



Welcome to the New POPPY HILLS

Inside the pearly gates of 17-Mile Drive, the best zip code in golf just got better. The new Poppy Hills has ascended to the revered stature of its sacred neighbors in golf heaven — and you still don't have to sell your soul to afford a tee time. ✱ Enjoy the quieter side of Pebble Beach, the cozy corner of the dramatic Del Monte Forest that Poppy Hills inhabits. A 13-month, \$13 million renovation has transformed the home of the NCGA into a firm, fast and fun foray that fades into the forest. ✱ The Champions Tour was so impressed with the renovation that it zeroed in on Poppy Hills to co-host this year's First Tee Open — even though some holes still lived in dirt form at the time. ✱ They could see what you soon will — a trendy and sleek design that amplifies its unique forest setting by sinking back into it, all while eliminating rough and upgrading to bentgrass greens. ✱ To commemorate this renaissance at Poppy Hills, we've dedicated the following special section to celebrating the newest course in Pebble Beach. ✱ **Turn the page. It's time for the newest chapter of Poppy Hills.**

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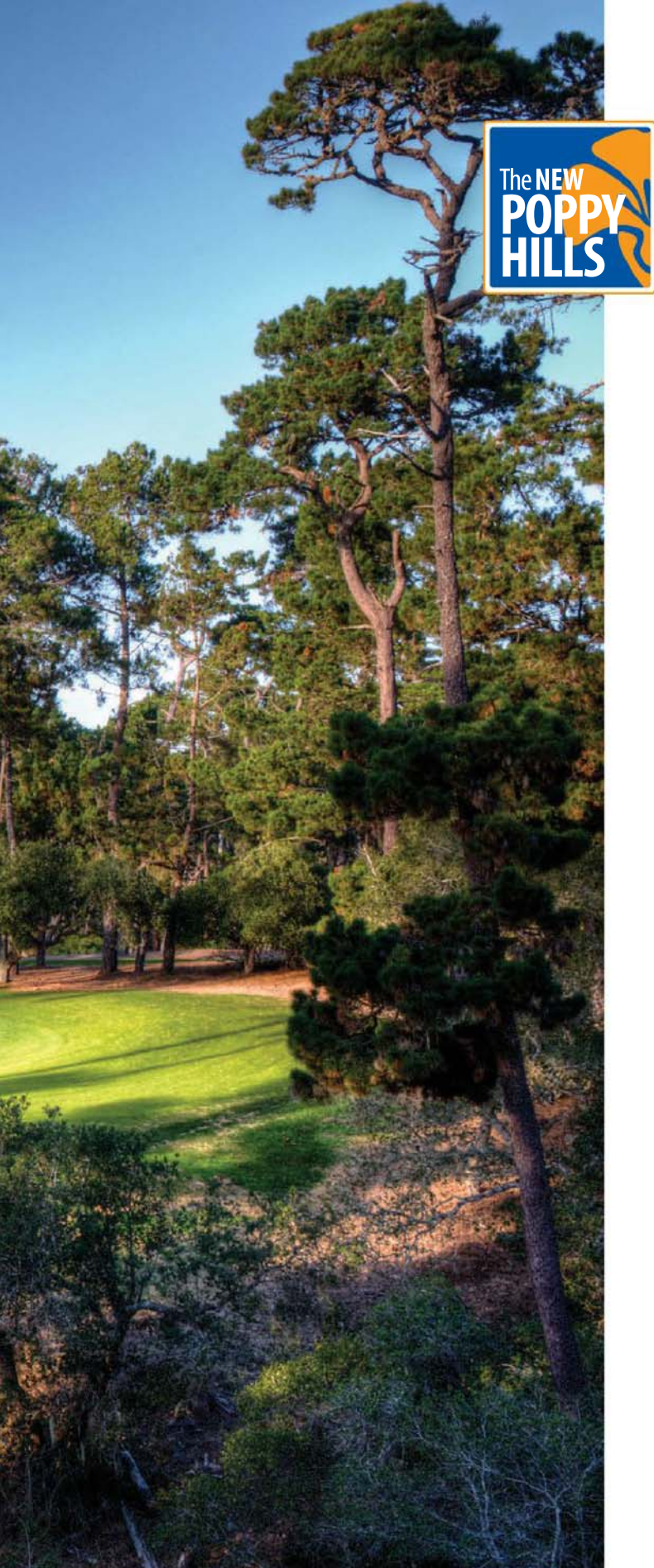
Fairway to Heaven

