



Miakka Golf Club to shine along a Florida river, but another course feature comes from Down Under

MYAKKA CITY, Fla. – The under-construction Miakka Golf Club has a lot going for it. A wide-open parcel of land with several interesting features. Two miles of frontage along a pastoral river. A former Ryder Cup captain as consultant. A successful developer with a proven track record, big plans and deep pockets.

Forget all that for a minute, and indulge this golf architecture nerd to geek out about one particular aspect of the work taking place inland between Tampa and Fort Myers on the western side of Florida's peninsula. Because if all goes to plan, the private Miakka might have some of the coolest bunkers found in the United States.



A par 3 under construction at Miakka Golf Club sits along the Myakka River in Florida. (Jason Lusk/Golfweek)

Yes, after a tour of the property in its raw-dirt form, it was the bunkers that caught my eye. That's because some of the best bunkers in the world caught the eyes of course architects Dana Fry and Jason Straka, who plan to model their traps at Miakka in the form of Australian Sandbelt courses.



A beautiful bunker's edge is carved directly into a green at Victoria Golf Club in Australia. (Jason Lusk/Golfweek)

Citing the style of bunkering at such international heavyweights as Royal Melbourne, Victoria, Kingston Heath and Peninsula Kingswood, Fry and Straka plan to build traps that reach deep into greens with the putting surfaces seemingly suspended in air above the sand.

Fellow architecture nerds are granted a gasp at the daring.

"Pretty cool, huh?" Straka said with a smile during a tour of the property.

The traps in Australia's Sandbelt around Melbourne are largely the creation of or inspired by Alister MacKenzie, the famed designer of Augusta National and Cypress Point, among others. It was on a working tour of Australia nearly a century ago that MacKenzie introduced some of the best bunkers in the world to several courses.

The best Sandbelt greens and traps are split by a knife's edge with no fringe, no separation. With graceful curves etched directly into the putting surfaces, they are among the most beautiful and frightening sand traps in the world, often falling back into a more rugged and natural design on the far sides of the traps.

But it's almost impossible to build such traps at most locations. The Melbourne Sandbelt is graced with dense sand, which helps the traps retain their shape. They wouldn't work at most American courses, as the edges of the bunkers would crumble under the weight of golfers and mowers on the surfaces above – such construction would

be a liability and a maintenance headache. Instead, American bunkers are normally kept at least several steps off a putting surface. Us lot have grown accustomed to the American style, most of us never realizing what we're missing Down Under.

Fry and Straka plan to utilize a modern construction method to change all that at Miakka.

The design team will lean on Loksand to construct bunker edges. With offices in Asia and Australia, the company Loksand has created a crimped fiber product that allows grass to grow atop it while resisting compression or shifting. The company's methods provide the hardy bunker walls Fry and Straka need to carve Sandbelt-style traps into greens in Florida, where native sand is normally much looser.

Showing off a Loksand test bunker at Miakka, Straka threw a golf ball into the wall of the trap. It bounced off in a natural way, not some weird rebound that would be a turn-off to golfers. The Loksand bunker also supports plenty of weight. The company provided a green light for Fry and Straka to make bold choices.

"We had looked at the Sandbelt course and wanted to find a way to build bunkers like that, and this gave us that chance," Straka said during our tour. "We tried several other options, and this just works."

For the golf architecture nerds who have had the good fortune to play in the Sandbelt, it's an inspiring choice.

But the property's developer, Florida-based entrepreneur Steve Herrig, was not originally inspired by golf at all. This all started with horses.



Miakka Golf Club will be operated by the same family that owns the adjacent TerraNova Equestrian Center, which has grown into a world-class facility with incredible barns and event spaces. (Jason Lusk/Golfweek)

Herrig – who has built profitable businesses in insurance and human resources – said he was told by friends that he should add a golf course. "Here we are now," he said at lunch before setting out to check on construction of his Miakka Golf Club.



Architect Jason Straka inspects a Loksand bunker edge at Miakka Golf Club. (Jason Lusk/Golfweek)

Miakka Golf Club sits next to Herrig's TerraNova Equestrian Center, which he built to accommodate the growing passion for horses shown by his daughter. Starting with small plans for a barn and a place to ride, TerraNova has grown into a world-class equestrian center capable of holding national events. Herrig has laid out plans for a horse-themed community adjacent to the equestrian center, with lots ranging from five to 20 acres, each with a private barn.

A frequent participant in golf games at Gator Creek Golf Club in nearby Sarasota,

One of those friends from the Sarasota club – known simply as Gator by locals – just happened to be Paul Azinger, winner of 12 PGA Tour events including the 1993 PGA Championship. He went on to captain the victorious 2008 U.S. Ryder Cup squad and feature as a prominent voice in golf broadcasting for 15 years. Herrig brought on Azinger as a design consultant at Miakka.

The property has a lot going for it. The course and its facilities will sit on 1,100 acres away from the planned homes. Overall, the land tilts on a plane dozens of feet down toward the Myakka River, and there's a twisting creek bed that will be interlaced with fairways. Some 3 million cubic yards of sand will be pushed into landforms atop the site, that sand having been mined from an area that will become a lake nearer a rural highway that passes the course and sprawling clubhouse. Plans include a 12-hole par-3 course, a huge circular practice facility, cabins and a lighted putting course.

Unlike at most Florida courses, which rely on man-made lakes for irrigation as well as shotmaking interest, the lake at Miakka won't be in play on the main 18. Azinger, ever an angler, said he can't wait to cast for bass in its water.

The river and its offshoots will be in play on several holes, most notably a par-3 that plays along the waterway. Other than that and the creekbed, the course will rely on Fry and Straka's shaping to provide strategic golf interest instead of water carries, similar to the way Australian Sandbelt courses don't feature much, if any, water.

In a state experiencing something of a golf construction boom, especially for high-end clubs with six-figure membership fees, it all serves to set Miakka apart in some ways. There will be horses, barns, firm and bouncy golf, and plenty of luxury for well-heeled members.

Best of all, there will be those bunker edges.



Some 3 million cubic yards of sand will be dug from a lake to sandcap the golf course at Miakka. (Jason Lusk/Golfweek)

*Article from Golfweek. Click [here](#) to view it on the website.