**GOLFWORLD.COM**  JULY 7, 2014

Roland Merullo

**Pat Ruddy’s** grade-school classroom in the west of Ireland was situated on the ground floor. This was convenient, because on days when his father came to take him out of school, young Patrick had some advance notice: He’d see the old man’s white head bobbing up and down as he walked past the window. Soon there would come a knock on the classroom door. Mr. Ruddy would have a quiet conversation with the teacher, and Pat would be excused for the rest of the day. The reason? It was fine golf weather.

This arrangement went on for a while, until school authorities began to object. So the elder Ruddy took his son out of the public school and enrolled him in a smaller private school run by the boy’s aunt. There, the rules were clear: On days suitable for golf (in Ireland, about 350 days a year are considered suitable for golf) Patrick’s classes would be held in the evening. On truly evil weather days, he’d go to school during normal hours.

Not surprisingly, given this foundation, Ruddy went on to make a career of golf—as a golf writer, designer or rede-signer of nearly three dozen Irish courses, publisher of golf books, and, since 1987, owner, designer and president of **The European Club**. The course has been ranked, depending on the survey, as high as second in the Republic of Ireland and 43rd in the world.

The European Club sprawls across 200 acres of linksland on the Irish Sea, an hour or so south of Dublin. “Clean-shoe golf,” Ruddy calls it, referring to the superb drainage pro- vided by sand that runs, in places, a hundred feet deep. He refers to the course as “my toy” or “my major,” but it would not be too much of an exaggeration to call it his fiefdom. He first saw the land on a helicopter scouting trip in the early 1980s, mortgaged his home to purchase it, and then—with a financial acumen far beyond the ken of most modern developers—set out to build the golf retreat he’d been dreaming of since his school days in County Sligo.

He did not take out enormous bank loans, or solicit help from investors. He didn’t sell house lots to help defray the cost—in fact, one sees no houses while enjoying his world- class playground. Ruddy sketched out the holes over three or four days, and then with Bernadine, his loyal and supportive wife of 45 years (“She’d go to hell with me and think it was great”), and their five children all pitching in, he ran the grading equipment, drove the trucks, seeded the fairways and bargained, face-to-face, with neighbors whose land or cooperation he needed.

The result is a modern masterpiece with roots deep in the game’s past. The holes run back and forth across a beautifully irregular topography of dunes covered in marram grass and gorse, a landscape so perfect for golf that you have the sense, walking it, that it would be a crime against nature to use it for anything else. Except for the whistle of the wind and the plash of the petulant Irish Sea (and, on one hole, the occasional passing car) the course is overlaid with a remarkable quiet. Since Ruddy was so careful with finances, he can now afford to keep the membership low. He neither wants nor needs to advertise. Everyone is welcome and the course attracts players from all over the world, but the $245 in-season green fee, moderately remote location and the owner’s insistence on widely-spaced tee times (generally about 20 minutes apart), mean that, in the club’s 12-month season it hosts only about 11,000 rounds. I played twice on a pleasant May weekend and saw exactly three other groups, total, and those at some distance.

But to use a word like “exclusive” would be to miss the point entirely. With white hair surrounding a bald patch, direct blue eyes and a devilish grin, the 6-foot-2 Ruddy presides over the operation like the most benign king in all of history. In a traditional Irish accent (“fillum” for film; “cam” for calm; “tirty” for 30) he jokes with employees and visitors alike, reeling off one-liners that are followed by a sly grin, a sound like “nnn?” and a tilt of the head that wonders if you were quick enough to catch his humor. He appears to be in his mid-60s, but when asked his age, he replies, “Ninety-

two and ten.” He’ll tell you that old men should design golf courses because they’ve had so many years to study the game, and then he’ll add, “But they have to implement their ideas quickly, before they forget them ... nnn?”

Millions of people love golf, but in decades of playing and writing about the game, I’ve never met a man or woman who loves golf as much as Ruddy. Nor have I met anyone who takes more pleasure in meeting others who love golf. “Now that’s a true golfer,” he said happily, when told a visitor had lugged his own sticks across the Atlantic just for a couple of rounds.

