



TEXTBOOK: A MASTERCLASS IN ROUTINGS

Architects Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw do not mince words when speaking of the brilliance of Old Town Club in Winston-Salem (NC). Crenshaw claims “it’s some of the best land I’ve ever seen for golf.” That’s quite a statement considering the two-time Masters champion has played many of the world’s most venerated designs.

Coore’s reverence for Old Town goes even deeper. Coore, who first became enamored with the Perry Maxwell layout while attending college at Wake Forest, protests that the 1939 classic encompasses one fundamental design component that’s in a league by itself.

Coore isn’t referring to Maxwell’s coveted putting surfaces and their world-renowned, internal “rolls”. Coore isn’t even talking about Maxwell’s natural bunkering style, which he (and Crenshaw) artistically restored to its original look and identity in 2013. That would be too brassy for the soft-spoken Carolinian.

Instead, Coore claims that Old Town’s true mastery emanates from its routing. Coore injects, “it’s how Mr. Maxwell used the land that’s so fascinating.” Coore always stops in his tracks to marvel at how each hole lays on the pitch of the land, showcases the natural features of the landscape, and how flawlessly they all fit together as a whole. Coore elaborates:

Any serious student of golf architecture must first go to Old Town to see how Mr. Maxwell laid out the course over such an exceptional piece of hilly terrain. Given the hole-variety and the fact that it’s still very walkable, that’s quite an accomplishment.

Coore, who considers Old Town a cornerstone for his early understanding of extraordinary golf architecture, contends that Old Town’s routing is ingenious and deserving of intensive study and examination. “It’s textbook material,” he says. “It’s a masterclass in routing a golf course.” A deep-dive exploration into Mr. Maxwell’s routing topography at Old Town Club follows herewith.

1. *Transitions, Flow and Connectivity*

Many of the world’s best routings contain a cohesive sequence of interesting holes that meld together on the land almost seamlessly. There’s usually a natural ease or flow from one hole to the next. Consecutive holes are often linked by a natural walk-path or a fresh fairway cut, and ideally transitions are intimate and short so the mind doesn’t stray. Today, there are some fascinating analytics dedicated to hole transitions thanks to Jeff Schley, a golf enthusiast from Chicago (IL). By charting golf course routings with ProVisualizer tools, Schley has created an aggregate “connectivity index” of *GOLF Magazine’s* 2021-2022 list of the “Top 100 Courses in the World.” Accordingly, Old Town ranks tied for 19th with a tight sequence of 1,038-meters between holes, equalling Coore & Crenshaw’s Sand Hills Golf Club in Mullen (NE).

2. *Variety Achieved With Undulating Topography*

Maxwell didn’t route Old Town straight into the teeth of earth-forms in a direct, head-on manner. Instead, Old Town’s routing skirts landforms rather obliquely—weaving and twisting its way around the layout’s boldest landforms. While many holes bend with the pitch of the terrain, “much like a racetrack,” according to Coore, other holes peel back against the land in “reverse camber” fashion. Coore professes, “shot makers must learn the art of shaping the ball high up against all sorts of side-slopes just to hold the grade of the terrain on the bottom side.” And it’s exactly this relationship between hole-shape and ground movement that yields some of the most varied challenges in all of golf. With 80-acres of tumbling and twisting fairways, swaying stances and hanging lies are the norm and vex even the most accomplished golfers. Maxwell’s unique use of tilting terrain at Old Town serves as the foundation for its unmatched variety round after round.

Connectivity Index

1. Utrechtse De Pan 821
2. St George’s Hill 871
3. North Berwick 881
4. Chicago GC 895
5. Somerset Hills 904
6. Rye Old 910
7. Fishers Island 916
8. Seminole[933
9. Winged Foot East 938
10. Swinley Forest 989
11. NGLA 992
12. Royal Melbourne (E) 999
13. Yeamans Hall 1009
14. Hirono 1016
15. Prestwick 1020
16. Cypress Point 1022
17. Pine Valley 1026
18. Myopia Hunt 1033
19. **Old Town Club 1038**
20. Sand Hills 1038
21. Garden City 1050
22. Southern Hills 1059
23. Baltusol 1068
24. Ballybunion 1070
25. Friar’s Head 1073
26. Shoreacres 1078
27. Quaker Ridge 1079
28. Oakland Hills 1094
29. Pinehurst No. 2 1101
30. Lahinch 1116
31. Cabot Cliffs[1121
32. St George’s Golf 1125
33. Royal Melbourne (W) 1135
34. Carnoustie 1137
35. Morfontaine 1142
36. Riviera 1151
37. Sunningdale New 1153
38. Kawana 1165
39. Tara Iti 1174
40. Pebble Beach 1180
41. Cape Wickham 1189
42. Royal Troon 1208
43. Koninklijke Haagsche 1212
44. San Francisco 1226
45. Prairie Dunes 1230
46. Woodhill Spa 1236
47. Bandon Trails 1240
48. Crystal Downs 1245
49. Sleepy Hollow 1245
50. Royal Liverpool 1252

