

The Story of Shadow Creek

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THE WORK on this golf course started as a dream many years ago for me. Many personal ideas and goals contributed to the Tom Fazio design, and the dream was achieved in the final product.

Looking forward in tall grass after a misplaced shot only exacerbates your frustration and makes the situation worse. I thought a golf course should have hazards so that you had to think and maneuver to avoid them. I also thought those hazards had to be clear and pronounced; you should immediately know when you had failed, yet have the gratification of knowing when you succeeded. You should also see your ball in flight, see it flower, and see it come down. When you did it right, you should have the satisfaction of seeing it roll to a stop. And then, when you got to your ball, the green would be in view for the second shot. Never a blind shot.

I had certain ideas about water that I had gotten from visiting other golf courses. I thought that you should always look down on water, a belief that I know Jack Nicklaus has written about. You should look down on water, and if it was a waterfall, even if you weren't technically looking down on it, you should be looking straight at it as if it came toward you, from high to low. You'd always see it, and I thought that way about all hazards.

Most of all, I wanted our holes to move and I wanted them to have animation. I know a little bit about movement of line. The human eye and the human mind, when they look at a picture or a painting, if there's a line there, your eye will follow the line from beginning to end. Your eye takes that line sequentially, and it's possible to give a static picture the quality of movement. It's a very important thing to remember, because it's a law of nature and the way the human brain works. The sides of the golf course would give a golf hole movement if a golf hole had sides that were well defined. Instead of it just going straight out or taking a right or taking a left, it could meander and you could take advantage of the subtleties of movement. Now, not only do the sides of a hole move if they are well defined

in the form of trees or hillsides, but ridges and changes in the earth's surface have lines and movement to them, depending on where your perspective is.

The great thing about designing a golf hole is the architect gets to put the spectator or the player at a certain starting point. It is a perfectly controlled perspective, one of the few perfectly controlled perspectives in life. We put two tee markers down and we say, "Stand here, golfer, and nowhere else, and you will look at what we put in front of you." You have a perfectly controlled perspective and you get a chance to work all kinds of magic with the human eye. You can make people feel cozy or wide and expansive. You can fool the eye by having things go from low to high or put things on a ridge where you're not sure how far away they are. You can do all kinds of tricks when you have controlled perspective.

THAT WAS the theory, the fun, and the philosophy behind the design of Shadow Creek. We had a lot of soft earth and no rock, and that meant that we could move it around relatively inexpensively. Three or three-and-a-half million yards of soil were moved about at a cost of 85 cents a yard, and it only took six weeks because it was just like moving sand at the beach.

We had a rule that we would have no landing area less than 50 or 60 yards wide. We wanted everybody to really kick back and let it rip off the tee. We were going to have hazards, but we were going to have great big wide landing areas like Augusta National.

We wanted to set the greens into the sides of a hill because we always thought that a green should be presented. It shouldn't just happen at the end of a fairway; it should be presented. This would not occur 100 percent of the time, but in the majority of the cases we wanted to present the green as a target dished up to you as if it were on a plate, so that you knew exactly what to do.

In designing this course, Tom Fazio felt that one of the dangers with starting from scratch was that the temptation would be to try and make every hole as fancy and as theatrical as we could. That wouldn't be good because in the

best of all possible worlds, if we were able to maintain and get control of this job, like a Broadway show or a great book, it would have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and there would be a progression of constantly increasing interest and excitement. So if we were on our game, the best holes on the golf course would be the last two. Yet, the first and second holes have to establish the character of the golf course, and we could not take the best holes from all the different golf courses around the world.

We studied the mountains by taking pictures with a 35mm camera, enlarging the photos to about 3 feet wide and 30 inches tall and mounting them on cardboard. We made models of the holes in 1/16th scale. The pictures were placed behind the models, and then we used a periscope camera to look at the relationship between the trees, the golf holes, and their contours. It included the sky and the wonderful southern Nevada desert mountains. We wanted to take the desert out of the picture but keep the mountains, ridges, and trees.

