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**DAVID
MCLAY
KIDD**

**DESIGNS NEW GOLF COURSE
FOR THE CORAL MOUNTAIN
DESERT CLUB**



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Coral Mountain Desert Club: Reimagining bold golf and surf culture in La Quinta

*An interview with
David McLay Kidd and Noah Hahn*

By Alison Elsner

*"Improvisation is where good
becomes exceptional." - David McLay Kidd*

*"Coral Mountain will be the first new club and
probably the last in the desert." - Noah Hahn*





In a lilting Scottish burr, David McLay Kidd offers what may be the most succinct summary of his career: “That is my life—traveling.” The renowned golf course architect is on the road several days a week, away from home base in Bend, Oregon, shuttling between projects like a director moving from set to set. He analogizes his design process to filmmaking: the routing is the screenplay, construction is the shoot, and the finished course is the final cut. Some scenes are shot exactly to script while many are improvised on location.

“Improvisation is where good becomes exceptional,” he says. “My job is to guide the talent without overpowering it.”

That creative ethos is now headed to La Quinta, California, where Kidd is working on Coral Mountain Desert Club, a new, highly private golf community for homeowner members that pairs worldclass golf with a nearby located surf club experience. It’s a Southern California original for Kidd—an allnew build rather than a renovation—and a collaboration with Meriwether Companies and partner Michael Schwab.

Kidd’s path to Coral Mountain loops back to Hawaii two decades ago. After finishing Bandon Dunes in Coos County, Oregon, he was invited to design Nanea Golf Club on the Big Island of Hawaii by



Chuck Schwab and George Roberts. It's where Kidd met Charles' son, Michael Schwab, now a partner with Meriwether Companies. Years later Michael reconnected with Kidd about the planned Coral Mountain project, locking in their own partnership.

Kidd said, "I want to do cool things with cool people, and you couldn't want for cooler folks than the Meriwether crew—and Michael."

Noah Hahn, managing partner at Meriwether Companies, says, "David — who's clearly one of the top five golf architects in the world — is not a traditionalist. Our whole ethos is to deliver something the desert hasn't seen—golf and surf, yes, but also a youthful, more open attitude," he explains. "There are 150 courses in the valley, many versions of the same thing. David builds true, linksstyle golf, and that's rare here."

Both men emphasize that Coral Mountain will embody barefoot luxury. Kidd explains, "We want it laidback—the exact opposite of uptight. While the club is private and membership will be tied to homeownership, the team's intention is an attitude that's welcoming, relaxed and human." Kidd nods to Nanea as his model for how a top-tier private club can still be gracious.

Hahn continues, "In Scotland, the pedestrians have the right of way. We'll have trails running through the property—bikes, hikers—and the attitude is: let the people go. We're all living here together."

Kidd relishes original works. Rolling Hills in Los Angeles and Rancho Santa Fe in San Diego may be notable recent SoCal efforts, but Coral Mountain will be, in his words, "a completely original build from a greenfield site in the desert." He credits Meriwether

with giving him neartotal creative runway. "If you hire Quentin Tarantino, you don't walk on set and tell him how to shoot the movie," he laughs. "They trust me to deviate from the script where it makes the art better."

Kidd is clear-eyed about the pressure that comes with delivering on time and on budget — the accountability factor. "There's a moment where the rubber hits the road and reality bites—by 9 a.m. tomorrow we have to be good with it," he says. That tension—between art and execution—is, for him, essential fuel. And being in the same time zone as the site helps. He says, "I can grab Starbucks in Bend and land in Thermal in two and a half hours to do a few scenes before lunch," reinforcing the screenwriting analogy.

Though the golf is Kidd's canvas, the surf component broadens the lifestyle and stretches the season. The surf lagoon—the largest pneumatic wave basin in the country—located a few miles from the course in Thermal, California, will be engineered, controllable, and inclusive.

Hahn says, "We can make a six-foot wave or a one-foot Waikiki wave. Anybody can learn—mom, dad, the kids—together." He calls it "democratized surf," devoid of sharks and shore break, where confidence builds session by session. Hahn points out that on a 95-degree May afternoon, that's a sweet feature. He says, "Just like Cabo—you hop in the ocean. Here, you hop in the wave, similar to what we've developed at Cabo Real Surf Club in Los Cabos, Mexico."

According to Hahn, Coral Mountain is built on three pillars: 1) golf 2) surf and 3) fitness/recovery. As part of the third pillar, Hahn describes a toolkit of hydrotherapy, light therapy, compression



Range Pavillion



Comfort Station

and mobility work, and potentially even hyperbaric chambers.

He continues, "We want members to perform at their best—however they define that." Expect purposebuilt pickleball and paddle, a skate park, a mountainbike pump track, movement studios, yoga decks tucked into the base of Coral Mountain, and a glamping zone. At low density tee times, kids will even get a window to play at a pop-up part-3.

Kidd's résumé hardly needs burnishing, as Bandon Dunes Golf Resort in Coos County, Oregon remains an eraredefining debut. But at this point of his life and career, Kidd is realistic about focusing on what he can control and eliminating the noise. He says, "I've learned to breathe deeply and let go."

Ask for a favorite among his roughly three dozen courses and he dodges the "they're all my children" cliché, then tells a story. In 2018, he flew his father—a Scottish greenkeeper—to play every one of his courses across the lower 48 - on his own plane as he's a licensed pilot. They returned home, poured the whisky, and Kidd pressed



Racquet Sports

for a verdict. His dad chose Gamble Sands in Brewster, Washington by a razorthin margin for its stunning views, appealing surfaces and joyful golf. The point, Kidd says, is that golfers don't need to hate one to love another. "This isn't binary. You can love them all."

Coral Mountain aims to be a fresh cut with a family-forward and modern cast. Hahn believes the timing and the land are singular. Kidd is energized by the blank canvas.

And the coach still wants rings. "We're the Patriots with six Super Bowls already," Kidd tells his team of 18 designers. "You want to be happy with that—or do you want seven?"

■ **Written by Alison Elsner**

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Surf Basin