

ALBATROS GOLF PERFORMANCE CENTRE at

Terre Blanche

The Academy moves to the French Riviera and the area's finest golf and spa resort, Terra Blanche. BY DAVID J. WHYTE



Set in southern France between Côte d'Azur and Aix en Provence is a 300-hectare luxury retreat of exceptional character with two consummate golf courses, Terra Blanche, was until recently run by the luxury hotel group, Four Seasons. It is now returned to the owner Dietmar Hopp but there is a little known fact that Hopp first bought it from legendary Scottish actor, Sean Connery, who owned it for 20 years.


It is now returned to the owner Dietmar Hopp but there is a little known fact that Hopp first bought it from

legendary Scottish actor, Sean Connery, who owned it for 20 years. Now a member of 'Leading Hotels of The World', it combines qualified luxury as defined by being a part of that select group, with premium golf experiences as Hopp is himself an avid golfer. And with the addition of the Albatros Golf Performance Centre 3 years back, Terre Blanche quickly became recognised as an exceptional learning facility bringing together cutting-edge technology with a team of highly qualified teachers. It is the first centre in the world to be branded as a "European Tour

Performance Institute", which is part of the European Tour's long-term strategy to create a worldwide portfolio of state-of-the-art coaching establishments.

The centre features 64 driving bays on two levels, private teaching enclosures, an indoor putting green, the latest high-performance training programs, two outdoor putting greens, two chipping greens and a grassy driving range with bunker area. It also boasts a fitness room equipped with physical training machines specifically adapted to golfers' needs. There is a club fitting workshop

using TrackMan and Select Fit systems to fit and assemble equipment to a player's exact requirements.

Here, in this wonderfully secluded resort, golfers of all levels can come, stay, play and work on their game. Some of Europe's Ryder Cup players have availed themselves to the latest knowledge and hi-tech equipment that accompanies these first-class practice facilities and continue to do so. The ethos here is to combine traditional coaching with the latest in sports science to optimise each individual's capabilities. 

ALL PICTURES ABOVE: The Albatros Golf Performance Centre at Terre Blanche is one of the most comprehensive teaching facilities in Europe.

ALBATROS GOLF PERFORMANCE CENTRE



ALAIN ALBERTI



JEAN JACQUES RIVET

PGA teaching professional Alain Alberti, who heads the David Leadbetter Academy here at Terre Blanche delivers a straightforward view of how a player should address his game with tips that are easy to apply at home or on the golf course. His array of teaching aids is almost playfully simple for such a sophisticated centre; a tennis ball cut in two halves, an exercise ball, a regular sized ball and two alignment canes, but it works wonders.

"For the average player, I do not have a fixed philosophy," says Alberti. "I look for the natural qualities of a player. There is no one swing that suits everyone. Each player is different. We look to adapt the swing to a player's physicality, not try and change the player to suit someone else's swing. Everybody has their own signature and it's the same with their golf swing. I try to help them to find their own swing."

This concept was furthered explain as Alberti takes us through another section sited alongside his coaching bays at the practice range called the BiomecaSwing Centre. This is where a battery of sophisticated, state-of-the-art appliances are available to diagnose and deliver a unique biomechanical swing profile for each golfer, showing us exactly what our profile is.



BiomecaSwing provides teaching professionals like Alberti with a far more detailed knowledge of what is really going on with a player's swing along with his physiology and prescribes exactly what is required to improve it.

Here is where Jean Jacques Rivet, otherwise known as J.J., takes over. A sports biomechanist, osteopath, founder of BiomecaSwing and head of the E.T.P.I "Sport Performance & Biomechanics" department at the European Tour Performance Institute at Terre Blanche, J.J. first studied as an engineer before 'accidentally' (as he confesses) coming across kinesiology, which is the scientific study of human movement that combines engineering, anatomy, physiology and bioenergy.

Connecting the laws of mechanics with the human anatomy, J.J. began lecturing in sports biomechanics. Subsequently, extensive experience in golf and his knowledge of biomechanics has earned him plaudits and now, players like Justin Rose, Matteo Manassero, Rafa Cabrerabello and Raphaël Jacquelin seek his guidance.

"In the beginning, BiomecaSwing was designed for Tour players," says Jean-Jacques. "14 years ago, we changed the program so that, here at Terre Blanche, any player can make use of the facilities. We apply the same programs and

procedures to our clients that we do with top Tour players."

"To be successful," J.J. went on, "golf coaching must be linked back to the biomechanical analysis of your swing and how it correlates with a morphological diagnosis of your skeletal structure, your neuro-motor system and your physical efficiency," he continues as he puts us through a sequence of sophisticated diagnostic procedures meant to decipher our physical structure and abilities.

"These detailed analysis will help pinpoint your individual strengths and weaknesses," J.J. emphasizes. "The findings will show you how to make ultimate use of your golf swing. This way, you can increase your strengths and learn how to deal with any natural limitations that we identify in your physiology."

Within a shortened evaluation session, I learned that I had very good lateral balance but my weight tended to be centred too far forward at address. This, I was told was probably caused by tight hamstring muscles and weak Tibialis anterior (the muscles that sit in front of the ankle that are crucial for good balance). J.J. explained how these weaknesses would impact my ability to make a well-sequenced swing.


