

The cat is ready to pounce

Now looking to start a signature design business, Argentine pro Eduardo Romero says golf should be a 'romantic challenge between player and course'

Non-golfers might not realise it, but of course Argentina has a long heritage in the game. Argentine professionals have been at the top of the game ever since Roberto de Vincenzo, who was Open champion in 1967, and who famously would have tied for the lead in the 1968 Masters if he hadn't signed for a four instead of the three he actually took on the 71st hole.

The Argentine heritage in golf isn't just about its players. Legendary architect Alister MacKenzie came to the country in 1930 and designed the two courses – Red and Blue – at Buenos Aires's upmarket Jockey Club. And, as with his work in Australia, MacKenzie left behind a protégé who would add to his legacy – in this case, engineer Luther Koonz, who went on to build the Olivos club in the city.

Angel Cabrera may have become Argentina's second Major champion this summer at Oakmont, but his compatriot Eduardo Romero has a good claim to be considered the country's most successful golfing export of recent years. Long a top player on the European tour, since turning 50 'El Gato' has hit it big on the Champions Tour in the US. Now, he wants to follow the path of many successful pros, and get into the signature design business.

"The best golf courses are those that reward the player who makes a good shot and punishes a bad shot," he says. "A good shot should not be penalised. For me the best courses are those which permit the good players to make many birdies as well as many bogies." He's not afraid to take a shot at some classic courses: "The course must be fair, and punish bad not good shots. St Andrews has some unfair holes."

Romero has always been a big hitter, and, during the 2006 Senior Open at Turnberry, reduced the par five seventeenth hole to a drive and a sand wedge, prompting the extensive works to lengthen the hole detailed in a previous edition of *GCA* (issue 8, p58). But he shares the view of many commentators that the great length of top players is having a negative effect on the game as a whole. "I think course designers should reach an agreement with equipment manufacturers to produce clubs and balls that ensure the sport remains attractive and difficult to play," he says. "I don't think it should be a race between longer courses versus better materials. Golf should remain a romantic challenge between

player and course in which the most important thing is the ability to play, not the material shafts and balls are made of."

After nearly thirty years on Tour, Romero has seen most of the world's great courses, but says his favourites aren't always the most famous. "My favourite courses are the ones I most enjoy playing," he says. "Naturally when you make a good score, you feel a special empathy with the course. But most of the time, a good score depends not only on the course. For me I have been lucky to win on some great and wonderful courses, such as Crans-

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Montana where I won twice, Loch Lomond and Wentworth. I also love to play links golf and there are so many great Scottish courses it would be wrong to name one in particular. In America I like very much Augusta, Pebble Beach and Whistling Straights. I am very competitive and naturally at some point I would like the opportunity to design courses capable of hosting a tour event and maybe even one day a major. But I'm most excited about building challenging and

competitive courses for amateurs. I would like, at the end of the day, for each player to go to the 19th happy and not disappointed because of the unfair course.

"I would like my courses to use the natural contours of the land and protect and incorporate local trees and shrubs. Coming from Argentina I also like lovely views, but this is not always possible. Bunkers will play an important part in my design and I have some special plans for this. But that is a surprise for the future. I don't like pronounced doglegs, too much water or artificial landscaping. For me a golf club should be a home from home that welcomes the whole family and encourages players of all skill levels. It must be a great occasion from start to finish. Good food and drink, great course and excellent facilities to practice and socialise."

Romero says that his years on the road have left him with a desire to work on projects in many countries. "I'm keen to do courses in South America, especially Argentina, but other regions such as the Caribbean and Florida, which have strong Latin influences, are a natural fit," he says. "And emerging markets such as China and the Middle East are going to be important for golf. I want to be involved 100 per cent in the design of each hole. I am neither an engineer nor an architect, but a very experienced player who spent more than 30 years testing hundreds of good and bad courses around the world. So I feel confident in what a player expects from a golf course. I will enjoy visiting them regularly and playing golf on my courses. Maybe I'll offset some fees for a house on the course! That would be very nice." **GCA**

