

Design **29** Setting **11** Memorability **12** Playability **7** Consistency **6** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 72**

A very healthy position for a longstanding favourite of GW's, certainly helped by recent investment in the course that means it will remain one of Portugal's finest. A couple of weaker holes affect its consistency mark, but otherwise a very strong all-rounder.



## 49 ROYAL LIMBURG HELCHTEREN, BELGIUM

Design **30** Setting **11** Memorability **11** Playability **7** Consistency **6** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 72**

Laid out by Fred Hawtree in what was an otherwise bleak period for design after World War I and the end of the '90s, Limburg is a fine heathland-style course that plays between heather and towering pines. It's worth trying to time it right for the heather in full boom – truly spectacular.



## 50 VILLAD'ESTE COMO, ITALY

Design **30** Setting **11** Memorability **11** Playability **7** Consistency **6** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 72**

Italy's No.1... just. With significant tree clearance, this old-school course could be 10 spots higher at least because the basis for a wonderful course is there thanks to the work of the eccentric Peter Gannon. Quirky and charming if a tad claustrophobic, but we love it beneath the branches...



## 55 FINCA CORTESIN CASARES, SPAIN

Design **28** Setting **10** Memorability **10** Playability **7** Consistency **6** Presentation **9** **TOTAL 70**

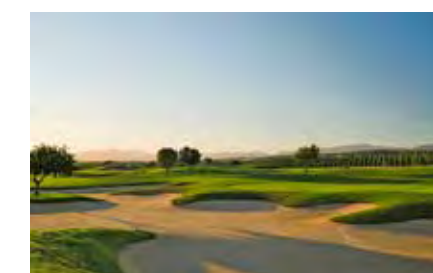
You will struggle to find better greens than those at this Andalusian course. If putting surfaces that are slick and true blow you away, put Finca on your list immediately. Cabell Robinson made an extremely good job of routing this modern course over what was a very difficult site.



## 57 SAND BANKERYD, SWEDEN

Design **29** Setting **10** Memorability **10** Playability **7** Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 70**

Sand has been a consistent presence in the middle of this ranking for many years now, our panel finding a course that engages. "I really shouldn't have liked it, but I did – it surprised me like some of Mike Stranz's work in America with its daring," said one panellist. Not perfect, but very good.

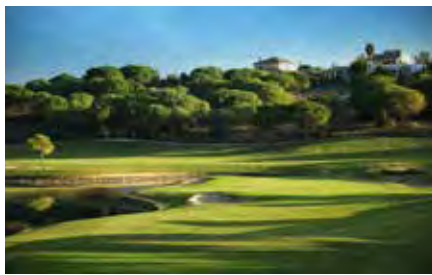


## 58 SON GUAL MALLORCA, SPAIN

Design **29** Setting **8** Memorability **10** Playability **6** Consistency **8** Presentation **9** **TOTAL 70**

This Thomas Himmel design is the epitome of modern championship golf. It sits under the flight path to Palma Airport and while you find that noticeable to begin, it soon becomes little more than background noise. Groomed to perfection and tests all parts of your game, especially the long game.





## 59 LARESERVA CLUB

🇪🇸 SOTOGRANDE, SPAIN

Design 27 Setting 11 Memorability 10 Playability 7  
Consistency 6 Presentation 9 **TOTAL 70**

Another course that benefited from the skill of Cabell Robinson in routing over severe terrain that could have compromised the final quality. Instead, there are some standout holes, epic downhill drives and Mediterranean views – and you won't find many in better condition.



## 62 PGA NATIONAL (SULTAN)

🇹🇷 BELEK, TURKEY

Design 27 Setting 10 Memorability 11 Playability 5  
Consistency 7 Presentation 9 **TOTAL 69**

The first course to get the big names to Turkey... and for a reason. It is a serious test and even Tiger and Rory were pushed by the Sultan, formerly Antalya GC. Water hazards, sand and trees make this a formidable test – and there are few better-conditioned courses in Europe.



