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Great Scot : The Play

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In remote western Scotland, Machrihanish Dunes is inspiring a very rational exuberance.

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When it comes to the business of golf-course development, ego can get in the way of due diligence.

Witness: Donald Trump's bullish-in-a-china-shop efforts to transform a sensitive dune system in northeast



Scotland into a mega-resort in his grand (or gaudy, depending on one's perspective) vision. At the opposite end of the spectrum, in the opposite corner of the country, developer Brian Keating and course designer David McLay Kidd took the exact opposite approach in developing the spectacular new Machrihanish Dunes Golf Club. "The course is essentially built by hand," says Kidd, whose portfolio includes Bandon Dunes in Oregon and the acclaimed new Castle Course in St. Andrews. "It is as natural a golf experience as I can imagine. Our role was like a composer, divining the arrangement, the tempo and the crescendos." The only heavy machinery Kidd

employed was a digger for shaping the greens. The mowing of the rough will be left in part to grazing sheep -- seriously, grazing sheep.

Opening in May, the course is located in the part of rural southwest Scotland known as the Mull of Kintyre, an area whose remote charms provided inspiration for the Beatles song "The Long and Winding Road." Indeed, Paul McCartney has long owned a nearby farm, and right next door is the famed Machrihanish Golf Club, fashioned by Old Tom Morris in 1876. Each offers an altogether unique experience: The old course is shorter and tighter, with ball-eating rough, revetted bunkers and more sedate greens, whereas the new Machrihanish Dunes, marked by natural imperfections made possible by modern technology, looks and feels authentically ancient. And while designing a course for St. Andrews was a professional dream come true for Kidd, creating this course in this place, where he spent his childhood summers camping with his family, was the design equivalent of trading with his own money.



For Keating, whose C.V. features executive gigs for tech firms -- including a stint as general manager of Apple Computer Russia -- it was more of a numbers play.

"There are some 33,000 golf courses in the world, but only 175 or so are true links -- yet on the lists of the world's top courses, 30 percent are drawn from that 175," says Keating, who was born in Ireland, schooled

in Australia and now happily headquartered in Scotland. "I crossed the dead architects off the list, which left only a few designers who had built must-play links in modern times. David Kidd is at the top of that list."

And now you can add Machrihanish Dunes to that list of must-play links.

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