2011 Old Tom Morris Award winner Nick Price has left behind his days of high-level championship golf for something more rewarding: family and friends.

Seth Jones
Jorge has been holding out.

Nick Price has been on the ground for only a few minutes, his private jet having just arrived in Cancun. And he wants answers. Jorge Huerta, the project manager for Price’s newest course, Grand Coral, drives his rugged Jeep toward the course.

“What is this that Wayne has been telling me, Jorge?” Price asks. “Are you holding out on us here?”

Huerta turns and looks to the back seat, over the tops of his Oakley sunglasses, giving Price a serious look.

“You’ve got a new fish taco place but you haven’t taken us there yet?” Price demands.

Huerta laughs, putting his eyes back on the road. He tells Price that this new place is his wife’s favorite place to get fish tacos.

“OK, then, that settles it,” Price says. “Once we’re done at the golf course, you’re taking us.”

The quest for the best fish taco in Mexico is one of Nick Price’s few concerns. There’s real, multimillion dollar business to tend to, but Price doesn’t consider it a concern so much as he considers it a privilege. His relaxed demeanor relaxes those around him. Once he gets to the course he’s all business, but even then, he’s more a people person than a businessman.

“I hate using the term ‘risk/reward.’ It’s more of a challenge. You dangle a carrot in front of the golfer — you tempt him, lure him, to have a go at a par 5.” Price’s home course, McArthur GC in Hobe Sound, Fla., was co-designed in 2000 by Price and fellow Old Tom Morris Award winner Tom Fazio.

Photo by Arthur Cicconi, Golf Shots Inc.
“The intensity that I played at, the level that I played at, for a fire, six, maybe seven-year period, was very difficult,” Price says. “(Golf course design) is less intense to me, in that you have time. It’s not a do-or-die situation. It’s much easier to have fun.”

It’s much easier to think about tacos.

Well-seasoned choice
Nick Price, a member of the 2003 class of the World Golf Hall of Fame, is one of the most decorated golfers of this era. From 1992 to 1994, when at his peak, there was no argument that he was the greatest golfer in the world. He won 16 of the 54 tournaments he entered, including three majors — the 1992 PGA Championship, the 1994 British Open Championship and the 1994 PGA Championship.

Price now adds to his trophy case the 2011 Old Tom Morris Award, given annually by GCSAA to an individual who “through a continuing lifetime commitment to the game of golf has helped to mold the welfare of the game in a manner and style exemplified by Old Tom Morris.”

“There’s not a nicer guy in the world. He’s also one of the soundest ball-strikers I’ve ever known,” says fellow World Golf Hall of Fame member (2002) and Old Tom Morris Award winner (1997) Ben Crenshaw.

“GCSAA know what he’s about and what kind of person he is. This is a wonderful, well-seasoned choice. And he’s really going to appreciate this award, too.”

GCSAA president, James R. Fitzroy, CGCS, says he could hear the sincerity in Price’s voice when he was informed of winning the 2011 award.

“He was extremely appreciative — it was like I was talking to an old friend,” says Fitzroy, who had never previously spoken with Price. “He told me how appreciative he was of our members, how they make the game better. I honestly think he was a bit humbled.

“I think (Price) has the qualities that exemplify what we look for in an Old Tom Morris Award winner,” Fitzroy continues.

Price has seen and played golf courses all over the world, making it a natural for him to throw his hat into the golf course design arena.

“A dog’s life
Price turned professional in 1977, notching his first win outside of Africa when he won the 1980 Swiss Open. Price burst onto the international scene when he finished the 1982 Open Championship at 1 over par (285), one shot behind winner Tom Watson. It was only Price’s third Open Championship.

The next year, Price went 10 under to win the World Series of Golf, a wire-to-wire win against the likes of Jack Nicklaus and Hale Irwin. Price didn’t win on the PGA Tour again for eight years, but when he did break through, he went on the aforementioned run of 16 wins in 54 tournaments, all in a three-year span.

