

End of the ice plant *plant* age

Monterey Peninsula kills invasive weed, revives native species

By Scott Kauffman

In giving its Shores Course a new look, Monterey Peninsula Country Club has gotten rid of an old problem that long has been the California coastline's equivalent of kudzu.

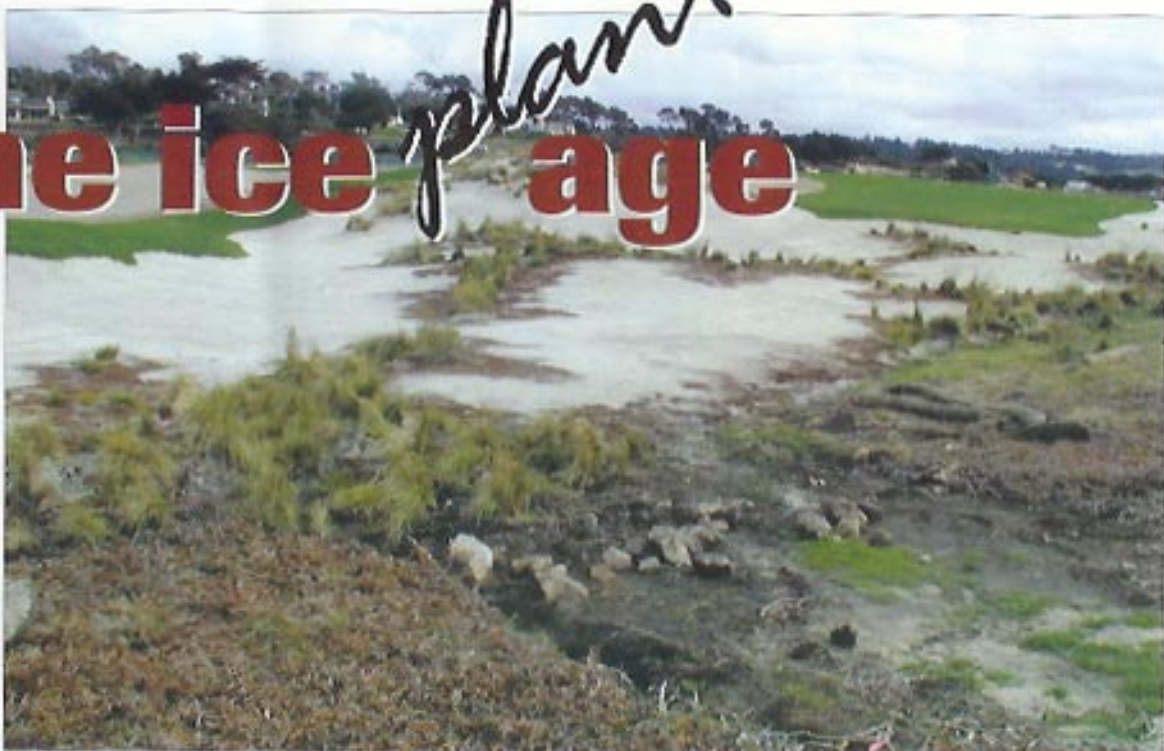
While effective as erosion control, the non-native ice plant (*delosperma cooperi*) – a flowering ground cover with thick, rubbery stems and gnarly roots – chokes out indigenous species and threatens to infiltrate the course proper. Tired of trying to hold back the invading weed, MPCC officials decided to eradicate the plant and return the landscape to native plants that disappeared years ago.

During the restoration of the 40-year-old Shores Course, 45 to 60 acres of ice plant, as it is commonly known in the West, were killed with Roundup and excavated, says Forrest Fezler of Charleston, S.C.-based Maverick Golf Course Design. Fezler says the ice plant removal was one of the largest in the West. Maverick oversaw the renovation/restoration work in conjunction with sister company, Mike Strantz Studios.

Used originally for erosion control in California, the South African weed has spread throughout the Monterey Peninsula, choking out native landscape along roadsides and at top area courses such as Pebble Beach, Cypress Point and Spyglass Hill. Strantz's design team reintroduced a host of native grasses, plants and bushes to one of the two 18-hole layouts at MPCC.

"This is a big restoration project," says Fezler, design associate and president of Maverick Golf, which is the construction arm of Mike Strantz Studios. "We're bringing back a lot of the native plants that have been choked out by the ice plant since its inception 400 years ago."

Fezler's team picked five different native grasses – including June grass, some fescue and blue-eyed grass



Monterey Peninsula CC killed ice plants encroaching on a fairway bunker and planted native grasses.

– giving the Shores Course a "coastal terrace prairie" feel on parts of the layout. In other landscaped areas, a palette of eight different coastal plants, such as coyote bush or California sage, were used to give the landscape a "coastal scrub look."

The Shores Course has been transformed and resembles Bandon Dunes in some ways, according to superintendent Bob Zoller. For instance, the fairways now have a mix of several bentgrasses – mostly Colonial – and a little fescue. The greens are a mix of different bentgrasses as well as *Poa annua*, based on plugs taken from two of the healthiest greens before the renovation work started in February.

The roughs have a dark green Kentucky bluegrass tint, Fezler adds, contrasting nicely with the lime green fairways.

"Visual lines are so important in golf," Fezler says. "The nice thing about the greens is the variety of bentgrasses and *Poa* creates a modeled, old look."

The ultimate goal was to have the renovated course flow into the restored native areas as if that were the original look.

Equally as important as the look of the course is its future playability.

The Monterey Peninsula's adobe-based soils have created drainage problems for many courses, including MPCC. Therefore, along with the new grasses and landscaping, an irrigation and drainage system was installed. The new fairway system marked a first for Strantz's team.

Basically, unlike the typical 8-inch sand-capping rou-

tine, MPCC used a 5-inch layer of sand with a 13 percent to 15 percent mix of a porous ceramic material called PermOPore, a product distributed by Agronomic Systems Design Group of Elberta, Ala. Coupled with more than 40 miles of pipe laid every 12 feet, MPCC essentially has a greens-like drainage system under its fairways.



The Shores Course now sports roughs with a dark green Kentucky bluegrass tint contrasting with lime green fairways.



Pipe was laid every 12 feet under the fairways of the Shores Course to improve drainage.

Not only do the fairways drain better, but Zoller's staff uses less irrigation water because the PermOPore material has proven to have excellent water-retention attributes.

"The fairways are so smooth it's like floating a green," Fezler says. "People have a misconception about the ceramic products. Yes, it can drain at 40 inches an hour, but the moisture control is also very high. . . . It turned out to be the best thing we've ever done."

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