

# It's just 'The Most'

Fazio's Vegas course breaks the mold with the most sod, most earth-moving, most trees...

BY MARK LESLIE

Tom Fazio may have designed himself right out of Las Vegas.

"After Shadow Creek I don't know that I could ever do another golf course in this town — because how can you do anything that can ever compare to this?" Fazio said.

The team of Fazio, Wadsworth Construction Co. and hotel magnate Steve Wynn are turning a tract of barren desert outside Las Vegas into what Fazio believes will be the "benchmark" desert golf course

when it opens in October.

"I would have to rate this course on a scale of being almost the most of everything," said Fazio, the designer of such fabled courses as Wild Dunes in South Carolina, The Vintage Club in California, Barton Creek in Texas, PGA National in Florida and Wade Hampton in North Carolina. "When you think about it, this is 'the most.'"

"This is maybe even the biggest challenge in some regards," he said. "Not all desert is unattrac-



Tom Fazio at work.

## Each job 'a different challenge'

BY MARK LESLIE

Each new golf course project presents a different challenge, but the expectations for the owners and Tom Fazio are the same, regardless of the site involved, he says.

"The aim of all the projects by all the owners... is to produce a world-class, spectacular, outstanding, magnificent golf course," Fazio said. "So, in a sense it's all the same; it's getting to that finished product that's different... The execution and what you have to work with are the difference and what keep up your attention level."

Fazio compared the Shadow Creek course in Las Vegas with others he has built or has on the drafting table.

At the Vegas course "we had flat, uninteresting, boring, unattractive desert. And there's different kinds of desert; for example, The Vintage Club in Palm Springs (Calif.) is in desert but there are outcroppings. Then in Tucson (Ventanna Canyon Golf and Raquet Club in Arizona), up against the



A view from tee to green of the 15th hole at Black Diamond in Lecanto, Fla.

Photo by Tony Roberts

foothills of the mountains, there was desert vegetation and spec-

tacular desert. All desert is not unattractive, but the particular desert in the Las Vegas area is."

So Fazio and the developers planned, and created, an entire environment at the Shadow Creek site from scratch, importing trees and creating waterfalls.

But that's a last resort. You usually have something to work with, Fazio said, and that something presents a different challenge.

"In terms of effort, each course is the same. It's just different in terms of the execution and what you have to work with," he said.

What Fazio called "next year's challenge," the Champion Hills course to be built in Hendersonville, N.C., is "a tremendous, spectacular, exciting, dramatic piece of property with rock and trees, and hillside and streams to work with," he said. "If you saw it you'd say this is going to be a excellent golf course. But it doesn't just happen. It takes a lot of hard work. And we are in the process of planning that project."

The Golf Club of Tennessee, which he is working on in Nashville, he said, is "a tremendous, great piece of property with a major running stream and rock cliffs and big trees and a lot of wonderful

things. And the challenge there is to fit golf into those natural features. And it is just as hard to fit (a course) into the natural features to make it look like it was always there as it is to create it from nothing.

"The fun part about (designing golf courses) is that it is so different — like this Shadow Creek project is different than ... a Champion Hills or a finished product like Wade Hampton or even a Black Diamond where we had holes in a rock quarry.

"The quarry at Black Diamond, for example, with its five holes was difficult... It was bizarre and unique and very different, a different challenge than in Vegas."

Fazio said he is not even sure which job is harder or more fun — creating a course from nothing or designing around spectacular environs.

"The good part about it is the difference. It certainly is not boring."

"I'm enjoying this (Vegas course) today," he said. "Creating this, that's the fun thing for me. But once it's created some of the fun goes out of it, and then it's good for other people, the golfers. But the challenge for me is over."

tive, but this particular site has literally no environment, so we've had to manufacture a totally new environment."

Creating that environment has meant, since last October:

- Trucking in 2.5 million cubic yards of soil (maybe the most ever), making 50- to 60-foot changes in elevation and other construction work costing approximately \$5.5 million.

- Sodding 110 acres of the course (likely the most ever) at a cost of \$1.2 million to \$1.4 million.

- Planting 7,000 18- to 35-foot-tall trees (likely the most ever) at a cost of about \$3 million.

- Building lakes and waterfalls costing \$2.5 million.

- And adding other amenities pushing the total cost of the course to around \$12 million to \$13 million, Fazio said.

### Kill the view

Another major factor was that the builders had to depress the golf course into the ground and create a ridgeline around the property to block the views of the area surrounding the 300-acre site. "The area will eventually be developed and made to be attractive, but right now it is still the natural unvegetated desert around it," Fazio said. "So we had to create ... a ridgeline around the property to wall us in not with a wall of stone and brick and mortar but with a wall of dirt."

"We struck a balance of cutting into the ground and using the dirt as framing definition, background, and ridgelines."

"I see this golf course as being an attraction for people to come as they do in other places to come just to see it," Fazio said. "This will be a benchmark in what he (Wynn) is doing. He is establishing a quality level of golf here and is kind of pioneering a new golf product here that will be great for the golf market from the public courses through the private courses because this will be the benchmark and measurement of what a golf course can be."

"And everyone (in Las Vegas) is trying to outdo the next person, so it will be interesting to see who's going to do something of this scale..."

"Also, Las Vegas has not been known for quality golf per se — basically because of the environment and flatness of the terrain."

The Wynn brothers, owners of the Golden Nugget casino, are building the course as a private facility. They are planning a separate, half-billion-dollar project in the vicinity that will include other golf courses.

### Wynn gave incentive

Fazio credited Steve Wynn for many of the ideas in the course.

"What got my attention and got me hooked on the project was

Continued on page 15

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