Pebble Beach has a new course you must play before you die —
the renovated and rough-free Poppy Hills

STORY BY KEVIN MERFELD ✱ PHOTOS BY JOANN DOST



The second hole featured two greens until 2009, but now it has one green with three distinct sections. A new tee was built to add 30 yards, stretching it out to 202 from the Jones Trail.



Glorious photos of the new Poppy Hills have been floating around since Joann Dost made her first site visit to the renovation in November of 2013.

You've probably seen the magnificent vista of the Monterey Bay and Santa Cruz Mountains that the new 12th tee produces.

Or maybe the brand new 11th hole, a precise par 3 snuggled between majestic Monterey pines to the left and an enchanting grove of Gowen cypress to the right.

Or perhaps the new ninth green, pressed dangerously against a resurrected creek, setting up a dramatic approach shot into the slightly less mysterious par 5.

The evolution of these new holes at Poppy Hills is striking and obvious. Each gives Poppy Hills something the Robert Trent Jones Jr. design never had: an ocean view in Pebble Beach, a bite-size par 3, a meandering creek.

Other flashy changes will bedazzle you the first time you play. The fifth hole transformed a punishing pond into a hillside of hurt, creating a new native waste area filled with fescue.

You will see these native waste areas seeping out from the forest floor throughout the course, adding strategic and aesthetic value to tee shots such as Nos. 4, 8 and 15 — although many of the grasses will continue to mature for another three to four years.

You will notice the vast canvases of fairway that blanket the course, since there is no longer any rough to contain them, nor any unnatural nob's to obscure them. Tee shots are instantly more inviting, while approaches are endlessly more interesting, bringing every type of shot imaginable into play.

Of course, you can look at a scorecard and compare the old course to the new. Despite par dropping from 72 to 71, the yardage from the back tees has increased from 6,863 to 7,002.

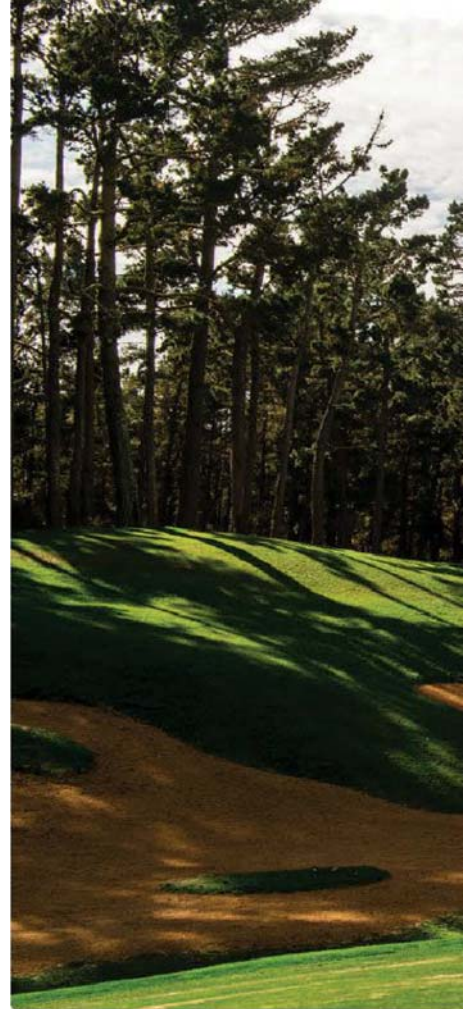
The opening stretch has become quite the gauntlet, as new tees add between 30 and 40 yards on each of the first three holes, a whopping 80 on the par-5 fourth, and another 50 on No. 5. The result is a front nine that is more than 400 yards longer than the back — the rainbow at the end of a stormy start.