## 65 GOLF DU MEDOC (VIGNES)

🇫🇷 BORDEAUX, FRANCE

Design 28 Setting 10 Memorability 9 Playability 9  
Consistency 6 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 69**

Rod Whitman has been the fated Bill Coore's trusted lieutenant for many years and he was given the chance to design the second course at Pian de Medoc. "Lovely – just keep off the fruit of the *vignes* until you've finished!" says one panellist. A first-class second course with heathland hues.



## 60 PENHA LONGA (ATLANTICO)

🇵🇹 LISBON, PORTUGAL

Design 29 Setting 10 Memorability 11 Playability 7  
Consistency 6 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 70**

Robert Trent Jones Snr has the name on the deeds, but it was the nous of Kyle Phillips that made the Atlantico the Top 100 course it is. He used the dramatic elevation change to his advantage when it could have been so easily a slog. Especially good when it is firm underfoot and plenty of memorable holes.

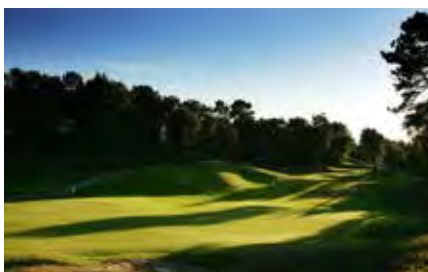


## 63 KONGSVINGER

🇳🇴 GRANLI, NORWAY

Design 27 Setting 11 Memorability 10 Playability 7  
Consistency 7 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 69**

Very different from our other Norwegian entry; whereas Lofoten sits on the edge of the sea and is surrounded by mountains, Kongsvinger gains its breathtaking beauty from holes that sweep between, and are framed by, towering pines. Excellent variety of holes and very few weaker ones.



## 66 SEIGNOSSE

🇫🇷 LANDES, FRANCE

Design 28 Setting 10 Memorability 12 Playability 5  
Consistency 7 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 69**

Robert von Hagge didn't really design easy courses, but even by his standard Seignosse pushes the envelope at times. It is seriously exacting on a handful of holes, but you can't help but love the whole experience. It's just so exciting. Set down on undulating land and populated by hundreds of trees and water.



## 61 RAVENSTEIN

🇧🇪 BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

Design 28 Setting 10 Memorability 9 Playability 9  
Consistency 7 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 70**

A proper step back in time in every sense. The Royal Club of Belgium is a bit like Swinley Forest in terms of ambiance. And while the course is cute, it is more woodland-parkland than heathland. Tranquil, playable (it's short) and impossible not to be charmed by.



## 64 ROYAL PARK (TRENT JONES)

🇮🇹 TURIN, ITALY

Design 27 Setting 10 Memorability 10 Playability 7  
Consistency 7 Presentation 8 **TOTAL 69**

This Robert Trent Jones Snr design is set within the Parco Regionale della Mandria, the former private grounds of Count Carlo Emanuele II of Savoy, with the Alps as its backdrop. It travels through phases of open parkland as well as tighter woodland – hence its nickname: '*i roveri*', the oaks.



## 67 LAS COLINAS

🇪🇸 ALICANTE, SPAIN

Design 26 Setting 10 Memorability 9 Playability 10  
Consistency 6 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 68**

Clever Cabell Robinson design, which had the mid-handicapper in mind more than the tour pro. Sits on at times undulating land with the residences set well back from the play. In good condition and with excellent consistency, it is a good all-rounder. Well bunkered and with several water hazards.



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# ‘THE MODERN COURSE I DAYDREAM MOST ABOUT IS LOFOTEN’

Darius Oliver, who co-designed the World Top 100 Cape Wickham Links, gives a candid and insightful assessment of the best new courses in Continental Europe



The 1st, Lofoten Links

**T**here is an exact 50-50 split between modern and historic courses in this Top 100, illustrating the strength of courses built on the continent in the last 30 years. By the time of our 2023 ranking, there's every chance modern may overtake traditional.

