

Drafting history:
Alister MacKenzie
working on a set
of plans, date and
location unknown

REPRINTED FROM THE LIFE AND WORK OF DR. ALISTER MACKENZIE (SLEEPING BEAR PRESS)

THE LOST MACKENZIE

By Thomas Dunne

*EIGHTY YEARS AGO,
the game's greatest architect
drew up plans for a golf course
unlike anything the world
has known. Long forgotten, the
design has recently
come to light, and an effort is
under way to get the course
built in the U.S.*

ENRIQUE HERNÁNDEZ IS BEHIND THE wheel of his silver BMW and braking fast. The car is no more than two feet from the back bumper of a beat-up minivan, which is overloaded and listing to starboard. It is possible the driver has been unaware of our autobahn-style approach—he will not move out of the left-hand lane. Another car blocks our passage on the right, so we continue our high-speed tailgating. Hernández, a pro shop owner and former national junior golf champion, isn't crazy; he's just a typical Argentine driver who happens to have a faster car than most.

"This guy—he's f...ing my balls," he says. In the back seat, I wonder if the Spanish-speaking world has been receiving questionable dubs of *The Sopranos*. We are on a highway somewhere between Buenos Aires and a coastal resort called Mar del Plata. The two cities are separated by 250 miles of blank-slate pampa, where only an occasional herd of black cattle or copse of trees hiding a farmhouse interrupts the grassland void. It is the dead of winter. The earth is yellow, the horizon charged by armadas of clouds on rapid maneuvers.

We eventually get around the minivan and arrive in Mar del Plata at midday, catching the final minutes of a rainstorm.

THE PLANS HAVE BEEN COMPARED TO A NEW ATOCHA—THE TREASURE-LADEN SPANISH SHIPWRECK RECOVERED OFF KEY WEST.

Off the main thoroughfare, the roadway goes from asphalt to gravel to mud. The landscape transforms along with it as the pampa gives way to a Perthshire postcard: green-brown hills, open fields and old-growth forests. Hernández guns the engine and we fishtail up the rutted slope until a house comes into view. Then it's through a high archway and into a courtyard, where a traditional Argentine *asado* awaits, the grill sizzling with chicken and chorizo, steak and pork.

It is a day of celebration: About fifteen people have gathered for the feast. For nearly eighty years, a priceless document has been tucked away, long forgotten on this vast and beautiful estancia at thirty-eight degrees south latitude. And today it will come back into the light.

We have reached El Boquerón—home of the lost MacKenzie.

IN 1930, ALISTER MACKENZIE, WIDELY CONSIDERED the greatest course architect in golf history, was in his creative prime, having recently completed a string of major successes in California, including Cypress Point, Pasatiempo and the Valley Club of Montecito. But the stock market crash of the previous fall had crippled his prospects for new commissions in the United States, so the Yorkshire-born doctor cast his gaze elsewhere. Although Argentina was also spiraling into the Depression, the country's elite still possessed enough confident capital to invite him to design two courses for the Jockey Club, in

what was at the time suburban Buenos Aires. MacKenzie made the two-week trip from the West Coast, sailing through the Panama Canal, and spent four or five months in South America.

His time there elevated the standard of design on the continent to new heights, much as his sojourn in Australia a few years earlier had transformed the game in that nation. He worked in his usual manner, laying out detailed plans for the site and then entrusting their execution after his departure to an associate, in this case an American engineer named Luther Koontz, a representative of the firm MacKenzie would later employ in the construction of Augusta National. The connection is worth noting, because his existing work in South America—the two courses at the Jockey Club, plus the excellent Golf Club of Uruguay in Montevideo, about 140 miles from Buenos Aires over the immense, shallow River Plate—can be seen as a proving ground for ideas that would reach their full potential at the home of the Masters (see page 113).