But the rating and slope for the entire course managed to drop (rating from 74.4 to 73.5; slope from 140 to 135), as widened playing corridors, no rough, firm and fast sand-capped conditions, simplified bunkering and softer contouring all promote a friendlier playing experience for every ability. There are now five sets of tees instead of four, with yardages also at 6,672, 6,299, 5,799 and 5,215.

The old Poppy Hills was bold and brash, with heaving mounds and wild greens lurking around sharp doglegs. You



The par at Poppy Hills dropped from 72 to 71 because of the stunning new 12th hole, which offers a spectacular panoramic view of the Monterey Bay and Santa Cruz Mountains from the tee. The hole changed from a sharp dogleg right par 5 to a straightaway downhill par 4.



were tested at every turn, whether you were playing from a hanging lie in the middle of the fairway, or attempting to recover from the bottom of a deep bunker.

The new Poppy Hills is coy and understated. Every hole has been reimagined, thanks to some intense introspection.

But the inspiration for the overhaul actually came from the old Poppy Hills. It was a hole that teed off at the northern tip of the property, gently climbing uphill to a welcoming fairway, with Monterey pines offering a scenic, yet nonimposing backdrop.

“Have you ever noticed how No. 13 just feels like it belongs there?” said Bruce



The new seventh green shows off the new Poppy Hills — fairway spilling out of simpler green complexes, surrounded by interesting, strategic bunkers and native waste areas.

Charlton, president of RTJ II. “It feels like it’s part of the forest. There aren’t a lot of big mounds on the tee shot. It just feels like it belongs. That was kind of our poster child—our guiding hole. We just worked with that, kept that.”

The 390-yard 13th hole was still touched up. The green—especially the right side—was unnaturally propped up into the air, a design pattern prevalent throughout the old Poppy Hills. This was especially seen on Nos. 5, 8 and 9, a maneuver that negated a potential downhill shot,

sometimes making it actually play slightly uphill.

While pondering the old 13th hole can help you understand how the new course fits into the forest more naturally, you will gain an appreciation for the flavor of the renovation after standing on the first tee.

Except, when you reach No. 1, don’t look down the first fairway. Look to your left and the new seventh green, which hangs over the new creek that cuts across the ninth hole.

The seventh green is the Poppy Hills sampler.

“That green complex is

so visible from the restaurant, so we wanted it to have a really good palette of everything we’ve done on the course,” Charlton said. “It’s not overly contoured, it’s set into the landscape well, fairway is spilling out around it, it has nice bunkers, the waste area is there. I call it the peek-a-boo to what the new Poppy is all about.”

Every fairway and green at Poppy Hills was essentially flattened, plowed under and bulldozed. Jones, Charlton and their team then looked at the tree line framing each side of the hole and connected the two

naturally, wiping out artificial mounding in the process.

“We tried to make it a long, flowing slope,” Charlton said. “Let the slope condition be the star of each hole.”

One difference you’ll notice now at the new Poppy Hills? You can actually see the bottoms of trees. That simple change makes the forest feel real, instead of acting as a stage backdrop.

The restored slope condition is evident right away, as there’s no more split-deck fairway disturbing the landing area of the first hole, or ski mogul course approaching the green. Gradual, broad

THE NEW POPPY HILLS IS COY AND UNDERSTATED. EVERY HOLE HAS BEEN REIMAGINED, THANKS TO SOME INTENSE INTROSPECTION.



The new 14th hole is the smallest green on the course at 4,700 square feet. The 18th hole is the largest at approximately 9,000 square feet. The average green is 6,600 square feet and features bentgrass, replacing poa annua.

slopes were created to maximize fairway space on holes such as Nos. 3, 9, 10 and 18.

The natural fairways can now bleed into the greens, which have been lowered to fit into the slope of the surrounding land. And that brings an entirely new concept to Poppy Hills: the ground game.

"Golf is a little bit of outdoor billiards," Charlton said. "There's a lot of that out here. But that doesn't work if there's not sand cap

and studying these green complexes," Charlton said. "There are great shots to be had where you don't necessarily hit it on the green here. You hit it outside the green and let the slopes do the work. We did that at Chambers Bay a lot."

