

Fairways & Driveways

In British Columbia, home to the West's latest golf boom, PGA starchitects, top-100 course ranking prospects and real estate opportunities abound.

By Jim Sutherland

Like infantry attacks or, perhaps more aptly, economic cycles, top-flight golf courses tend to arrive in waves. The Vancouver area boomed in the early 1990s and Alberta has had a couple of strong decades, but leading up to the turn of the century, much of the action migrated eastward. Well, now it's British Columbia's turn.

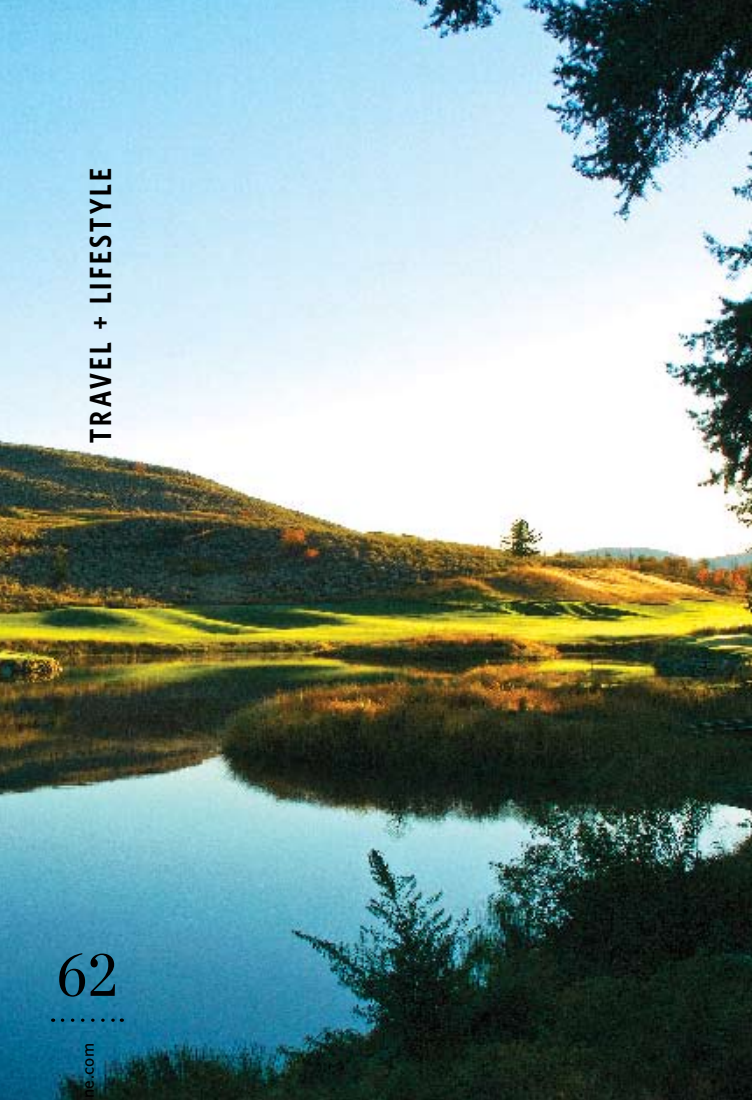
At least a dozen prominent courses have just opened or will launch this year, with a similar number just around the dogleg. Virtually all have big-name designers attached, including no less than six current or former Tour players. (And that's not even counting Annika Sorenstam's North American design debut at Rossland's Red Mountain, slated to open in 2011.)

All of this has implications—for golfers, obviously, but also for those in the market for a place to live or

play. With a typical resort course running up to \$20 million to build, and with most hosting fewer than 35,000 rounds a year, green fees alone aren't enough without a real estate component.

Driveways and fairways are finding fresh new ways to live together. Developers recognize that many of their buyers don't even play the game and provide other amenities. Meanwhile, perhaps the most welcome trend in golf developments is the recognition that the golfers don't want to be too close to the houses, and vice versa.

So here they are: the contenders that should rewrite the book on Canada's best courses. In the case of the nine we've visited, we've evaluated their chances at breaking into the biannual list of Canada's Top 100 courses, as published by *Score*.