During his stay in Argentina, MacKenzie made a side trip south to consult on a possible renovation of the Mar del Plata Golf Club, which had been laid out by Juan Dentone, an Argentine golf professional. That plan was never implemented, but the visit did allow MacKenzie to meet Enrique Anchorena,

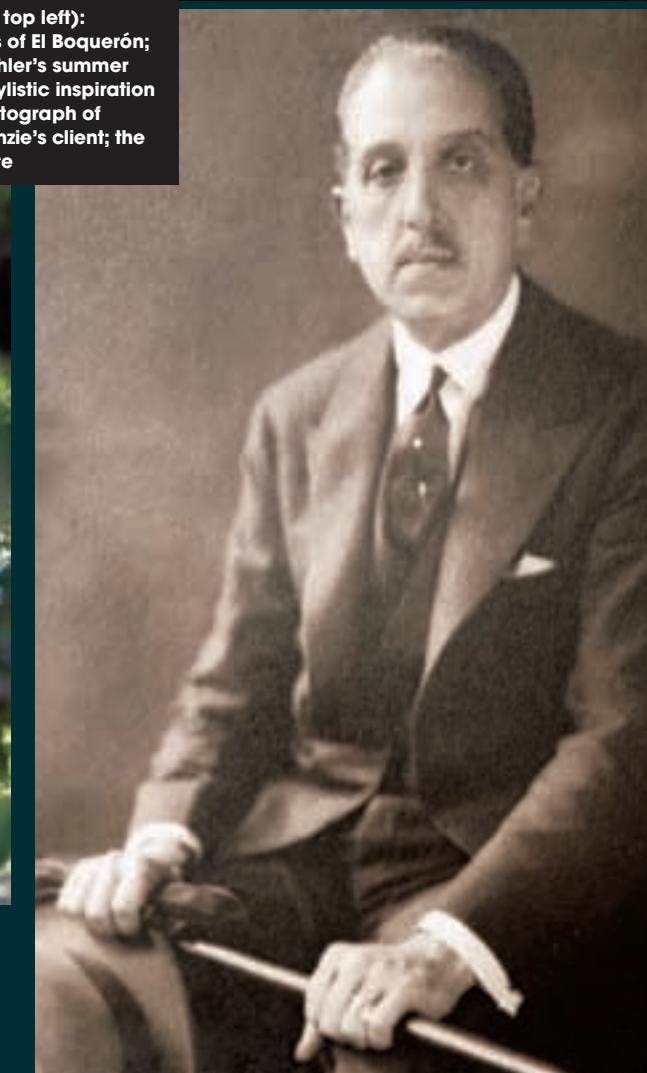
one of Argentina's wealthiest men. A Buenos Aires businessman and land baron, Anchorena's vacation home was the nearby estancia El Boquerón (named after an 1866 battle in the War of the Triple Alliance), and the family guest book he kept there bears MacKenzie's signature, dated March 4, 1930. (Other pages include the signatures of Argentine presidents, the literary giants Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriela Mistral, and three-time British Open champion Henry Cotton, who was married to an Argentine woman and lived in Mar del Plata.)

Anchorena was in the midst of developing 750 acres of the Boquerón property into one of the finest private parks in South America. He hired top talent for every aspect of the project. For the landscape design, he turned to the prominent German Hermann Botrich (famous for the Llao Llao hotel in Patagonia). Top Argentine architect Alejandro Bustillo was hired for the homes and buildings, and, on or about that March day, Alister MacKenzie was recruited for the golf course.