Darius Oliver co-designed Cape Wickham in Tasmania, our World No.10, and is also a writer who has published *Modern Masterpieces*, a book whose content needs little explanation. Having seen most of the finest golf in continental Europe, Darius is perfectly placed to assess the various different aspects. He does that here, putting it in context alongside the best of GB&I. And the traditionalists aren't ignored either.

#### The most breathtaking location...

There are many scenic courses in Europe, so that's a very difficult call. For me it's a three-way tie, between Old Head in Ireland, Ardfin in Scotland and Norway's Lofoten – perhaps the only courses that rival Australia's Cape Wickham as the world's most spectacular. Among older courses in continental Europe, Crans-sur-Sierre and Sperone stand out.

#### The most interesting overall design...

Including its superb nine-holer, the European

course which stands out to me as being exceptionally well designed is Morfontaine. Each hole and all 27 green sites have tremendous aesthetic and strategic appeal, and they're fascinating to study.

There isn't really a modern course that comes close, although the original Eddie Hackett holes at Belmullet (Carne) in Ireland are a true throwback. There aren't many modern courses anywhere as rugged and understated as Carne. The golf is totally raw and the holes feel much older than they really are. I wish there were more courses like it.

Of the modern European courses I've seen, I found elements of design at Sand (Sweden), Budersand (Germany), Praia D'El Rey (Portugal) and Lofoten to be quite interesting.

#### The best green complexes...

As much as I love the simplicity of Carne's greens, and some of the crazy, organic targets at Machrihanish Dunes, both Kingsbarns and Castle Stuart stand out for me as having a really solid set of modern green complexes. The Castle course at Bro Hof Slott in Sweden is another one that impressed me.

Among Europe's older courses, I think it's hard to go past Morfontaine and Chantilly.

#### The best presented...

This is a hard one, because so much depends on the time of year you visit or particular experiences during your round. I've seen each of Doonbeg, The Grove, Loch Lomond, The Scandinavian, La Zagaleta, Valderrama, PGA Catalunya and The European presented in almost perfect condition. The best golf turf that I've played in Europe, however, was at Kingsbarns.

#### The most memorable hole...

It's obviously tough to narrow all of Europe down to just one most memorable hole, but the first time you stand on that 2nd tee at Lofoten Links it really takes your breath away. The original 14th at Doonbeg may have given it a shake here, and certainly the 2nd and 10th at Ardfin are spectacular as well – but there is something impossibly beautiful about the 2nd at Lofoten, and a magic that photos can't properly capture. I have to say, though, that it helps that I saw the Northern Lights from this tee box!

My favourite older hole in Europe is the 17th at Falkenstein, and for no other reason than it occupies beautiful rolling ground, has a healthy cover of heather and is unusual in that it

favours a draw from the tee and a fade into the green. I once took a detour from the UAE to Scotland via Hamburg just so I could return to the club and play this one hole.

#### The best use of its site...

Lofoten in Norway isn't perfect by any means, but it is pretty close to ideal for the land it occupies. The same could be said of Machrihanish Dunes as well, given the environmental restrictions. But my pick for the best use of a modern site would be Carne, in its original form, because of Hackett's preparedness to integrate flatter, duller ground early in the round in order to get as many holes as possible into that epic landscape nearer the sea.

Among classic European courses, the likes of Royal Hague, (Utrecht) De Pan, Chantilly and Morfontaine stand out for the use of their land. You can include Ullna in Sweden in that as well. It has a nice routing that uses its lakefront land well.

#### The most demanding...

Renaissance Club and Trump Scotland are pretty demanding for mortals, yet somewhat straightforward for elite golfers. Old Head can be brutal too, as can The European, Valderrama

and the Stadium at Bro Hof Slott. For me, though, the course that seemed closest to unplayable for the average amateur was the Faldo Course at Amendoeira in Portugal. I won't be hurrying back.

#### The most fun...

Kingsbarns and Ardfin would be right up there, along with Machrihanish Dunes, which I prefer to most of David McLay-Kidd's other work because it feels so authentically old-school – and is great fun now that it has matured. Lofoten as a destination and an experience is incredible, but there are a number of shots that you really need to sweat over and some of the holes are less enjoyable than others.

