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GOLF
LEGEND

THE SHARK

STILL ATTACKING LIFE

KEEPING UP WITH 63-YEAR-OLD GREG NORMAN IS AS CHALLENGING AS EVER, ALTHOUGH THE MULTI-BUSINESS ENTREPRENEUR SEES CALMER WATERS AHEAD.

WORDS Paul Prendergast

Of the many principles and values that Greg Norman documents in his 2006 autobiography *Greg Norman: The Way of the Shark*, it's perhaps the final listing, 'Attack Life', that best depicts the public persona of Norman throughout the years.

It's a mantra Norman has lived out in full, from teenage years surfing and diving, an aggressive approach to his golf that took him to two majors, 91 professional victories and 331 weeks atop the world rankings, to well-documented off-course pursuits that included fleets of fast cars, private jets, luxury yachts, 12,000-acre Colorado ranches and the unflagging energy he has tipped into creating a diverse and enduring business empire.

I spoke to Norman shortly after wife Kirsten ('Kiki') had landed in Cabo del Sol, Mexico, to oversee yet another golf course and real estate development bearing his name and brand. Much to Norman's delight, Kiki

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now works cheek and jowl alongside her husband handling the interior design for all Greg Norman-branded real estate.

The couple were only days removed from what Norman called a "very educational and informative" vacation to Israel, Norman's first visit to that country – which is hard enough in itself to believe, given the rampant, globetrotting life he's led since bursting on to the scene in the 1970s.

"My life is fantastic, quite honestly. My kids, grandkids and stepkids are all happy and healthy, we're fortunate to experience things that few people get to see and we do it in a very humble, understated way." Norman said.

"From the pure surface value of what life is delivering us, it's pretty darn good."

It's been 20 years since Norman, the Hall of Fame golfer, recorded his last four-round tournament victory and 10 since his magnificent performance at the 2008 Open Championship where, at age 53, and a card-carrying part-timer, Norman led the championship with nine to play before being trampled by playing partner Padraig Harrington's superlative finish.

That final win in 1998 was ironically in his own event – the Greg Norman International – at The Australian Golf Club in Sydney, featuring notables such as Jack Nicklaus, John Cook, Steve Elkington and Jose Maria Olazabal, who threw down the gauntlet to Norman with some final-hole theatrics.

Tournament golf thereafter started to become more and more spasmodic for him as business, family and, perhaps, desire, impacted on his willingness to put his body through the work he deemed necessary to perform creditably at the highest level.

When Norman turned 50 in February 2005 and became eligible to play on the Champions Tour, unlike for Bernhard Langer and others of Norman's generation, it failed to provide significant motivation. While he did play sporadically, Norman contested just 13 Senior events, the last of which was in 2012. It's safe to say that cue is now well and truly in the rack.

Greg and wife Kiki, who handles interior design for Greg Norman-branded real estate.



Greg Norman kisses the Claret Jug after winning the 1986 British Open Golf Championship at Turnberry in Scotland.



ABOVE: Breaking ground, Norman discusses with his team how he envisages shaping the land.



ABOVE: Norman making a special guest appearance at the National Restaurant Association show in Chicago to showcase his Signature Wagyu beef products.
LEFT: The rebranded Shark Golf merchandise.
RIGHT: Ready to race in the celebrity challenge at the 1987 Australian Grand Prix.
BELOW: Norman having a trial round at the soon to be opened KN Golf Links, Cam Ranh.



When, millions of balls on from those days on the range at Royal Queensland under the watchful eye of mentor Charlie Earp, after staying thousands of nights away from home and logging countless air miles, Norman decided it was time to walk, he walked. Other than the odd appearance at unofficial team events, he harbours absolutely no regrets about that decision.

“No, not one at all,” he laughed “My timing was right and how I did it was perfect.”

