



The 450-yard 18th plays uphill toward the classically designed clubhouse.

OPPOSITE: After playing holes like the 540-yard 14th (near right), members can enjoy al fresco sunset dining at the River Club (far right).

Quail Valley Golf & River Club



WITH A UNIQUE COURSE
AND A SPRAWLING BOATING,
TENNIS AND SWIM FACILITY,
QUAIL VALLEY OFFERS A
SPORTING AND SOCIAL
EXPERIENCE LIKE
NONE OTHER

There aren't too many golf clubs that are immortalized in a book by a best-selling author. When novelist and *Miami Herald* columnist Carl Hiaasen decided to return to the game after a 32-year hiatus, he joined Quail Valley and then recorded his often-hilarious account in *The Downhill Lie: A Hacker's Return to a Ruinous Sport*.

Hiaasen couldn't have picked a better place to get back in touch with the game than Quail Valley, which opened in 2001 and is located about eight miles from the coast in Vero Beach, Florida. Not only does it have one of the best practice facilities in the area with a 35-acre range, state-of-the-art Learning Center and six par-3 practice holes, but the course itself is so beautiful, well-designed and challenging that it's the perfect place to rekindle anyone's interest in the game.

Because of all the man-made elevation changes, there's really no place else like it in South Florida, starting with the Shinnecock Hills-style clubhouse perched 50 feet above the rolling terrain and lakes. A hunting lodge-like luxury permeates the interior of the 26,000-square-foot building, while outside rocking chairs sit on the wraparound terrace. It's the perfect spot to take in the action on the course, which is notable for two things: the lack of any sign of homes and a 64-acre lake that is bisected by the 570-yard "island hole" 10th. The unique hole starts with an elevated tee box that offers a terrific view of the wide fairway that bends gently to the right to a relatively bunkerless green that juts out into the lake.

"Some people have island greens," says owner and developer Steve Mulvey, who came up with the concept. "We decided to go a little further than that."

Designed by Tom Fazio II and Nick Price, the 7,350-yard layout can play totally different from one day to the next depending on the South Florida wind. With six sets of tees, players can mix and match the appropriate yardage for the conditions.

"It's a very good risk-reward golf course," says Price. "If you hit good drives, you'll be rewarded with easier second shots into the greens. You can play wide of the hazards all day long, but if you want to go low, you'll have to hit some shots."

And hole some putts. The TifEagle greens are notoriously quick. "We have a great reputation for our green speeds," says member Matt Avril, a plus-two handicap who was the 1999 Florida Match Play champion. "They routinely run 12–13 on the Stimpmeter, so no



The greens, like the one at the 432-yard 9th, are very slick; note the island hole 10th in the background.

INSET: Water guards the entire left side of the 396-yard 11th.





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one here is ever intimidated by another club's greens."

Adds Price: "You can't high-side yourself. A lot of times you're better off having a 20- or 30-footer up the hill rather than a 10- or 15-footer down the hill."

It's hard to believe that the 280 acres were once a flat orange grove, but a construction feat worthy of the Army Corps of Engineers created the lakes and elevation changes in less than six months. Fazio and Price used 25 40-ton off-road dump trucks and eight excavators to dig the 30-foot deep lakes and create all the fill for the elevation changes. They wound up moving almost three million cubic yards of dirt.

The blank canvas was almost harder than one constricted by trees and wetlands. There really wasn't anything they couldn't do with regard to the routing or vertical variations.

"When you have nothing to blame but yourself, you had better get it right," says Fazio, the nephew of his famous namesake. "My biggest goal was to keep changing speeds so that every hole was completely different from any other hole. We needed to create the ponds to generate the fill

but I didn't want it to feel like a typical Florida course where the water is in play, so unless you're going after a certain pin or you really hook it or slice it, you can play the course and never come close to hitting it in the water."

The links-like design appears pretty straightforward with few forced carries, especially from the forward tees. (There are two sets of women's tees—a rarity.) The greens are open in front and receptive to run-up shots, so it's eminently playable for higher handicaps. But there are 141 bunkers and some wonderfully strategic design elements that Fazio likes to call "Easter eggs," little speed slots that result in an extra 30 or 40 yards. On the par-5 10th, for instance, there's a slight ridge in the fairway and if a player takes the more aggressive line just to the right of it, the ball will catch the downslope and roll to a flat spot right next to the lake in the go zone.

Bunkers abound at the 438-yard 13th.

INSET: The Learning Center features K-Vest technology.

OPPOSITE: Don't miss the green left on the 416-yard 17th.

'THE UNIQUENESS OF THE COURSE
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KEVIN GIVEN.





With one of the best caddie programs in the state, those design secrets don't stay hidden for long. And with two men's groups divided into those above a 15 handicap and those below, with each teeing it up a couple of times a week, there's always a game to be found.

"We have eight of the best amateur golfers in the area, male and female," says co-owner Kevin Given, adding that they can often be found at the club's new \$1 million Learning Center. "The uniqueness of the golf course sets it apart but the practice facility takes it to a whole other level. It's drop-dead gorgeous."

Like most great clubs, Quail Valley, which hosted the 2009 Florida State Open, was built by word-of-mouth, friends inviting friends. "We have the best membership by far of any club I've ever owned or been associated with," says Mulvey, who has built, owned or operated 17 clubs, including venerable Hudson National in New York's Westchester County. "It's all based on service. The financial stability is a huge key for people too. We weathered 9/11 and this recent recession. We're probably the most financially sound club in Florida, if not the United States, right now."