At first The European Club had no clubhouse, then just wooden cabins, then a small, stone building where golfers could check in. Now there’s a fully stocked golf shop, a good- sized restaurant and, upstairs, living quarters Ruddy uses when not home in Dublin. His elegant second-floor retreat includes a golf library of 6,500 volumes, a signed pair of Johnny Miller’s golf shoes (“One of the gods,” Ruddy calls him. “No one knocked the paint off the flag like Miller”) and rare treasures like an illustrated book of golf poems written by Humphrey Bogart’s mother. The white wooden trim in his second-floor living space is festooned with cherubs holding golf clubs, and an armchair has golf-themed upholstery. In the evenings the onetime scratch player will take a 7-iron down to a favorite spot along the sea and hit balls, one after the next, in a rite that borders on the religious. He’s done that, he says, “thousands of times.”

It’s not like the creation of this little paradise came easy. Pat Ruddy harbored the dream of his own course for something like 30 years and made two costly false starts before he found this piece of land and felt financially comfortable enough to take the risk. Even then, partly because he needed to work elsewhere from time to time to replenish his funds, there were five years between groundbreaking and the first paid round. And, despite his 15 years of design experience, the learning curve was steep. He seeded the first green only to have the wind blow it out to sea during the night. A bit later, before the course was irrigated automatically, Ruddy found himself navel-deep in a pool of water and had to bury his face in it—at 3 a.m., by the lights of a car—to plug a hose into a leaking connection. Not once, but twice, he witnessed one of his sons flip a dump truck on the undulating terrain. Later came a disagreement with a kindly but recalcitrant neighbor, and the temptation—resisted—of selling his creation, during the Irish boom times, for EUR40 million.

All this was complicated by the fact that Ruddy is, to put it mildly, something of a perfectionist. When he created courses for others, he’d typically spend 230 days a year on site, working from dawn to dusk then lying awake wondering how to make this or that hole more interesting. Given that past, it’s not a surprise to learn that he’s constantly tweaking The European Club, adjusting the deep bunkers—faced with railroad ties—in keeping with his theory that long hitters should have to be ac- curate, or indulging his subtle sense of humor. After watching Jean Van de Velde’s troubles with the Barry Burn at Carnoustie, Ruddy changed the pond in front of The European Club’s final hole to a U-shape burn with extended perpendicular handles (and kept it shallow enough, I can say from experience, that mishit balls can easily be fished out).

When I asked him to take a cart ride and show me the thinking that had gone into his favorite holes, he brought me around the side of the clubhouse and told me to get into his silver Jaguar sedan. He then proceeded to drive past the putting green, in front of the first tee, and very slowly up the middle of the first 12 fairways, hole by hole, pouring out his thoughts as we went. “You see here how the view of this hole is constantly changing as you play it?” “That bunker over there is what I call ‘a frightener.’ ” “I like the look of the grass growing be- tween the sleepers.” “Notice the way the sea comes into view here.” We skirted greens, bumped between gorse-carpeted dunes, became briefly stuck, and ceased our leisurely perusal only because he saw golfers ahead and didn’t want to disturb them with the shocking sight of a car on the fairway.

It gave new meaning to the word “golf tour.”

It was also perfectly Pat Ruddy. It’s his place, and he does exactly what he likes there. “I can go out and hit 30 6-irons onto a green and nobody can bother me about ball marks,” he says, not with any malice, but with the grin of a boy skipping school.

The consideration he showed for the golfers is perfectly Pat Ruddy, as well. Because he doesn’t want guests to be bothered by the sight of his staff of eight greenkeepers, he has never allowed a tee time before 8 a.m., won’t allow the machines within earshot of neighboring property owners before that hour, and has the work done from the 18th hole back to the first, so that if a fast player does have to encounter someone on a mower, he sees and hears the machine just once, going past him in the opposite direction.

