

# Unconventional wisdom

A new 'flexible' course and practice facility designed by Billy Fuller, ASGCA is helping to grow the game of golf in Clarksville, Tennessee

Defying convention can sometimes be a wise choice. At The River Club in Clarksville, Tennessee, architect Billy Fuller, ASGCA recommended a move away from the 18-hole norm in order to help his client achieve the objective of building a facility that could help grow the game in the local area.

The 145-acre site for the development is located between the Route 374 Highway and the Red River, which joins with the larger Cumberland River in downtown Clarksville.

Fuller was initially brought in by the club's co-owner Greg Guinn to draw up plans for an 18-hole routing and small practice facility. However, after consideration, Guinn was convinced a larger, more expansive practice facility would help to grow the game of golf in the North Tennessee area.

"I suggested we design nine holes with a combination of double greens and/or large greens to offer two pin settings for each green," Fuller explains. "One for the front nine and one for the back nine, along with double tees for each hole."

After getting the go-ahead from Guinn, Fuller set about creating a

design for both the flexible nine-hole course and a practice facility at the northern end of the site.

Fuller says that the course's design is "all about Golden Era look and feel," with much emphasis on the ground game in green approaches. "American golfers have become entrenched in the air game, yet the game was born as a ground game in Scotland," says Fuller. "My hope is players will enjoy the ground option at The River Club."

The architect paid special attention to the topographical elements of the site when drawing up his design, and said that the drainage story at The River Club is a unique one.

"The Red River rises several feet over the property, and most of the course is flood plain," Fuller explains. "I designed large, wide swales between parallel holes in lieu of lakes. These help to evacuate water off greens, tees and fairways as quickly as possible and help resume play after large storm events. These swales are mowed at rough height and serve as secondary hazards."

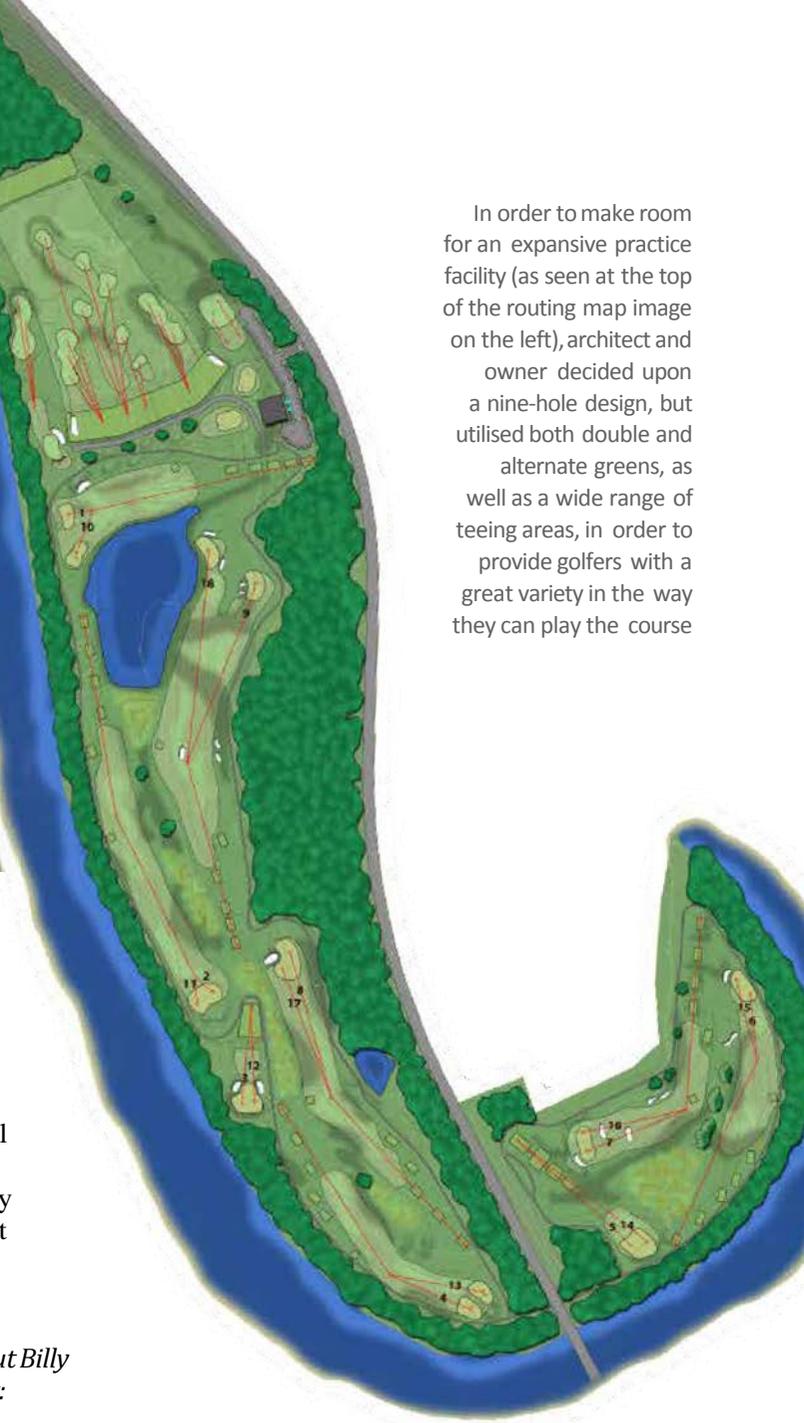
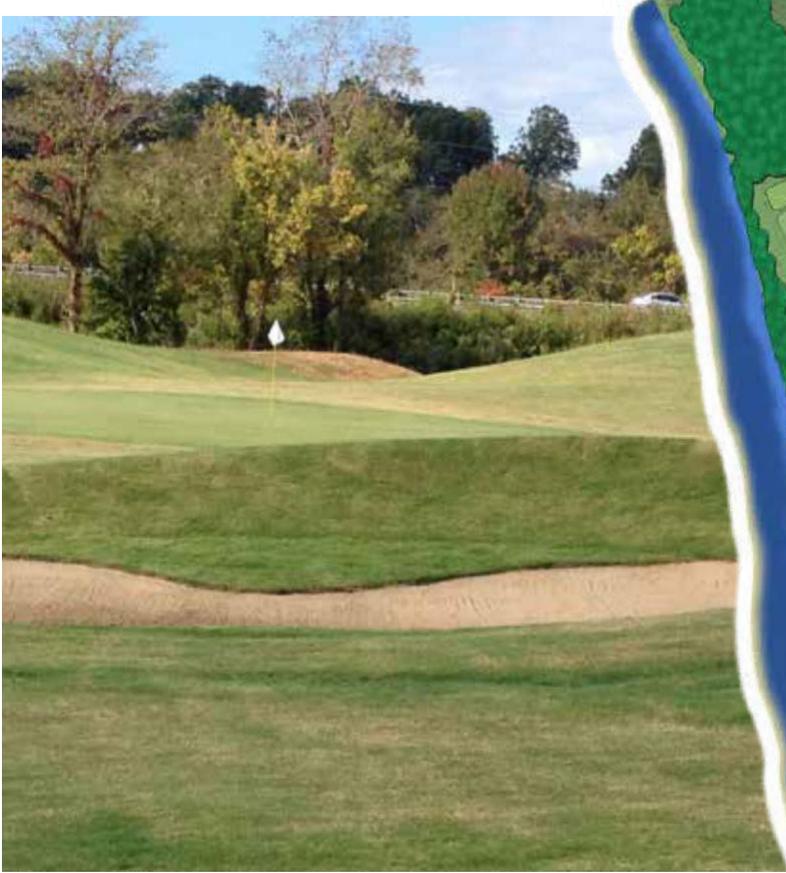
The swales are engineered with a large pipe underneath to remove water and restore good playing conditions as rapidly as possible.