Once we brought sand cap into the picture, it really allowed us to think about roll from a design philosophy. It's going to be firm and fast. We can do things with the design that we didn't have before. The idea of fairway cut everywhere really helps that whole philosophy."

The only other course RTJ II has incorporated the ground game to this extent is Chambers Bay, site of the 2015 U.S. Open.

"I'm hoping that everyone will spend a lot of time looking at these greens

The new greens at Poppy Hills are draped in glassy bentgrass, a welcomed upgrade over poa annua. If bentgrass is a clean shave from a barber, poa annua resembles a 5 o'clock shadow. The greens are also much subtler, primarily favoring the pitch of

the surrounding land.

"We wanted to have at least 10 pin positions on every hole," Charlton said. "When you do that, you create greens that don't have those huge slopes, or else you lose a lot of green for hole locations."

Charlton also wanted to dot hazard edges with as many hole locations as possible. The ravine fronting the right side of Nos. 1 and 17, and the creek bordering the left side of No. 9 will be littered with sucker pins.

"One of the key green strategies on No. 9 was to



The only brand new hole at Poppy Hills is No. 11 (above), which gives the course something it didn't have before — a short par 3. It plays between 99 and 161 yards. The 13th hole may look familiar (below), and it should. Its simple forest feel as a model for the renovation.



march hole locations all the way along that left edge, so it could feel like the flag was hanging onto the edge of the earth," Charlton said.

Of course, it's up to you to decide how you want to attack the new Poppy Hills.

"The player who is playing conservative or to his skill level and wants to avoid the big number, Poppy gives you a place to bail on almost every hole, or sneak it on to a corner of the green," Charlton said.

"Deciding how to play each hole is part of the fun factor here." 🏌️



Renovation Rundown

BY KEVIN MERFELD | So you've heard that Poppy Hills is a brand new course, even though just the 11th and 12th holes were significantly reconfigured. Here's what is different about the new Poppy Hills:

Native waste areas ✱ The true inspiration for the renovation was water conservation. Drainage and irrigation have been improved dramatically, but maybe just as important, the amount of irrigated turf has dropped from 82 acres to 62.

Native waste areas were a clever way of eliminating grass in an aesthetic and strategic way, while further tying the forest setting into the golf course. This mixture of loamy forest floor and native grasses woven throughout compact waste areas dances between tee boxes and along the edges of several holes.

"One of the key things we saw was a great opportunity to showcase how we can bring the forest into play," said RTJ II chief design officer Bruce Charlton, noting the fourth hole especially.

These new native waste areas particularly creep into play on the tee shots of Nos. 4, 8 and 15, and on the approach into No. 5. A lake on No. 5 was transformed into a native waste area, which will conserve water by eliminating evaporation, while also separating the fifth green from the seventh tee and serving as a different hazard to negotiate.



The true inspiration for the renovation was water conservation.

Course setup flexibility ✱ Poppy Hills is more flexible than it has ever been. It will certainly challenge the game's elite, as the Jones Trail stretches out to 7,002 yards, even though par dropped from 72 to 71. New tees on Nos. 1, 3, 4, 5, and 8 help add 139 yards to the total layout, but there is also much more variety. Four par 4s measure at least 440 yards and the fourth hole is a beastly 629-yard par 5. But there is also a shorter, more fun side to Poppy Hills. The three remaining par 5s are very reachable (tipping out at 535 yards), and the back nine plays just 3,254 yards. The five par 3s each vary in distance, from the precise 11th (ranging from 99 to 161 yards) to the demanding 223-yard 15th.

"We really gained some variety in how we set up our 3 pars," Charlton said. "That's always been a weakness at Poppy. We had all these par 3s, but you were hitting the same club all the time."

There are now five sets of tees instead of four. Including the Jones Trail, there are additional yardages at 6,672 yards (4 Poppies), 6,299 (3 Poppies), 5,799 (2 Poppies) and 5,215 (1 Poppy). These five yardage options also give Poppy Hills more flexibility for tournament and combo tee setups, as plenty of variations can be adapted to challenge players both mentally and physically on each hole.

