2011 ASLA Design Awards

Lodestone Golf Club
Merit Award
Design Workshop, Denver

Design over $500,000 Construction Budget
Project name: Lodestone Golf Club  
Project location: McHenry, Maryland

**Project summary:** Creating a sustainable, tournament-caliber 18-hole golf course on this challenging and environmentally sensitive mountaintop site in Maryland’s Youghiogheny River Valley and Laurel Highlands was only possible by respecting and enhancing the natural environment. This destination mountain golf experience was designed to complement the existing Wisp Resort and provide an amenity for surrounding residential development. Site-sensitive design and strategic integration of the namesake Lodestone rock outcroppings became the defining framework for the golf course and surrounding neighborhood communities.

**Purpose of project:** For over 30 years, Wisp Resort has thrived as a four-season resort with access to such amenities as an Olympic-level white water rafting course, a mountain roller coaster, a ski hill, a restaurant, a hotel and a day lodge as well as beautiful Deep Creek Lake. However, in order to leverage the resort to a broader and more exclusive clientele (from the nearby metropolitan areas of Baltimore, Washington D.C and Pittsburgh) as well as to take better advantage of the unused portion of the resort’s 1,400+ acres that overlooks Deep Creek Lake, the resort’s partnership hired the design team to create an upscale golf and residential community on the top of Marsh Mountain. The design team ad-eply created this prestigious course – on land that had formerly had extensive erosion and contaminated wetlands and streams from over 70 years of timber harvesting – by incorporating Lodestone rock outcroppings and routing the holes through the now tree-covered mountain. The result is championship-caliber golf course with creative routing and breath-taking views.

**Construction budget:** $11.5 million

**Role of the Landscape architect:** The landscape architect embraced the site’s natural features through creative golf hole placement ensuring the protection and preservation of sensitive wetlands, trout streams and key drainage ways by integrating them within the championship-caliber golf course. As a result, the golf course was routed around the entire property to take advantage of a variety of prominent landscape features, eco-systems and wildlife habitat. The strategic component of the golf course is reminiscent of 1920’s classic golf course design, as it looks much harder than it plays with center-line bunkering and visual deception tactics. The course challenges the better player and is forgiving to the less-skilled golfer. The landscape architect used selective clearing, unique grading practices, and wetland and wildlife preservation, to create a golf course that offers an incredibly rich golf, community, landscape and experience with nature.

**Special factors:** In the early stages of design, the discovery of several dramatic moss-covered rock features provided both a design challenge and opportunity. These outcroppings occur sporadically throughout the site and linking the golf course around them became a guiding factor of the routing and design concepts. Most notably, the location for the 17th hole drove the routing for the back nine with the most dramatic rock feature on the entire site. In addition, the mountainous topography provided the opportunity to position golf holes to practice one of the most fundamental landscape design strategies: “the borrowed view.” These captured views are evident throughout the golf course and include the distant Laurel Highlands, Deep Creek Lake and the Alleghany Mountain Range. Also, the routing brings sensitive mountain wetlands and streams into the strategy of the golf course at key locations, while also maintaining vegetative filtration so as not to contaminate the waterways with golf course runoff.

**Significance**  
**Environmental Sensitivity** – The Lodestone Golf Club was only the second golf course that was approved and permitted by the Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) in Garrett County, MD. During the spring months, the mountainous property teems with ground-fed streams, drainage ways and vibrant wetlands. An initial metric was set to limit wetland and stream disturbance to less than one-half acre throughout the entire 1,400-acre property. This measurable goal was met, and, after two years of operation, the streams still flow as clearly as they did before the golf course was constructed.
The design team and project engineer developed and implemented a $1.3M erosion and sediment control plan (E & S Plan) to protect water quality during construction. Coincidentally, the first of two construction seasons came with record rain falls that tested the limits of the system. The controls remained intact, protecting the adjacent trout stream and wetlands from sediment transport. (The system was required to remain intact until 75% seed germination was established, thus restoring much needed groundcover and understory to the erosion prone, timber-cleared mountain sides.) The Army Corp of Engineers (ACOE) and MDE praised the design and now use these practices as a standard for golf development in Maryland.

Also, the landscape architect implemented several important design solutions in order to comprehensively treat and protect water quality. These measures not only treat runoff from the golf course runoff but were also designed to handle the runoff from future residential parcels. This can be seen clearly on the 14th hole where a vegetative swale and bio-filter basin were designed into the strategy of the golf hole to collect runoff from the adjacent residential property and redirect it into the vegetative swale and ultimately back into a nearby stream. This system allows for the water to be cleansed before re-entering the natural drainage ways.

Finally, the team designed the course with an awareness of the wildlife present on the site before development. One of the most charming aspects of the property is the abundance of deer that live there and by maintaining native, vegetative corridors between golf holes (and even on some of the holes themselves), the course maintains a vital deer habitat throughout property. In addition, the deer can now be seen throughout the golf course and add a tremendous, natural quality to the golfing experience.

**Design Aesthetic**—The landscape architect employed extensive use of native grasses, a strict and selective tree clearing plan, unique golf course features and strategic placement of golf holes next to unique site features to create a golf course that sits in harmony with the mountainous landscape and deciduous forest of the Laurel Highlands. In addition to saving water through increased native areas, the native grasses provide a sublime and picturesque edge transition between the manicured turf and the native understory of the forest that includes existing Mountain Laurel and native ferns. The native grasses are also used on the backside of bunkers to further the notion of blurring the edge between the golf course and the native landscape.

The team utilized topographic relief to create dramatic, downhill golf shots that tempt players of all abilities and that create powerful landscape experiences. Through intense, up-front analysis, the landscape architects laid golf holes upon the land in ways that take advantage of the most spectacular views from the site, enhancing the overall golf experience.

**Local community**—By providing jobs for many local residents, the construction and maintenance of the golf course has greatly benefitted the overall community in McHenry. Additionally, the golf course serves as the open space framework for the Lodestone residential community. The landscape architect’s plan included the creation of trails and roadways that cross between golf holes. The course has nearly six miles of a meandering eight–foot-wide cart path/circulation system that doubles as a cross-country ski trail in the winter and pedestrian loop during non-golf times in the summer. Also, maintained vegetation between the golf and residential areas serves to maintain the character of the mountainous landscape and buffer golf, development and wildlife. The team designed the course’s buffers at 450 feet – much wider than the typical 360-foot golf course corridor. The wider buffer allows for a expansive vegetative and wildlife corridor and safer golfer experience, while at the same time eliminating the double-loaded real estate scenario common in residential golf course developments.

Teeming with clear streams, and punctuated with dramatic rock outcroppings, the golf course is a series of dramatically undulating emerald landscapes that meander through the forest and tours the golfer through the mountainous Laurel Highlands.