

Up To Par: Good lies in this Hammock

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The complementary landscaping has resulted in Hammock Bay being declared a Gold Sanctuary course by the Audobon Society.

Despite all the surrounding developments (of both Hammock Bay and Marco Shores), there's not a hole on the course that makes one tentative for fear of sending a ball through someone's window.

In The Beginning

Local golfers affectionately called it the Shores.

Officially, it was called Marco Shores Golf Club, a course devoid of any great character, but popular because of its wide open fairways that invited pulling out a driver on almost every hole.

Truth be told, though, Marco Shores was beginning to show its age as the new Millennium rolled in.

The clubhouse had a diner-type feel, the pro-shop was rudimentary to say the least, and the practice facility was limited to a putting green.

Play was decidedly weather-dependent, meaning that when it had rained, some of the holes sported instant water hazards.

Nobody who remembers the course, for example, would deny squelching through the marsh that masqueraded the 10th hole after even moderate downpours.

Landscaping was incidental, too, with the course apparently plunked down in cleared land off the then SR951, about four miles down the drag from Marco Island.

Change was in the air, however.

WCI Communities moved in on the cusp of the wave of development that pervaded in the early to mid 2000, and announced plans for a new 247-acre community of towers and townhouses anchored by a brand-new and exclusive golf course.

Existing low-rise condos and townhouses along Mainsail Drive would not be affected by the plans, but their assorted golf course views certainly would.

The Changes, The Result

Four years ago, PGA tour veteran Peter Jacobsen and his colleague Jim Hardy officially opened up the Hammock Bay course with a flurry of media attention.

The twosome had completely redesigned the course to the extent that it would be virtually unrecognizable from the original.

In a truly mammoth operation, thousands of tons of dirt was excavated to form new lakes and irrigation reservoirs, allowing the eventual creation of undulating — and indeed even hilly — fairways on the new course.

At the same time, the various buildings had forged ahead, and the newly-created private and gated community

took shape to the West of the property.

In tandem with a still-to-be constructed golf clubhouse is a sport and recreation center that comprises tennis, spa facilities and a tropical lagoon-style pool.

Tour de Fours (and Threes and Fives)

A year-and-a-half at the helm of the golf club and sports complex, General Manager Rick Rainville enthuses about the condition of the course, the omnipresent drought threat notwithstanding.

A PGA golf professional formerly from Rhode Island, Rainville is more than happy to take time out from his busy administrative schedule to show off a couple of holes.

The course's trump card, he says, is the intuitive use by Jacobsen and Hardy of South African-developed seadwarf paspalum grass, which, above all, is salt-tolerant.

"It helps water management, and can be mowed at different heights, so the tees fairways and greens are all paspalum," he says.

Bottom line, he adds, is that you hit the fairways, you'll have good lies as the ball sits beautifully up.

Immediately evident, too, is the judicious combination of fairways and attractive waste areas that are dotted with native vegetation.

It makes economic sense to place fairways where they're logically needed, Rainville says, but a feather in the course's cap is that the complementary landscaping has resulted in Hammock Bay being declared a Gold Sanctuary course by the Audobon Society.

Out on one of the holes, member John McMillan stops Rainville to compliment him and his staff on the course's condition.

A five-time-a-week player, McMillan reckons the course compares with the best in Southwest Florida.

"And abroad," says the Scottish-born Marco resident.

About A Round

Starter John Rewald gives the full course run down before dispatching you to the first tee — pin positions for the day, divot procedure (don't replace, use sand) and what to expect on the greens on this particular day.

"You'll enjoy the front nine," he says, "but the back nine is where the course really comes alive."

He's talking, one discovers, about the amazing peaks and valleys the designers achieved with all that fill.

Despite all the surrounding developments (of both Hammock Bay and Marco Shores), there's not a hole on the course that makes one tentative for fear of sending a ball through someone's window.

At the same time, the longer holes almost all tantalizingly suggest: "use a driver, use a driver," but that's where the tried-and-trusted notion of course management holds true.

Some fairways are obviously wide enough to give it a full go, but others (in hindsight) are deceptive, and when you pull out a slightly more accurate long iron you can almost sense designers Jacobsen and Hardy nodding in agreement.

Five sets of tees on each hole elevate or diminish the degree of difficulty, but the greens turn out to be the great levelers.

Fast, but true, many of them have undulations that require a lot more than the cursory quick assessments that most casual golfers make before committing to putts.

Thus, they can be infinitely satisfying or beyond infuriating, particularly if one has made a green in regulation.

But that's the essence of the game, and, as the saying goes, there's always that one shot that will bring you back for more.

Hammock Bay is a private club with non equity, refundable fees of \$50,000 and \$21 in cart fees year-round per game. There are no assessments, and no minimums for food and beverages.

Some reciprocals (primarily with other WCI Communities clubs) are available.

Outside memberships are available, and the overall cap is 375 members.

The club's Website is hammockbay.com.

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