Since there’s no lodging at the club, Ruddy arranged for me to stay in the Tinakilly Country House, an Italianate mansion outside the humble town of Wicklow, some 20 minutes away. This turned out to be both a good and a bad thing. Good, because the Tinakilly—built by the sea captain who laid the first transatlantic cable—is a bit like Ruddy’s course: the same blend of elegance, modern convenience, and old, old roots. There are tall-ceilinged parlors where one can enjoy an excellent steak and a glass of Jameson Black Label Reserve, an exceptionally friendly and accommodating staff, good beds in immaculate rooms, gardens for a stroll and massages for the golf-weary.

Here’s the bad part: The last half of the drive from Tinakilly to the club winds along a road exactly wide enough for two bicycles. At least it seemed that way to me, sitting on the right side of the car and creeping along on the wrong side of the road. Yes, there was a sign warning “CAUTION, ACUTE BENDS AHEAD,” and yes it was a scenic drive: sheep in sloping fields, 97 shades of green, tranquil estates, ancient stone walls and signs in Gaelic that read “Go Mall,” which either encourage the visitor to shop or to Go Slow. But, as Pat’s son Patrick told me in the clubhouse, “the way to do it is to keep your left mirror brushing against the foliage at the side of the road. Careful, though, sometimes there’ll be a thin coating of ivy, and beneath the ivy, hard stone.”

Once I’d arrived safely on that first day, Patrick’s father and I sat down to tea and conversation. “A butter-free society wouldn’t be worth having anything to do with,” was the first thing Ruddy said as he slathered some on his scone. By the time he sent me off on the first tee, two hours later, I felt as if I’d been given a warm and loquacious welcome to a golfer’s fantasy king- dom. There wasn’t another soul to be seen on that mild Irish day. Just the wood-faced bunkers that looked like the mouths of so many whales, arranged in a pattern of such brilliant illusion that the golf became a puzzle, a mental challenge as much as a physical one. Tee off with a hybrid and stay this side of the bunker, or try to fly it with a driver? Risk the wind pushing a fade into the dunes, or hit a long iron and have a 200-yard approach? Yes, that’s true of most links courses, but at The European Club it is true on every shot, mercilessly true, magnificently true. The holes are finished off with smooth greens sporting mad- deningly subtle breaks. “There’s a mouse buried here and there, yes, true,” Pat admitted afterward.

The second time I played, the wind was, more typically, up in the 15-20 miles-per-hour range, which made Ruddy’s puzzle into a Rubik’s cube of options and obstacles—215-yard 5-irons in one direction, 165-yard drivers in the other.

Ruddy gave special attention to the par 3s, where the superhuman length of the best players matters little. My favorite hole was the downhill sixth, 177 yards from the members’ tees, with a green that slants toward a stream close to the left edge, a mighty bunker front right, the deep grasses and smaller bunkers beyond. As Pat pointed out to me from behind the wheel of his car, part of the optical fun is a conspicuous bush. From the tee, it appears to be just in front of the putting surface: It’s actually 40 yards shy.

Here and there throughout the round, one comes upon other traces of Ruddy’s mischievous humor. A sign at the en- trance says, “We prefer traditional steel spikes for safety but soft spikes are allowed.” The aforementioned U-shaped burn at 18 is 10 yards more forgiving to a shot flying toward mid- green; there’s an Irish cursing stone on No. 10, where you can doom your enemies. In another unique touch, there are two extra holes, neat par 3s that play to elevated greens and are set in such a way that, if you choose to enjoy them, they don’t interfere with the course routing. Twenty holes for the price of 18, and why? Because Pat Ruddy loves golf, that’s why.

The best joke of all is the 127-yard-long green on the sweeping, oceanside 12th. On the day Tiger Woods played here, in preparation for the 2002 British Open, he finished the hole and then challenged his playing partners—Mark O’Meara, David Duval and Scott McCarron—to a putting contest, dropping balls as far from the pin as possible and seeing who could lag it up the closest. “Now there’s a man I can relate to,” Ruddy thought, because it was the kind of thing a golf-loving kid might do. Woods holds the course record from that day, a 67, but perhaps equally impressive was the 70 Rory McIlroy— barely 17 at the time—shot in qualifying on his way to winning the Irish Men’s Amateur match play in 2006.

