

Chocolate Drops: Dave Zinkand Wraps Up Work at Old Elm Club

Golf architecture news and notes for the week of March 3, 2025



Was it a slow week on the golf architecture beat? Yes. Do I have a couple of fun things to talk about? Always.

→**Zinkand Golf Design**, headed up by former Coore & Crenshaw associate Dave Zinkand, has completed a multi-year restoration project at **Old Elm Club** in the Chicago suburbs. Old Elm boasts a unique design pedigree: Harry Colt drew up plans for the course in 1913, and Donald Ross oversaw construction. The two legendary Golden Age architects likely spent about eight days together on site. Old Elm’s routing and bunkering are typically attributed to Colt, while its greens are thought to be Ross’s creations.

Old Elm’s recent restoration* was a collaborative effort as well. With the help of superintendent Curtis James, Ohio-based architect Drew Rogers began the master planning process in 2010. Rogers initially focused on recapturing the width and scale of the course by removing trees and adjusting mowing lines. He then brought on Zinkand to help with bunker and green shaping. Today, Zinkand Golf Design is the club’s architecture firm of record.

“We took painstaking care to reintroduce Colt’s preferred bunkering at Old Elm, merging his aesthetic preferences and strategic concepts with modern play and maintenance expectations,” Zinkand said. “The course now features bold bunker forms with dramatic ‘ripped’ and ‘torn’ edges that complement the site’s beautifully rolling terrain.”

(*I feel that the word “restoration” is appropriate in this case, although I’d need to see Old Elm for myself to make a confident judgment. The club seems to have done a lot of the right things—took its time, gave a lot of responsibility to a knowledgeable head super, resisted the urge to overspend on infrastructural bells and whistles, and maintained a focus on historical accuracy. For a broad-strokes discussion of how fraught the term “restoration” has become recently, check out this article from a couple of weeks ago.)

{{content-block-chocolate-drops-dave-zinkand-old-elm-club-001}}

Zinkand remains distinctly underrated among youngish American golf architects. Perhaps that will change over the next few years. Right now, he is working on a reversible nine-hole course at Medina Country Club in Ohio, a short course at Chechessee Creek Club in South Carolina, and renovations at Knollwood Country Club in Michigan and Mike Strantz’s Shore Course at Monterey Peninsula Country Club. Don’t be surprised to see Zinkand get a breakout opportunity soon.

Also underrated: Old Elm itself. The Chicagoland-born-and-raised members of Fried Egg Golf’s architecture team, Andy Johnson and Matt Rouches, both hold the course in very high regard. Here’s how Matt puts it: “Old Elm Club sits in a class far above the rest of the golf courses in Chicagoland—a class that includes only Chicago Golf Club and Shoreacres. There is a clear distinction in these three courses that elevates them far beyond everything else in the state due to their ability to present world-class golf on land that is above average from the mostly flat plains of Illinois. Specifically at Old Elm, the combination of varied strategy, clever routing, and expert stewardship and presentation make this course a highly notable design in America.”

For good measure, Matt sent me his rough ranking of Chicago-area courses:

- Chicago Golf
- Old Elm
- Shoreacres
- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...
- New Medinah Course 3
- Beverly
- ...
- Skokie
- ...
- ...
- Everything else
- Old Elm
- Shoreacres
- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...
- New Medinah Course 3
- Beverly
- ...
- Skokie
- ...
- ...
- Everything else