Price is now a popular figure on the Champions Tour. He played in 17 tournaments this season, winning two and collecting $1.4 million in prize money. His playing schedule is dictated by his children’s schedule, not wanting to be away from home when they’re on summer or spring break. “Those six weeks are golden,” he says. Price and his wife, Sue, have three children, Gregory (a freshman at the University of Miami), Robyn and Kimberly (both in high school).

“I’d probably play in 40 tournaments a year if they were all close to home,” Price says. “I don’t like travelling great distances anymore. It’s the hotels and the travelling that get you after a while. It’s a dog’s life. If you didn’t have a passion for playing golf, you wouldn’t do it.”

Price has another passion for golf that goes beyond chasing the ball down fairways. He’s also a student of the game, and that’s what led him to create his new passion in golf, Nick Price Golf Course Design.

Hiking boots
Price has seen and played golf courses all over the world, making it a natural for him to throw his hat into the golf course design arena. He has a dedication to the game of golf; an appreciation of the history and the traditions of the game; and he’s always done exceptional charity work to benefit society.”

— James R. Fitzroy, CGCS

Left: “If the learned more on this project than any other project I’ve ever worked on,” Dean Branthwaite, project designer at Price at Grand Coral. “He has a way of talking about golf, about how to play golf...he just had a way of explaining it so it makes sense.”

Right: Price asked Branthwaite to add elevation to the fairway in 2011. “It’s hard to affect the golfer a better view of the green and surrounding bunkers.”

“Dad and I have always been good friends. We actually built lots of golf courses together.”

— Nick Price, 2011 Old Tom Morris Award winner.
He's now designed golf courses all over the world, including courses in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Europe, and in the United States. The manager of Nick Price Golf Course Design is Wayne Branthwaite, a South African who was a superintendent early in his career. In fact, Branthwaite was at one time a Certified Golf Course Superintendent. After building a few courses in Asia, Branthwaite joined Gary Player's design firm for a few years before being hired by Price full-time.

Together the duo forms the core of Nick Price Golf Course Design, and if you hire them for a job, expect to see both. “Every golf course I'm going to do, I'm going to be involved in a big way,” Price says. “Only time will tell how good I am, but I'd rather build 60 or 70 courses throughout my life and they all be good ones, all be courses I've been involved with, as opposed to building 300 courses where I couldn't tell you what the seventh hole is on a particular course.”

And bring your hiking boots because design business.

with each property they take on. Price and Branthwaite like to walk the holes as they're in the process of being shaped. It allows them to get a better look at what is going on with the property, Price says. And, he says as he smiles, it also helps them have the onlookers behind so they can focus on the task at hand.

“Price is one of the few designers who still will walk the entire review, giving you so much insight from a player’s perspective,” says Huerta, who has been on the Price design team since 2008.

“This is priceless for us who stay behind to build his course. In the golf course construction industry there is an understanding that golf course design plans are only conceptual and not literal. When the designer gives you the tools to understand his concept early in the process, this becomes a win-win for everyone involved — designer, construction team and owners. The designer gets his desired course, the construction team has a clear understanding of what they are to do and the owners get lots of savings in their reduced cost of reshaping and moving dirt twice.”

Price is especially proud of his team and Grand Coral and the results they're seeing, saying he'd “do another project with them in a heartbeat.” He's getting the best out of everyone, it seems, because the crew has such a strong desire to impress Price, who takes so much care to describe his vision to them and make them feel like an asset to the team.

Take the time Price described in great detail why he wasn't satisfied with the slope of the No. 8 green. Shaper Dean Bedwell listened intently to Price as he talked about angles, and the game of the average golfer, and how what he was seeing wasn't what he wanted to see. Bedwell told Price he could fix it right then and there if he gave him an hour to work on it. Price told him that wasn't necessary, but Bedwell, wanting to impress Price on one of his first visits to the course, insisted.

