



The par-4, No. 10 demands a high degree of accuracy. The small elevated green is protected by bunkers and framed by a dramatic rock outcropping.

The Pinnacle of Golf

By Raymond Estrada

Some say it's the setting, some say it's the architect, others say it was the team effort but what truly makes the Estancia Golf Club so special is the golf course. With views of Pinnacle Peak and the surrounding desert, this course designed by Tom Fazio has become the premiere address for golf in Scottsdale.

Building a team

Developer John Lang's five years of hard work came to fruition upon opening of Estancia. The \$9 million private club is nestled under Pinnacle Peak, Scottsdale's most noticeable landmark, and sprinkled with saguaro cacti and other desert plants.

In December of 1990, Lang bought the 640 acres from Pinnacle Peak Partners, a company that had purchased the property from the Arizona State Land Department. For Lang, the next four years involved obtaining permits to develop the environmentally-sensitive area and putting together a team of golf development professionals. With permits in place Lang brought in Haas & Haynie of San Francisco, Calif., as a co-developer of the club.

In January 1995, ground was broken and by the last week in November, 1995, the 7,146-yard, 18-hole course was open.

Lang says he initially was working with other architects on designing the course however, in mid-1994, Fazio Golf Course Designers, Inc. was brought on board.

Fazio is one of the hottest names in golf architecture today because his designs are ranked among the best in the world. Some of the those designs are: Shadow Creek Golf Club in Las

Vegas, Pelican Hill Golf Club in Newport Beach, California, World Woods Golf Club in Florida and Old Overton Golf Club in Alabama.

Fazio has been designing courses since 1962 and started his own company with offices in Jupiter, Fla., Overland Park, Kan., and Hendersonville, N.C., in 1972.

"Not only is he a master of what he does," Lang says of Fazio, "but he has the finest professionals with him that I have ever worked with... He is the single biggest reason for the success of Estancia."

The developer praised the way Fazio utilized natural resources to make a spectacular desert course. When it opened, "The course looked like it had been there for a long time," Lang says.

Of the Estancia course, Fazio says, "It's awesome...it won't do me much good to describe it until you've seen it."

However, as much as Lang praises Fazio's work, the designer paid tribute to Lang whom he says, "has guts and imagination."

Looking for the best holes

"When he (Fazio) came out to look at the property, he said "There are 100 great holes out there; we have to find the 18 best," Lang says.

"We do not have a corridor golf course," Lang says, meaning homes do not line the fairways. Fazio insisted on wide fairways, which are as wide as 425 feet.

However many of the houses at Estancia will have a view of the course, "We developed our real estate around the course," he adds.

On the rocks

"Tom used the rock formations very interestingly," Lang says.

The rocks make for a dramatic setting from the tees and are used strategically in lining up shots. One example of this is the par 4, 451-yard 5th hole where golfers are advised to play their drive from tees set on boulders to a fairway protected on the right by a large bunker.

Another example is the par 5, 565-yard 17th hole. "The tees are in chutes among the boulders to give different angles of approach to the narrow fair-

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way where spectacular outcroppings frame the greens”, Fazio says.

“I got into the rocks,” Fazio says during an interview at the opening of his newest course, Oak Creek Golf Club in Irvine, California. “I feel creative with natural things to work with,” he says. “There were some big boulders we had to move and then we just flattened out some spots and put the greens in,” says Fazio.

The dramatic elevations at Estancia didn’t faze the designer. “I have experience with mountain courses so I could look at it and say ‘this is what it could be.’ It’s very logical, very simple when you look at it,” Fazio says. Simple is an understatement considering contractors moved less than 200,000 cubic yards of earth to build the course.

Unique desert site

Dennis Wise, a Fazio associate who handles quality control, says Estancia is the first course his company designed in the Scottsdale-Phoenix area. Wise says he oversees three or four jobs every year for Fazio and makes 20 to 25 trips to project sites.

He first saw the Estancia site in spring 1994. “It was by far the most outstanding desert site I’ve ever seen,” he recalls. “It reminded me a lot of Ventana,” referring to Ventana Canyon Golf & Racquet Club in Tucson, another Fazio design. “It was so enclosed and so close to Pinnacle Peak, it shocked me. It’s real rugged, real wild with a lot of rock outcroppings.”

There’s little or no framing or definition in many desert courses. So, trees were brought in and many native plants were saved to be replanted after the course consecration was finished.

“Basically, we were preserving the environment because the area is so sensitive,” says Wise. “We had to study each and every plant.”

Everyone has a favorite

Wise says he couldn’t label a signature hole at Estancia. “That’s like saying which is your favorite kid,” he says. “I became emotionally involved with each hole,” Wise says.

He lined up with a group of journalists to play on the club’s media day

and every hole was named as a favorite one by at least one of the golfers. Some like the long-range views, others liked seeing Pinnacle Peak.

Unlike some other desert courses, Estancia does not penalize a player if he makes a good shot.

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“It’s forgiving but challenging from the back tees,” Lang says. The 6th hole is a good example of risk-reward golf. If a golfer plays up the swale that runs the length of the right side near a fairway bunker, he or she is rewarded with the best

approach into the partially blind green. However, if the hole is played to the safer left side, the approach requires a shot over bunkers to a green slope that fades away.

“The course shows the vision that John Lang had in developing Estancia,” Wise says. “He allowed us to route the golf course where we felt it would naturally fit in with lots.”

Wise described his toughest task: “Once we got permits, it was trying to find places to put cart paths. We went through great expense to hide the paths,” he says.

A world apart

While building a beautiful golf course is what Lang intended, the success of Estancia is not only in the raves from golfers but in the balance sheets.

Already Estancia has sold about 225 memberships out of 375. Though the equity memberships cost \$100,000 the demand has been strong and the membership is nearly full.

Estancia has also sold over 200 home sites. There are 224 custom home sites and 39 custom villas starting at 4,000 square feet. Lots range in size from 3/4 acre to two acres and cost from

\$250,000 to \$1.25 million. The homes will sell for \$2 million to \$5 million.

The success is best described by the architect Fazio, who had praise for his client. “John Lang is committed to quality golf,” Fazio says. “You’ve got to have ideas, courage and enthusiasm, that’s the way life is today.”

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Pinnacle Peak provides the perfect backdrop for the challenging 137-yard, par 3, 11th hole. The hole is surrounded by huge boulders and giant Saguaros.