

# DEPARTURES

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## Golfing Miami's Doral



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The city isn't a world-class golf destination, but Donald Trump's Blue Monster may be the one exception to the rule.

**D**onald Trump, as we've all witnessed over the past four decades, is congenitally incapable of staying out of the news. In the past year, though, his headline-worthy moments have come not so much from the worlds of politics or pop culture but from his frenzied activities in the world of golf. While he suffered a setback in the winter when a Scottish court ruled in favor of the development of an offshore wind farm near his golf course in Aberdeenshire—he had argued the turbines would spoil the views from the

links—Trump has nevertheless been on a major roll.

At the beginning of the year, he purchased a pair of high-profile links properties in Great Britain and Ireland (Tumbery and Doonbeg Golf Club, respectively). Trump Golfing at Ferry Point, in the Bronx, where he holds the management concession, won the rights to host the 2017 Barclays championship, New York's long-running stop on the PGA Tour. And in May the PGA of America announced that the 2022 PGA Championship will be played at Trump National Golf Club in Bedminster, New Jersey, finally giving the mogul the men's major he has long coveted.

Meanwhile, the total transformation of Trump National Doral Miami, which the organization purchased in early 2012 for \$150 million, proceeds apace. "We acquired Doral at the bottom of the market," says Eric Trump, Donald's son and The Trump Organization's executive vice president of development and acquisitions. "It was tired, but we could see it had potential."

Indeed, even before Trump's purchase, Doral towered over the Miami golf scene. The city has other good courses—the ultraexclusive Indian Creek Country Club boasts a 1928 William Flynn design on a private island, while The Biltmore Golf Course in Coral Gables offers a strategic Donald Ross layout—but none captures a golfer's imagination like Doral. The resort, which opened in 1962, benefits from international brand awareness thanks to its PGA Tour host status, which dates back half a century. It also has a location that's hard to beat for convenience. Though the surrounding neighborhood is a patchwork of office parks and strip malls, it's about six miles from Miami International Airport—and about a half hour from South Beach.

Doral's top drawing card is its Tour venue—the Blue Monster, 7,608 yards' worth of sandy intimidation and watery graves. After acquiring the property, Trump immediately hired rising-star golf-course architect Gil Hanse (who's currently racing the clock to finish the course for the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro) to give Dick Wilson's 1962 layout a comprehensive renovation. Thousands of trees have been either moved or removed to open up the property's interior as well as to screen out unwanted views of the city outside the gate. Trump also insisted on replacing the coquina rock walls that had separated land from water with grass-faced slopes—it has resulted in a much cleaner look. And Hanse's team constructed a network of canals around the property, which on Doral's pancake-flat site promotes significantly improved drainage. That, in turn, leads to better turf conditioning.

The renovation was much more than an engineering job, though. Trump and Hanse altered almost every hole on the course to some degree, and plenty of changes will be readily apparent to those familiar with the course from TV. In 2005, for example, Tiger Woods famously drove the green of the par-four 16th during a showdown with Phil Mickelson. His 347-yard bomb flew over a dense grove of palms—it was a completely blind shot. Today all those trees are gone, opening up the view of the green and giving more golfers (assuming they

play from the appropriate set of tees) a chance to try that heroic shot, although the drive must now carry a lake that has been newly extended down the left side of the fairway. That same lake has been reshaped to wrap around the green of the previous hole, the 15th, turning a once-mundane par three into an exciting shot to a peninsula. One hole that has remained basically unchanged is the punishing 18th. Statistically it's one of the hardest pars on the PGA Tour, and it looks just as terrifying in person as it does from the couch in early March.

The Blue Monster is one of those layouts, like the Black Course at Bethpage State Park in New York or The Ocean Course at Kiawah Island Golf Resort in South Carolina, that you tackle if you want to find out “where your game’s at.” Any weaknesses will be mercilessly exposed. At least a couple of times each round, players will inevitably find the Monster pushing their abilities to the limit, whether it be with a long iron into a crosswind or a lob over a bunker to a car-hood-sized target.

Trump hasn’t just reenergized Doral’s most famous layout, either. After the Blue Monster job concluded, Hanse’s right-hand man, Jim Wagner, stayed on-site to spearhead comprehensive renovations on two of the resort’s four other courses, the Red Tiger and Golden Palm, which are slated to reopen before year’s end. Both have hosted professional events but were generally considered to be the undercard. Hanse and Wagner see the two as offering markedly different experiences. “The Red Tiger is more on an intimate scale [and] focuses on the average player,” Wagner says. As for the Golden Palm, “it will be second only to the Blue Monster in terms of difficulty. It will use larger features and dramatic bunkering—think of a Royal Melbourne in terms of scale.” Wagner is not known for Trumpian claims, so any comparison with the Australian legend should pique curiosity. It hasn’t been talked about much, but there’s a lot riding on Hanse and Wagner’s work here. Doral, if we’re being honest, has never had more than one true “must play” course—adding depth and quality to the roster could see the resort solidify its position within the top echelon of American golf.

Trump’s investment in restoring Doral to its former glory has been stated at an estimated \$250 million, although given The Donald’s slight tendency toward hyperbole, the numbers might best be taken with a grain of salt. Either way, there’s no doubt the property has been dramatically enhanced. “There isn’t an inch of it we haven’t fully renovated,” Eric Trump says. For the interior design and renovation of the resort’s 701 rooms and suites, Ivanka Trump, Donald’s daughter and another Trump executive vice president of development and acquisitions, collaborated with the architecture firm WATG. The result is appealing—there’s plenty of gold-leaf detail, but it’s well balanced by neutral and mahogany tones. This gold-and-white palette carries over to the Royal Palm pool area.

Of course, at this point, a Trump property that didn’t have a few extravagant flourishes would be seen by many as a disappointment. The hotel’s public spaces have a couple of heavy touches—in front of its restaurant, BLT Prime, guests can gawk at Trump’s prominently displayed custom motorcycle (gold-plated, naturally) from the show *American Chopper*—but the best excess is found outside. One fun game to play while strolling the grounds is to count fountains—the most over-the-top clearly being the limestone wedding cake, imported from Florence, of cherubs and chargers and fish-riding Neptunes that sits between the first and 18th holes. Tastes in such things may differ, but you could certainly make the argument that if there’s one city where Trump’s flamboyant aesthetic truly fits in, it’s Miami.

## DORAL'S CUTTING-EDGE INSTRUCTION

Trump National Doral Miami is home to arguably the finest golf school in America. Top instructor [Jim McLean](#) has run his flagship academy at the resort since 1991 (*from \$750 for one-hour lesson; 305-591-6409*), and the facility just completed a top-to-bottom renovation, expanding to 7,000 square feet and installing a TaylorMade Performance Lab for club repair and fitting. McLean is heavily invested in using the latest technology to help golfers improve. Along those high-tech lines, we paid a visit to Dr. Rob Neal, a biomechanics expert who has worked with McLean at Doral for ten years and has developed a cool swing-analysis system ([golfbiodynamics.com](#)). By attaching electromagnetic motion sensors to various parts of the body, technicians can view a golfer’s swing in three dimensions. While the sensors measure everything from pelvic rotation to head sway to hand speed, the software report spits out the data within the context of “corridors”—the acceptable parameters of well-functioning action. Each point is assigned a grade, giving golfers positive reinforcement about what they’re already doing well, along with an understanding of what needs some work.

*Rooms start at \$210; greens fees, from \$160 per person; 4400 NW 87th Ave.; 305-592-2000; [trumphotelcollection.com](#)*