The course that the Good Doctor drew up for Anchorena turned out to be something special, even by MacKenzie's standards. Though it would bear many hallmarks of other great courses he designed, it was in one way compellingly different: It features nine double greens of the sort that distinguish the Old Course at St. Andrews. The routing was an ingenious intertwining of two nine-hole loops, somewhat similar to that of Muirfield. MacKenzie apparently scouted the grounds, drew



Estate tour (clockwise from top left): Zuberbühler on the grounds of El Boquerón; the dining room in Zuberbühler's summer home, which will provide stylistic inspiration for a new clubhouse; a photograph of Enrique Anchorena, MacKenzie's client; the entrance to the family estate



MAXI FAILLA/3NODOS PHOTO; ANCHORENA PORTRAIT COURTESY OF JAIME ZUBERBÜHLER

MACKENZIE'S MASTER PLAN

MacKenzie's compass-spinning routing for El Boquerón is loaded with adventurous design ideas—not the least of which is nine double greens—and no small dose of peril, as the shaded areas represent patches of *curros* (gorse). Some of the highlights to look forward to:

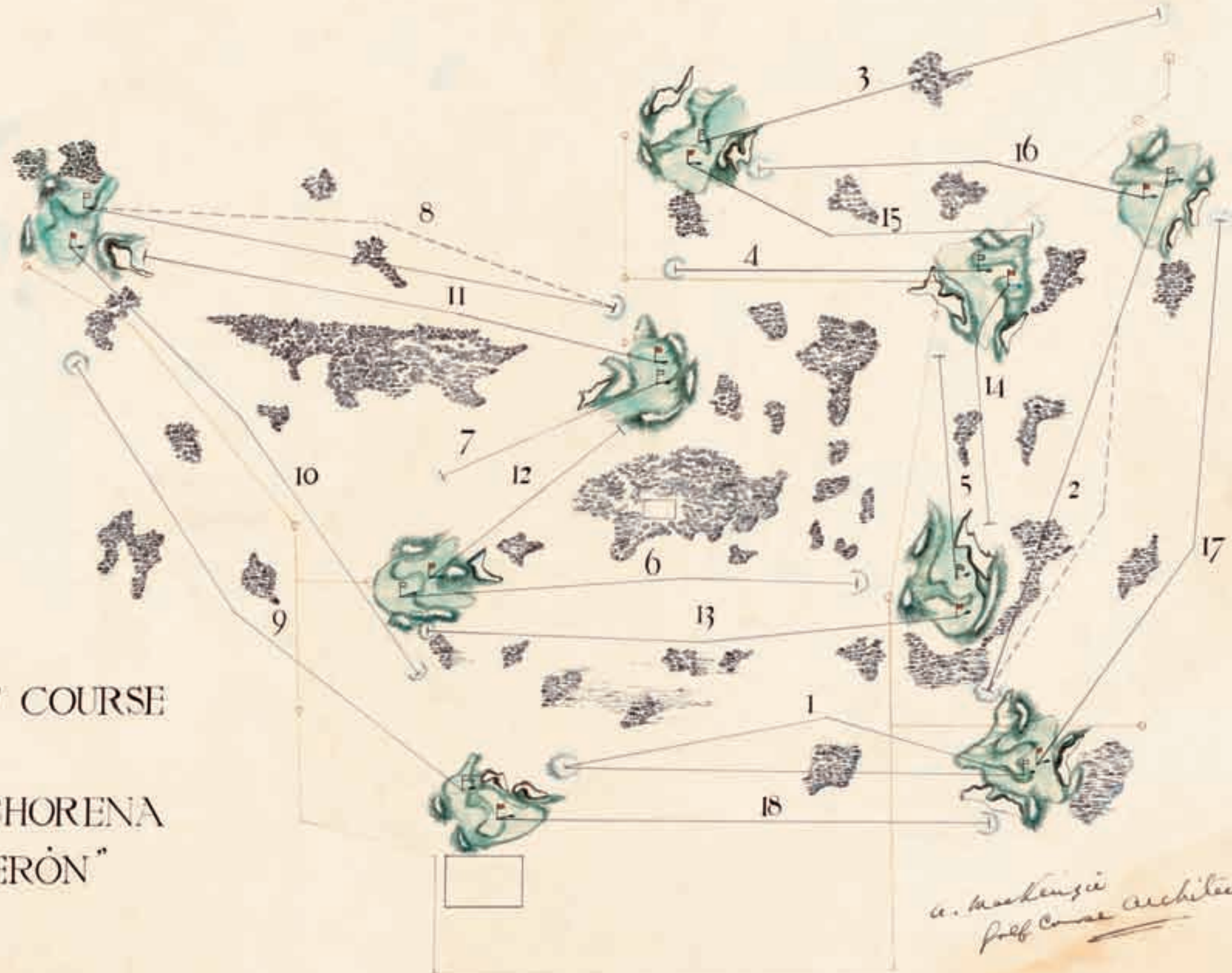
1st Hole The first of a handful of holes that offer two play lines, indicating a heroic path as well as a safer one.

