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Practice Facility Makes Near Perfect

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

By Geoff Shackelford, Contributing Editor





ince 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. *Continued on page 56*



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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 colorcoded 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 tifdwarf 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.

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Raynor Course Rejuvenated

A superintendent's startling discovery and an architect's candid criticism led to a course restoration at Yeamans Hall Club • BY LARRY AYLWARD, MANAGING EDITOR



eamans Hall Club superintendent Jim Yonce was rummaging around his golf course's clubhouse attic on a rainy summer day in 1986 when he uncovered a rare and exciting find from yesteryear.

Yonce was looking through an old cabinet when he came across a blueprint — a vintage blueprint — that read, "Original golf course as designed by Seth J. Raynor."

That is, golf course as designed by Seth J. Raynor in 1925.

"I about fainted," Yonce recalls of his discovery. "Luckily, somebody saved it."

Luckily, somebody saved *them*. Yonce found several more blueprints in the next three months, including original specifications for green contours and a topographic map of the entire course.

Not long after Yonce's find, golf course architect



Tom Doak, who's well-schooled in Raynor's design style, visited Yeamans Hall Club in Charleston, S.C., to play 18. Doak was in the midst of research for his book, "The Confidential Guide to Golf Courses," a self-published book released in 1988 that's labeled as a "no-holds-barred rating" of courses Doak has played.

Doak was not kind to Yeamans Hall.

"I thought it was one of the neatest places I'd ever been, but it was all messed up because the greens had shrunk to half of their original designs," Doak says.

On the upside, Doak's critique — and Yonce's discovery — set in motion the plans for a major course restoration at Yeamans Hall, although it would take nearly 10 years to get started. But in the end, those "messed-up" greens would be greatly enhanced in size and structure, and Yeamans Hall would become a more challenging course. A few greens would more than triple in size and their rolling contours would demand more tactical putting.

Lobbying effort

Interestingly, around the time of Yonce's find, a group of Yeamans Hall members formed a group called the Friends of Seth Raynor to raise funds to restore the course to its near original design.

And when word spread that Yonce found the original blueprints, old black-and-white photographs were also uncovered. The son of the previous superintendent found photos and gave them to Yonce. So did a former employee's grandson.

In an effort to convince members that a greens restoration was needed, Yonce and his crew mended the No. 1 green as close to Raynor's specs as possible. Still, it took time and tremendous lobbying to convince members of a coursewide greens renovation.

Then, about four years ago, Doak received a phone call from Henry Terrie, the green chairman and leader of Friends of Seth Raynor. He had read Doak's book and comments about Yeamans Hall, and Terrie extended an invitation to Doak to visit the course and discuss a greens renovation.

Terrie knew Doak had consulted at other Raynor-designed courses, including the Camargo Club in Cincinnati and the Creek Club in Locust Valley, N.Y. Doak rebuilt the 13th green at Yeamans Hall in another attempt to convince members that a restoration was needed. This time, the members agreed to raise money for the project.

When he played Yeamans Hall, the one thing Doak noticed was the course's bermudagrass greens were a far cry from the greens Raynor had designed more than 60 years earlier. In that time, however, the country endured the Depression and World War II. Money was tight and fuel was scarce. As a result,

the greens weren't properly maintained.

"Nobody was paying attention to what the design was supposed to be," Doak says.

And after years of topdressing, the shrinking greens gained large and noticeable crowns and lost their contours.

"The part of the greens that were topdressed were about a foot higher than the rest of the old greens," Doak says. "They were very odd looking, like big mushrooms growing out."

Easier? Yeah, right

The original plans had been discovered, old photographs had been found, and a top young designer who knew Raynor had been consulted. Just as important, the money had been raised. Finally, in the spring of 1998, the greens renovation began.

Yeamans Hall, whose main golf season runs from November through April, closed from May through September for the renovation.

"I walked the green committee through what we were going to do," Doak says. "Obviously, the committee's biggest reluctance was that we were going to make the greens easier. I told them the greens would be different, but not easier."

Doak, Yonce and others involved in the project studied the maps and old photographs intensely while renovating the greens.

"We had a map that showed where there were ridges in the greens," Doak says. "It didn't show us how high the ridges were, but it gave us some idea."

Yonce knew little about Raynor when he came to Yeamans Hall in 1982. But after he discovered the blueprints and after it was de-*Continued on page 62*



After years of topdressing, the shrinking greens gained large and noticeable crowns and lost their contours.

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