

The Name's the Game at The Gallery Golf Club

By: Steve Habel

If you are going to call a golf course facility "The Gallery" you best make sure the property is chock full of holes, vistas and moments worthy of a space to display works of art.

With his work at The Gallery Golf Club in Marana, Ariz., just outside Tucson, golf course architect John Fought and, to a lesser extent, British Open champion and 2006 Ryder Cup Captain Tom Lehman on one of the courses, has fashioned a pair of tracks and an overall experience that is both "museum-worthy" and a challenge to all levels of golfers.

Keeping a focus is the challenge on the North Course, which offers with sweeping views of the high Sonoran Desert landscape among subtle elevation changes and rolling routing. Designed by Fought and Lehman and opened for play in 1998, the North Course has been ranked as the top track in Southwest Arizona by Golf Digest and is acknowledged as one of Golfweek's Top 100 Modern Courses.



No. 10 at The Gallery's South Course

Thousands of giant saguaros provide golfers with an all-together different experience on the South Course, which Fought also fashioned and opened in 2003. The South differs from North in both terrain and architectural scheme; its links-style routing and green surrounds are reminiscent of Donald Ross' Pinehurst No. 2.

The South Course hosted the WGC-Accenture Match Play Championship in 2007 and '08 before that tournament moved down Tangerine Road to the Ritz Carlton Dove Mountain.

Both courses showcase the best of desert golf and are lush, green havens amid an arid environment. "We wanted to create courses that were beautiful and artistic but we also made sure they were more than just pretty pictures," Fought said.

Rocky Goings-on the North

When The Gallery's two golf courses were being planned Fought was given the freedom to find his routings out of desert hardscrabble that was full of rocks, boulders, canyons and washes.

Once he determined the site for the property's lavish clubhouse, he laid out North on the toughest ground, with the knowledge that another course would be built later on land that was somewhat flatter and less severe.

"When we started to build the North Course, the site was really, really remote and a challenge to work with," Fought said. "We knew there would be plenty of forced carries and holes created along the canyon edges because of the wash that ran through the site and all the rocks, I mean huge boulders."

The North Course plays to a par of 72 and 7,384 yards from its back set of four tees, where it carries a rating of 74.0 and a slope of 142.

The 422-yard par-4 second begins a seven-hole loop into Ruelas Canyon. After dealing with the wash that runs along the hole's entire left side one encounters a green guarded in front by a rock abutment and bunkers on the right and back edges.

At 464 yards, the fourth is the longest two-shotter on North and may actually play longer when you consider it runs 40 feet uphill. The tee shot must carry three cross-bunkers set into a natural ridge line for a clear angle to the green. Avoid the "purgatory" fore bunker deeply embedded seven feet below the fairway, directly in front of the green's apron.

After negotiating North's canyon holes, players must face the massive 725-yard par-5 ninth. With a downhill tee shot to a generous landing area, the second shot is also downhill and gives players several options as there is a bunker left, two bunkers center, two traps right and a large lake bisecting the right half of the fairway. The putting surface is guarded by a cross-bunker short of the green on the left, a deep bunker on the right and a small wash, which bisects the fairway.

"The ninth is daunting on the scorecard but it is very playable because the first two shots are downhill," Fought said. "It's really a placement hole rather than one that requires nothing but length."

At first glance the 558-yard par-5 downhill 11th appears rather docile, but in reality the hole's nine bunkers are precisely positioned to form one of the most interesting strategies on the golf course.

And things do not get easier on the 214-yard par-3 12th - it's the longest and most difficult one-shotter and its green, which measures approximately 6,800 square feet, sits at the base of a plateau with abundant specimen saguaros as its backdrop.

Players will love the chance to go for broke on the 336-yard par-4 17th, the shortest two-shotter on the golf course but definitely not short on options on how to play it. Pinpoint accuracy is required to miss the three fairway bunkers in the prime landing area, and a cavernous bunker in the front of the green must be avoided to have any chance of scoring well. The putting surface is divided in the center lengthwise by a roll, making positioning of the tee shot imperative.

"I love what we were able to do on the North Course," Fought said. "It's a challenge for all level of players, and the variety keeps the player on his toes."

Fought Channels Ross on South

Fought deeply admires Ross's work and that sentiment is shared by The Gallery's owner, John MacMillan. When it came time for the second course on the property, the entire golf team at The Gallery headed east to Pinehurst, where for three days they played, studied and dissected Ross's ballyhooed work in North Carolina.



The Gallery's South Course

"I won the U.S. Amateur in 1977 on a wonderful Ross course (Aronimink Golf Club in Philadelphia) and I have always loved his work because he is so efficient with his design," Fought said.

For courses built in the desert, there is a limit to the amount of ground that can be grassed because of state-imposed irrigation water restrictions. Who better to turn to for a template of efficiency than Ross, the old master?

The South Course has generous fairways - some as wide as 70 yards - to encourage players to plot the best lines into the raised, angled greens that offer hints of Pinehurst No. 2. In effect, Fought has designed a course that is completely different from the neighboring North.

South sports plateau-type greens (a la Ross), as Fought intended the 7,466-yard, par-72 track to be a thinking player's course. "If you play smart, understand risk-reward and position the ball well," Fought said, "you can have a good measure of success on the South."

South also has a "trickle effect" as the ball rolls toward the valley from greens with lots of undulations and false edges - the center of putting surfaces are often the flattest spots.

Perhaps the best strategic holes are its two short par-4s, the 349-yard seventh and 362-yard 12th. But don't forget its six par-4s of 447 yards or longer (including the 496-yard fifth and the 499-yard 13th) and the pesky 225-yard par-3 third, the hardest one-shotter on South.

The Gallery one of the few private clubs in the country that features two highly acclaimed courses. Among its honors are Golfweek's Best Residential Courses (North is No. 84, South is No. 88); America's 100 Greatest Courses - Best in Arizona (North No. 11, South No. 25); and Golfweek's Best New Courses for 2003 (South No. 31).

If you have a chance to play The Gallery, the memories you will gain will be pretty as a picture.

For more information, visit www.gallerygolf.com



Nos. 1 and 9 at The Gallery's North Course



No.6 at The Gallery's North Course



The 14th hole at The Gallery's North Course