3rd Hole Stopping a short iron on the upper shelf of this green, which abruptly falls away toward a back bunker, will be a test of nerve.

4th Hole The first par three on the course is also the golfer's first direct encounter with the deadly artistry of a classic MacKenzie bunker.

14th Hole A short par four for the ages, this drivable devil plays straight downhill, but into a quartering wind that pushes shots toward the front right bunker.

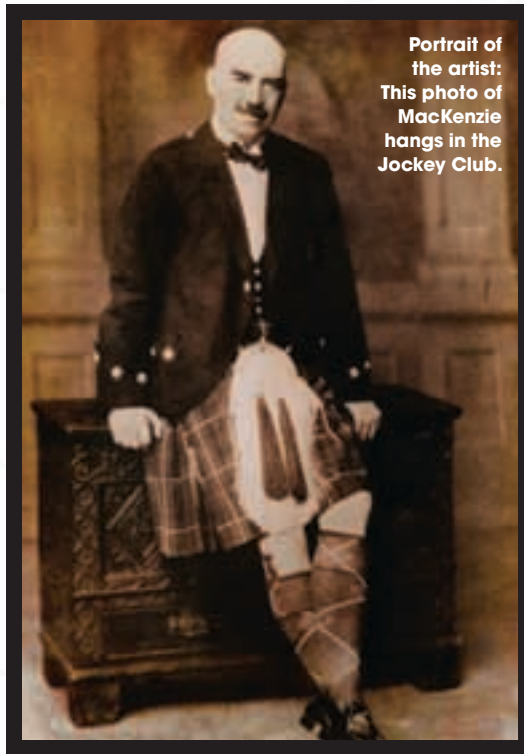
PRIVATE GOLF COURSE OF SEÑOR E. DE ANCHORENA "EL BOQUERÓN"



up the plans, handed them over and presumably collected a fee—but then the course was never built.

Why MacKenzie's design for El Boquerón wasn't executed remains a mystery. Instead, Anchorena hired Dentone to build a nine-hole course on the estancia grounds that, although situated in the location that MacKenzie had in mind, was only loosely based on his design. It too was called El Boquerón, it had a clubhouse, and golf was played on it for a generation by the Anchorena family and their friends. But after the patriarch's death in 1951, the property was divided among his heirs, and the course gradually disappeared.

One of those heirs was Enrique Anchorena Jr., who turned the clubhouse into his permanent home and kept the original MacKenzie plans in a frame above the



Portrait of the artist: This photo of MacKenzie hangs in the Jockey Club.

With Enrique Hernández accompanying him, Edel has a couple of items on his San Telmo wish list. For one, he's trying to corner the market on medallions from the Jockey Club—silver tokens, stamped with the year, signifying the bearer's membership at one of the world's great sporting clubs. San Telmo is awash in them, it seems, and Edel scores at least ten in excellent condition. After a few detours, he finds the second part of the day's scavenger hunt—a set of leather-bound volumes containing well-preserved issues of *El Golfer Argentino*. An entire generation of the nation's golf history, from 1931 to 1960, lives within these pages.

Edel's interest in all things Argentine dates back to the early 1990s, when he began migrating south

several lives: the existence of a routing plan, intensely creative and deeply idiosyncratic, bearing MacKenzie's signature.

