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Sports

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Mountain masterpiece

Estancia may be Arizona's finest layout

By Rick Bullock
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If fabled Cypress Point on California's Monterey Peninsula can be referred to as golf's version of the Sistine Chapel, then Estancia Golf Club in north Scottsdale might be aptly compared to Michelangelo's masterful painting of the Last Judgment.

Two artist's — one human, the other not of this world — have combined to make this new 7,146-yard layout arguably Arizona's finest.

Estancia is draped across the northern slopes of Pinnacle Peak, whose granite spire overshadows the landscape like a great Gothic cathedral. It is situated off Dynamite Road on 640 acres of virgin Sonoran desert, plentifully strewn with boulder outcroppings and tall stands of saguaro cactus.

Tom Fazio, labeled as the world's best modern golf architect by Golf Digest and designer of such creations as Shadow Creek (Las Vegas), Ventana Canyon (Tucson) and Grayhawk's new Raptor course just down the hill, has joined forces with nature to produce a magnificent masterpiece.

A recent invitation to play at the exclusive club, which opened Thanksgiving weekend, came from marketing director Mark Sollenberger, a four-time Arizona Amateur champion.



A dramatic backdrop of Pinnacle Peak highlights the 137-yard, par-3 11th hole at Estancia Golf Course. With the tiny green guarded by boulders and a gaping bunker on the from left, this hole demands an accurate tee shot.

"We think Estancia's very special," Sollenberger said.

It is. Fazio has blended all of his expertise with the land in producing a thinking-man's course. Sensitive to the delicate environment, a minimum of earth was disturbed.

There aren't any weak holes at Estancia. Among the best:

The par-four 451-yard 5th: A solid drive off an elevated tee leaves a long-iron second to a large green guarded on the right by at least six bunkers.

The 341-yard par-four 10th: A deceptively dangerous hole. Uphill all the way, this dogleg right demands accurate distance

on the second shot to get it close. Bunkers guard the front.

The 137-yard par-three 11th: Destined to be the most photographed, this little hole calls for a short iron to a tiny green guarded by boulders and a gaping bunker on the front left. A dramatic view of Pinnacle Peak is the backdrop.

The 608-yard 14th: This par five, the longest hole on the course, requires three good shots to reach the huge putting surface, which is guarded by a lake and bunker on the left edge.

The 449-yard 18th: This par-four closing hole offers a tremendous view of much of the golf course from its elevated tee.

A long second is needed to reach the uphill green.

Estancia is tremendous but exclusive. Unfortunately, most golfers will never get an opportunity to play it unless they're on the "A" list. You've got to buy a lot (there's only 350 available beginning at \$200,000), and the equity club membership fee is \$80,000. A lot just off the seventh hole recently sold for \$1.25 million.

Oh well — you can dream.

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