

THE ARCHITECTURE ISSUE



The Cradle at Pinehurst

Resorts Embrace Short-Course Virtues

There are days now when Tom Pashley, president of Pinehurst Resort, stands on the well-worn brick steps outside the clubhouse and soaks in the scene.

Just beyond the sprawling, tumbling Thistle Dhu putting course sits the Cradle, the Gil Hanse-designed short course that, in two quick years, has become as much a part of Pinehurst as the familiar putter boy logo.

Located perhaps 100 yards from the clubhouse and just a short-iron shot from the 18th green at Pinehurst No. 2, the Cradle has become an integral element in the Pinehurst experience. Just nine holes measuring 789 yards, the short course distills golf to its essence – the joy of the game.

“It’s hard to imagine us not having it now and it just turned two years old,” Pashley says. “To see the activity out there, you almost wonder what guests were doing before.

“It draws you in like the candy aisle at the grocery store. It’s hard to walk through that without grabbing a candy bar. It’s that way with the Cradle.”

As the game and golf-centric resorts evolve, the concept of short courses as resort amenities has blossomed. It’s the notion that less can actually be more. The Cradle, Pashley says, averages about 36,000 rounds a year not counting replay rounds, of which there are several thousand annually.

Increasingly, resorts have added short courses to their lineups, giving guests a different option than traditional 18-hole rounds. The Preserve at Bandon Dunes, a rollicking 13-hole creation of Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw, may have lit the fuse on the short-course revolution.

Big Cedar Lodge in Missouri has two short courses, one of which (Top of the Rock) hosts a PGA Tour Champions event. A 10-hole layout called the Nest is scheduled to open next summer near Cabot Links in Nova Scotia.

The 17-hole Sandbox at Sand Valley in Wisconsin was an instant hit. At Forest Dunes Golf Club in Michigan, a short course co-designed by Riley Johns and Keith Rhebb, who did the popular nine-hole municipal course in Winter Park, Fla., will come on line in 2020.

“Watching the success of the Preserve and seeing the demographic evolve away from playing 36 holes a day to playing 18 holes and wanting a little more but not a lot, it’s been amazing,” says Ben Cowan Dewar, co-founder and CEO of Cabot Links.



No. 1 at Mountain Top, one of two short courses at Missouri’s Big Cedar Lodge

“It’s about camaraderie. That’s one of the great parts of the game. I think that’s part of our product. We’re selling camaraderie as much as we’re selling the resort itself.”

The virtues of short courses are numerous. They require less land therefore costing less to maintain. They reduce the amount of time it takes to play. They can create a different vibe such as at the Cradle, where music plays and a specially designed drink cart is stationed on the course.

As much as these courses are there for the dedicated golfers, they also provide a less intimidating way to bring non-golfers into the game.

“We get more families with non-golf spouses visiting now but also in the core buddy trips, they aren’t going to play 36 holes a day now but they want to slip out for more,” Cowan Dewar says. “As a father of three young kids it’s an amazing thing to think of that as an approach to the game and a way to get golfers to the game. It’s fun.”

Beau Welling, who has a design company of his own as well as being the senior design consultant for Tiger Woods’ firm, recently completed a 12-hole stand-alone short course adjacent to the Old Edwards Inn in Highlands, N.C.

Welling has also worked with Woods in creating three short courses – one at Bluejack National outside Houston, one at Diamante near Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, and one at Jack’s Bay in the Bahamas.

“The atmosphere makes them a different animal. It’s fun without the formality of real golf,” Welling says. “In the past, par-3 courses were just smaller versions of traditional golf courses.”

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