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THROUGH
THE LENS

WORLDS OF GREEN

PHOTOGRAPHER RUSSELL KIRK SPENDS
AROUND 150 DAYS A YEAR, ON THE ROAD
OR IN THE AIR, CAPTURING STRIKING IMAGES
FROM GOLF COURSES AROUND THE GLOBE.

WORDS Thomas Hyde



ABOVE: The Old Course, St Andrews. BELOW: Sarasota National Golf Club, Florida.



11th hole, Monterey Peninsula Country Club.



Photographer Russell Kirk

Russell Kirk achieved early success as an advertising photographer in New York City, producing successful campaigns for the likes of AT&T, IBM, Rolex, Hallmark, Kodak, Visa and American Express. His success continued at a rapid pace after switching to golf photography.

Today, his images are among the best in the business. They've been published in *Links* magazine, *Golf*, *Golf Digest*, *American Express Golf & Travel*, *The Golfer*, *The US Open Journal* and the *Ryder Cup Journal*, among others. He has worked for the Links Trust in St Andrews.

His online portfolio includes The Old Course at St Andrews, Shinnecock Hills, Southern Hills Country Club, Merion Golf Club, and Medinah Country Club. *The Cut* is thrilled to present the best of Russell Kirk, who knows New Zealand well and tells us here he's looking forward to his next visit.

Q You are based in Atlanta, is that your home town?
A No. I'm originally from New York, born in Brooklyn, then moved to Staten Island. For the first 10 years of my career in photography I had a studio in New York, so no matter where I'm based New York will always be home.

Q We've read that playing golf inspired you to pick up a camera, is that right?

A Not exactly. I started taking pictures at an early age. My father was an advertising photographer in New York, so I spent hours assisting him. Playing golf became my second passion later. I played with my father when I was old enough to be included with his clients and when on location assignments.

Q You were successful in New York in advertising, tell us more about that.

A I graduated from Rochester Institute of Technology



“I’M ALWAYS PLANNING A FEW YEARS IN ADVANCE AND THAT OFTEN MEANS LOOKING AT WHERE MAJOR TOURNAMENTS WILL BE STAGED IN THE FUTURE. FOR INSTANCE, I PHOTOGRAPHED CARNOUSTIE THIS SUMMER IN PREPARATION FOR NEXT YEAR’S OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP.”



Corales Golf Club, Dominican Republic.



17th Hole The Castle Course, St Andrews.



Russell Kirk is one of the few golf photographers capable of photographing clubhouse interiors, food, facilities and portraits.



with a degree in photography, then returned to New York to work as a freelance assistant for commercial photographers. I eventually opened my own studio and though it took perseverance and a lot of hard work, I was fortunate to have clients working on campaigns for the likes of Rolex and Marriott Hotels. An American Express ad used an image of mine from St Andrews that became the turning point for me to shoot more golf.

Q Describe your approach.
I spend time scouting a golf course, deciding on angles and recording where the light hits the course and when. I prefer to photograph the course the way it's played, keeping in mind that each golf course has its own subtle differences.
As the world became digitalised, I exchanged my Mamiya RZ67 for the Canon 5D Mark II. I like the process of working with digital files, and using Photoshop I can manipulate images and remove things like hazard stakes without taking away the integrity of the course.
I am now a licensed drone pilot. This allows me to capture higher angles and the client doesn't have the expense of a cherry-picker or helicopter. And I don't have to hang out the side!

16th Hole, Gulf Harbour, Whangaparaoa.



18th hole, Millbrook Resort, Arrowtown.



17th hole, Royal Melbourne West Course.



Q How do you plan your travel?
I've travelled to Ireland and the UK, for example, at least 30 times. Most of my trips have been assignments and then I shoot other courses as time and weather permit. Weather dictates my shoot schedule.

I am on the road and in the air about 150 days of the year, each trip planned well in advance. Overseas shoots are often booked a year out and as the dates get closer I narrow the specific days based on weather and course conditions. Because of my commercial background, I'm one of the few golf photographers capable of photographing clubhouse interiors, food, facilities and portraits.

Q By chance, we're featuring the work of Gil Hanse in this issue. You've worked with him for many years, what stands out in your mind about his approach to course design?
I think of him as a traditional architect in the mould of A.W. Tillinghast, Donald Ross and Seth Raynor. When planning a course, Gil skilfully incorporates natural environment and existing land resources. Gil is hands-on. I've photographed Gil using a bulldozer shaping greens and in that way literally shaping his vision.

Q You've shot courses in Australia; when are you coming to New Zealand?
I've been to New Zealand. I worked with New Zealand Tourism but had only limited time to shoot the Queenstown golf club, Millbrook, Wairakei International and Gulf Harbour.

What I especially like about New Zealand is its spectacular range of golf courses, from alpine to lake and beach. Paraparaumu Beach, Kinloch, Jack's Point and Royal Wellington are ones I'd like to shoot next time. The unparalleled hospitality and culture of the people in New Zealand outweighs the long flight, so I really look forward to returning in the next year to 18 months. **□**

www.golflinksphotography.com