To me, the essence of golf is having fun, and the modern course that best complements all the great old links in Europe on that basis is Carne. On the European mainland, I really enjoyed the Castle Course at Bro Hof Slott and Royal Hague. Morfontaine too, but that's becoming an old answer!

#### The one I want to return to the most...

The modern courses in Europe that I daydream the most about are Lofoten and

Carne. The proper answer, though, to the question of where I most want to return, is probably Kingsbarns, because playing that course again would mean I was back in Fife.

Among the older courses I've played on the mainland, my personal highlight is Morfontaine and in particular its nine-hole Valliere. I could play those short, quirky holes every day for the rest of my life and never get bored.

#### The best clubhouse...

Morfontaine and Kingsbarns, because they manage to strike that rare balance between a comfortable and intimate interior, and an exterior that enhances the landscape and is complementary to the golf. The R&A clubhouse at St Andrews is obviously the gold standard in this regard.

I was impressed by the history and grandeur of the Bro Hof Slott clubhouse as well as the more modern Castiglioni del Bosco in Tuscany. If I had to pick one based on first impressions, however, I would probably lean toward The Scandinavian.

■ Darius Oliver also runs Planet Golf, a brilliant resource for connoisseurs of courses. [www.planetgolf.com](http://www.planetgolf.com)





## 68 SAND VALLEY

🇵🇱 GDANSK, POLAND

Design **28** Setting **10** Memorability **10** Playability **7**  
Consistency **6** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 68**

This design by Lassi Pekka Tilander, with later input from Tony Ristola, is now a fixture in our Top 100. Some of Ristola's greens are funky to say the least, but we love the routing and the old-style architecture of Poland's No.1. The 2nd hole would sit among the elite of this list.



## 69 SWINKELSCH (CHMSHP)

🇳🇱 SOMEREN, NETHERLANDS

Design **27** Setting **9** Memorability **9** Playability **9**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 68**

Frank Pont's name appears in this ranking several times for his skilful restoration of classic courses. Here he demonstrates he is also adept at creating fine new courses. The site did not do him many favours, but Pont has produced a thoughtful and engaging experience in an unfussy manner.



## 70 EL PRAT (ROSA)

🇪🇸 TERRASSA, SPAIN

Design **29** Setting **10** Memorability **9** Playability **6**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 68**

El Prat has been in this ranking for decades – both its original course near the airport and this new one by Greg Norman north of Barcelona. There are five loops (one is for practice really), but we rate the Rosa as marginally the best option. Woodland golf of a high and demanding standard.



# 78

AMAZING LOCATION

## BRAUTARHOLT

🇮🇸 REYKJAVIK, ICELAND

Design **22** Setting **14** Memorability **13**  
Playability **6** Consistency **5**  
Presentation **6** **TOTAL 66**

Our first Icelandic entry to the Top 100 keeps its place in this 2021 list. Yes, its setting is key to its allure, but there is also a fine golf course in addition to the epic location. We've had several panellists play here and they all rave about it and Icelandic golf in general.



## 71 LAS BRISAS

🇪🇸 SOTOGRANDE, SPAIN

Design **27** Setting **9** Memorability **10** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 67**

Las Brisas was heading out of the ranking a few years ago until this well-heeled club realised they needed to polish their Robert Trent Jones Snr original. RTJ acolyte Kyle Phillips was brought in to refurb nine holes – such was its success they just kept going. A showcase of the best in Spanish golf.



## 72 PGA NATIONAL (LINKS)

🇸🇪 MALMO, SWEDEN

Design **26** Setting **10** Memorability **8** Playability **9**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 67**

This is comfortably the better of the two courses at this Swedish resort. Kyle Phillips did both, but the Links is a different class to the Lakes in our view. It sits on undulating ground that resembles linksland when it gets firm and brown in summer, even if it is not fescue grass. Thoroughly enjoyable.



