



fairway robbery

New golf course construction is booming in Asia and the Arab Oil Belt or in North Africa. Golf is also growing at a more moderate pace in Europe and South Africa. However, in America, the number of golf courses is declining. From Maryland to Florida, a golf land grab is replacing golf landscapes. Until recently, public and private golf courses were considered priceless community assets. Now suddenly, these large open space parks are being consumed by insatiable developers. This year, over 130 golf courses in the U.S. will be replaced by houses and shopping malls. These conversions increase traffic and thus trade the re-oxygenating "lungs" of the city for the carbonizing engines of congested traffic.

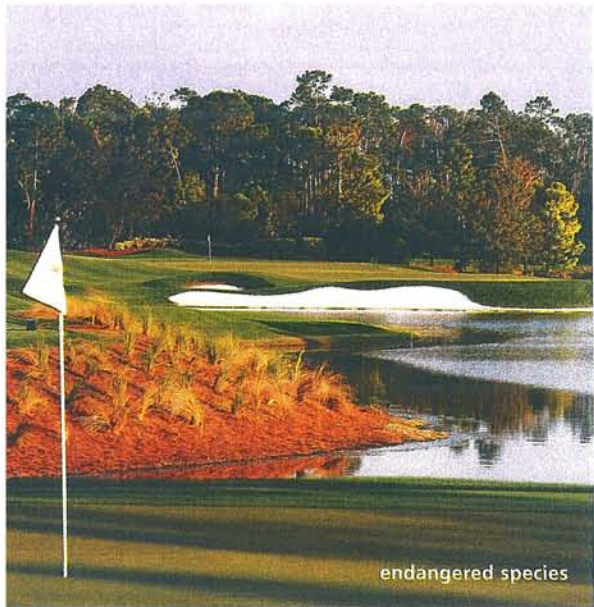
A subtler, creeping acquisition simply takes large bites out of valuable golf holes. The picturesque oceanside 16th hole on the South Course at Makena in Hawaii may be dramatically shortened and squeezed against a fragile beach ecology. In the high mountains of Jackson

Hole and the lowlands of Hilton Head, new housing is creeping into old classic golf holes. In Florida, clubs are negotiating to rezone and to sell some of their existing holes where the land is coveted by eager developers. Tightened by new development, the cautionary cry of "fore" is replaced by the fear of "incoming", as off-line shots bombard newly constructed barbeques and swimming pools.

Where once beautiful golf courses attracted tourists and homebuyers, today land developers see the course itself as a valuable opportunity to be harvested for huge profits. They say the land is private, to do with as the owners like. Golf Clubs and public sportsmen have joined with open space advocates to point out that the land golf is played on has long enjoyed special low taxes because of the recreational and environmental benefits it provides. At a time of strained city budgets,

town managers and city councils should consider the 1960 Plebiscite Proposition 6 and the Williamson Act of California, which gave huge tax relief to privately owned golf courses and agricultural open spaces. However, should owners wish to re-zone their modestly taxed land for development, they might be required to pay ten or more years of back taxes - obliged to pay as if the land had been zoned all along for housing. Today, when you fly over a great American city, notice most of the green open spaces below are golf courses, especially in the Sun Belt.

They say "money talks", but the great Donald Ross, American's first premier golf architect, understood that the newly rich and their families would also want open lands for leisure - places where "money plays". Back taxes of converted golf courses would encourage the preservation of local beautiful and historic landmarks. In California, it's the law. Now that's a farsighted tax law even a capitalist could admire to protect his and his family's life style. ■



espaces en danger

Boum du golf en Asie, dans les Emirats. Ca marche en Europe, en Afrique du Sud. Moins aux Etats-Unis. En 2006, 130 parcours s'abandonneront aux constructions. Ces poumons disparaissent au détriment de l'environnement. Des trous réputés sont menacés à Hawaï ou à Hilton Head. En Floride, les clubs vendent une partie de leurs parcours. Hier, le beau golf attirait touristes et acheteurs de résidences. Aujourd'hui, les promoteurs voient d'abord les dollars dans l'immobilier détruisant un parcours. Mais celui-ci, ayant bénéficié de conditions fiscales très basses, la levée de boucliers est radicale, les édiles imposant le paiement des taxes non perçues sur dix ou vingt ans, histoire de freiner cette décadence.

Donald Ross, le plus grand des architectes américains, pensait que les fortunés apprécieraient d'abord l'espace vert dédié au loisir. Reste alors aux capitalistes d'applaudir, une fois n'est pas coutume, cette surtaxe destinée à sauvegarder leur style de vie et le golf avec.