Norman established his company, Great White Shark Enterprises, while still highly active as a player, dabbling in apparel, course design, real estate development, restaurants and wine, among many business projects that caught his eye or were presented to him. Along the way, he sought the counsel of others within the game— Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer among them – and successful entrepreneurs and business executives, as he shaped his own business acumen, skills and identity.

Norman has long espoused the importance of “finding a niche and filling it” and the recently re-branded Greg Norman Company has added a variety of interests to its broad repertoire: eyewear, data analytics and even cable wakeboard parks in collaboration with son, Greg Norman Jr.

“Opportunities find me, too,” Norman added, “I watch, I listen and I’ve been very lucky to identify virgin space, identify the potential opportunities in that space and map out a business plan or game plan to go after it.

“If I see opportunities outside of golf, I go after them. I get awfully excited about that and there are certainly opportunities because of the foundation I’ve developed within my company that have given me the flexibility to move on them.”

Norman’s course design business endures as perhaps the most tangible evidence of his enormous impact and enduring legacy in the game. He may be better known to millennials as “The Wine Guy” or the guy that wrestled a chainsaw and survived, but a course design business he was reluctant to become involved in while playing (“I felt golf course design would be an unnecessary distraction”) continues to flourish into its third decade.

“It’s been a great business and journey,” he said. “I’ve been very passionate about that and I’ve got my wife involved now in projects, which I absolutely love.”

The recently announced KN Golf Links, Cam Ranh project will be Norman’s third course in Vietnam and his 104th creation in 34 countries worldwide. He’s highly enthusiastic about his latest ‘links-style’ design, due to open later this year on Vietnam’s stunning South Central Coast.

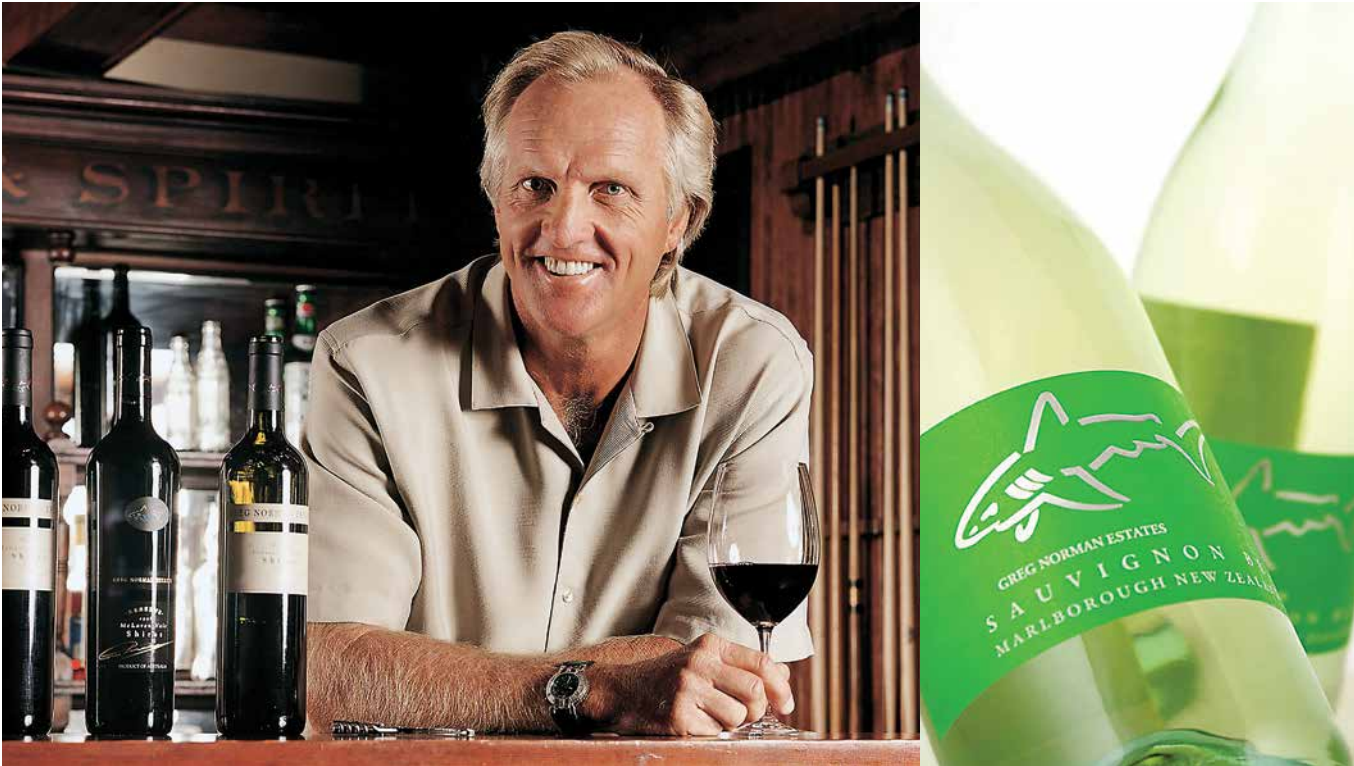
“The scale and natural topography of the property lends itself beautifully to a great variety of golf holes,” Norman said, “We’ve been very, very lucky in Vietnam, we’ve had some great coastlines to work with, magnificent sand dunes. I’ve worked extremely closely with the Vietnamese Government