## 73 ROYAL ANTWERP

🇧🇪 ANTWERP, BELGIUM

Design **27** Setting **10** Memorability **9** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 67**

We have always liked Royal Antwerp, but this enhanced position is testament to the tree clearance which has let its attractions breathe. This woodland-heathland by Willie Park Jnr and then Tom Simpson has delightful green complexes. "A great old lady!" enthuses one panellist.



## 74 PENATI (HERITAGE)

🇸🇰 BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA

Design **27** Setting **9** Memorability **9** Playability **9**  
Consistency **6** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 67**

Englishman Jonathan Davison has made a real impression in this part of Europe and this is his showpiece design. He made a fine job of working a decent site to create a course of rare interest and variety. His old-school architectural preferences are enjoyed on a rolling property decorated with pines.



## 77 AROEIRA (NO.1)

🇵🇹 LISBON, PORTUGAL

Design **27** Setting **10** Memorability **9** Playability **6**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 66**

A strong position for No.1, which is the better of two courses at this resort on the outskirts of Lisbon. It winds between avenues of tall pines and there is a wonderful tranquillity to a game here. Small targets and the odd water hazard keep you focused. Often underrated. It shouldn't be.



## 75 HOLSTEBRO (SKOVBANEN)

🇩🇰 BRANDSBJERGVEJ, DENMARK

Design **28** Setting **9** Memorability **9** Playability **7**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **7** **TOTAL 67**

"A round here is a peaceful and interesting experience. Exactly drawn dog-legs must be considered on the tee shot," says one panellist. This Erik Schnack design has been in the list for years and we can't wait to get back to Denmark in 2022 – arguably Europe's most secretly brilliant destination.



## 76 GREAT NORTHERN

🇩🇰 KERTEMINDE, DENMARK

Design **28** Setting **9** Memorability **9** Playability **6**  
Consistency **7** Presentation **8** **TOTAL 67**

This Nicklaus Design entered the Top 100 two years ago and we would have had more panellists to assess it by the time of this ranking, but for you-know-what. We've had enough experience to know it's a very strong modern course built to a high spec and with plenty of dramatic holes, though.



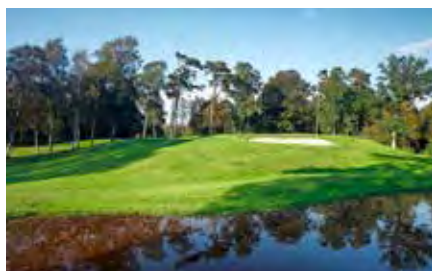


## 79 SAN LORENZO

ALMANCIL, PORTUGAL

Design 25 Setting 12 Memorability 11 Playability 7  
Consistency 5 Presentation 6 **TOTAL 66**

Located in the nature reserve of Rio Formosa, this Algarve course has one of the most sensational visual stretches in the list in the middle of its back nine. It has previously been as many as 50 places higher but needs investment to return it to those lofty heights. The potential is there.



## 82 HALMSTAD (NORTH)

HALMSTAD, SWEDEN

Design 26 Setting 10 Memorability 9 Playability 7  
Consistency 7 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 66**

This former Solheim Cup host is one of Sweden's grand old courses. Unspectacular at times but a thoughtful design – courtesy of Sundblom, Skold & Pennink – with ditches and trees making you strike the ball well to score as you'd wish. Traditional parkland course, just lacks some fizz to be higher.



## 85 VASATORPS (TOUR)

HELSINGBORG, SWEDEN

Design 27 Setting 9 Memorability 9 Playability 6  
Consistency 7 Presentation 8 **TOTAL 66**

Not much to choose between the Swedish courses in the 80s – some panellists would have the Tour just behind Falsterbo and Bro Hof's Stadium in fact. It's that good. And if you like well-groomed, modern championship golf, you'll love it here. A well-executed challenge by Hills & Forrest.



## 80 VISBY

VISBY, SWEDEN

Design 25 Setting 11 Memorability 11 Playability 7  
Consistency 6 Presentation 6 **TOTAL 66**

Pine, birch and heather give this island course off mainland Sweden a real links feel – as do large, fescue-topped bunkers. Expertly reworked by former Ryder Cup player Pierre Fulke with Adam Mednick, it has that delightful mix of escapism and adventure to it. And it's rising in our list.

