

Practice Facility Makes Near Perfect

Tom Fazio's World
Woods gets high
marks for quaintness
and attention to detail

By Geoff Shackelford,
Contributing Editor



Since opening in 1993, the word in golf is that the practice facility at Brooksville, Fla.'s World Woods is one of the best around. You hear how large and complete it is. But like any artistic treasure, it's the subtlety and attention to detail — not the massive size — that makes the World Woods practice park a model for future facilities.

If you've heard about World Woods but haven't been there, your likely impression is of a large expanse of green grass featuring a huge circular tee with plenty of open space and targets designed for hitting a variety of shots. In part, that's true.

However, the beauty of the facility is its quaint feel created by architect Tom Fazio. The practice park comes about as close as you could wish in simulating real conditions, despite occupying a massive 23 acres.

Four primary teeing areas are used on a

The beauty of World Woods is its intimate and charming feel created by architect Tom Fazio, even though the property comprises 23 acres.

rotating basis, with each separated by oaks and other growth that block any view of the other teeing areas. But Fazio's most subtle and endearing touch was to leave oaks on the sides of the tees as well as a few placed in the landing areas to help separate the four primary tees and target areas.

"Fazio not only put the oaks in the middle of the landing area, but he brought them in on the corners so you don't see anything other than the area you are hitting to," says Stan Cooke, director of golf, who oversees the practice park as well as the facility's highly regarded 36 holes.

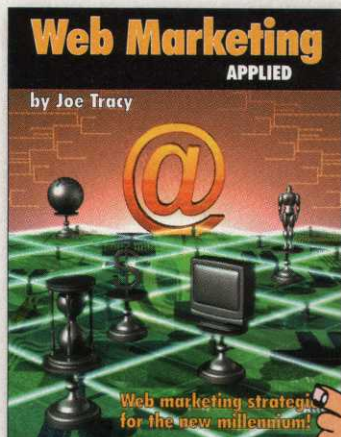
Besides having the four sections of the range acting virtually as four individual practice areas, Fazio's team sculpted life-sized bunkers for the landing zones — but not the usual flat slivers of sand you find on many ranges that fail to simulate on-course hazards.

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Practice Facility

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This allows practicing golfers to visualize shots similar to what they will find on the course, particularly with their longer clubs.

This addresses the most common problem with practice facilities — the inability to visualize tee-shot scenarios similar to what you find on the course. But at World Woods, an imaginative practicer can pick a bunker and work tee shots over or around them. Throw in a variety of target greens for shorter shots and a yardage system updated daily with color-coded pins, and you have the ideal variety of practice options.

That's only the beginning, though. Instructed to build the best practice facility in the country (as if the two world-class courses weren't enough, particularly the Pine Barrens layout), Fazio created short-game areas that cater to all levels of play. Even those who hate practicing can't deny the joy in testing out the "Himalayas" putting course, the two chipping greens, three practice holes, or the 9-hole short course (two par 4s, seven par-3s).

The quality of bunker and green shaping, along with the replication of features similar to the facility's 36 holes, make fine-tuning your game particularly practical and fun.

But all this comes at a price both in cost and man-hours for third-year superintendent Quinn Kuite. Besides overseeing the practice park, Kuite supervises maintenance of the Rolling Oaks 18-hole layout at World Woods. For most superintendents, the practice area would be enough. With 23 acres occupied by the range, five are taken up by tee space that's open six days a week year-round. Large portions of the tee area are substantially shaded because of surrounding oaks, but their importance in defining the range outweighs the maintenance headaches they create.

The short-course crew of 10 also mows and changes cups daily on the 9-hole course and on the steeply contoured 1.5-acre tiffdwarf bermudagrass putting course. Besides offering a variety of practice options, the 9-hole short course presents a different style of golf for residents in the Brooksville area.

While the 36 holes at World Woods are strictly for those needing their fill of "championship" golf, the short course provides just enough challenge to give beginners some thrills, while not beating them up so bad that they never want to come back.

And at \$10 (\$20 with cart), it's the kind of affordable golf that's badly needed these days, particularly in a region dominated by retirees who don't need the frills that come with the latest craze, the high-end golf experience.

Although Fazio is widely lauded these days as a designer of upper-tier golf courses like those at World Woods, it may just be his short course and practice park that will give golfers the most long-term joy.

And who would have ever thought that about a practice facility? ■