

Replica Courses 'Inspired' by the Best

As the saying goes, no matter how much money you make, there are some things you still can't buy: happiness ... a long life ... love ... or a round at

Augusta, Cypress Point or Pine Valley.

Certainly North America's top courses have the allure and mystique that leads golfers to want to tackle the fairways where the legends played. Everyone wants to play Amen Corner like Greg Norman

or Jack Nicklaus. But ability aside, most never will grace the greens of the homes of the masters.

I once was told by the president of one of the top technology companies in the world that he'd dropped everything after getting an invite to Augusta, and took the corporate jet to Atlanta just to make his tee time. "It was worth rescheduling meetings for two weeks following the round," he said.

There also was a story in a major golf publication a few years ago about a young man who played Augusta at night under a full moon.

Courses like Pine Valley and Cypress Point are all about exclusivity. Even Bill Clinton couldn't get an invitation to play Augusta – it's a Republican course, after all. Only a few hundred members ever get a chance to play the top courses in the world and the sad fact is that they

often only belong to the club, and rarely head out to knock a drive down the best of the best.

But there's another way to tackle the pinnacles of golf without ever stepping foot in Georgia. They're called replica courses, and they're sprouting up all over North America.

The first of these courses was built by noted designer Ron Garl in 1986 in Ocala, a small town about an hour north of Orlando, Fla. Though Garl says the project wasn't properly financed and he is currently in the midst of finishing an overhaul of the course, Golden Ocala became the first of the replica courses. Not every hole was a copy, though the course does have its own versions of some of the best from Augusta, as well as several designed with British Open courses in

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mind. Due to financing difficulties Golden Ocala was never a big hit – more a curiosity than a must play.

That didn't deter the creators of Tour 18, a facility built in Texas. While Ocala featured several replicas alongside Garl originals, Tour 18 went whole hog, laying out 18 holes that took from the likes of Pebble Beach Golf Links and Pinehurst No. 2, the homes of the last two U.S. Opens.



Photos courtesy of International World Tour

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by Robert Thompson

But, the concept went even further. The plan included putting a lighthouse behind the green of the hole taken from Harbour Town Golf Links. That went too far and in 1994, a group of courses, including Pebble Beach, Harbour Town and Pinehurst, sued Tour 18.

The decision was split. Although the judge said Tour 18 could continue, it recognized specific “trademarks” of certain courses, like the lighthouse at Harbour Town. So the lighthouse at Tour 18 had to go. The judge also ruled that replica courses could no longer market their holes as being “exact copies.” Rather, they had to say they were “inspired by,” which is now the standard billing for these copycats. You’re never playing a hole from Bay Hill, the legendary Florida course owned by Arnold Palmer. You’re simply playing one inspired by it.

The lawsuit didn’t deter a new breed of replica courses from giving it a




go, however. In the last year alone there have been two new ones: one in Myrtle Beach, S.C. and a new course from Garl north of Toronto.

As a criticism, golf aficionados – the ones who claim to have played Pine Valley – will argue that the replica courses never offer exact copies. For



the most part that is the case. Even when the designers get it close, as they often do with holes taken from some of the best of the British links, there’s still something missing. In most cases it is the ambiance. A course in South Carolina is never going to feel like St. Andrews. They may be built near the same ocean, but that’s typically where the similarity ends.

For the most part, golfers don’t seem to care. They are flocking to the new International World Tour course in Myrtle Beach, which features 27 replica holes and charges \$150 a round. It’s as close to greatness as most will ever get. Clearly copying the best is now big business.

Given all the success of replica courses and the interest of the golfing public, maybe it is true that, as Oscar Wilde said more than a century ago, “Talent borrows, genius steals.” 

Robert Thompson is the features writer for PGATour.com, the official Web site of the PGA Professional Golf Tour.

The 5th hole at International World Tour (above) is inspired by Augusta’s No. 12. Below, the World Tour Clubhouse flies the flags of countries whose famous holes are replicated.