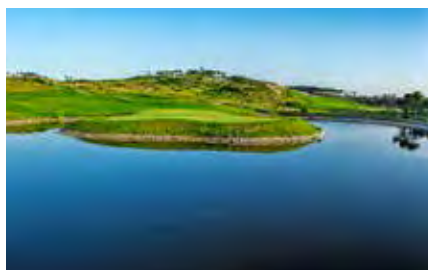


## 83 BARSEBACK (MASTERS)

LUND, SWEDEN

Design 25 Setting 11 Memorability 11 Playability 7  
Consistency 5 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 66**

Another Swedish former Solheim Cup venue, and we find it hard to split the Masters course at Barseback with Halmstad. This one flits between holes routed among tall pines – à la Woburn – and others on open land close to the sea. A bit more strategic merit and it's top 60.



## 86 ROYAL OBIDOS

OBIDOS, PORTUGAL

Design 24 Setting 11 Memorability 9 Playability 7  
Consistency 7 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 65**

Shows the strength in depth of this Top 100 when Royal Obidos is in the 80s. This Seve Ballesteros design overlooks the Atlantic Ocean from its more elevated fairways and one of the attractions of it is the phases it moves through, guaranteeing good variety to the experience and the holes.



## 81 DOMAINE IMPERIAL

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

Design 24 Setting 12 Memorability 11 Playability 7  
Consistency 6 Presentation 6 **TOTAL 66**

"Great location right on the lake shore with a Castle as a clubhouse," says one panellist, "Switzerland's No.1". Designed by Pete Dye and incorporating large bunkers and tricky greens in a typically eye-catching design to complement a super location. A game here among Geneva's well-heeled is one to savour.



## 84 VERDURA (EAST)

SICILY, ITALY

Design 25 Setting 11 Memorability 11 Playability 7  
Consistency 6 Presentation 6 **TOTAL 66**

We have changed our minds about the East and West in the last four years as more panellists have played both. The East, with a fabulous finish along the coast, started as the favourite. But while the West may be the No.1 now, this Kyle Phillips design is still worthy of the Top 100. So well put together.



## 87 CHIBERTA

BIARRITZ, FRANCE

Design 27 Setting 10 Memorability 10 Playability 6  
Consistency 6 Presentation 6 **TOTAL 65**

Typical Tom Simpson interest around the greens and a nice mix of sea holes and forest at the end. Bunkering and width maintained the integrity of the classic design. The blind tee shot on the par-4 2nd reveals a view of the ocean and a typically intricate Simpson green complex.

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## 88 LES AISSES

FRANCE, FRANCE

Design 26 Setting 9 Memorability 9 Playability 7  
Consistency 7 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 65**

A debut in the list for a long-time contender, a course originally designed by Frenchman Olivier Brizon and then renovated by Martin Hawtree in 2010. The undulating fairways are relatively generous but protected by prominent drive bunkers and heather. The greens are also guarded by proper traps.



## 91 THE NATIONAL

TURKEY, TURKEY

Design 24 Setting 9 Memorability 8 Playability 9  
Consistency 7 Presentation 8 **TOTAL 65**

The original course in Belek finally made it into the Top 100 in 2017 after being oddly neglected for nearly two decades. The sister course of our Turkey No.1 Carya, The National is a super-classy parkland with lots of nice architectural touches by former Tour player David Jones.



## 94 LINNA

FINLAND, FINLAND

Design 25 Setting 10 Memorability 9 Playability 7  
Consistency 7 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 65**

Set among classic Scandinavian pine and birch forests, Linna offers a secluded experience and a wonderful ambiance. Routed on undulating terrain by Tim Lobb when he was with European Golf Design, it has just enough finesse to comfortably keep its place among the elite of the continent.



