

# How one well-travelled greenkeeper found a home at Simon's

After accumulating experience across clubs in varying environments, Reamonn O'Neill has spent the past 16 years shaping standards at one of Denmark's standout clubs

Reamonn O'Neill arrived at Simon's Golf Club in 2010 with the kind of CV that can only be built by saying yes to opportunity. By then, his career had already taken him through the United States, Austria and Denmark, with experience across tournament preparation, construction, grow-ins and resort operations.

At Simon's, that varied background has become the foundation for something more settled and sustained. Over 16 years as golf course superintendent, Reamonn has helped one of Denmark's standout venues attain ever-improving standards, from bringing newer greens up to the level of the original layout to bunker renovation, technology and the challenge of presenting summer greens year-round in the Danish climate.

The experiences he accumulated before arriving at Simon's still inform the way he operates. The long days in America, tournament preparation at TPC Sawgrass, construction experience at Oak Hill, Royal Liverpool and the grow-

in at Lübker all added something to the way he thinks, manages

and solves problems. For Reamonn, greenkeeping is so much more than a job.

"This is not what I do. It's who I am," he said. "If you ask me who I am, I'm the golf course superintendent at Simon's. Every little bit out there, at some point, I've had a hand in it."

Opened in 1993, Simon's was the vision of owner Arne Simonsen, known by many as Simon. Designed originally by Martin Hawtree, with a further nine holes later added to create three interlinking loops, it has developed into one of Denmark's leading golf facilities, staging events across the Challenge Tour, Ladies European Tour, men's European Tour and senior tour.

For Reamonn, the attraction was immediate. Simon's had history, ambition, strong infrastructure and a course with obvious potential. After years spent moving between clubs, resorts and grow-ins, it offered a place where he could apply everything he had learned and build something over time.

His connection with greenkeeping goes back to childhood. His older brother, 10 years his senior, had started an apprenticeship at Caldry, and Reamonn's earliest memories of the job involve tagging along as a child, riding around on a golf cart and helping with small tasks.

Growing up in West Kirby, he later spent school days passing Royal Liverpool and imagining that one day he might work there. By his teens, greenkeeping was already the only career he had any real intention of pursuing.

"I never really thought about doing anything else," he said. "Back then you either went to college or university, or you picked up an apprenticeship. The apprenticeship was always regarded as the entry level."

He began formally in the profession in 1996 with an apprenticeship at Wallasey. The money was limited, but Reamonn saw the bigger picture. Completing his NVQ Level 2 would open doors.

One of those doors led to Carden Park, where he worked under Andy Campbell. Moving from a small links team

to a major resort with two 18-hole courses, an academy, hotel and large maintenance operation was a culture shock, but it proved formative.

"Andy was very keen to encourage greenkeepers who wanted to make it as a profession," Reamonn said. "He pushed you to take opportunities and make the most of them, and he always left the door open to return. Whenever I left, there was always going to be a job for me if I came back."

That backing enabled Reamonn to join the Ohio State University turfgrass programme in 2000, beginning with a summer placement at Westchester Country Club that April. Joe Alonzi was superintendent there, while his son, Chris, was serving as head assistant. It was a formative introduction to American greenkeeping, placing Reamonn in an environment where long hours, exacting standards and the influence of senior figures quickly made an impression. Chris later became superintendent at Woodbridge

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Shipco Masters - Simons Golf

Country Club in Connecticut and invited Reamonn back on a second visa in March 2002, asking him to work as his assistant through his first season in charge.

From there, he moved to TPC Sawgrass, where he encountered an entirely different working culture. Overtime was discouraged and the environment contrasted sharply with the intensity of New York, but he again progressed quickly. During The Players Championship, he was trusted to cut the back nine pins, a responsibility that still stands out in his memory.

"Even to this day, that's still monumental in the level of responsibility," he said. "For a young foreign greenkeeper, that was quite something."

The next move was Oak Hill Country Club, where he worked under Paul B Latshaw and sought more construction experience. Again, the experience reinforced the value of demanding environments and high standards.

"I've worked with some of the

highest-achieving superintendents in the country," he said. "These guys brought in super assistants and beat them into being superintendents. It was almost like a military mentality. You were all in it together."

Periods back at Carden Park were followed by time in Connecticut, study at Ohio State, a spell in Austria and construction work with Souters Sports, building golf greens and bowling greens. Then came the chance he had wanted since childhood: Royal Liverpool.

Following The Open, Reamonn joined the team under Craig Gilholm. For someone who had grown up dreaming of working at Hoylake, it was a significant personal milestone. It also provided another reminder that prestige does not remove day-to-day practical challenges.