Since flooding is an issue at the site, Fuller and Guinn agreed to limit the number of sand bunkers to just 14, and include grass hollows and strategic angled mounding placements in some instances. These may hide a portion of a player's target on a misplaced tee shot.

The final design includes nine 'flexible' holes, including six with double greens that allow for a second hole location. The design allows for as many as six tees per hole, and players can play in three, six and nine hole loops. If a full 18 holes are played, the course can play from as short as 3,111 yards up to a maximum of 7,150 yards. There are six sets of tees to accommodate every level player.

This nine hole configuration freed up space for an extensive practice facility, which covers around 25 acres, is lighted, and includes more than 100,000 sq ft of tee space, two short game chipping and bunker complexes, and two putting greens. The course opened for play in the Fall of 2014, and the club is selling annual membership at a competitive monthly price to 200 players. These players get priority tee times up until 1pm each day, after which all play is



In order to make room for an expansive practice facility (as seen at the top of the routing map image on the left), architect and owner decided upon a nine-hole design, but utilised both double and alternate greens, as well as a wide range of teeing areas, in order to provide golfers with a great variety in the way they can play the course

public. The public also has access to any tee times before 1pm that have not been reserved 24 hours in advance.

Members have unlimited access to practice facilities and balls, while a practice membership is also available that allows players to hit unlimited balls and then pay a green fee to play the course.

Fuller believes that concepts such as the one at The River Club could act as a template for other clubs. "If a club with an existing 18-hole course was looking to sell off land to real estate developers, what we've done at The River Club is a good example of how to create a

great golfing experience in a limited area," Fuller concludes. "Not only can clubs potentially benefit from a model such as this, but golfers can also enjoy a flexible course that meets their play and practice needs." ●

To find out more about Billy Fuller's projects, visit: [www.billyfuller.com](http://www.billyfuller.com)



The site (seen before development, left) for The River Club occupies 145 acres in Clarksville, Tennessee