## 89 BRO HOF SLOTT (CASTLE)

SWEDEN, SWEDEN

Design 25 Setting 10 Memorability 10 Playability 7  
Consistency 6 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 65**

A debut for the course very much regarded as the No.2 at this Swedish club. We really like it though and while it is a lot more subtle than the Stadium, expect it to move closer to its sister in future lists. Interesting, fun holes in an interesting, rocky landscape with some excellent green complexes.



## 92 ROYAL OSTEND

BELGIUM, BELGIUM

Design 24 Setting 11 Memorability 11 Playability 7  
Consistency 5 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 65**

This venerable course has a parkland start and finish and although they've been opened up through removal of bushes and trees, they're its weaker phases. It has some annoying road crossings too, but here's the good news... there is a section by the sea that is as good as anything in this list.



## 95 ULLNA

SWEDEN, SWEDEN

Design 26 Setting 9 Memorability 9 Playability 7  
Consistency 7 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 65**

Made its debut in 2019 and holds its place with ease. We've seen this course pre- and post-Nicklaus Design changes and while we didn't necessarily love the overhaul, it's still good enough to sneak into the list. A classy parkland – with several holes by the water – that rewards good ball-striking.



## 90 KYTAJA (SOUTHEAST)

FINLAND, FINLAND

Design 23 Setting 13 Memorability 10 Playability 7  
Consistency 5 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 65**

This is definitely not a good walk spoiled. Anything but. Whether wandering between the pines and over the undulating ground that defines the early section, or alongside the water that dominates the finish, South East is an absolute delight. Nice routing by Canadian architect Thomas McBroom.



## 93 COSTA NAVARINO (DUNES)

GREECE, GREECE

Design 26 Setting 10 Memorability 9 Playability 6  
Consistency 7 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 65**

Designed by Bernhard Langer in association with Ross McMurray of European Golf Design, this is a stout parkland course at the resort that will soon be continental Europe's No.1 (two new courses imminent). Langer's input is evident, because this is definitely not 'swipe away' resort golf.



## 96 CORNELIA (PRINCE)

TURKEY, TURKEY

Design 25 Setting 9 Memorability 9 Playability 7  
Consistency 7 Presentation 8 **TOTAL 65**

We've long been a fan of this Sir Nick Faldo design, where he has used the dense forest thoughtfully in a way that makes what is a comparatively short course a real test. Its sporty par 4s and funky greens add to the interest. Expect excellent conditioning, too, as is standard in Belek.

# 99

## INFINITUM (HILLS)

SPAIN, SPAIN

Design 26 Setting 9 Memorability 9 Playability 7  
Consistency 6 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 64**

We said, eight years ago, that the Hills was the No.1 course here – when everyone else, including the club itself, believed the Lakes to be – and that it has potential to be in our list. After significant investment in the course to maximise its potential, it has finally made the leap into the elite of Europe. Clever design and routing to make the most of quarry green sites add bags of character to a fine modern course.



## 97 COSTA NAVARINO (BAY)

GREECE, GREECE

Design 21 Setting 13 Memorability 11 Playability 7  
Consistency 6 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 65**

"I think it belongs somewhere in the lower end of the list, even though it is considered the 'second' course at Costa Navarino," said one panellist. Although shorter and quirrier than the Dunes, some felt it had more interesting holes. And with views of the Bay from all but one hole, its setting is epic.



## 98 BIELLA

ITALY, ITALY

Design 27 Setting 9 Memorability 9 Playability 7  
Consistency 6 Presentation 6 **TOTAL 64**

A fall for this classic John Morrison design in the mountains above Turin, and one we oversee reluctantly. The bones of a true great are there and it is still a treat to play it, but it needs notable woodland management to fulfill its potential. With the right input, this classic could be closer to 50 than 100.



## 100 MODRYLAS

POLAND, POLAND

Design 25 Setting 9 Memorability 9 Playability 7  
Consistency 7 Presentation 7 **TOTAL 64**

Gary Player's second design in the Top 100, this time in Poland on a less obviously special site than Thracian Cliffs. However, Player and his team did have some natural water hazards, rolling terrain and a variety of mature trees to use... and they do so with admirable restraint and skill. Quality track.