I loved that 12th hole. Played from elevated tees, it sweeps down in a gentle leftward curl with the whitecapped Irish Sea against its right flank. In certain winds you have to start the drive out over the water in order to have it find fairway. There are bunkers clustered just left of the narrow landing area, then more bunkers set in zigzag fashion right up to the front of the massive putting surface. The par-4 seventh has been chosen as one of the 100 best holes in the world, but No. 12 should have a place on that list, as well. It’s here that the owner sneaks off to late in the day to hit iron shots and muse. If you look east from his favorite spot, you can imagine Liverpool, 100 miles across the sea, the place where the British Open will be played this year. In 2019 or so, the Open will travel to Royal Portrush  in Northern Ireland for the second time, and in 2007 Padraig Harrington used The European Club to prepare for his Open victory at Carnoustie, so it’s not impossible to picture the great tournament crossing the Irish Sea again, champions testing their skill against Ruddy’s sometimes mirthful, sometimes cruel design. When I finished my first round, I found him on the putting green—deep into the late Irish twilight—still practicing. “And I thought you were a kind man,” I joked.

He looked up, grinned, and answered, “No, I’m a miserable bastard.”

“He’s a genius,” said a member of The Island GC in Dublin, a great old links with a fine, if less stunning, layout. “He’s so modest,” opined a worker at the Tinakilly. Both terms fit. It’s one thing to find and finance the land, design and build your own links. It’s something else entirely to see your creation ranked in the world’s top 100, next to courses that have been around for centuries.

More than many nations on earth, Ireland has seen its tough times. The cruelties of British occupation, the famine, the seemingly endless troubles up north. More recently, a bank collapse that took all the fierceness out of the Celtic Tiger and made for empty buildings in the capital, unemployment at 12 percent and an Irish diaspora that sucks hometown youth overseas simply to find decent work.

But there is something in the Celtic spirit that accepts these trials with a stoic good humor and affability. On a Sunday night in Dublin, O’Donaghue’s Pub was packed with young people sipping Guinness and listening to a two-man band singing the Rolling Stones’ “Dead Flowers.” The vibe was pure Irish—loud, friendly, touched around the edges with an understanding of sorrow.

Wandering the streets there, listening to radio reports of Gerry Adams’ arrest, of a gangland hit in South Dublin, hearing about a string of great old courses near Malahide that have given up on requiring any initiation fee and are just hoping to hang on, I wondered if Pat Ruddy was trying to bring a bit of sunshine to the Emerald Isle with his “toy.” A place to go once in a while and have a few hours of primeval peace. A shrine to true links golf and the sometimes masochistic pleasure it can bring a soul.

“The light just goes on,” he told me in our last conversation, “and you realize what you’re supposed to be doing with your life.”

Asked when that light went on for him, he launched into a tale of trying to get a golf ball airborne for the first time on his gravelly yard back in Sligo when he was 6. He tried and tried, and finally managed it. Unfortunately, he managed it so well that the ball smashed through the kitchen window, where his mother was preparing supper. I asked if she was angry, and he said, “No, she was very much in praise of my getting it airborne ... nnn?”

There is about this man a lovable eccentricity. For all the scruffy seaside perfection of The European Club, there’s something there that sings a tune of pure, unselfconscious love of golf and casts a glance back over its shoulder to that boy in County Sligo, clubs strapped to the frame of his bicycle, pedaling hard to get in a last round before darkness falls.

**Robert McCoy**

**The European Golf Club**

Brittas Bay, County Wicklow, Ireland

Designer: Pat Ruddy, 1992

Par: 71; Yardage: 6,443 to 7,399

The European Club lies on the Irish Sea 35 miles south of Dublin city center, between the coastal villages of Wicklow and Arklow. Look for Jack White’s Pub and follow the sign to Brittas Bay. When you reach the T-junction at the beach turn right and proceed for 1.5 miles where you will see the course on the left. You are at the south end of Brittas Bay and Mizen Head.