We started with a 100 scale model of the 320 acres that was the size of a table top. All the ridges were made out of clay so that we could look at them and see that they all related to one another in a natural way. When we had to move a ridge or alter it, as time went by in the refinement of the design, we always went back to our original land plan to make sure that those ridges kept their integrity.

The one thing that I have observed, and Tom can confirm for me, is that all great golf courses have one thing in common: They have their own personality. It is a function of the terrain that they have a consistent personality of their own. Nobody has ever been able to make a golf course that has been a collection of the 18 greatest holes and have it be memorable. You have to be yourself in life, and that is true of golf courses as well. So our technique developed that we would try and move the golfer along in a series of culminations, plateaus, and crescendos. We would start off with the first and second hole and establish the character of Shadow Creek, then we would get a

little more difficult on number 3. When we get to 4 and 5, we would bring them to the first mini-climax.

The idea of number 4 is very much in keeping with the whole spirit of Shadow Creek. When you are on the number 4 tee, the water is on your left and a huge, wide landing area invites you to let it rip. As you proceed toward the green, it gets ever more narrow, ever more cozy, and the ridges around the green come in more steeply and more tightly. There is a cove of water on the left of the green, but on the other side is a steep rocky face filled with trees. I remember when we shaped the hole, we kept bringing the hillside around the green, in closer and tighter.

Number 5 is also an emotional experience, and we wanted to scare you and get your pulse rate up. I call it the big hole, no bailout, all or nothing. It is 160 yards from the regular tees, 205 from the back tees, over a 60-foot depression filled with several hundred pine trees. The green is big and large enough to catch the shot. This hole looks much more difficult than it is to play, and the way we did it is to take advantage of another trick of perspective.

The tee was placed about six or eight feet below the actual level of the green. When you stand on the tee, the surface of the green is even with your eye and you are almost looking up. That fools you as to the distance to the green. When you look at the card that says 160 yards, you are struck by the deep foreboding nature of the ravine between the tee and the green, and you say, "If my ball goes down there, it's gone. There is no safe place to play but to go for the green." We deliberately made it look a little further than it is.

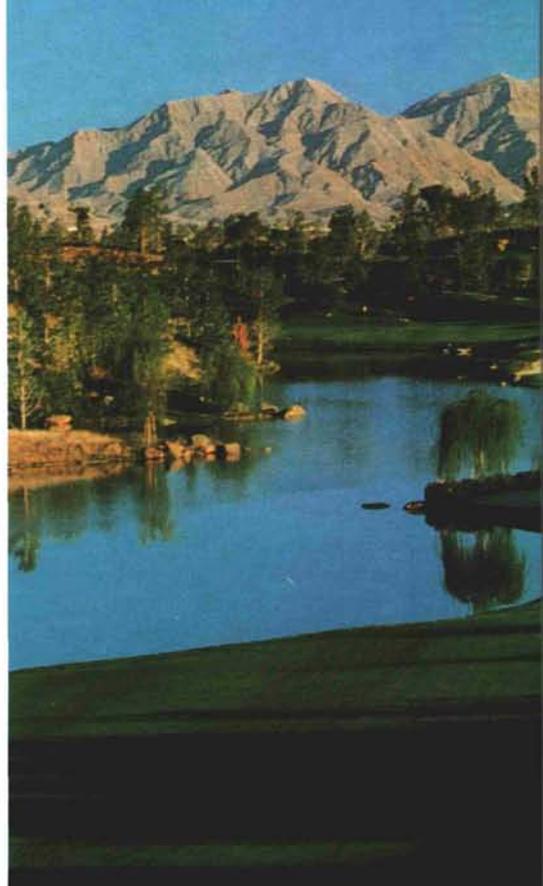
AS A KID, I thought it would be wonderful to have a golf hole where the only way you could go in is through a tunnel and the only way you could come out is through another tunnel. You could neither see it nor experience it any other way, and it would be invisible from any other perspective. A hidden place, a bowl, a valley. We could put a par 3 in there and have the tee inside the bowl so you felt completely encased in this valley with the sides planted with wildflowers. What a wonderful surprise it would be, and it would be part of the big finish of 8 and 9 as we compete the front nine. Interestingly enough, we built the golf hole first, we put the tunnels in, and then we built a ridge on top of the tunnels. This was a little different than the normal way it's done.

