

Preserve GC earns its name, saving 18,000 acres

By DOUG SAUNDERS

CARMEL, Calif. — From the first tee at the Preserve Golf Club, it's obvious that this is a special place. The dramatic backdrop of the heavily forested hillsides frames a tiny green that is tucked under old-growth oak trees like a picnic blanket.

This Tom Fazio-designed gem winds through 350 acres of one of

the most pristine settings on the West Coast and is the cornerstone of an ambitious development known as the Santa Lucia Preserve.

The 7,067-yard course peels off the first rise and works through three valleys that are representative of the immense landscape that makes up the Preserve. Located nearly nine miles up a narrow mountain road in

the middle of the 20,000-acre site, at 1,500 feet above the Pacific Ocean and nearby Carmel, the peace and serenity of the region is overwhelming, stunning, and calming all at once.

Situated on a piece of property that is larger than Manhattan Island, The Preserve is more than just an exclusive golf course community. Rather, the Santa



Photo: Freddie Bird

The third hole at the Preserve Golf Club in Carmel, Calif.



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Lucia Preserve is attempting to show how private development can be a positive force in the preservation of massive tracts of open space.

FORMER SPANISH LAND GRANT

When the golf course opened to rave reviews last year, it was the culmination of 10 years of litigation, planning revisions and redefinition to make the Santa Lucia Preserve a reality. This huge plot of land was first a Spanish land grant dating back two centuries. Ownership changed hands several times but the estate hung together, eventually becoming one of the largest single tracts of property on the California coast.

When a developer first proposed a plan for over 2,000 houses in the late 1980s, the no-growth sentiment in the Carmel-Monterey area was staunchly opposed to losing such a huge piece of open space. The current ownership, Union Pacific Co., under the leadership of partner Tom Gray, obtained the property in 1990.

Aware of the property's unique traits, the firm hired a prominent environmentalist to develop a plan to both build on and preserve the landscape in a sensitive manner. His 1,300-page report became a blueprint for the Preserve.

SAVING 18,000 ACRES

Initial plans called for two golf courses, a hotel, and over 1,000 home sites. After a revision, the final concept called for just one golf course and only 300 exclusive home sites ranging in size from three to nine acres, which all told would affect only 2,000 acres of the property. A \$20-million endowment, generated through the sale of lots priced from \$900,000 to \$4 million, would be the financial engine used to save the remaining 18,000 acres as open space.

These guidelines were directed towards the design and construction of the golf course as well. Tom Fazio and his lead architect, Kevin Sutherland, strived to do only what was necessary to blend the course into its natural setting. Only 350,000 yards of dirt were moved and care was taken to preserve trees, natural stream flows and wetlands. The green sites that the designers chose seem to be discovered rather than created, as they tuck around trees and blend into the natural topography.

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GOLF COURSE NEWS

Weiskopf adding course at \$5-billion Vegas resort

HENDERSON, Nev. — Tom Weiskopf has broken ground on his first design in Nevada, this one on 180 acres here at the Lake Las Vegas Resort, a \$5-billion residential and golf complex unfolding on 2,245 acres.

The resort already has two highly rated Jack Nicklaus-designed courses, SouthShore Golf Club and Reflection Bay. The

Weiskopf layout has not yet been named but is scheduled to open in summer 2002. It will offer daily-fee play.

"We're looking forward to watching this masterpiece take shape and expect the course to rank among the best of Tom's acclaimed designs recognized throughout the world," said John Herndon, director of golf at the resort.

Weiskopf said his design will feature two contrasting nines. "The front nine exists in more subtle elevation changes and winds through the natural desert landscape," he explained. "The back nine has quite dramatic changes in elevation with spectacular views to the distant mountains and downtown Las Vegas. The strongest characteristics are definitely going to be the water

holes, unique canyons and some unbelievable changes in elevation."

The par-72 track will offer multiple tees on every hole, and measure 5,400 yards from the forward pegs to 7,100 yards from the back. Wadsworth Golf Construction is building the course.

Lake Las Vegas Resort is being developed by Transcontinental Properties, a subsidiary of the operating owner, Transcontinental Corp., with entities

owned by Sid and Lee Bass of Fort Worth, Texas. Transcontinental, based in Santa Barbara, Calif., specializes in developing master-planned communities.

The proximity of two Nicklaus courses has driven the price of the community's 850 residential lots to a range of \$300,000 to \$10 million.

Nicklaus and Weiskopf were teammates on the Ohio State golf squad in the 1960s.

Preserve GC

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Throughout the design and construction, the course's impact on the land continued to be the primary concern. Four collection lakes exist on the course, and together they can hold 50 percent of the annual water usage. Modern disease-resistant and drought-resistant grasses were used on tees, greens and fairways. Only 49 bunkers exist on the course; any more than that, Tom Fazio believed, would pull a golfer's attention away from the endless vistas that frame each hole.

WINTER DRAINAGE WORK

Head superintendent Forrest Arthur came to the Preserve in 1998, just as construction was about to begin. After several years as superintendent at Spanish Bay Golf Links, he was familiar with the challenges of the coastal climates.

Arthur took extra care in the selection of grasses that would not only do well but would also be more disease-resistant in order to minimize the need for chemical applications.

Throughout the shaping phase, drainage and collection of run-off become a strong priority.

"One obstacle was that the natural soil doesn't have a strong percolation rate," Arthur said. "We decided to lay down an eight-inch sand cap across the fairways to improve winter drainage, and we supplemented this with an extensive amount of drain tile to collect the run-off. During construction we brought in 38,000 tons of sand, but the effort will pay off in the long run by allowing for a stronger root system for the turf."

This determination to create a more sustainable environment drove every stage of construction, from hole locations to cart path building. The result is a course that flows through the varied terrain while providing an exceptional golfing challenge. The absence of homes near the course adds to the feeling of total immersion in this superb environment.

Golf here is truly played in a natural preserve of a rare kind, and this project will serve as a shining example of the ways in which golf development and land conservation can co-exist without public funding. ■

GOLF COURSE NEWS



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