Bedwell chuckles as he reflects on it now, but it wasn't long into that hour that he started second-guessing his ability to deliver on his promise. Price, Huerta and Branthwaite came back after an hour to look at the green.

“Nick looks at the green, and then he looks at me. He says, ‘Were you not listening to me? Do you have any idea what I want?’” Bedwell says. After a panicked second, Bedwell looked over and saw Huerta and Branthwaite covering their faces to hide their laughter. “Then Nick throws his hands in the air and says, ‘I’m kidding, it’s perfect!’ I finally started breathing again.”

“Every golf course I'm going to do, I'm going to be involved in a big way,” Price says. “Only time will tell how good I am, but I'd rather build 60 or 70 courses throughout my life and they all be good ones, all be courses I've been involved with, as opposed to building 300 courses where I couldn't tell you what the seventh hole is on a particular course.”

And bring your hiking boots because the two like to get up close and personal
Practicality over beauty

Price says that his design style, first and foremost, is that of a traditionalist. "I hope when people play my golf courses, they will see that a lot of thought has gone into it, and also a lot of passion," he says as he walks the course.

Price likes to think from the perspective of the casual golfer, and how he or she would play a course. It's not hard for him to switch his brain from his game to that of the 18-handicapper, he says.

"I play with amateurs in pro-ams every week. I get to see more amateur golf than a lot of the other designers," he says.

Because of this, holes like the famed 17th at TPC Sawgrass, for example, leave him scratching his head.

"There's no strategy involved in that hole — you either hit that shot or you reload," Price explains. "You know what the worst thing you can do to an amateur is? Not let him get off the tee. He wants to play; he doesn't want to keep dropping balls all over the place."

Price has kept the course at Grand Coral relatively flat. It wouldn't be believable, he says, if he added a lot of undulations to the fairways because the surrounding land is clearly flat. The real difficulty in this course is going to be when the wind blows in off the nearby Caribbean.

"As a player before an architect, I look at the practicality of a golf course before the beauty, whereas an architect will always go with beauty over practicality," Price says. "Some architects will say, 'Oh, this looks great, let's put the tee over here.' Well, guess what? You can't play that shot."

"I've always believed if you just hit the ball straight, even if you hit it along the ground, it's better than hitting it hard with a big slice," Price says. "To me, that's what golf is all about. It's why the links courses are so great."

He likes to have subtle slopes in his greens, a point he's stressed to Bedwell.

"I've always said the hardest part in the world is from 6 feet, and you don't know if it's right lip or left lip. And wherever you decide, the ball breaks outside the hole," Price says. "When you've got a sharp slope, it's a lot easier to see which way the ball is going to break. All you've got to do is get the right speed."

For all his golf design philosophies, there seems to be one recurrent theme: Price wants golfers to have fun.

"This course is going to be fun to play. That's what I want more than anything," Price says. "A guy finishes playing at 5 o'clock, he's got an hour and a half of sunlight left, and he says to his wife or his buddy, 'Let's go play another nine holes.' That's the biggest compliment anyone can pay me when they play one of my courses."

Just being a human being

If Price is known for one thing on Tour, it's for his good nature.

In 2002, Price won the first-ever ASAP Sports/Jim Murray Award from the Golf Writers Association of America. The award is given every year to a player for "consistent and thoughtful cooperation and accommodation to the media." In other words, it disregards scoring average and focuses on smiling average. Later that year the PGA Tour honored Price with the Payne Stewart Award for his "respect for the game, his professional conduct and his commitment to charities."

"He has this very infectious personality — people are just drawn to him," Crenshaw says. "He always has a big smile on his face, and he's a great storyteller. It's just been a pleasure to know him and be around him."

"He's the nicest guy, and he's as good of an ambassador of the game as you could have," Deariso says. "Me having been able to work with him from the golf course maintenance side, it's just made me think that way even more strongly."

Deariso sees Price at least weekly because Price is a part owner of McArthur Golf Club, and hence, Deariso's boss. But it's not just lip service from the 13-year GCSAA member. Price has a loyalty to the superintendent.