This chapter is as much about a man as it is about a golf course. It is about what it takes to build a great course on a very limited budget at the end of the 20th century. The story of The European Club is my very favorite of all the courses covered in this book. Anyone who has had a burning childhood dream about adulthood achievement will relate to this tale.

As much as possible I have tried to introduce significant individual personalities into this narrative, including some that I have been fortunate to know personally. Pat Ruddy had a life-long dream to own and build one of the best courses in Ireland. Through determination, grit, and courage he turned the dream into reality. What better golf story is there then to have a lowly paid golf writer without independent means achieving a life long dream of not only creating one of the best courses in his beloved country, but also one of the top courses in the world.

The evolution of The European Club stands in stark contrast to the development of another fine course. At about the same time as Pat was scraping together enough money to start construction, high powered businessman Steve Wynn was spending over $40 million to build Shadow Creek in Las Vegas, Nevada to induce “high rollers” to gamble at his casino. Both turned out to be very good courses, but I think the moral of this story is that you do not need a lot of money to build a world class golf course. Imagination and determination are as important as money.

Actually the lack of capital stretching the construction phase of The European Club over six years might have been a positive. One of the main points expressed in this book is that it takes time to design and build a great course. Without a nest egg upfront and perennially strapped for cash, Pat had six years to let his unconventional imagination work at full throttle.

Even if The European Club was just a mediocre course, I would include it in this book because I want the golf world to know as much about Pat Ruddy as possible. I absolutely adore this man for many reasons. He represents the “purity of the links game”. There is an Irish twinkle in his eyes along with self-deprecating impish humor. Pat is a burly garrulous man who likes a good laugh, who looks at the bright side of life, and is very quick-witted. Every word coming out of his mouth is lyrical. At times Pat might gild the lily a little too much, but the glow about him is infectious. You want to spend as much time as possible with him.

Pat is a man with golf in his blood. Without formal training Pat has been the ultimate entrepreneur - golf reporter, golf editor, golf promoter, golf publisher, golf magazine owner, golf architect, and golf course developer. He conceived, financed, designed, built with his own hands, and 100% owns The European Club. Since opening day he has been a committee of one and is both the chief administrator and maintenance supervisor. He sometimes is affectionately referred to as the commander-in-chief.

The part traditional links and part modern seaside course is on 200 acres of rugged, tumbling dunes land covered by miles of tall, waving marran grass. The modest clubhouse is at the western tip of the property at sea level. The two nines fan out in an easterly direction from the clubhouse into tall dunes. The south side is bordered by rolling farmland framed by the distant Wicklow Mountains. The Irish Sea, with three complete holes, is at the eastern part of the course. The northern boundary has pastureland. There is a sense of seclusion with no real estate development.

The design is a mixture of Pat working with the land and his own personality. For example, Pat believes the old links courses have too many blind shots. He says … “Let the dogs see the rabbits.” Thus there are no blind shots at The European Club, and on 14 holes the green can be seen from the tee.

Pat’s iconoclast nature has produced some unusual features. The score card has an irregular pattern with just two par-5s and three par-3s along with 13 par-4s for a total of par of 71. Actually, there are two additional par threes (7A and 12A), so for the price of 18 holes you have the opportunity to play 20 holes. The par-four 12th has the longest green in the world, measuring 127 yards from front to back. Some bunkers are faced with railway sleepers (wood planks).

The first nine plays through dunes with glimpses of a lovely part of the Irish Sea called Arklow Bay. The setting is pastoral with cows grazing as spectators just 20 yards off the side of the course. Not only does the second nine have direct sea views but the water directly into play on three holes that run along the shore, with the sea and beach a constant hazard to the right. In total, players admire sweeping sea views from seventeen holes.

The fast-running fairways are generous in width, but then you have to deal with thick rough lined with gorse, ferns, bracken, white-thorn and marram grasses. The 60 bunkers (some cavernous) seem to be more for framing than to be penal. Most of the greens are open in front to leave the run-up shot option, but some green elevations call for the best shot to be in the air. The greens are of different sizes and elevations, generally large, undulating, or sloping back to front.

