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# the great unknowns

Three golf companies on the rise

by Thomas Dunne

**T**he history of the golf club is rich with stories about engineers puttering in garages and testing quirky backyard inventions in the hopes of discovering the next big thing. But for every Karsten Solheim with his famous Anser putter, there are hundreds whose rush to gold does not pan out. So it is unsurprising that upstart equipment makers are sometimes regarded with suspicion. Nevertheless great designs still rise to the top, and several smaller outfits are unveiling new equipment of great artistry and precision. Here are three companies to keep an eye on—they all place a premium on first-rate performance and craftsmanship, producing golf clubs that would not look out of place in the bags of top pros.

In the flatstick department, **Gauge Design Golf** produces some of the most stylish putters in the business. Founder David Whitlam spent several years making inroads on the Japanese Tour, producing limited edition custom lines in a dazzling array of head shapes, colors and finishes. Now his sights are lined up on the American market, where he intends to compete with the likes of Scotty Cameron and Bob Bettinardi. Gauge Design putters speak for themselves in both performance and aesthetics. Handmade in the U.S. and milled from solid billets of mild steel, the three major releases this year are the J-Spec, a superbly well balanced backweighted model; the GAA Series, in the mode of the Anser-style blade; and the M Series, a line of mallets with a wide range of hosel configurations. A growing PGA Tour presence that boasts Shaun Micheel and Jesper Parnevik as well as a partnership with top instructor Jim McLean are signs that the company is on a roll. [gagedesigns.com](http://gagedesigns.com).

For precision short-game weaponry, Oregon based **Scratch Golf** is a company on the rise. Founders Ari Techner and Jeff McCoy noticed that, despite the trend toward forged irons, the vast majority of golfers today still play cast wedges—exactly the clubs that require the most feel. They researched what kinds of wedge grinds work for every type of swing—from “diggers” to “sweepers” and everything in between. The result is an extensive line of handmade custom wedges. After being forged at the Ishihara foundry in Japan from 1018 carbon steel—the softest steel in the industry—the wedges are then formed by hand with three distinct toe shapes, countless sole grinds and distinctive finish options ranging from satin chrome to brushed nickel. Although off-the-rack models are available, the company’s comprehensive fitting, which can be done either in person or by phone, helps golfers determine precisely the custom wedge they need to gain an edge around the greens. [sgolfclubs.com](http://sgolfclubs.com).

Since hitting the U.S. market earlier this year, **Nakashima Golf** has made remarkable strides towards earning a spot on the short list of the best metal wood manufacturers in the world. The debut line consists of the NP-1 driver, NP-1 fairway woods and the NP-R utility club. All feature high end construction techniques and a distinctive look that is at once classic and modern. Nakashima promises its clubs will play true to loft, using a precision CNC milling procedure many other companies find too time consuming. Forged titanium face inserts provide uniform smoothness across the club face, creating maximum energy transfer to the ball and a soft, solid feel at impact. [nakashimagolf.com](http://nakashimagolf.com) •