Vancouver Island

Bear Mountain *Victoria*

To its existing mountain 18 (make that 19, with the bonus “gambling hole”), Bear Mountain adds both a splashy new golf academy and a new valley course this summer. It’s designed to be highly playable without sacrificing any drama. Sadly, although the new track is easily walkable, the resort’s mandatory cart rule will not be relaxed. **Designer** Like its predecessor, this is the work of Jack Nicklaus Design. **Top 100?** The original course was number 47 on the 2006 list. **Stay** The 156-room Westin Hotel is already open, complete with spa. **Live** Bear Mountain will ultimately contain about 5,000 residential units, making it one of Canada’s largest and most successful golf course developments ever. **Green fees** \$75-\$145. bearmountain.ca

Wyndansea *Ucluelet*

Although not slated to open this year, this course is included because of its significance. Some holes front directly on Pacific Ocean surf; all are carved out of temperate rain forest. Those gnarly shore pine and candelabra cedars are impressive enough en masse



but isolate a perfect specimen beside a green and the effect is almost mystical (to a golfer, at least). The course will be one of the most environmentally sustainable ever built. **Designer** Jack Nicklaus Design is so prolific, the company’s association with the game’s leading pre-Tiger figure is usually almost meaningless—but here the Golden Bear has been very hands-on. He’s been comparing the course to Pebble Beach and Cypress Point. **Top 100?** This is a cinch; it also has the potential to rank globally. Some have been skeptical of rainy and isolated Ucluelet’s suitability as the site of a world-class golf facility. Funny, Bandon, Oregon (now ranked the top golf destination in the U.S.) has exactly the same problems. Come to think of it, so does the west coast of Scotland. **Stay** A five-star stunner (one of two hotels planned) will, if current architectural plans reach fruition, put the lie to the idea that golf course architecture must be either rustic or traditional, if not both. **Live** Several hundred residences of various types will be available on the 150-hectare site. Oceanside lots in the signature circle (where Nicklaus has reserved a site) are already for sale for \$1.4 million. **Green fees** Expect in the \$150-\$200 range. wyndansea.com

Far left: Bob Huxtable



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From left to right:
Vernon-area course
The Rise; a home at
Victoria’s Bear
Mountain; high desert
holes at Tobiano near
Kamloops; Redstone,
a Rossland treasure.

