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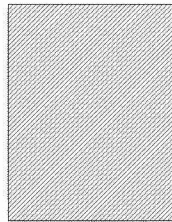
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THE YEAR'S **NEW** COURSES

ONLY a dozen new courses officially opened in North America in 2011 (some took six years or more to complete), and though none of them rise to the level of the reworked **L.A. Country Club** or **Pinehurst No. 2**, all have merit. ➔ For pure risk and reward, **Firekeeper** in Kansas has plenty of alternate routes and options to encourage even average golfers to think strategically. But the year's most impressive Native American casino course was **Salish Cliffs Golf Club** in Shelton, Wash., a Gene Bates roller-coaster routing through a forest of fir trees, with splashy bunkering and great panoramas. ➔ In sand dunes south of Kearney, Neb., Jim Engh's **Awarii Dunes** is all about ingenious green contours. Some are fabulous, others outrageous; all encourage creative shotmaking. ➔ Highlight of the **Rope Rider Course** at Suncadia Resort near Roslyn, Wash., a Peter Jacobsen-Jim Hardy design built atop old coal mines, is Tipple Hill, an enormous gray spoil pile looming over the seventh through ninth holes. The clubhouse was designed to emulate an old portal building, complete with multiple mine shafts that lead to cart storage. ➔ The usual Tom Weiskopf architectural elegance at **The Club at Kukui'ula**, atop Pacific bluffs on the island of Kauai, Hawaii, is enhanced by a landscaping plan that highlights different tropical vegetation on every hole. ➔ **Metamora (Ill.) Fields Golf Club**, a residential design by PGA Tour veteran D.A. Weibring and design partner Steve Wolfard, features "funnel bunkers." Every fairway extends down into its fairway bunkers, and shaved banks lead into all greenside bunkers. ➔ Several courses went easy on the bunkering. At the high-plains **TimberStone Golf Course** in the Boise suburb of Caldwell, several bunkers on John Steidel's blueprint were built as grass hollows for cost reasons. On the tropical 27 holes of **Osprey Point Golf Course** in Boca Raton, Fla., architects Roy Case and Jeff Grossman substituted humps and mounds around many greens and expanded the width of coquina-shell cartpaths in selected areas to serve as waste bunkers. Canadian architect Shawn Watters relied more on rocks, pines and water as hazards at **Oak Bay Golf & Country Club** in Honey Harbour, Ontario, producing the year's most awesome new par 3, the 170-yard 15th over a lake cove to a green atop a granite outcropping. ➔ The Michael Nicklaus/Dave Heatwole design of **Applecross Country Club** in Downingtown, Pa., averages just three bunkers per hole (far fewer than Michael's papa, Jack, normally uses). Another Nicklaus Design project, **Rock Creek** near Lake Texoma, Texas, features a sterling layout by Nicklaus associate Chet Williams, who used trees in place of bunkers on holes 10 through 12. ➔ Last, **Wildstone Golf Course** in Cranbrook, British Columbia, is a Black Knight Design (a subsidiary to Gary Player Design), but architect Jeff Lawrence, a former Tom Fazio associate, produced a layout with the look of a Fazio model. Wildstone excels in scenery and strategies, particularly on the short par-5 ninth (where pines split the fairway into optional routes) and on the par-4 17th (cross bunkers stretch across the fairway some 50 yards short of a perched green that looks as if it was appropriated from Pinehurst). Wildstone was my favorite round of the year. —RW