

# Athens Architect Designing Oceanfront Course In Nicaragua

ATHENS, Ga.—Athens-based golf course architect Mike Young has been hired to design the first up-scale, resort-quality golf course in Nicaragua.

The OceaNica Golf Club is being designed as the recreational centerpiece at Montecristo, a 1,000-acre oceanfront residential resort located directly on the Pacific Ocean roughly an hour west of Managua. Situated in Costa Azul, one of four distinctive communities within the overall Montecristo development, OceaNica plays along a point where the Rio Soledad meets the Pacific Ocean.

Young has routed the 7,060-yard, par-71 course to take maximum advantage of a dramatic site which features more than 300 feet of elevation change. Initial clearing is already under way. Plans call for actual construction of the course to begin this fall with the course opening for play in the fall of 2008.

“The OceaNica site is one of the best I’ve ever had to work with,” said Young, who has designed more than 40 courses in five different countries around the world. “The front nine is set on a relatively flat plain, with the river to the south and the Pacific Ocean to the west. But the back nine climbs up into the mountains, providing some spectacular views in all directions – of the ocean, the river and the interior, as well. The views of the water are breath-taking, as one would expect, but the inland vistas, looking across mountain ridges and sprawling valleys, can be just as dramatic. Add in the wind, which is certain to a constant factor at OceaNica, and you have a course that will be as challenging as it is beautiful.”

Twelve of the 18 holes at OceaNica will provide sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean. The links-like front nine, set between the mountains and the beach, features a core routing with no intervening real estate development. The out-and-back routing of the back nine climbs into the mountains. Parallel fairways on seven of the nine holes again mean that real estate development will be limited to the perimeter of the golf course. Young characterized the overall course as a strategic design that will present a variety of risk/reward



**Clubhouse site at OceaNica provides stunning view of the Rio Soledad and the Pacific.**

opportunities to challenge golfers.

“I have always believed that the best golf courses are the ones that provide solid, strategic challenge within a natural environment,” Young said. “At OceaNica, we are blessed to have an incredibly beautiful natural setting, one where the ocean, the mountains and the river all come together. I feel extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to design a golf course in such a setting.”

“It’s easy, and certainly safe, to say that there is nothing like OceaNica anywhere in Nicaragua,” Young added. “That’s because there is hardly any golf in Nicaragua right now. But this course, I believe, is going to set a pretty high standard for future golf development in the country. And believe me, there’s going to be more golf being developed in Nicaragua in the near future, just as there has been in recent years in Costa Rica, just to the south.”

Currently, golf is almost non-existent in Nicaragua. In fact, the

national tourism website, Nicaragua.com, lists only two courses in the country, both in the capital city of Managua, saying, “Nicaragua is still catching up with the popularity of golf and golfers may find their options somewhat limited.” But the website also talks of plans for courses and resorts “in the pipeline.” Certainly, one such course is OceaNica at Montecristo.

“I think OceaNica will launch a wave of interest in golf in Nicaragua, much like we’ve seen recently in Costa Rica,” said Young, whose Hacienda Pinilla course is ranked as one of the best in Costa Rica. “As an American architect, I am thrilled to be in position to help bring golf to a country that I am sure will benefit from the sport.”

The overall Montecristo development is the brainchild of Jorge and Lori Estrada, a husband and wife team who own and operate a medical clinic in Managua. Jorge Estrada’s family tree includes three former Nicaraguan presidents and

several Premier Generals of the Republic. After working in the U.S. in medical equipment and clinic administration for a number of years, he returned to Nicaragua in 1997 with his wife, Lori, an orthopedist, and their three children. One of the Estrada’s first projects in Nicaragua was to establish a premier orthopedic clinic in Managua. The couple also developed a number of community outreach programs that have earned the 2003 Diploma of Honor and the Medal of Amistad from national fire and police organizations in 2004 and 2006, respectively.

Young began his design career in 1986 with the design of the Fields Golf Club in LaGrange, Ga. His Catechee Golf Club in Hartwell, Ga., was named one of Golf Digest’s “Best New Courses” in America when it opened in 1999. Later, the course was recognized as the first Audubon International Signature Sanctuary course in Georgia.