"You think Royal Liverpool and you think, 'Wow', but you learn when you're in the industry that everything is not always as you might imagine," he said. "The irrigation system was a nightmare at the time, before they

renovated it. I pretty much strapped myself to a hose for a couple of months."

From there, Denmark entered the picture. Reamonn was approached about joining the grow-in at Lübker Golf Resort, a major project that opened to immediate acclaim. The course was ranked number one in Denmark and among the leading courses in continental Europe, giving Reamonn another substantial project to add to his CV.

"It was a really interesting project," he said. "Extremely long hours, but the product and the course we managed to present were to a very high standard."

That success led to Simon's Golf Club. From the beginning, Simon's had been built with ambition. Its USGA-specification greens, Rain Bird irrigation system and overall construction standards reflected the owner's desire to create one of Denmark's leading golf facilities.

"Simon was very much driven by wanting his course to be the best,"

## Career timeline

- 2000: Westchester Country Club, international intern OSU
- 2000-2001: TPC Sawgrass, international intern OSU
- 2001: Oak Hill Country Club, international intern OSU
- 2002: Woodbridge Country Club, assistant superintendent
- 2004-2005: Golfclub St. Pölten, assistant superintendent
- 2005-2006: Souter Sports, foreman
- 2006-2007: Royal Liverpool Golf Club, senior assistant
- 2007-2010: Lübker Golf A/S, senior assistant golf course superintendent
- 2010-present: Simon's Golf Club, golf course superintendent



Reamonn said. "Even the level the course was built to in 1993 was insane."

For Reamonn, who arrived in March 2010, there was meaningful work ahead, particularly in bringing the newer C loop into line with the original 18. He describes those early years as a practical challenge.

"You look at the issues you have, then you work out how to prioritise them," he said. "What do you need to do to get the best out of the course? How qualified is the team? How keen are they? How reliable are they? What do you need to do to build a stronger team?"

The C loop greens required sustained work. A more radical approach may have produced a faster reset, but the club wanted to keep the course in play. Reamonn and the team therefore worked through the process while maintaining access for golfers, using pedestrian grading and aeration to rebuild performance over time.

By August 2011, those greens were

performing at the level required for the club championship.

"It took a season and a half to get them dialled in," he said. "We succeeded, but it was definitely the harder way to do it."

Those early improvements set the tone for the years that followed. The course has improved year on year, supported by consistent investment and a private ownership model that has allowed decisions to be made directly with the owner and family.

Machinery investment became a rolling conversation, replacing the older practice of renewing a whole fleet every six or seven years. Reamonn would identify what the team needed, explain what each item would enable them to achieve and build progress through repeated annual improvement.

That willingness to keep pushing remains visible. In 2020, during the Covid period, Simon's renovated all 27 holes, installing capillary concrete, reshaping bunkers and refreshing the course without rebuilding greens.

The work was overseen by Caspar Grauballe, who had previously been involved with the newer nine holes, with approval from Hawtree.

More recently, the club invested in 15 Belrobotics robotic mowers to cut fairways and semi-rough, covering around 40 hectares. For a superintendent who spent the early part of his career chasing new experiences, the ongoing appetite for progress at Simon's has been a major reason to stay.

"You could choose to move somewhere else for a new challenge," he said. "But the course you're at is embracing modern technology and still looking for ways to improve every year. As long as there's forward momentum and the interest and passion are still there in the background, you wouldn't think to look anywhere else."

Family life has also rooted him in Denmark. Reamonn and his wife, Caraline, arrived at Simon's in March 2010, and their first son was born two months later. Their second son

followed in 2012. Caraline has been a constant support throughout his career journey and has shared parts of that working life too, having worked alongside him at both Lübker and Simon's. Both boys have grown up in Denmark, which Reamonn describes as an "absolutely incredible country" in which to live and raise children.

The place has also worked its way under his skin professionally. He lives on site at the maintenance facility, which means the job is never truly out of sight or mind.

"I'm never off," he said. "But I think most greenkeepers feel connected to the site they're managing. You are constantly looking for ways to

improve yourself, the course and the team."

The team has been one of the defining parts of his time at Simon's. Many staff have arrived without formal greenkeeping qualifications or previous golf course experience, making training and culture critical. Seasonal staff are often sourced locally, sometimes through strong relationships with the job centre, and those who fit the environment are encouraged to return.

For Reamonn, creating a good workplace is central to building course standards.

