

A new look for a Dallas classic

Architect Tripp Davis is updating the classic Northwood Club course in Dallas. Adam Lawrence reports

One of the eternal truths about golf is that nothing stands still. Often, courses that only a few years ago were regarded as among the elite are, if not forgotten, at least now seen as yesterday's news. The nature of the game is about change; ever since 1848, when the gutty ball first began to replace the ancient featherie, technological progress has been a key part of the story of golf.

Courses like St Andrews that have been regarded as championship tests for a century or more are, to say the least, the exception to the rule. To look back over the list of courses that have hosted major championships over the last century is to observe a small number of repeating names – Merion, Muirfield, Baltusrol and Pebble Beach – in among a large mass of one and done names.

Dallas's Northwood Club is a great example of those one and done names. Founded in 1946 – there are not many courses in Texas that go right back into the pre-WW2 Golden Age – and originally designed by the prolific golf architect Bill Diddel – Northwood hosted the US Open in 1952, won by Julius Boros, ironically a Texan end to local great Ben Hogan's streak of three Open wins. Hogan in fact led that US Open at half way, but fell back to finish in third place.

Northwood was, in many senses, a typical course of its period; many large specimen trees occupied the property, and Diddel's greens were mostly small. The course was redesigned in 1990 by the architectural team of Jay Morrish and Tom Weiskopf, but essentially it remained the course it had always been. Playing just over 6,800 yards to a par of 70 from the back tees, Northwood

consistently ranked among Texas's top twenty courses in the list produced by the *Dallas Morning News*. But with the golf scene in the city rather dynamic – as shown by the development of the nearby Maridoe course featured in the last issue of *GCA* – the club concluded it needed to do something fairly dramatic to retain and enhance its position.

That was why, in 2015, Northwood hired golf architect Tripp Davis with the brief to do whatever was needed to improve the course as much as possible.

Davis's renovation started in October 2016. Diddel's routing has remained largely untouched, but tees, greens and bunkers have all been rebuilt. The new Northbridge strain of bermudagrass has been introduced across the golf course, with the exception of the greens, which have remained bentgrass. Contractor Landscapes Unlimited has run the job, though the fine detailing has largely been handled by Davis's staff shaper Jason Gold, along with design associate Kyle Downs. The total value of the project is in excess of US\$14 million.

Northwood club president Chris Harris described the project as a "high profile opportunity" for both club's members and the architect. "We have worked with Tripp Davis for many years preparing to return the Northwood course to the classic layout that tested Julius Boros and Ben Hogan more than 60 years ago," he said.

A new four-hole short course, with holes ranging from 50-120 yards, has been built as part of the project, with the aim of making the club more appealing to junior golfers. The club's existing practice facilities have been rebuilt, and a new irrigation lake has been





Bold new bunkering is a feature of Tripp Davis's renovation of the classic Northwood Club in Dallas, as seen here on the seventh, above, and seventeenth holes

installed. As an homage to the 1952 US Open, Davis has placed a marker on each hole to show where those players played from.

Perhaps the most dramatic hole on the golf course is the fourteenth, which plays along White Rock Creek. The tees are located atop an eroded stone bluff above the creek; while standing on the tee, the location might not seem too spectacular, but when golfers look over the side, it is abundantly clear that the tee is right above the water.

"A large measure here was to take the course back to a more classical style," Davis said. "We are more focused on playability than penal design. The goal was to enhance the course without making the course harder for the average player. Northwood is a great club with one of the best and most historic golf courses in Texas. Our approach has been to restore the original character found in Mr Diddel's greens, rebuild the bunkers to reflect Diddel's style, and reposition bunkers and tees to be more strategically relevant for today's game." **GCA**