Number 9 presents a beautiful picture because we think here, as much as anywhere else, Tom Fazio's work, his blatant manipulation of nature, playing God, for lack of a better term, is invisible. This looks like it has been there forever. When you stand on this hole, you cannot remember what it looked like as a flat, barren desert. It is believable and looks like Mother Nature, and that's where I think our work was the very best. All the ridges and depressions moved as they would if it had happened by nature.

TOM FAZIO, like most great architects, has a signature habit. He loves to have a reachable par 4 on every golf course, and number 11 is approximately 300 yards and has two greens. The one on the right is heavily trapped. The second green is a very easy green as you hit over a waste bunker in the foreground and down through a narrow avenue of trees. We alternate one green into the other, which is fun to do, and it gives a special personality to number 11.

Your eye is accustomed to a couple of very simple truths: If you look at two straight lines that go parallel into the distance, they seem to come closer and converge. Similarly, it is another optical truth that as things recede and get farther away from you, they get smaller. Tom Fazio and Andy Banfield used this idea in the design of number 12. It actually is a 375-yard par 4, but when you stand on the tee, you swear it is a par 5. A series of sand traps were placed down the left and the right sides of the hole as you proceed toward the green. These parallel sand traps move closer together and get smaller so that the two traps closest to the green are rather tiny. The fairway gets narrower, comes to a point, and makes the green seem about 470 yards away. We absolutely fooled the golfer for 125 yards.

If you build a creek on a golf course, you have to do it foot by foot on both sides of the creek bed. You just can't bring the grass down to the water; that's not the way Mother Nature does it. Creeks are carved from the earth and they erode. The creeks were steeply cut and carved as if the high-speed water coming out of the mountains had made the creek sides steep. Rocks were installed to look like they have been exposed by erosion. These rocks were placed in the sand and dirt, and turf was put around them. As you get down by the tee, the creek bed widens and flattens out as if it has lost some of the force that Mother Nature gave it as it came out of the steep mountains.



The builders started with a blank piece of desert. They hadn't built the fairway and they had done no contouring. Hundreds of various size boulders and stones were brought in and dumped in a string along the desert. The boys would move the rocks around with a forklift. They would stand in the desert and look at this big stone in the middle of the dust and say they were visualizing



(Above left)
Shadow Creek Golf Course
hole number 6.

(Above)
Shadow Creek Golf Course
hole number 10.

(Left)
Shadow Creek Golf Course
hole number 17.

the stream. Two young men built that creek, piled up the sides, put in all the landscaping, built the fairway around those rocks and made Michael's Creek look like it was created by nature. Every time I go out there, I walk up the left side of that hole and I look at that creek and I still cannot get over it.

Tom was under a good deal of pressure for a big finish when we got to the

18th hole, and he let it all go. When you're on the tee, you are in the trees, but if you walk to the back of the tee, you can look over the ridge, down onto the desert the way it was before we built Shadow Creek. We deliberately left a window there so you can see the before and after shot. On the 18th hole, where construction and manipulation of the earth was at its maximum, we wanted you to

be able to look out and see what it was all like before construction started.

It is a wonderful thing when people have a chance to work together on a project in pursuit of excellence and not have to compromise. That's a rare privilege and a wonderful moment in life. Anyway, that's what you can do in the southern Nevada desert with a pile of money and a couple of bulldozers.