"Pedro and I were talking about MacKenzie," Hernández recalls, "and how not everyone at the Jockey really appreciates what they have here. Then he told me that one of his friends had the plans for a course MacKenzie designed for his family. I'd never heard of anything like it in my life."

Edel, whose own deeply felt connection to the architect goes back to the stories his father used to tell about caddying at Cypress Point in the 1950s, was blown away. "I hadn't seen the plans yet, but Enrique compared them to a new *Atocha*," he says, referring to the 1985 discovery of a sunken Spanish galleon off Key West that yielded a haul of gold and jewels worth a half-billion dollars. "But in those days I never got any sense that the owner was interested in selling. So I just filed it away and went on with my life."

Nonetheless, the plans were resurfacing, and the pieces of their ultimate resurrection were beginning to fall into place.

EL BOQUERÓN DOES NOT APPEAR IN MACKENZIE'S autobiography, *The Spirit of St. Andrews*—a document that itself was lost for decades until his step-grandson, Raymund Haddock, discovered it in his father's papers. The Jockey Club makes an appearance in that book, perhaps because it was the primary focus of the 1930 trip and the only course that MacKenzie would have seen in something close to a completed state before he left Argentina.

Neither did Anchorena's family make a fuss over the plans. Toward the end of the 1990s, Enrique Anchorena Jr. sold his

portion of the Boquerón property, including the clubhouse and grounds of the old course, out of the family (and to the family's disappointment). He would spend the last decade of his life in a hotel in Mar del Plata, where he died last year, a few months shy of his one-hundredth birthday. Before he moved out of his home, however, fate intervened.

One day in 1998, Anchorena's nephew, Jaime Zuberbühler, was visiting his uncle in his clubhouse home on the family estate. In passing, he expressed interest in making a color copy of the MacKenzie plans, which were still hanging over the fireplace, for his home. Much to his surprise, Anchorena gave him the framed original. "At the time I wasn't even thinking about the value," Zuberbühler told me when I met with him. "I thought I'd put it in my home in Buenos Aires, and I'd be very proud to have it."

As a Jockey Club member, Zuberbühler daydreamed, of course, about bringing the course to life, but he couldn't picture it being anywhere other than on his family's land, where he still had his summer home. And his uncle's sale of the clubhouse and the design's intended acreage had made this an impossible dream. So he safeguarded the plans for several years, discussing them occasionally with friends—including Hernández's Jockey Club pal, Pedro Cossio. Eventually Hernández sought out Zuberbühler with some news: Having heard about the plans and after turning it over in his head for several years, Edel had had an inspiration. He wanted to acquire the drawing, but not as another flea-market trophy to decorate his mantel-piece. Edel wanted to buy the plans and have the course they depicted built—in the United States. ►

WHY MACKENZIE'S DESIGN FOR EL BOQUERÓN WAS NEVER EXECUTED REMAINS A MYSTERY.

fireplace. There the document languished for the rest of the century, a faded star in the Englishman's glittering career.

DAVID EDEL STRIDES ALONG THE COBBLEstones of Calle Defensa, moving purposefully through the crowd. It's Sunday at the San Telmo market in Buenos Aires, a head-spinning indoor-outdoor antique fair set amid the splendid colonial architecture of one of the city's oldest neighborhoods. You can find practically anything here, from ornate silver maté gourds to stained-glass Art Deco doors to a vintage Bugatti racer just perfect for a spin at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance.

