



An ode to the greatest golf visionary who ever lived.

Jim Nantz

A family connection to Pebble's founder

IN 2012, shortly after we moved into our home at Pebble Beach, I spent a morning strolling about the colonnade at The Lodge, getting a feel for the surroundings. I walked into my favorite shop, a golf antiquity and collectibles store called Golf Links to the Past, one of the best on the planet. ▶ After exchanging greetings with the man in charge, Kip Opgrand, I glanced at his offerings. Within seconds, my eyes fell on a large painting propped on the floor. Moving closer, I saw it was a stunning landscape of a scene at Pebble Beach, with a hint of Stillwater Cove peeking through. It was enormous, and I immediately envisioned it hanging on the wall of our dining room. ▶ “Guess who the painter is?” Kip said. I stooped down and saw in the corner the signature, *SFBM, 1968*. I bolted upright. “That’s right, it’s by Sam Morse,” Kip said, smiling. “It’s an original. It just came in yesterday.”

Within 30 minutes—Kip and I hadn’t even settled on a price—the painting was mounted on a golf cart and being driven slowly to my residence, where it fit the dimensions of the wall to within an inch. If that sounds like a reckless way to buy a rare piece of art, understand that Samuel Finley Brown Morse, the founder of Pebble Beach, is to me the greatest golf visionary who ever lived. We’ll all get to see the fruits of his vision in June when the U.S. Open is played at Pebble Beach. But Morse also was behind the creation of Cypress Point, Spyglass Hill and Monterey Peninsula. He didn’t just foresee and develop the incredible courses, he laid out the entire area.

Born in 1885, Morse moved to California in 1907, and in 1916, he was hired to manage the Pacific Improvement Company, which owned 28,000 acres of land in the area—including what is now my property. Morse yearned to buy the land and ultimately obtained the \$1.3 million in financing. The Pebble Beach Golf Links opened in 1919, the year Prohibition was ratified.



▶ **SAM MORSE** A portrait by Jesse Corsaut, now owned by the author.

The 100th anniversary of the first round played there was in February, and a large bust of Morse resides near the first tee, commemorating the man who died in 1969.

My 2012 purchase of that painting by Morse was the first of several efforts to keep his presence alive, for my family and guests at my home. In 2014, when my wife, Courtney, was expecting our daughter and we were contemplating a name, I said, “How about Finley?” Only after Courtney said that she loved the name did I reveal that it was inspired by an aspect of Samuel Finley Brown Morse. I admit now she might not have been as smitten had I told her about the Sam Morse connection up front.

I later bought the only known oil portrait of Sam Morse and another of his paintings, bringing my total of Morse-related art pieces to three.

The final part of my Morse infatuation occurred in 2016, when I learned that Sam’s youngest child, Mary Morse Shaw, was still alive, age 96 and living in Pebble Beach. I passed along word that I’d love to meet her. On the day of my visit, I told her that my wife and I named our daughter after her father. “For goodness sake, what is the child’s name?” she said, “Is it Sam for Samantha?” I said, “We named her Finley. She was born in Pebble Beach. She’ll be raised here. We wanted to pay tribute to the man who built this magnificent place.”

Taking a sip of her martini, Mary replied, “Well, there are a lot of people named Finley.” Her lack of sentimentality was a little jarring.

Upon Mary’s passing in 2018, I realized how fortunate I was to have met the dignified woman who had witnessed the greatness of her father and his beloved Pebble Beach. And I’m gratified now knowing there’s a little girl living in the Del Monte forest who shares the Morse family name. **G**