"The only time you're really able to tell how a guy is going to adapt to your club is to give him time," Price says. "Let a superintendent do his own thing without micromanaging. There's no way that any member — unless he's with a turf nursery or is an agronomist or is a Ph.D. — is going to tell us what to do with the greens. That's his expertise. If I had to do another club and I found out it had a greens committee, it would be my No. 1 priority to disband it."

Letting Deariso use his expertise freely has worked well at McArthur. Many Tour pros use the course as a practice facility based on the ferocious green speeds on the
Price's good nature extends well beyond the game of golf. Having lost his father at age 18, Price and his wife are generous supporters of numerous charities, especially those that help children who have lost one or both parents.

"If you've had the good side of life, it's good to help out people who have had the bad side of life," Price says of his charitable work. "Especially kids. Adults have the opportunity to get themselves out of a hole. But kids, when they're born in a situation... There just aren't many people up there on the edge of their seat.

The family that eats together... It's a strong human being, you know?"

The family that eats together

A favorite part of Price's day is sitting down and enjoying a meal with his "mates," whether it's an expensive Thai restaurant on the water in Playa Del Carmen, or a grilled Panini with Darnell and his assistants in the maintenance facility at McArthur.

Back at Grand Coral, it's time to take a break for lunch. Huerta leads up Price and Beauchaine in his Jeep. Bedwell and course photographer Adriana Huerta, Jorge's daughter and a high school senior, follow Destination? The best fish tacos in Mexico.

It's an unusual cast of characters at the cantina: represented are four different countries, 36 years separate oldest from youngest, two arrived in a private Cessna 172, Bedwell and his wife Branthwaite in his Jeep. The cantina's owner is a former wrestler, and it's popular with the course photographer Adriana Huerta, Jorge's daughter and a high school senior, who accompanied Price to the beach club. The family that eats together... It's a strong human being, you know?"

The topic of conversation quickly turns to Bedwell, the shaper extraordinary, and his next job. The only problem is Bedwell doesn't have one lined up yet.

Price assures him a man of his talents won't go looking for work for long. Bedwell, not quite convinced, mentions something about a job possibility in Korea, before acquiescing that "something will come up."

Huerta recalls the first lunch he ever had with Price. It was Price's first visit to the course. In Huerta's experience, designers expect — or maybe demand — to get the royal treatment when it comes to lunch. So the project manager arranged for gourmet meal at the beach club. Then Price blew him away when he said, "Let's go get some tacos."

Huerta went out on a limb and took him to a local dive that had a Mexican wrestler theme. The dive has since gone out of business. Apparently luchadores — Mexican professional wrestlers — don't conjure up a strong desire for tacos.

"The meal was all about the company at hand, sharing life and golf stories that had everyone there on the edge of their seat," Huerta recalls. "Nick has been the only player/designer who has engaged me in a five-minute conversation about my family. He was not only asking me about my family, he was showing me he cared about me as a person and not just as someone who works on one of his courses."

The first round of fish tacos arrive, and the group dives in. Requests for more fresh salsa come quickly as the current supply is scooped into individual tortillas. The group is jovial as the tacos have exceeded their lofty expectations. Another round is ordered.

It's an unusual cast of characters at the cantina: represented are four different countries, 36 years separate oldest from youngest, two arrived in a private Cessna Citation, one is a World Golf Hall of Fame member, and one (Bedwell) doesn't remember getting his most recent tattoo.

And yet, to the eyes of an outsider, this could be a family reunion.

Price says, "You write a thank-you note when it's justified."

“Every golf course I’m going to do, I’m going to be involved in a big way. Only time will tell how good I am, but I’d rather build 60 or 70 courses throughout my life and they all be good ones, all be courses I’ve been involved with, as opposed to building 300 courses where I couldn’t tell you what the seventh hole is on a particular course.”

— Nick Price