Edel is a forty-year-old PGA professional from Reedsport, Oregon, a depressed timber town that lies about an hour north of Bandon Dunes, and a protégé of Ben Doyle, the sage of Quail Lodge and one of the nation's foremost interpreters of the instructional treatise *The Golfing Machine*. But Edel only teaches the full swing on occasion, instead focusing on expanding his trade in the custom-made putters he sells at such places as Pebble Beach and Barton Creek (see "Fitter Flatsticks," May/June 2007), as well as on his side projects in watchmaking, fly-fishing reels and hand-tooled leather goods. Nothing gets him going more than good old-fashioned craftsmanship, whether it's a putter, a racecar, or an exquisite pair of polo boots from Casa Fagliano, the 115-year-old family-run workshop in suburban Buenos Aires.

for the winter to teach, as do many in his profession. Most descend no farther than Florida, but Edel pressed onward, traveling throughout Central and South America. He saw his share of backwater towns, but in Buenos Aires, Edel flourished: "It was like the Europe I could never afford to get to, and it came at me from every angle—the food, the music, the openness of the people. It sure beat the mundane country club life in the States."

Edel landed at a driving range called Costa Salguero, where he was befriended by Hernández, who began booking students for the American through his pro shop. Edel asked his new friend if he could stay with him for a week or two while he searched for an apartment. "After a few days, Enrique said, 'Why don't you just stay?' So I did—for months at a time." And although their friendship often works on the level of frat-boy ribbing (Hernández's highway profanity proved to be a long-running joke between the two), by 1994, when Edel met his wife, Barbara, during a power outage on the subway in Santiago, Chile, it was clear that he had found a second family.

"There are times in life," he says of Hernández, "when you ask yourself: 'Without that person, where would I be?'" This universal idea—how we are shaped, even transformed, by those around us—hit home during a round of golf at the Jockey Club between Hernández and his friend Pedro Cossio. That day, Hernández made a discovery that would change

FROM ST. ANDREWS TO AUGUSTA, VIA ARGENTINA

In *The Spirit of St. Andrews*, MacKenzie wrote that the **Jockey Club** "has a greater resemblance—not only in appearance but in the character of its golf—to the **Old Course at St. Andrews** than any inland course I know." Like most great architects, he didn't set out to reinvent the wheel every time out; he found concepts that he liked and then refined them. The 175-yard twelfth of the Jockey Club's Red course is an Eden hole based on the Old Course's eleventh, and the bunkerless finishing hole has its own Valley of Sin. Comparisons have even been drawn between the Jockey's tenth and the Road Hole—both are par four-and-a-halfes with deviously angled greens. And the double green of the Blue course's ninth and eighteenth holes is reminiscent of those at the Home of Golf—and the only such green MacKenzie ever built.

But his work in South America was forward-looking, as well. **Augusta National**, which he began planning with Bobby Jones and Clifford Roberts

shortly after his return to the United States, is foreshadowed on such holes as the tenth at the **Golf Club of Uruguay**. A dogleg left with a back-to-front sloping green, it's a dead ringer for Augusta's ninth. And at the Jockey Club, the seventh of the Blue course is twenty yards longer and lacks the front bunker of the famous twelfth at Augusta, but it is a recognizable first draft nonetheless. —T.D.



Double vision: the ninth and eighteenth green complex on the Jockey Club's Blue course

MAXI FALLA/3NODOS PHOTO: PORTRAIT COURTESY OF THE JOCKEY CLUB

MAXI FALLA/3NODOS PHOTO

THE IDEA OF A “NEW” MACKENZIE COURSE—one based on a routing that, with its nine double greens, manages to put even the Old Course, which has seven, in the shade—is irresistible. What would El Boquerón look like? For one thing, there would be plenty of quirks: With its crossing shots, tees in front of bunkers and gigantic greens, the course was not designed to handle the masses. It would also probably be fairly forgiving off the tee. The architect advocated economy in construction to such an extent that he declined to draw a single fairway bunker, even on an estate course where money was no object (though those squiggles on the plans represent *curros*, Argentina’s steroidal answer to gorse and surely no picnic for ball hunters).

