

# SLEEPY HOLLOW COUNTRY CLUB: *Restoring A Classic*

*by Ian Critser*

**W**ith a resume that includes restorations at Winged Foot, Merion, Fishers Island, and dozens of others, Gil Hanse is no stranger to giving new life to classic courses. While Sleepy Hollow Country Club north of New York City may not be as well known, the work that he and his team have done there over the past two years may be some of his boldest—and best.

The original Sleepy Hollow 18 was designed by Charles Blair Macdonald in 1911, with an additional



18th HOLE

nine holes contributed by A.W Tillinghast in the 1920s. Before Hanse’s work, the main course was a mix of holes from both designers that fit together but didn’t share a common style. To unify them, Hanse and his team had to make a difficult choice:

either convert the Tillinghast holes to a Macdonald/Raynor feel or vice versa. Their proposal was to change the Tillinghast holes and restore the Macdonald/Raynor holes to their original designs.

Convincing the membership wasn’t easy, but Hanse—with the help of the late George Bahto, an expert on Macdonald/Raynor—presented a compelling case. “Our strongest argument was that there are a number of wonderful and significant Tillinghast courses in Westchester County, but there is only one course designed by Macdonald and Raynor,” Hanse says. “The combination of this factor and the prominent history of the original design and affiliation with the club by Macdonald allowed us to get to where we are today.”

Hanse and his team—including design associate Ben Hillard, course superintendent Tom Leahy, and contractor Geoff Porteous—attacked the project in two phases of nine holes each. The holes at the far end of the property (many of which were attributed to Tillinghast) were completed in the winter of 2016–2017; those closer to the clubhouse were redone the following winter.

Sleepy Hollow already possessed a number of the “template” holes common to Macdonald/Raynor courses, but the Hanse team took it upon themselves to add more. “On the non-Macdonald/Raynor holes, we renovated them to create the missing template holes, and without changing the routing make them feel as if they were always part of the original Macdonald and Raynor design,” Hanse says. This included the addition of “Leven,” “Eden,” “Road,” and “Knoll” holes, which while all technically Hanse originals feel as if they were always part of the original design—exactly as intended.

Just as important was restoring the original

Macdonald/Raynor holes. Having slowly drifted away from their original designs over 100 years, they required extra attention to bring them back to their former glory. Hanse and his team poured over countless old photographs and original drawings to make their work as accurate as possible. This meant clearing trees, re-shaping bunkers, and enlarging and squaring greens (a distinctive Macdonald/Raynor trait), among other refinements.

Today, Sleepy Hollow is better than ever. The two sections flow seamlessly together: The original holes look and play as Macdonald intended and Hanse's new holes fit in like missing puzzle pieces. It's difficult to discern what was there 100 years ago and what wasn't. Hanse was particularly happy with the 8th ("Sleepy Hollow") and 16th ("Panorama"): A Hanse original, No. 8 is modeled after the 17th at the Old Course in St. Andrews, the famous "Road Hole," with a menacingly deep pot bunker guarding the front left of the green and trouble running the entirety of the right side (in this case, thick woods serve as the "Road"). Number 16 is a short, downhill par three that offers dramatic views from high above the Hudson River that were noticeably improved with the clearing of trees and rebuilding the infinity green to include the distinctive "Thumbprint" contour familiar to many Macdonald/Raynor one-shotters.

C.B. Macdonald layouts are few and far between—fewer than two dozen remain. With a Hanse assist, Sleepy Hollow is now one of the purest expressions of his genius.



16th HOLE