

Unearthing a Guernsey gem

With its redesign of La Grande Mare, European Golf Design aims to create something special for the island.

Located on Guernsey in the UK's Channel Islands, La Grande Mare is owned by Stephen Lansdown, founder of the Hargreaves Lansdown investment company and owner of several Bristol-based sports teams.

He bought the golf course and hotel in 2019 with the aim of creating a premium development and holiday destination. European Golf Design (EGD) was hired to renovate and reroute the golf course and KKA Architects to create a new country club and lodges.

"Location-wise it is second to none, with the sea in front and beautiful countryside behind," says Lansdown. "I saw the chance to create something very special for Guernsey."

The golf course was a 4,761-yard par 64, but with the purchase of additional land, EGD is extending

Work in 2024 will then shift to the remaining seven holes.

"The new land has provided brand new third and fourth holes and a much-lengthened par-five seventeenth," says Robin Hiseman, who is leading the project for EGD. "The prime site characteristic is the widespread use of water hazards, which offset the short length with some thrilling shots.

"La Grande Mare translates as 'the big pond' and the site straddles a delta on the western coast of the island, where numerous watercourses converge before entering Vazon Bay. The original designer dug out several ponds in addition to the many ditches, or 'douits', as they are called in Guernsey. These douits crossed many fairways at right angles, which served to frustrate and penalise golfers, who couldn't hit full tee shots."

Hiseman's redesign will reduce the number of times players encounter the douits. The new ponds will provide strategic challenge, as well as water storage, flood alleviation and a source of fill.

Much of the existing layout has been retained, but every hole will be

redesigned from tee to green. "We've reconfigured the course to fit the two loops of nine holes better with the new clubhouse," explains Hiseman. "It's a short, technical layout, with a lot of strategic twists and surprises. We have numerous 'half-par' holes, which entice you with realistic birdie opportunities, but with jeopardy to be tackled in the process. It will definitely be a course with lots of birdies and eagles, but also plenty of doubles and triples."

Water is the primary defence, with only four holes without water hazards. The landscape reminded Hiseman of Florida and of one course in particular, the Donald Ross-designed Seminole. "I explained that we could do something similar here, albeit on a reduced scale," he says. "The new water features are diagonally orientated, with the geometric formality found at Seminole. We think the new seventh will be a favourite of many. It is a shorter version of the tenth at The Belfry, but we think ours is better!"

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it to a par 69 of 5,400 yards, while also adding a new driving range, golf academy, short-game area and putting green.

MJ Abbott is under way with construction, with the driving range and 11 holes, including two on new land, the focus of the first phase.