To say that El Boquerón would defend par primarily around the greens, in classic Alister MacKenzie fashion, would be an understatement: The architect who takes on this project will have the chance to build some of the wildest putting surfaces ever realized. The greens bear more than a passing resemblance to those at the Golf Club of Uruguay, which according to Tom Doak, James Scott and Raymund Haddock’s biography, *The Life and Work of Dr. Alister MacKenzie*, had as much as six feet of relief in certain places before the club softened them. So

“A couple of things interest me about that hole,” Edel says. “It has the only curving play line that he drew on these plans, which I take to mean it’s a short four. But it also runs downhill, and on the original property it would have played into a left-to-right crosswind. All of those things factor into the risk-reward equation.” To that end, he’s determined to find a site where the prevailing wind works in a similar way: “Without it, the plans don’t make nearly as much sense.”

Edel also points out that the compact nature of the routing, with its abundance of shared playing areas, would have a bearing on the atmosphere of the club. “The way the holes link together, El Boquerón would have a really great social element. It wouldn’t be the type of course where every hole is off on its own. Which makes sense given that it was a design for a private estate course—it was meant to bring people together.

“I want to create a club where you’d drive all the way across town just to have lunch, and when you enter, you feel your past,” he says. “A place where you show up and say, ‘This is my home.’” Such sentiments are commonplace among developers of new golf properties. But for Edel a concept like “tradition” must be grounded in reality, because it’s all around him—at the San Telmo market, at the Jockey Club,

EL BOQUERÓN’S NINE DOUBLE GREENS MANAGE TO PUT EVEN THE OLD COURSE IN THE SHADE.

El Boquerón would likely need to disregard today’s quest for lightning-quick greens to keep those contours playable.

The design itself is precisely rendered in colored ink on a two-by-three-foot drawing board; the distinct lettering, a common feature of MacKenzie’s work, speaks to the architect’s attention to detail. The best point of reference when studying them is the clubhouse (represented by the rectangle at the bottom of the plans). Imagine a broad hillside gently sloping down from it—the original clubhouse overlooked the entire course—and one begins to get a sense of how the various holes work with or against the inclination of the land. For example, the par-five ninth would be a tough uphill trek, and the tenth, which appears to be almost as long on paper, could be a classic half-par hole in the 480- to 500-yard range.

MacKenzie’s intertwined loops, with no two consecutive holes running in the same direction, made ingenious use of a piece of land that, while attractive, was not especially large. Situating the par fives on the perimeter opened up possibilities for the interior, where all kinds of entertaining features await. “I love the intimacy of those inner holes,” Edel says. “That part of the course is all about finesse.” The heart of El Boquerón features great moments, such as back-to-back one-shotters at numbers four and five, each guarded by its own jagged expanse of sand; the approach to the crescent-moon green of the sixth; and the wonderful fourteenth, which appears to be a drivable par four that tempts golfers to thread the needle between its two fronting bunkers.

at El Boquerón. Fifteen years of cultivating friendships and immersing himself in Argentine culture has brought him the chance of a lifetime, and he is determined to reward those who would entrust him with an artifact of such significance.

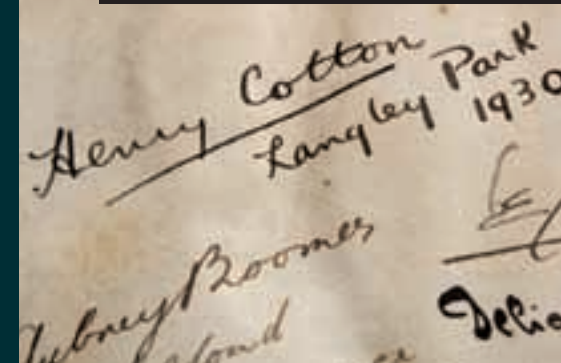
AT THE CELEBRATORY ASADO AT EL Boquerón, all the principals are in festive moods. Edel—who would take possession of the plans the next day in the men’s grill of the Jockey Club, beneath a portrait of the Good Doctor—reflected on how everything came together. In his view, once he realized that he might use his savings to acquire the drawing and then commit a major part of his life to getting the course built, it all came down to Zuberbühler. “The important decision was Jaime’s to make,” says Edel. “I just had to be ready when he was. And sure, this is a lot of money [a mid-five-figure number] to me, and my wife asked questions that I didn’t have all the answers for. But it was always enough to think about how I could be connected to the history of Alister MacKenzie. That’s something that can be passed down through generations of my own family—that I was involved in something great.”

