

2010

Best New Courses

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Hugging the coast of the Moray Firth, and the bluffs above it, Scotland's Castle Stuart is the first great links of the 21st Century.

Photo by Stephen Szurlej

OVERSEAS DESTINATION OF THE YEAR

Not that Scotland needed another great golf venue, but it has one in **Castle Stuart Golf Links**, a resort layout closer to Royal Dornoch than [St. Andrews](#) in distance and architecture. Co-designed by managing partner Mark Parsinen, a transplanted Californian, and American architect Gil Hanse, Castle Stuart might be the most perfectly conceived and executed design ever built. The first three holes on each nine hug the coastline of the Moray Firth, a thumb of the normally tempestuous North Sea made docile by extensive sea walls. The rest of the course is mostly atop a plateau, and the stair-step nature of the routing and shaping create the impression that every green is hanging right over the edge of the water. Call them infinity greens.

Castle Stuart is more than 18 pretty faces. Parsinen and Hanse provided wide corridors to reduce the possibility of lost balls and to increase the excitement of recovery shots. Strategies are constructed around approach angles into generous but subtle greens. Each hole is as easy to read as a billboard, if you're not distracted by the stunning panoramas. As thrilling a trek along the ocean as Pebble Beach or Casa de Campo, Castle Stuart is the most stimulating and thoughtful architecture I saw all year.