# FIVE THINGS WE LEARNED

Key themes to emerge from the most thorough continental ranking process ever



The Scandinavian (Old)

## 1 DISTINCTIVENESS OVER SOLIDITY

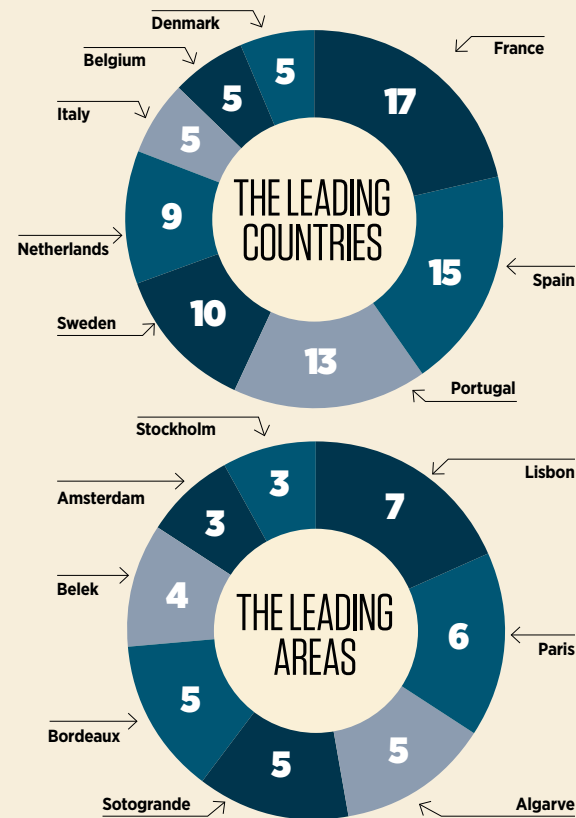
There's no doubt this list rewards courses that offer something different. That *tends* to be quirky, historic courses doing well in preference to more brawny 'straight out in front you' competitors. The continent has a lot of the latter, they're not hard to find and they're well known. Rightly or wrongly, we've favoured distinctive courses over more standard ones. This certainly isn't to be contrarian, we just think they offer a more fun, memorable and entertaining experience.

## 2 ... BUT MODERN CAN MATCH HISTORIC

As noted above, it's probably true that in our 2020/21 Top 100s we've tended to favour more eccentric, usually older courses. But this list shows we're definitely not biased or blinkered, because there is a 50-50 split between courses built before and after 1995 (our definition of 'modern') in this list. So the message is clear: modern courses *can* do very well, if done properly – but, yes, we are quite hard to impress!

## 3 QUALITIÉ, QUALITIÉ, QUALITIÉ

France is where you should go for the



very best on the continent. It has five of the top 10, another two in the 11-20 bracket plus three from 21 to 30. It has 17 entries in all, but it's its top-loading that makes it really special. With Les Bordes New likely to climb higher in future rankings, it's not impossible it could eventually have three of the top five.

## 4 SURPRISE PACKAGE... SWEDEN

We know Sweden is a production line for many fine tour golfers, but it now needs to be recognised as a golf destination too. It has 10 entries in this Top 100 and, with other fine courses outside the ranking such as Ljunghusens, Kristianstad and PGA National (Lakes), it's a high-calibre destination with serious depth.

## 5 RESTORE OR BE DEAD

Well, maybe not dead, but drop down the list – or out of it altogether – at least. The value of a thorough, skilled overhaul has never been more illustrated than in this Top 100... just look at the number of times where it's noted a course has moved up because of one or fallen because it requires investment and restoration. It pays to invest, and to engage professional expertise. ■

## THE BEST OF THE CONTINENT IN NUMBERS

20

The different countries in this 100.

7

The number of clubs with more than one course in the 100.

5

Entries in the top 10 for France.

7

Entries in the top 35 for the Netherlands.

54

France, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain account for more than half the list.

7

The number of countries with a single entry.

50

The number of entries built after 1995.

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