For Zuberbühler, although he wanted a respectable sum for this piece of his family’s history, it was never about the money. What intrigued him about Edel was the American’s genuine interest in Argentine history and culture, as well as his track record as a craftsman. Also, before they even met, Edel asked course architect Dr. Michael Hurdzan—who

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Pampa and circumstance (clockwise from top left): Zuberbühler and Edel seal their deal at the Jockey Club; an Anchorena swing sequence in *El Golfer Argentino*, one of Edel’s San Telmo finds; the original clubhouse, where MacKenzie’s plans hung for decades; the celebration at El Boquerón (Enrique Hernández is pictured, far right); Henry Cotton’s signature in the Anchorena guest book.



GUEST BOOK AND EL GOLFER ARGENTINO COURTESY OF DAVID EDEL; GUEST BOOK PHOTOGRAPHED BY TERRY POE; ALL OTHER PHOTOS BY MAXI FAILLA/3NODOS PHOTO

LOST MACKENZIE

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has one of the world's largest collections of golf artifacts and has played every MacKenzie course in existence—to write a letter putting the item in perspective, historically and financially. Impressed, Zuberbühler then invited Edel to visit him in Argentina, where the two hit it off like old friends.

Their contract is a relatively simple document, governing use of the plans and the Boquerón and Anchorena names. The most notable aspects of the agreement reflect Zuberbühler's abiding goal: to play golf at El Boquerón. At sixty-eight, he still owns a respectable game. A nine handicap, he's been making noise lately in senior competitions at the Jockey Club—but he can't wait forever. To that end, Edel has a five-year window of opportunity to break ground on the project, or the plans can revert to Zuberbühler's control. (The contract also establishes founding memberships for Zuberbühler and Enrique Anchorena III, plus private cottages for their use when visiting.)

Now that he is on the clock, Edel has begun his search for an architect, and Hurdzan is a leading contender. "It would be a fantastic project to work on," Hurdzan says. "There's lots of design information even though it's a fairly simple plan, so it's basically a gigantic paint-by-numbers [drawing]. It doesn't have a scale on it—which in some ways lends a bit more freedom—but it would need to be paired with another of his plans that has elevations and green details." A key to unlocking this piece of the puzzle could be found in the plans

(which still exist) for the Golf Club of Uruguay. That course was designed a mere two months after El Boquerón, making them sister courses, stylistically.

Fortunately, unlike the site-specific routing of a Cypress Point, the plans for El Boquerón would translate well to many parcels of land, from the California coast to the Texas Hill Country—the imperative is to find a broad, open hillside. Edel isn't sure where that land will be found, but once all the elements are in place—real estate, architect, investors—the mandate for the new club is crystal clear: Although it will be built somewhere in the United States, it will be Argentine to the core. The clubhouse and cottages would pay tribute to the buildings on the Anchorena estate, with Zuberbühler's summer home serving as a model for the clubhouse, and the original clubhouse (which is tiny) providing a basis for the guest cottages. The Jockey Club medals and vintage golf magazines Edel found in San Telmo would join other items in a museum devoted to the history of Argentine golf and the legacy of Enrique Anchorena.

Presumably some approximation of razor-sharp *curros* could be found with which to aggravate golfers who stray from the fairways, and there's no question that the course's unique challenges would be a fine addition to MacKenzie's luminous body of work—even if it arrives to the party more than eight decades late. With any luck, a few years from now a *quebracho*-fired steak and a hearty glass of malbec will await those fortunate enough to have just walked off the eighteenth at El Boquerón. •