Undulation Index

1. Kawana 169
2. Merion 120
3. Somerset Hills 118
4. Los Angeles North 105
5. Cypress Point 102
6. Old Town Club 98
7. Crystal Downs 98
8. Oakmont 98
9. Riviera 97
10. Cal Club 95
11. Peachtree 92
12. Nine Bridges 86
13. Sleepy Hollow 83
14. Castle Stuart 83
15. Baltusol 82
16. The Country Club 82
17. Whistling Straits 82
18. Oak Hill East 82
19. Olympic Club 81
20. Augusta National 81
21. Ellerston 80
22. San Francisco 79
23. Pebble Beach 79
24. Shinnecock 78
25. Seminole 78
26. Bethpage 77
27. Cabot Cliffs 76
28. Pine Valley 76
29. Camargo 71
30. Ballyunion 70
31. Sand Hills 70
32. Friar's Head 70
33. Bandon Dunes 70
34. Prairie Dunes 69
35. Myopia Hunt 69
36. Cape Wickham 68
37. Yeamans Hall 65
38. Lahinch 65
39. Southern Hills 64
40. St George's Golf 64
41. Sunningdale Old 63
42. New South Wales 62
43. Sunningdale New 61
44. Chicago Golf Club 60
45. St. Georges Hill 60
46. Cruden Bay 60
47. Oakland Hills 59
48. The Golf Club 59
49. Inverness 59
50. Cape Kidnappers 58

Since undulation is inherently free flowing and multi-dimensional, it's difficult to quantify or compare from one living landscape to the next. To simplify matters, Schley formulated a shrewd approach for assessing golf terrain by "measuring the extent to which all centerline ascents within a routing combine to be greater than the elevation change of the property." Calculating all the humps, bumps and rises along the central axis of each hole offers a rough sample-size of a layout's degree of undulation — and the character of its terrain. Schley again uses data analytics to corroborate sensory information normally derived from your personal experience.

After crunching the data, Old Town's "undulation metric" matches Oakmont (PA) and Crystal Downs (MI), tied for sixth among *GOLF* Magazine's 2021-2022 list of the "Top 100 Courses in the World" with a composite centerline ascent of 123-meters minus 25-meters of elevation variance for a total of 98-meters. Indeed, if undulation is the heart and soul of golf, then Old Town rightfully earns its place among the noblest of playing fields.

3. Variety Achieved By Length and Direction

In 2023, Old Town's small tee boxes were converted into large flowing ribbons of teeing space, which provide expanded width, lateral versatility and distance elasticity within all teeing grounds. As a continuation of Old Town's fairways, the restored teeing area concept offers differing looks and decisions on a daily basis.

It's also hard to find another course where all four par-3s face different directions and build consecutively in distance throughout the round.

4. A Core Design (Integration vs. Separation)

Eight fairways meld together without the interruption of rough or vegetation. Plus, six holes converge around the nucleus of the double green at holes 8 and 17, forming the communal epicenter of the layout. It's also rare to find both front-9 and back-9 loops start and end in such close proximity to one another — and to the clubhouse doors — located on the sentinel elevation of the property. By tracing each loop with your index finger, one will find that the front-9 wraps counterclockwise around the southern perimeter, while the back-9 turns clockwise around the northern boundary. Each nine represents an isolated loop until they meet at the double-green, and then criss-cross at the shared teeing grounds of holes 9 and 18. Unrivaled for its intimacy and integrative charm, golfers are constantly crossing paths and are often within eyeshot—engendering a fraternal spirit among all.



Over: Aerial view of Old Town's double-green, where four fairways merge and six holes meet creating a natural epicenter. Two miles away, the Winston-Salem skyline appears prominently in the backdrop. (Photograph By John Cavalier)

Left: A vintage inspired map of Maxwell's master routing at Old Town following Coore & Crenshaw's 2013 restoration. (Rendering By Keith Cutten)

5. Mixing Up The Targets

The way a target looks often depends upon the topography of its location. Ran Morrisett, architecture editor for *GOLF* Magazine, has long been fascinated by the diverse presentations and elevations of Old Town's greens. For instance, golfers play up to hole 1, down to hole 2, back up to hole 3, down to hole 4, then up to five, down to six, up to seven, down to eight, up to nine and down to ten. "It's uncanny how Maxwell varied the looks and elevations of each target," says Morrisett, who was perhaps the first to recognize this constantly changing dynamic. And there's more — the routing finishes as it starts playing up to hole 16, down to hole 17 and back up to hole 18.