Far left: Bob Huxtable

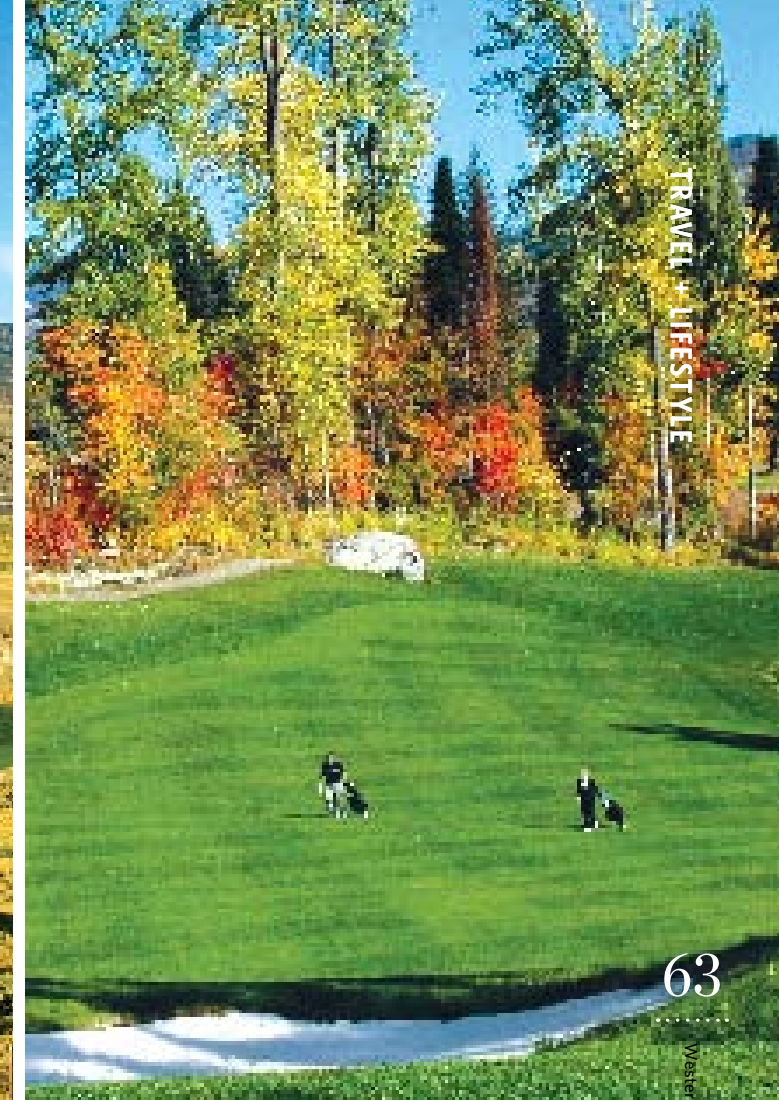
Okanagan

Canoe Creek *Salmon Arm*

This course marks a transition in golf architecture, from the manicured and often artificial “championship” style common since the 1960s toward the more naturalistic approach favoured in the British Isles. Hugging a valley wall, the course is pastoral, picturesque and highly walkable. Play it through the air or along the ground—even if its receptive greens render most bump and runs unnecessary. **Designer** This is the first design venture by two-time PGA winner Dave Barr (a Kelowna native). **Top 100?** Open since last year, this course is almost directly adjacent to the Salmon Arm Golf Club (number 31 on the *Score* list) and members there allow that Canoe Creek has the potential to challenge it. **Stay** A lodge is planned. **Live** Nearly 500 lots and townhouses will be available, pending approvals. **Green fees** \$80. canoecreekgolf.com

Golf Club at the Rise *Vernon*

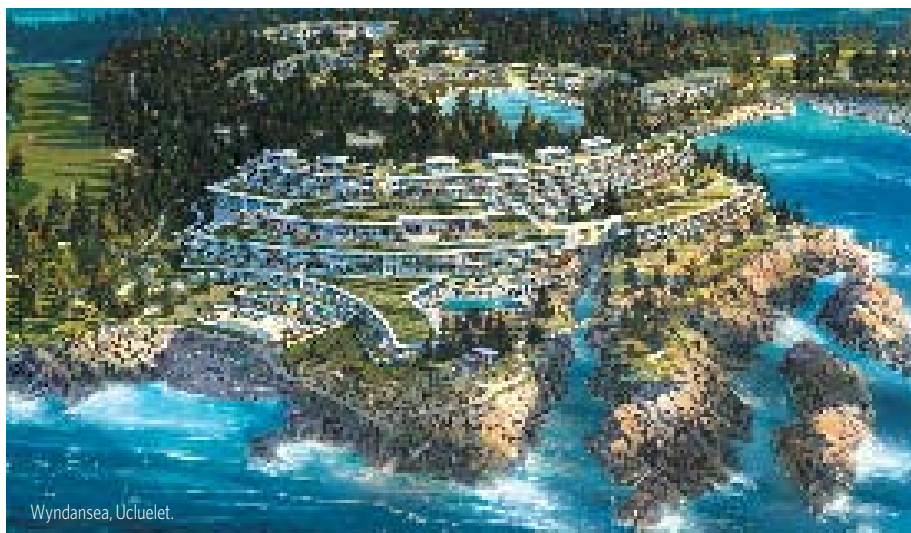
This highly anticipated course opens for play this season along a mountain plateau looking over Lake Okanagan just west of Vernon. Golfers of various



abilities will find plenty to like, with a generous allotment of driving holes to go along with others that call for specific shots. **Designer** Although it’s a Fred Couples “Signature” course, the Tour favourite saw the property for the first time last summer when construction was nearing completion. Gene Bates, a longtime Jack Nicklaus associate and golf st architect (with courses like Idaho’s Circling Raven among the dozens in his personal quiver) deserves the true credit. **Top 100?** The Rise will definitely out-wow certain current *Score* list honourees included primarily for their dramatic scenery. **Stay** A boutique hotel is planned. **Live** More than a thousand detached houses and semi-detached villas (all located well out of slicing range) have a Tuscan theme, appropriate perhaps given another feature of the property: a vineyard and winery. **Green fees** \$130. therise.ca

Sagebrush *Merritt*

A private course situated in an isolated locale, this summer opening is the first Canadian example of the all-out minimalist style (like the trio of courses at Oregon’s Bandon Dunes), in which you’re meant to feel like you’re walking through a natural landscape that