"Everything is going to the calf," he told me. "All the muscles in the front are not working and all the muscles in the back are too tight – always working. This creates poor posture."



For my tight hamstrings, J.J. recommended a treatment that would have immediate effect. Dressed in a skin-tight body suit, Jean-Paul applied a large vacuum-type machine with rollers to the backs of my thighs. The sensation of pulling the skin wasn't uncomfortable but I could feel its effect. "This is the opposite of massage," J.J. explains.

"We are pulling at the muscle fascia. 60 percent of the elasticity of the muscle is linked with the deficit in mobility in the fascia, the envelope around the muscle." J.J. tested my ability to raise my legs straight up after the treatment and there was a marked improvement, at least a 70 percent increase in flexibility. For my weak Tibialis anterior he showed me two simple exercises that would strengthen and stretch those muscles into activity.

While the science behind biomechanics is complex, the remedies are dazzlingly simple. Back to Alberti's halved tennis balls, exercise balls and canes. It was coming clearer to me now. Armed with concise biometric data, golf coaches can apply that technical information directly towards the areas that cause poor swing dynamics. The appropriately placed halved tennis balls addressed my weight dispersal issue giving me the sensation of keeping my weight back on the rear foot during backswing and moving it forward on the front foot during the downswing.

If touring professionals are coming here with their coaches to make use of the BiomecaSwing technology, just think what it can do for amateur golfers. The traditional approach of the David Leadbetter Academy combined with BiomecaSwing really is a powerful combination to make lasting improvements to any golfer's game. The European Tour is also using this concept in its physio unit on tour and in all the future ETPI centres. 

CENTRE IMAGES: Alain demonstrates how a simple tennis ball, cut in half and garden canes can help address swing issues identified by BiomecaSwing.

BOTTOM LEFT PAGE FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Alain Alberti uses an exercise ball to establish correct rotation; Canes also help to establish a more precise alignment

TOP RIGHT PAGE: The European Tour Performance Institute concept at BiomecaSwing identifies specific physical issues and links them to swing issues. This helps golf coaches to offer specific solutions in their training programmes.





With original works of art that are part of Dietmar Hopp's personal collection tastefully scattered around the interiors and gardens, Terre Blanche sprawls around an ancient chateau perched upon a hill, uninhabited but not abandoned with plans for its rescue and renovation.

The accommodations, all suites and villas, are generously appointed with a personal patio facing the sun and a well-appointed spa to soothe tired muscles. In the evening, its restaurants take centre stage. The lounge-style Le Gaudina Restaurant specialises in fish of the Mediterranean combined with local products that are personally sourced by chef Franck Ferigutti, while Le Faventia Restaurant is where Ferigutti practices his considerable talents. Le Tousco Grill is more casual and open only during the busier summer season and Les Caroubiers is the clubhouse restaurant with very fitting fayre for this part of France.

Among its luxurious temptations is a 3,200 sqm spa villa nestled among Mediterranean gardens but it is the golf that most will come to Terre Blanche and they are quite exceptional; 'Le Château' is clearly one of the finest in France while 'Le Riou' is highly entertaining.

Getting around Le Riou involves precision driving (usually foregoing the driver) along with impeccable greenside play. The course funnels through tight, often doglegging, tree-lined configurations. There is little need for distance in this rather short course but Le Riou tests the ability to scramble around the multi-tiered greens, which can be difficult to hit and hold. It is interesting to note that Le Riou course will be hosting an Open for the Ladies European Tour Access Series. With wonderful views across to the villages of Pays


A luxurious appeal that vows to entrap the visitor with a multitude of sensory experiences.

de Fayence, Le Riou is great golf in a relaxed, scenic setting.

Dave Thomas designed both courses and integrated them perfectly into what must have been challenging but inspiring terrain. The Le Château course is clearly one of his best efforts anywhere in the world and certainly one of the finest in continental Europe. This is a full-blooded championship experience, kept in perfect condition and designed to test the very best. The course measures 6,616 metres

and combines wide water features with rocky ravines and large, tantalizing greens that tempt you to go for it.

Because of the elevation changes, there are many high driving holes which is always enjoyable coupled with lush fairways to aim at. More generous off the tee than its shorter sibling, Le Château employs water hazards to tighten shots and puts pressure on the player to hit confidently. Le Château is the only France-based event on the European Senior Tour and a fitting course to test your newfound prowess following a session with Jean-Jacque and Alain Alberti at the Performance Institute.

The likes of Cannes, Nice and Monaco are within easy driving distance (30 minutes) of the resort, as is the Mediterranean Sea. But once through the gate, there is little desire to go elsewhere – at least for a few days. The property sprawls across wooded hills and lush valleys creating a great sense of seclusion from the rest of the world, especially when staying at one of its many villas set alongside the hillside commune, and if one wishes to continue staying there, they can enquire about building their own dream villa within the resort. 

www.terre-blanche.com



The quality of the facilities at Terre Blanche are second to none both on and off the golf courses.

