



A \$10-million CHALLENGE!

How do you turn an old quarry on the outskirts of Benoni into a links-like wonderland? Well, apart from a very, very large pick and an equally large shovel...

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMIE THOM

IT WASN'T that long ago Ebotse was our course of the month, so why go back there so soon? Well, our old photographer mate Jamie Thom recently sent us four rather amazing images. Working for Matkovich and Hayes, Jamie has been privy to courses being born – and captured many of the intimate moments on film (well, digital memory cards actually, but let's not get picky!). And the result of this particular series of photos is visual proof of just how beneficial a golf course can be to a natural area that's been torn apart by man.

Ebotse was not only an ambitious project but also cost more than M&H had ever been given to build a course. Then again, considering that the ground available was mostly wasteland left over when the old kaolin mine packed up shop, it's not surprising: the Rynfield lake was a mess, the land was abused beyond recognition and rehab is never cheap.

A 'before and after' analysis of the Ebotse

These images show the par-four 13th (this page) and the par-three 11th (overleaf) – an area where almost a third of the total earthworks was necessary. Once the quarries had been hydro-sluced, they built a retaining wall in the water to form the edge of the 11th green and 12th and 13th fairways, using some of the dump rock material. As the wall progressed, the 'safe' area inside was filled in to create the fairways pictured here. In the 'before' picture of the 13th (bottom right), the grey retaining wall is clearly visible.

environment reads like something *National Geographic* would actually approve of. Prior to the bulldozers moving in, the old kaolin dumps were like landmines waiting to spill into the already heavily polluted dam, the old walls of the quarry were eroding by the day and the only people who used the place, quad-bikers and 4x4 fanatics, were destroying what little vegetation and wildlife remained.

From Ebotse's palette, however, a radically different picture emerges: alien trees replaced with indigenous; unsafe kaolin dumps removed; new wetlands created; two tons of plastic bottles, glass, tyres, cans and other

litter removed from Rynfield Dam; a dramatic increase in bird life and the establishment of no-go conservation areas. To achieve that, and build a golf course that is as impressive from a construction and contouring perspective as anything ever draped on African soil, required an inordinate amount of earthmoving. Imagine a pile of soil laid out over two rugby fields and rising up 200 metres into the sky – that's what 2 200 000m³ of earth looks like. Add in thousands of trees and 30 hectares of rehabilitated veld and it's not surprising that when all was said and done, the total bill for the construction of Ebotse topped R80 million.





"What Peter has done in creating Ebotse is unbelievable. It is a diamond in the middle of Benoni. I love the course, as not only is the condition of the greens incredible, but for me the strength of the course is that it has no bad holes." – Simon Hobday

For the fauna and flora of the area, Ebotse is a poster-child for intelligent, sustainable environmental rehabilitation. What's important to understand here is that they didn't start out wondering how to build a links course in the East Rand and decide to move two-million cubic metres of earth – it was the other way around. To rehabilitate the environment they needed to move a massive quantity of soil and building a golf course as an excuse was an excellent way to do it!

All of the material on site from the mine dumps, slime dams, dam walls and kaolin had to be taken somewhere – and filling and reshaping the dangerous quarry holes and surrounds was the only viable option. For a designer with the vision of Peter Matkovich and team, it was a perfect opportunity to create a dune landscape that mirrors his love of the great links courses of the world.

IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"The real success story of this golf course is that it was created from nothing. Ebotse stands out from the rest on the Highveld because of the links feel and the strategic aspects of the game that come with a links-style golf course. A links golf course makes its challenges clear to the golfer, places high premiums on accuracy of both tee shots and approach shots, and forces you to think your way around the course. These days courses are becoming wider and golfers are able to hit the ball anywhere and still be in play. You can't arrive at Ebotse expecting to play like this, but I will guarantee you will play a course which has balance between long and short holes, wide and narrow, as well as four holes skirting a lake – unusual for a links-style course. Because of the

kikuyu grass, it will tend to play slightly different in summer than winter. It is, however, in winter when you can expect to get the feel of a real links golf course as the ground gets firmer and your ball will take some really quirky bounces.

"The real success and satisfaction I take out of Ebotse in its current state is that our team was able to take the picture in my mind and work it into the ground, even though it was tough in the beginning. It is amazing when you consider that this 'links-style' course was created by an exclusively South African team and black South African shapers on the Highveld of South Africa. The pride and joy I take from this is astounding considering the fact that most of these people would never have seen a links course before." – Peter Matkovich



EBOTSE BY THE NUMBERS

- R84 million was the final construction bill.
- R22 million was the cost of the earthworks alone.
- 2.2 million is how many cubic square metres of earth were moved – 1.45 million via hydro-slurping and 750 000 by shovel!
- 2 600 trees and shrubs were planted.
- 80 hectares of alien black wattle and their thirsty blue-gum friends were removed.
- 60 Combretum trees were planted – some as high as five metres.
- 40 mighty oaks were transplanted.
- 20 hectares of veld grass were seeded along with 11.5 hectares of grass plugs.

FOR MORE ON EBOTSE, CHECK OUT www.ebotsegolf.com.