

SURPASSING EXPECTATIONS

iji's most revered sportsman Vijay Singh says Els Club Desaru Coast Valley Course has what it takes to test the best in the world.

THE VALLEY WAS DESIGNED TO LEAVE GOLFERS IN AWE

What were your first impressions of the site prior to the construction of the Valley Course, and did you instantly recognise that it would make for a world-class golf course?

The impact was immediate. Even though it was densely covered in vegetation, the elevation changes gave us lots of routing opportunities, which as a designer gives you the challenge and prospect of creating something unique.

Given the scale of the wider Desaru Coast destination development, I felt we could create something iconic.

We always strive to deliver a product that impresses and surpasses expectations. Combining with Ernie and his team allowed us to blend our visions to really get the most out of the property.

What goals did you have in mind while creating the Valley Course?

We wanted to create something that sparked interest in Desaru Coast. It was clear the rationale of the ownership group in bringing in Ernie and The Els Club brand was to put the destination on the map.

This was a first for both myself and Ernie. We have enjoyed a great relationship on and off the course, so when the opportunity of collaborating with him and his design team came along, we were very excited at the prospect of working together.

From the start, we wanted to develop a course that complemented the Ocean Course, while providing a distinct experience for visitors.

The land really lent itself to layering bunkers at different elevation points, placing a premium on strategy and positioning.

On a personal level, I have always enjoyed golf courses that encourage me to try and play a range of shots. I try to design courses that have a visual impact, but allow golfers to consider the various ways that they can tackle the holes.

At the Valley Course, we wanted to create some impact around the aesthetics of the course, but create something with real character and personality.

I also wanted to create something that left golfers with an image of each hole imprinted in their minds. You can leave some courses unable to really remember some of the holes.

At the Valley, we wanted the guests to leave in



The land lent itself to layering bunkers at different elevation points, placing a premium on strategy and positioning, said Vijay Singh (below).



awe. When you see the finished product, I think we you will agree we have achieved that.

Can you tell us about any of the challenges that may have risen prior, during or after the construction period?

Any development comes with challenges. We were fortunate to have a committed ownership group, a team from Ernie Els Design and Troon Golf to collaborate to ensure the most seamless integration.

Tell us what kind of challenge and experience golfers can expect when they play the Valley Course?

This is a one-of-a-kind golf course that will reward golfers for good play but penalise wayward shots. I also feel that it provides a real element of escapism for golfers.

You find yourself on this tranquil corner of south-east Malaysia, overlooking the sea and to

Singapore in the distance. The atmosphere and location really set the tone and we think the golf course only adds to the experience of the Desaru Coast.

I know from a service and hospitality perspective, the teams at Themed Attractions Resorts & Hotels and Troon will provide the very best experience for anyone who comes.

We want guests to be greeted by an immaculately-conditioned golf course, but at the same time a first-class off-course experience, and I know that our partners will be able to deliver this all year round.

You are always curious as a designer as to how golfers will react; part of the excitement really. I am looking forward to experiencing the final product myself and to hearing first-hand feedback from visitors.

Can you envisage a Championship ever being played on the Valley Course?

I think in time it certainly has what it takes to test the best in the world.

I know Desaru Coast will be populated with several premier hotels and additional leisure attractions, so bringing the TV cameras alongside a Tour event would make a lot of sense.

How has your experience as one of the greatest players in the world informed your creation of the Valley Course? Does your success in the game give you the upper hand over other designers?

First and foremost, I would say the range of golf courses I have played around the world over my career has shaped my opinion on what makes a great golf course design.

I have played some of the toughest-conditioned courses, that leave you feeling pretty raw about the experience, but at the same time relished the challenge a more difficult course poses.

You have to strike the balance as a designer and find your own sweet-spot. There is much debate about who the great designers are, but it is so subjective.

I try and approach the design as I saw the game; needing all the shots and rewarding well-placed and executed shots.

When you get your hands on a great piece of land, like Desaru Coast, you can do this.