Wider fairways and softer doglegs ✱ Not only was rough removed, but serious thought was given to widening playing corridors whenever possible. Fairway space was increased by an impressive 150%.

Several doglegs were reduced or even straightened, including No. 3 (fairway 15 yards wider), No. 4 (green moved 15-20 yards right — so much so you can look back and see the tee of the former double-dogleg), No. 8 (green moved 25-30 yards left and back tee built 10 yards left of previous marker) and No. 10 (green moved 10-15 yards right).

And then there is the new 12th hole, which converted from a sharp dogleg right par 5 (taking driver out of the hands of many players) to a straightaway par 4 with an ocean view.

The goal: create more space for players to hit driver throughout the course.

"You can feel like you can bust it now and really swing away," Charlton said.





Natural course elevation ✱ Ever notice when you were warming up at the old Poppy Hills driving range how it felt like you were hitting into a canyon? That piece of property was originally relatively flat, but during initial construction at Poppy Hills, dirt was removed to build featuring throughout the course.

Well now, that dirt is almost all back on the range. An important goal of the renovation was to return Poppy Hills to its natural elevation along the forest floor. The property itself is plenty interesting, with ravines and natural swings in elevation throughout.

"We originally built this course on top of the land, we imposed our will on the land," Charlton said. "The new Poppy takes what the land has given us and lets the course flow with the land much more."

Gone are the elevated tee decks, perched greens, split-deck fairways and ski moguls. Holes that flow downhill now play that way, instead of veering back up to elevated greens. Even a natural creek that was buried during the original construction was revitalized, as it now cuts in front of a significantly lowered ninth green.

A visual hint of these changes is the ability to see the bottoms of trees — because there are no more artificial mounds hiding them.

Not only was the course smoothed out, but that philosophy has also brought the surrounding forest more into focus.

Rough eliminated ✱ You will still find longer native fescue grasses in waste areas along the forest floor, and eyebrows lining bunkers. But there is no longer rough restricting fairways, nor fluffy stuff ringing greens. If you are within the intended playing corridors, you will have a nice tight lie, creating welcoming drives but also unique short-game challenges.

"No rough seems to frustrate the heck out of top players," Charlton said. "They used to be in a 4-to-6-foot bunker, and now they're 4 to 6 feet below the green in short grass. Now players have to think."



Sand capping ✱ Every fairway and teeing ground sits on a 5 1/2-inch layer of sand, completely changing the soil profile and drainage capacity of the course. Sand capping might have been the most important decision of the renovation, as it will allow the course to play firm and fast year-round.

"The bottom line is we are trying to create firm and fast conditions with very short grass," said Charlton. "If we would have gone with the natural clay soils out here, we would have gotten very inconsistent playing conditions."

Armed with the confidence that Poppy Hills would play firm and fast — even in notoriously wet Pebble Beach — Robert Trent Jones Jr. and his architecture team were freed up to make the unique decision to eliminate rough and design green complexes that would accept shots played both through the air and on the ground.

This also means you will get more yardage off the tee — since your drives will actually bound forward instead of plugging.

The yardage options give Poppy Hills more flexibility as plenty of variations can be adapted to challenge players both mentally and physically on each hole.

New Bentgrass greens ✱ The greens will be smoother — both in texture and undulation. Every green at Poppy Hills was completely redesigned, and then upgraded with bentgrass, replacing poa annua. The goal was to soften the undulations and create as many hole locations as possible, especially close to hazards — setting up dramatic hero shots. Nearly every green has an entryway where the ball can be played on the ground, or a side slope that can be used to feed onto the putting surface.

The putting greens average 6,600 square feet, ranging in variety from 4,700 (No. 14) to 9,000 (No. 18). As for negotiating the new greens, Jones has a tip:

"Use the ravines and ocean as your guide to reading the breaks on putts, as the ball will often gather in the direction of the Pacific and prominent ravines," he said.