Target variety can also depend on the scenery beyond the flagstick. Some targets are framed by a backdrop of trees, offering visual scale and dimension. Other targets are reminiscent of a links design, where open boundless space removes any sense of depth and visual assistance. Old Town has it all — blind greens, skyline greens, infinity fall-away greens and some that are even "layered" beyond the sight line of the target.

As the former associate of architect Alister MacKenzie, Maxwell applied MacKenzie's trade of "layering" throughout the layout. Here, one will find distant green-sites in the backdrop of a hole tying-in visually to the one at hand. Without any sense of the distance between greens, layering can create visual deception from the approach. For instance, Hole 7 green-site serves as the dominant visual backdrop to hole 14, though its located hundreds of yards away. Hole 6 green also stands up prominently in the backcloth of hole 4, and the flagsticks at the double green stack up just above the flagstick at hole 11 creating a similar distraction. In each case, layering serves as a visual examination, requiring golfers to hone in on the real target. As a collection, it would be challenging to find a more varied display of target settings anywhere.

6. Utilization of Natural Hazards

It's also difficult to route a course using a single water feature so prolifically. Silas Creek looms large on more than ten holes stretching almost two miles across the heart of the property. The diversity in which the creek and its branches are used — flanking left, flanking right, diagonally across, and blindly in front of green-sites — plays a critical role of impacting hole strategies throughout the layout.



Opposite: In the foreground, hole 4 contains a partially 'blind' putting surface hidden at the base of a dell. From the approach, golfers marvel at the commanding view of the formidable infinity green at hole 6 sited in the backdrop. Positioned at different elevations, both green sites are presented in the plateau style and are wrought with depth-perception challenges. (Photograph by Jon Cavalier)

7. A Sense of Space and Place

Like city parks, many golf courses are distinctive and invigorating. Their routing configurations can play a large roll in their ultimate allure and appeal. David Normoyle, a noted golf historian and former Director of the USGA Museum, contends that Old Town's routing best utilizes the principles of "space and place" expounded by Frederick Law Olmsted, the father of American Landscape Architecture. According to Normoyle, Olmsted believed the human mind craves a long, open space. While addressing the Fenway Park Commission in Boston in 1870, Olmsted's words resonate at Old Town still today:

What we most want to counteract the harsh realities of modern life in our cities, is a simple, broad open space; surrounded (but not interrupted or broken up) by a depth of wood, enough... to gain tranquility and rest the mind... and to completely shut out the city from our landscapes.

Much of Old Town's routing—14 holes in all—scales its perimeter boundary. Of its 165-acres, Maxwell utilized exterior corners and offshoots of the property so judiciously, allowing for a much looser, more expansive interior. Golfers are first exposed to this inner-vastness when cresting the fourth fairway. Many first-timers call this cosmos "The Big Reveal," as tree management has reclaimed distant vistas throughout the heart of the property. In this way, Old Town's exterior routing configuration resembles the loops around countless Olmsted-designed parks. From perimeter perspectives, sweeping internal sight lines naturally captivate those with anticipation for what's waiting to be discovered as they stroll around to the other side.

While shaking his head in disbelief, one observer mused, "there's nothing like it anywhere around here. It felt like I was in the Sarengeti," he says. "No one would believe this is two miles from downtown Winston-Salem." Thanks to Maxwell's external routing and his use of open core space, a walk around Old Town can transcend anyone's sense of place.

Opposite: Aerial view highlighting an abundance of fairways and golden prairie grasses that blanket the topography offering vistas in every direction. These Elysian fields about Wake Forest, where Wait Chapel stands tall in the backdrop. (Photograph by Andy Johnson)

Upper Left: aerial view of Olmsted's Shawnee Park in Louisville, (KY) also showcases a perimeter routing buffered by dense vegetation with open views across interior fields. Naturally, it serves as a haven or refuge from city life outside. (By Broken Sidewalk)

Lower Left: Design plan for Olmsted's Cadwalader Park in Trenton, (NJ) also features an exterior "walk-in-the-park" routing with visible offshoots along the perimeter to pique your interest for what's ahead. (By Cadwalader Park Alliance)



*Right: The Big Reveal: No
seaside cliffs or mountain
views are needed here.
The grandeur of open
inland topography can also
stir the soul. A true
sanctuary within city limits.
(Photo by Dunlop White)*