"You bring guys in and invest your time into them," he said. "You create

this team where everybody looks after each other and everybody is keen to provide the best conditions for the membership and the golfers.

"You can't do it on your own. I spend a great deal of my day managing my team, but it pays back tenfold. The team I have is extremely strong."

That sense of responsibility also connects back to the people who shaped him.

Reamonn recalls Joe Alonzi speaking with pride about former staff who had gone on to become course managers, and he now feels much the same when he sees people he has supported take the next step in their own careers.



TPC Sawgrass

### Reamonn's tips for greenkeepers looking overseas

- Be willing to step into demanding environments, because the hardest experiences often produce the fastest development
- Seek out different types of work rather than repeating the same experience in a different location
- Learn from every manager, including the ones whose strengths are different from your own
- Treat travel as professional education, because working in another culture teaches far more than visiting it
- Build skills with purpose, so that when the right long-term opportunity arrives, you are ready to make the most of it



"To be able to help and support them is a great honour," he said.

Reamonn inherited a group that had endured difficult periods and was, in his words, "a little bit demoralised". Some staff were nervous about being near members because of the scrutiny that came with course condition issues. Rebuilding confidence became as important as improving surfaces.

The private ownership structure at Simon's is distinctive.

There is a club board and a greens chairman, but course maintenance decisions ultimately sit with the ownership.

Members, naturally, still have views and expectations, and Reamonn has

had to learn how to manage those relationships over time.

"You don't really know how you're going to deal with the politics or the challenges until you come across them," he said. "Everything is adaptation. What's put in front of you? How do you work your way through it?"

Denmark has brought challenges familiar to many in the UK, with added local intensity. Simon's is one of the few courses in Denmark that remains open on summer greens throughout the year, a significant selling point for membership and a demanding agronomic commitment. Reamonn keeps detailed weather records, and the shift towards more extreme patterns has been clear. Drought, high temperatures, prolonged snow cover and changing disease pressure have all become part of the modern reality.

"Every month seems to be another record breaker," he said. "Whether it's lack of water, high temperatures or something else, it's crystal clear."

Dollar spot, which was not a major issue at Simon's three years ago, has become an increasing concern. Pesticide restrictions add another layer of complexity. The club's commitment to year-round summer greens means winter wear must be managed carefully, especially when play continues during periods of limited growth. From November to April one recent season, Simon's recorded around 5,000 rounds despite being closed for two months under snow.

"Providing summer regulation greens year-round in the Danish climate is definitely my biggest challenge," Reamonn said.

Yet the challenge remains part of the appeal. Sixteen years in, Reamonn says his motivation has grown rather than faded.

"Every year it gets more and more under your skin," he said. "You've eliminated an awful lot of the problems along the way, so it has only got better. The membership is really strong. You have members who have known you for 16 years and seen you progress. They know your children.

"You feel part of the family. You're maintaining something that belongs to them and you care about it as if it was your own."

For greenkeepers looking at Reamonn's route, the obvious thread

is travel. His career has been shaped by saying yes to opportunities, even when they involved uncertainty, hard work and unfamiliar cultures. He is careful to acknowledge that travelling for work is more complicated now than when he started out, but his underlying advice remains clear.

"I would suggest to anybody to embrace the opportunity to travel for work," he said. "The world is an education in itself, but to travel to different cultures and work in different countries is quite unique. It's very different to going on holiday and it opens your eyes to many opportunities."


That belief has only been reinforced by what Reamonn has seen around the world. Wherever his career has taken him, he has found UK-trained greenkeepers are held in high regard, respected for their work ethic, technical grounding and willingness to keep pushing towards the next stage of their careers.

He has never viewed his early movement from job to job as restlessness. Each step had a purpose. He wanted tournament experience, construction experience, grow-in experience, resort experience and exposure to different management structures. Those pieces eventually formed the foundation that allowed him to settle and thrive when the right superintendent role came along.

"I moved around to gain the skills," he said. "I've worked grow-ins, tournaments, small 18-hole links courses and big resorts. The travelling and gaining experience helped build the foundation to make me a good course manager eventually."

That foundation is now being expressed in one place. Simon's has provided Reamonn with the challenge, support and sense of belonging to turn a varied international CV into a long-term body of work. The young greenkeeper who once left home to test himself in America is now the long-serving superintendent of one of Denmark's leading golf clubs, still looking a year ahead and still seeing the course as an extension of himself.

"You never finish," he said. "You're constantly looking for what you can do next year that will benefit the course. Most greenkeepers are that way. No matter where you are, you're a year in the future." **GI**



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