



HOTEL MAGNATE MANCHESTER: SIX FEET UNDER OVER THE MEADOWS GOLF COURSE

Seeking dirt on San Diego hotel entrepreneur Doug Manchester? Look no further than his recently acquired golf resort in Del Mar Mesa.

Manchester has applied for a city permit to bury him and four family members in a plot of flat grass covered land on the highest point of The Meadows golf course, overlooking chaparral covered canyons and the ocean—the ultimate nineteenth hole.

There were a lot of worried souls who shuddered when Manchester Resorts bought the private golf course and adjacent five star hotel site last January for \$35 million, fearing that the guy who walled off the bay downtown with giant steel hotels might shift design course from class to crass.

Conservationists fretted that the litigious developer would fail to respect the acres of endangered habitat surrounding and winding through the golf course. He recently lost a gazillion dollar project in Oceanside at the hands of the environmentally restrictive California Coastal Commission.

Doug Manchester is not, as far as I know, a card carrying Sierra Club member. In fact, the club worked overtime to help kill his 425 acre El Corazon Oceanside resort project. They claimed it would block public access to the coast.

He has successfully sued government agencies, like the San Diego Port Commission, and former business partners when deals went sour. The good people of Oceanside are defending their public treasury after the death of El Corazon, for example.

But, his intention to occupy a piece of gnatcatcher country for eternity could be a good thing if he can get into the swing of Del Mar Mesa's semi-rural and habitat friendly sensibility—pride of ownership, and all that.

On the conservation side, he is not off to a good start. The proposed Manchester final resting place is already covered in water hungry manicured sod, which means oodles of pesticides oozing into the wildlife corridors. There is a picnic table, but no recycling trash can. I'd suggest a better set designer before city planners get a look at it.

It also appears that several upcoming upscale Pardee Homes estate houses will be neighbors, which gives Pardee's "Welcome Home" billboard along I-5 a macabre new meaning.

Mr. Manchester is well advised to start his quest at the relatively young age of 62. He is likely to reach the outer limits of his genetic clock by the time he conquers the arcane labyrinth of government regulatory agencies involved in approving nontraditional burials.

And, a strange zoning quirk belonging exclusively to the Del Mar Mesa area, which includes The Meadows, could force him to go to the ballot for approval.

That is because Del Mar Mesa is the last area in San Diego remaining under rules passed by voters in 1985 which tightly restrict the type of development allowed in the so-called Future Urbanizing Area and requires a vote of the people for any change.

Cemeteries are out, along with nuclear power plants, sewage treatment plants and hotels. In fact, it took a vote of the people in 1996 to approve The Meadows resort hotel. The ballot measure passed only because it provided for a room fee dedicated to buying sensitive open space for the public.

Ironically, it was Doug Manchester who bankrolled the recent ballot measure requiring a two-thirds ballot vote before the city can raise taxes on hotel rooms. He knows what going to the ballot means. Picture cable TV campaign ads during *Six Feet Under*. Immortality often comes with a hefty price tag.

The Manchesters can argue that their golf green is not a cemetery because the State of California defines a cemetery as six gravesites or more. Pity the poor Development Services planner who must make this call.

In the best of circumstances the Manchesters will have to face the City Planning Commission and likely the County Health Department, not the friendliest places for anomalies.

But then there is always appeal to a more receptive City Council. The Manchester family gives lots and often during and after campaign season—the District One Councilman got plenty during his first year in office.

If successful, the family could start a trend. John Moores might be buried under the Petco Ballpark's Park at the Park, if it is ever built. Corky Macmillan could be interred in the Naval Training Center historic center, if it survives redevelopment. And Alex Spanos could end up under an end zone in some stadium somewhere.

One thing is certain in the uncertain future of The Meadows: Doug Manchester's choice for a final resting has a view to die for.