

Borrego Springs reminiscent of 'Palm Springs years ago'

By MARK LESLIE

BORREGO SPRINGS, Calif. — Desert-type waste bunkers, early-1900s-style putting surfaces that subtly flow and affordable greens fees were the aim of course architect Cary Bickler and developer Cameron Brothers Construction Co., when they built Borrego Springs Country Club and Resort here.

They believe they have captured the look and presented the cost when the 18-hole public course opened for play on Jan. 2.

Borrego Springs is "like Palm Springs years ago," said Bickler from his headquarters in San Diego, where brothers Bill and John Cameron live. The Camerons, whose golf course work included rough grading for Torrey Pines and LaCosta Country Club in the 1960s, have built much of the town over the years. Having built subdivisions, roads and other projects, the Camerons plan to intersperse homes throughout their new golf course. They have just finished a 100-room hotel as well as a clubhouse and dining facilities, tennis courts, pool and a spa in this spot, which sits 100 miles from San Diego and a one-hour drive from Palm Desert.

Situated on 175 acres, Borrego Springs Country Club is "a very unique golf course," Bickler said. Taking advantage of the 1,000 acres of mesquite trees and date palm groves the Camerons own, golf course builder Park West of Irvine transplanted 300, 40- to 50-foot palms, spreading them around the property for a finished look. Four lakes were created — one 4-acre body in a heart shape, with two holes around it, and three half-acre ponds that border three other holes.

"It was a flat site," Bickler said. "But



Palm trees and a mountainous backdrop highlight the look at Borrego Springs Resort & Country Club, designed by Cary Bickler.

we moved about 400,000 cubic yards of dirt and were able to create a lot of movement. Fifty-five bunkers are artistically designed and shaped, and strategically located with a combination of out-of-play areas and waste bunkers."

Targeting a 4,800- to 6,600-yard course, he said: "We wanted to make it look challenging and interesting and beautiful, but we wanted to address affordability and create a course the average golfer could play and enjoy. There's nothing tricked up about it — just straight-forward, fun golf."

The affordability translates to \$49 to \$59, which includes cart and is far below many area courses.

The greens average 6,300 square feet and, Bickler said, replicate the early-1900s style.

"There's enough interest in them," he said. "They have up-and-down contours

and two to three breaks, but everything flows and blends together. If you can see it you can make it."

A signature hole? "We've got six," Bickler said, pointing out several par-3s — a couple of medium length and a couple more than 200 yards; one demanding a 150-yard forced carry over water.

"But I give everybody a way out in case they want to shoot alongside the water," he said.

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Meanwhile, Bickler's design at Encinitas Ranch in Encinitas will display landscaping of unique magnitude when it opens March 1.

The property is covered with red poinsettias, and will remain so to a large degree, until they are harvested each year for the holiday market.

Part of thousands of acres owned and farmed by the Paul Ecke family about

'The property has been tucked away and hidden for decades.'

— Cary Bickler

30 miles north of San Diego, the 180-acre Encinitas Ranch was donated to San Diego County by the Ecke heirs. Sitting on a high mesa, the entire property displays views to the west, northwest and southwest of the ocean a mile and a half away.

The city owns the course and it will be managed by JC Resorts, a local operator. The greens fee will range around \$30 weekdays, with local residents getting a discount.

"The property has been tucked away and hidden for decades," Bickler said. "It has a 2-1/2 percent slope to the west, perfect for ocean views. At the most northern hole, the 16th, you look straight down on LaCosta Country Club. And Aviara is to the south 100 feet below it... When it's clear you can see 80 miles up and down the coast.

"It will be wonderful for the public."

As well as constructing roads and a bridge, builders moved 450,000 cubic yards of dirt on the golf course. The track will play from 4,800 to 6,700 yards over five sets of tees.

"I wanted to accomplish an old seacoast ranch look," Bickler said. "Trees were strategically positioned, but we left open viewing corridors to the ocean. The bunkering looks timeless. I want a style that looks like it has been there 100 years."

Since the community anticipates 65,000 rounds the first year and expects that to climb to 90,000, the greens average 7,100 square feet, which, Bickler said, allows 21 pin positions.

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