Wyndansea, Ucluelet.

just happens to be playable for golf. The course begins on a bench with big views of Quilchena Lake, then meanders up a quiet valley where there's a trout pond and holes that will elicit heartfelt sighs and the use of words like "sublime." Its fescue fairways will be both easily walkable and highly playable with lots of different routes to the hole. Beware, however, more than 150 bunkers, as penal as they are beautiful. **Designers** This is the first course from British Columbia native Richard Zokol, who won two PGA events and plans to try his luck on the Champion's Tour when he turns 50 later this year. He teamed with Albertan Rod Whitman, the rare designer who doubles as a shaper, spending months on-site riding a bulldozer while meticulously crafting fairway contours and greens. **Top 100?** Probably very high on the list—except that Zokol is distrustful of the methodology and says he won't allow Top 100 voters onto the course. It's widely viewed as the most important Western Canadian debut this decade. **Stay** Before rushing to reserve a room at the planned lodge, know that play will be restricted to the club's 40 members and a posse (they'll tell you the story) of 200 or so anointed associates. Zokol is also planning to host an annual tournament or two. **Live** There are about three-dozen home sites, mostly on choice promontories well back from the course. For dibs, you'll have to pony up the \$200,000 membership. **Green fees** private course. sagebrushgolf.com

Talking Rock Kamloops area

Generous driving holes lined by thick forest start the course quietly; it ends with a bang, climbing up a rise for views of Shuswap Lake. The 18th, which is shoehorned into a narrow passage between a road and a sandy beach, became one of the country's best finishing

holes when it opened last year. **Designer** Montreal-based Graham Cooke and Wayne Carleton have designed several courses in the area. **Top 100?** Probably not in contention—but this is a very walkable and playable course. **Stay** The Little Shuswap band, operators of Talking Rock, were pioneers in First Nations tourism development with their Quaaout Lodge and Conference Centre. A boutique hotel is also planned. **Live** A cottage subdivision of 87 lots is still in the planning stage. **Green fees** \$70. talkingrock.ca

Tobiano Kamloops area

An exceptional site on the shores of Kamloops Lake provides the setting for one of Canada's few high desert courses, à la American Southwest. Bring a camera—but beware those picturesque coulees, not to mention the beautiful swaths of thick fescue, which will swallow up badly struck balls (and the odd perfect shot, too). **Designer** Toronto-based Thomas McBroom is one of the few Canadian golf architects with a profile outside the country. **Top 100?** The buzz is audible and many expect Tobiano, which opened last summer, to be named Canada's Best New Course. Playability remains a concern, however. **Stay** Three hotels are planned. **Live** Bring your horse: the 405-hectare site will be home to more than a 1,000 homesites and condo units as well as a marina, village centre and equestrian facilities. **Green fees** \$70-\$130. tobianogolf.com

Kootenays

Redstone Rossland

Built as a public nine-holer serving employees of the nearby smelter in 1922, this course soon attracted attention for the



Gary Player at Wildstone.

rope tow up an ultra-steep par 3. A new back nine opened last fall and the original nine is currently being renovated to reopen this summer. The full 18 will remind golfers of top-flight mountainside courses like Greywolf and Trickle Creek in the East Kootenays, with a dash of the South Okanagan's Fairview Mountain, also dating from the 1920s. The original log-cabin clubhouse becomes the pro shop. **Designer** Les Furber is Western Canada's most prolific designer. **Top 100?** A sleeper pick—but if there were a national "value list" it would be a favourite. **Stay** An inn is planned. **Live** Around 440 homes and condos will be built in the area. **Green fees** Expected to be below \$60. redstoneresort.com

Wildstone Cranbrook

With two courses (the first opening this summer) and plans for some 5,000 residents, this development would be considered ambitious anywhere, let alone in the relatively remote East Kootenays. The first 18 holes are situated on a bench facing the Rockies; the second course will head farther up the hill. **Designer** A more hands-on designer than most Tour legends, legendary South African Gary Player visited the site of his first Canadian design foray several times. **Top 100?** It's not really the point for the first 18, but look out when the upmountain track opens. **Stay** A boutique hotel is planned. **Live** The completed development will feature more than 2,000 home sites and condos with amenities including a village centre and what promises to be the splashiest driving range in the country. **Green fees** To be determined. discoverwildstone.com

Turn the page for more course listings.