

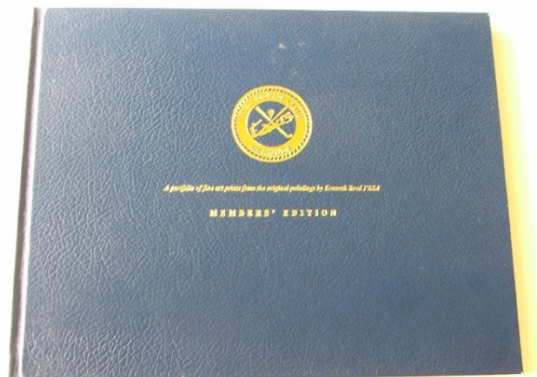
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The Mid-Ocean Club, Bermuda



Charles Blair Macdonald mentions in *Scotland's Gift* that several of his friends thought it was a better idea to build a golf course in Cuba than in Bermuda, but Macdonald was convinced that Bermuda was the right spot. The unsentimental and self-assured Macdonald wrote about the land that would become the Mid-Ocean Club: "the beauty of the situation is unsurpassed."

He goes on to elaborate, "The contours of the property are unsurpassed, delightful valleys, one hundred to two hundred yards in width, winding through coral hills from twenty to seventy-five feet in height, along the line of play; well wooded with cedars, oleanders, bougainvilleas and hibiscus, lending the most fascinating color scheme to the whole. The contours are inviting to the golf architect to construct unique and scientific putting greens consistent with the length of hole demanded. Bermuda was a hard task, owing to climatic conditions, but all difficulties have been surmounted, and I am confident the course will stand in golfing circles as an achievement in a semi-tropical climate as great as the National Golf Links of America has been in the temperate zone."



The cover of the Members' Edition fine art prints of the Mid-Ocean Club

While the original Mid Ocean Golf Club came into being in 1921, the current incarnation of the club began in 1951 when the governing bodies of the island approved of a reconstituted entity that allowed members to purchase it from the Furness Steamship company, the original owner behind the club's development. To celebrate the fifty-year anniversary of the event, in 2001, the club commissioned a special book to celebrate. Consistent with the quality Mid Ocean embodies, they issued a limited-edition book with fine art prints drawn by Kenneth Reed, a well-known painter of golf courses who has been commissioned by both the USGA and R & A. The book was written by Alan Dunch, J.P., a member of the Board at Mid Ocean and by Keith Mackie, a golf writer.

The unpaginated (but 72 page) book is oblong, measuring 14 inches by 11 inches and was limited to 1,500 copies for the membership of the club, done in a blue hard cover with a matching slipcase. The book contains sixteen watercolor prints of various holes including the most famous of all, the fifth, "Cape" hole, the best rendition of this prototype hole in existence in this writer's view. The hole has been selected as one of the best 18 in the world by George Peper and the editors of *Golf* magazine in their book *The 500 World's Greatest Golf Holes*.



The renowned 5th ("Cape") hole at Mid-Ocean

In addition to the prints, the history of the course is interspersed throughout the book. The story of Mid-Ocean cannot be told without Charles Blair Macdonald, the course designer, and stories and vignettes about him are throughout the book. The color sketches of the holes are very high quality. The last illustration is a course map showing the routing and all eighteen holes. Nice anecdotes about Winston Churchill, Dwight Eisenhower, and Babe Ruth are included as well, since Mid Ocean attracts the rich and famous.

Given the prominence of the Mid-Ocean Club in the world of golf, it is surprising that more has not been written about the club. The only other title we have seen is undated, but is likely from the early 1950s, when the club went private. It is titled *The Mid-Ocean Club Tucker's Town, Bermuda* and is a sixteen page softcover booklet published by Wendell P. Colton Co.



It appears to be mostly a promotional brochure that describes Mid-Ocean as a "distinguished private colony club," and contains black and white images of the club and the golf course including some birds-eye shots. It also includes images of the club's beach and the interior of their clubhouse. Golf holes that are singled out include—not surprisingly—the fifth, which the brochure refers to oddly as the "Cup hole," indicating that the writer of the brochure perhaps had too many Dark 'N' Stormys, or knows something the rest of the golf world does not. Other featured holes are the 13th Biarritz and the 17th Redan.



The tee shot from the 5th hole at Mid-Ocean as featured in the 1950s brochure

In some respects, we can speculate that the golf world is lucky that Macdonald favored Bermuda over Cuba in the building of his tropical course. When Fidel Castro came to power in 1959 he tried the sport of the “idle rich and exploiters of people” and denounced golf as a bourgeois hobby. Among other courses lost to history during his reign was the well-regarded Donald Ross-designed Country Club of Havana, which was nationalized and then destroyed. Luckily Mid-Ocean survives to this day as a sparkling beauty.



The view off the 3rd tee today at Mid Ocean (author's collection)

-- John Sabino