On the front nine a challenging stream comes into play on two holes and there is a stream on the eighteenth hole. The degree of course difficulty is high at The European Club because Pat was thinking of tour players during the design phase. The original course had a full length of 6,945 yards, but some new back tees were added to bring the length up to 7,300-yards. The exposed terrain means that wind is always a factor.

My initial visit to The European Club was in May 1998. The first impression was that this must be pure golf because the small, concrete-block clubhouse (with a couple of cracked windows) was not meant to impress. It did impart a relaxed, low-key atmosphere. You immediately knew that a modest investment was being made here and you were at the other end of the world from Mt. Juliet, Druids Glen, The K-Club. It was back to the basics of golf, and I absolutely loved that.

Then I met 53-year old Pat Ruddy. The club is actually a family affair, with Pat’s daughter running the collection of greens fees and supervising starting times. Pat would prove to be worth the price of admission alone because he is always in a relaxed and expansive mood. The final product he produced here is a wonderful “raised-links” that is the very essence of golf – it is meant to be fun, loved for itself, and not as just a walk between pints.

Unlike the majority of courses in this book, there is no need to speculate as to who might be responsible for what holes. Pat Ruddy was born in 1945 and spent his schoolboy years in northwest Ireland. The overwhelming passion for golf quickly took hold and he doodled golf course plans in his notebooks at school, writing “Pat Ruddy – Master Golfer” on the spines of all his text books. Despite achieving a handicap of one, reality soon made it apparent that a successful professional playing career was not in the cards. At nineteen he began writing about golf for a Dublin newspaper. In 1973 he founded his own golf magazine and also became involved in golf tournament promotion. During all this time Pat got to travel to many of the world’s best golf clubs. He then added golf course design in 1975; first in partnership with the late Sir Henry Cotton and in 1987 with Tom Craddock.

Now that the European Club is a success a logical question is why did it take so long to discover the site? In the 1980s Pat took a helicopter trip to Ballybunion and was struck by the fact that the course was on the only visible sandy soil covering a 60 mile stretch along the Shannon estuary. Ballybunion was a sandy oasis amidst green fields and brown marshes. So Pat knew what to look for.

After a disastrous first attempt of owning and building a course in his hometown of Ballymote (northwest Ireland near Rosses Point Golf Club), in 1987 Pat spotted an advertisement in a Dublin newspaper offering a stretch of seaside land fifty miles south of Dublin. Another helicopter trip revealed that the available land contained the first decent bit of sand on the coast between Royal Dublin (50 miles north) and Waterville (300 miles southwest). Better yet, the sand was formed into giant dunes.

At this point Pat had already designed or co-designed 20 courses in Ireland and thus had the experience to design his own dream course. With the support of some banking friends Pat bought the property. Then during six months of intense study he came up with the routing. With little money in the bank, Pat and his prodigious work ethic, along with his family did 90 percent of the work to build the course over the next five years. In addition to sweat equity, Pat put in all his money - he re-mortgaged the home, sold his insurance policy, and drove an old car. Money was very tight, interest rates went to 25 percent and an extra lb 250,000 was a real burden. Help did come from a government tourism grant for golf course development. You can imagine Pat’s joy while collecting the first day’s green fees from the window of his car as the rain was pouring down. Once opened, Pat brazenly promoted the club in his magazine and other publications. The course was an instant hit with 20,000 players the first year.

Pat has written the best course guide of any great club in the world. It is 36 pages and describes his design strategy. “Care has been taken to conceal portions of fairways behind hillocks, in valleys and behind reeds; to throw-off depth perception by the use of swales; to exaggerate length by the use of long corridors through tall dunes; and to make some greens look extremely small by making them wider, thus distorting the visual proportions, or placing them in front of high banks to give a misread of depth perception.”

Pat has produced a consistency of style. Typically there is a drive from an elevated tee and an intriguing channel to be followed through the dunes. The channel usually narrows as you approach the target. Well-conceived slopes and bunkers make the greens more tightly guarded than they appear from the fairway. The bunkering is restrained and strategic rather than showy. Greens are large with a lot of movement.