What's unique about Quail Valley is that, unlike most country clubs, the golf and other amenities are completely separate. While the golf club is all about playing the game, the focus of the River Club, eight miles away, is social interaction. The sprawling complex is near the beach on the Intra-coastal Waterway. Says Mulvey: "This added so much. The members absolutely love it."



The River Club, which opened in 2003, has a 43-slip marina, fitness and spa complex, 25-meter pool, tiki bar, seven Har-Tru tennis courts and eight 900-square-foot suites with outdoor fireplaces that overlook the water. Many members who live in the Northeast don't even own homes in the area and just stay in the homey accommodations.

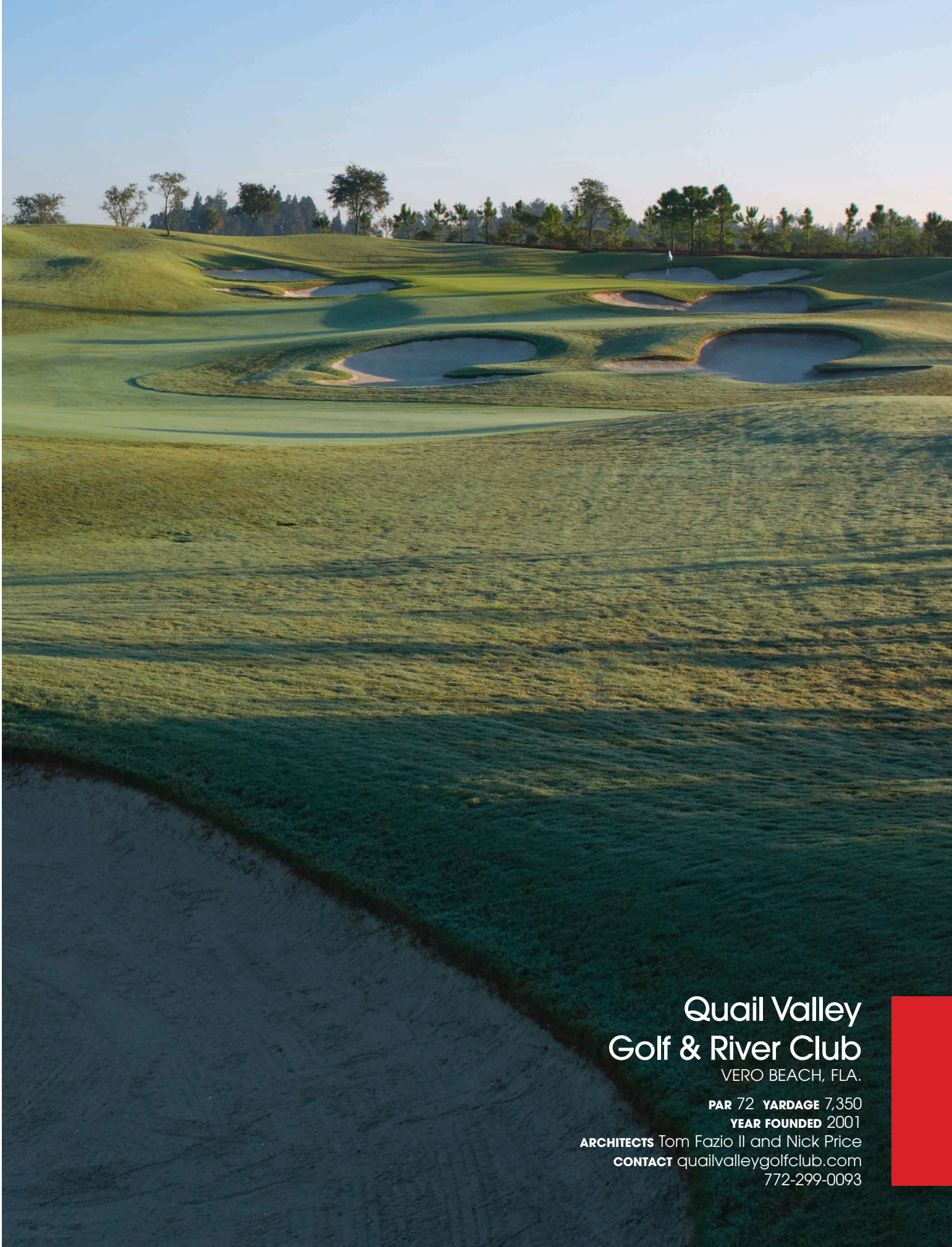
Located in the heart of downtown Vero Beach, the River Club is also the social center of the club, playing host to all kinds of fun events, like live music three nights a week and poker nights in the Boathouse. The main restaurant, the French cottage-style 2343 Prime, serves up certified Black Angus beef cooked on an 800-degree griddle and some of the best sunsets you've ever seen, while the sports-themed McKeever's Pub & Grille offers more casual fare.

As president of the hotel group of Starwood Hotels & Resorts, which includes the Westin and St. Regis brands, Avril knows a thing or two about quality and service. "It's fair to say I have high expectations when it comes to that," he says. "And I haven't seen any club that does it better than Quail Valley."

The River Club is pure Florida, with a 43-slip marina, 25-meter pool and seven clay tennis courts.

INSET: The fire pit is a popular spot.

OPPOSITE: The 437-yard 15th doesn't give up pars easily.



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VERO BEACH, FLA.

PAR 72 YARDAGE 7,350

YEAR FOUNDED 2001

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