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BELOW: Greg Norman Estate wines include a Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc.



on projects not just around golf course design, but growing the hospitality and tourism industries in Vietnam.

“The same can be said for relationships we’ve built in Australia, here in Mexico, in Jordan in the Middle East – even up in China.”

While Norman boasts involvement in close to 20 layouts in his homeland, the staggering gap in his design career might well be New Zealand. A Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc features proudly among Greg Norman Estates’ wine offerings, but despite many of his courses playing host to PGA Tour events and forming the centrepiece of dozens of profitable developments, Norman is yet to turn sod on a course design in Aotearoa.

“I’ve never been asked to do a project in New Zealand and I’m kind of shocked it hasn’t happened yet, to be honest. It’s unusual, given the number of quality projects we’ve completed, but if it happens, it happens, if it doesn’t, it doesn’t.

“I’ve been to New Zealand many, many times and I love New Zealand. So, of course, it would be really exciting if an opportunity were to arise.”

Ask the Greg Norman of today – a grandfather of two (with another eagerly awaited in July), a stepdad, husband, father – what his next five- to 10-year plan might entail and for the first time you get a real sense that he’s almost as hell bent on taking a foot off the pedal moving forward as he was on slamming it flat to the floor in years past.

Central to that ambition is positioning his business to the point where he is comfortable abdicating responsibility to his people to get on with it.

“Am I [still] involved in the minutia of things? Probably not on a lot of things, but I am involved in the minutia of where I want my company to go, be that with data analytics, telematics, through real estate or connectivity for golfers through golf carts; yes, I’m very much hands-on.

“I’m starting to get my company and the people within it in the right vein of where I want them to be. That’s going to allow me to step back a little. [My company], it’s my Holy Grail. I’ve nurtured it, I’ve protected it, I’ve built it, I’ve built my brand and reputation to a very solid level globally.

“When I get the right people around me and a few more, which I’m starting to do now, I can sit back a little more and become more of a chairman emeritus than anything else.

“I couldn’t have seen this happening a few years ago because it was a sports marketing company and I was the widget, I had to go do everything. Nowadays, I have trust in other people I can send to New York for meetings instead of me. My flight hours are the lowest they’ve ever been since I’ve had a plane. I’ve gone from 600 hours to under 200 hours a year and that’s exactly what I want.

“I love being home, I love being with my wife, I love spending time – peaceful time – love getting away.”

Don’t look now, but Greg Norman might be starting to attack life a little more from the slow lane than we’ve become accustomed to. □