There are at least six excellent holes: the third tumbling downhill towards Arklow Bay and mountain in the background; the seventh with an eerie marsh running the full length of the fairway, the eighth, the eleventh, the twelfth, and the seventh that plunges through a secluded dune-lined valley. The best golf hole is seven with disaster beckoning on both sides. The heart of the course is holes seven through thirteen (six straight par-4s and then a fairly long par 5). Midway through the back nine there is a stimulating change of pace. The beach is an integral part of holes twelve and thirteen and the cliffs of Mizen Head are a constant threat on fifteen. The contrast between the holes carved through high dunes and the relatively flat, exposed seaside holes is invigorating. The walk to the exceedingly elevated twelfth tee, when the ocean suddenly comes into full view, is one of the most exhilarating moments on an exciting golf course.

The only really controversial aspect of the original course was the peninsula eighteenth green. A pond (originally a bog) was left, front left, and back left of the green. The water was not visible from the tee and so came as a total surprise to the golfer confronting it with a fairly long approach shot. Pat envisioned the approach shot as being similar to that at the fifteenth at Augusta National. Unfortunately for him, the artificially looking water produced a totally jarring effect and seemed totally out of place after the visual excitement of 17 and ½ wonderfully natural links holes. The criticism of it was overwhelming. Further compounding the problem was it coming at the very end of the round. Pat valiantly fought the battle for ten years, but finally relented. In 2003 the pond was transformed into a meandering burn (stream) that follows a serpentine route across the front of the green and back up the fairway for 30 yards.

With the eighteenth hole “fixed”, there are now 18 solid holes at The European Club. This is unlike almost every other top links course in Ireland where there is some controversy about at least one hole.

The real bonus here is the unique atmosphere/ambience inside the clubhouse. Members and guests feel relaxed at Brittas Bay. Pat wants to encourage a “spirit of simplicity” and to recreate the mood of a time when golf was enjoyed in less hurried, less crowded and less pretentious circumstances. The policy at the club is to have the clubhouse warm and bright and the kettle on when the first players arrive at 8 a.m. and to keep the welcoming glow going to dusk each day.

The original criticism about The European Club concerned course condition. With all his equity tied up in the club, Pat is certainly not rich. He also has a purist view that golf should be accessible and reasonably affordable. Although this is a private club, Pat has curtailed the number of individual members, there are no corporate members, and visitor green fees are fairly modest relative to other world-class courses. Pat has been spending the majority of his funds on refining the course, but he has also been polishing the course to address the conditioning issue.

Pat is looking for a sufficient cash flow to sustain the club and course. He is not using the course to create a personal fortune. With his passion for Irish golf, Pat rightfully glories in having created a quickly recognized course as one of the very best in Ireland. That it is also on world’s greatest lists is just an added bonus for him.

In 2003 Pat finished working on the last of 33 courses he designed, co-designed, or re-designed. He has retired from outside design work to devote his total energies to massaging his beloved European Club. Further effort will be made to refine some of the existing holes (The original attempt to build 27 holes was abandoned in favor of the two loops of 10 holes each.) Pat will be maturing the links to perfection as he is looking for those “intangibles” that will set the course apart. Potential investors have come to him on a number of occasions but Pat has resisted the temptation. The current operation is a family affair with four of Pat’s adult children being managers at the club. Thus, Pat feels that he has at least two generations of Ruddy’s to get it right.

The altruistic approach was put to the test at the height of the crazy Irish real estate boom in 2007. Pat was offered Euro 30 million for The European Club. He turned the offer down because of his future generation strategy. As things turned out Pat should have taken the Euro 30 million and then bought everything back for half that amount or less after the property market collapsed in 2009. But Pat is a man of passion and commitment and said ‘no thanks’.

Suggested reading “Fifty Years In A Bunker” by Pat Ruddy, self-published 2007. A more current read is Pat’s 2012 self-published THE PERFECT GOLF LINKS, which is a pictorial tour of his links at The European Club with essays containing some of his musings on golf course design.