



Modern Classics

# Great Waters

*Jack Nicklaus returned to Reynolds Lake Oconee to modernize and renovate his three-decade-old gem*

by **JAMES A. FRANK**

RUSSELL KIRK

11th hole



13th hole

Jack Nicklaus has done some great things in the state of Georgia. There are those six green jackets, of course. But Jack also did some pretty fancy tailoring about 100 miles west of Augusta, where he built—and recently renovated—Great Waters at the golf community/resort Reynolds Lake Oconee.

Perhaps Jack's greatest accomplishment in creating Great Waters was convincing the powers that be that the available lakefront should be used for golf holes, not golf homes. As a result, half of the course is along the water. Both when he first saw the property back in the early '90s and again after finishing the renovation last fall, Nicklaus called it "one of the really great pieces of property with which I have ever had the experience to work," joking that he was given "more water than we could ever have asked for."

The parkland-style front nine rolls through thick forests, with the occasional stream, pond, and stone wall, all set off by dramatic elevation changes. The back nine is a peninsula embraced by the lake, playing in and out of trees, to and from the water. With its mix of beautiful views and challenging angles, Great Waters, which originally opened in 1992, was not only a member favorite among the six courses at Reynolds, but perennially ranked among the state's best.

While there was nothing really wrong with the course, time had taken its toll. "Things wear out and things change a lot in 30 years," explains Chad Goetz, the Nicklaus Design associate who oversaw the project.

"Technically, we rebuilt the golf course. It is the same course, but now it is really polished."

The results are evident on every hole. Trees were cleared and trimmed to reduce shade, improve the quality of the turf, and open up the views—especially of the lake. Cutting back trees also widened the fairways and brought more turf into play, making Great Waters more player friendly, a course-wide goal further accomplished by softening slopes, re-contouring greens, and reducing overall bunker area.

The irrigation and drainage systems were updated and replaced, as was the turf itself: Fairways and tees are Zoysia, roughs are TifTuf Bermuda, and greens are TifEagle Bermuda. And tees were added at both extremes, with a new set way back at 7,436 yards (Great Waters regularly hosts collegiate events) and a forward set at 4,485 yards designed to increase participation, improve pace of play, and get everyone starting from the most appropriate points.

Six holes received even more extensive touch-ups, including moving tees and recontouring fairways. The par-three 8th was the only hole to receive a complete remodel, and now features a series of bunkers that wasn't there before. A number of greens were moved closer to the lake, but usually with allied refinements to balance the challenge.

Among the words Nicklaus used to describe Great Waters while he was tinkering was "spectacular," "exciting," and "really strong." Words that apply to all his Peach State accomplishments.