

Changing Courses

Way beyond the Monterey Peninsula and the sand hills of North Carolina, top designers have carved out exceptional, out-of-the-way greens that are becoming America's new bucket list-worthy links.

by Shaun Tolson

Hole 5 at Ozarks National
in Missouri

Courtesy Big Cedar Lodge

MISSOURI

The hidden nature of **BIG CEDAR LODGE** (bigcedar.com) has an approaching expiration date. November marked the opening of Ozarks National, Big Cedar's second 18-hole, championship-caliber course and the first designed by Coore & Crenshaw in the state of Missouri. Anticipated for 2019 is the grand opening of Payne's Valley, the first public course designed by Tiger Woods. Its location in the heart of the Ozarks in southern Missouri notwithstanding, the resort's reputation as an exemplary golfing destination will soon match the already exceptional quality of its courses.

Big Cedar's other 18-hole course, the Tom Fazio-designed Buffalo Ridge Springs, and its two par-3 courses—Top of the Rock (designed by Jack Nicklaus) and Mountain Top (designed by Gary Player)—boldly showcase dramatic natural elements like sunken caves and exposed rock formations. But Ozarks National, which runs along the top of several ridges, is distinct for highlighting its surroundings in an understated way. "It's extremely peaceful out there," says Johnny Morris, the founder of both Big Cedar Lodge and Bass Pro Shops. "It's just old farmland. If you had been there 200 years ago, I would imagine that it would have looked very similar."

Like all other Coore & Crenshaw designs, the course's layout is married to the natural topography of the land. Some holes are visually intimidating and require shots to be hit over expansive-looking hazards, but co-designer Bill Coore reassures prospective players that the shots look much harder (and the hazards appear much larger) than they are. "There's nothing more thrilling than to hit your ball and see it fly over something," he says. "That's a thrill that's not forgotten."

By the end of 2019, Big Cedar Lodge will boast 77 holes, all of which reinforce Morris' mission statement: to encourage people to explore and enjoy the surrounding natural world as he did growing up. "I think of golf like fishing," he says. "It's an excuse to get outside and an opportunity to spend time with people you care about."

Top Accommodations: Private log cabins, from \$315. >



Hole 9 at the Gary Player-designed Mountain Top course. *Opposite, from top:* The secluded lodging at Big Cedar; the Osage Restaurant's rotunda room; the spa features an indoor grotto pool with rustic stone walls.

WISCONSIN

Some might argue that **SAND VALLEY** (sandvalley.com) shed its discreet status the moment reports circulated in 2013 that developer Mike Keiser had purchased the property's 1,700 acres. After all, legendary Keiser opened Bandon Dunes on Oregon's southern coast in 1999 and subsequently created the Cabot Links resort in northern Nova Scotia in 2011. But Sand Valley remains lesser known (at least for now) because its location in far-away-from-everything central Wisconsin does not immediately spring to mind when golfers consider a luxurious links getaway.

The resort's first, namesake course, Sand Valley (a Coore & Crenshaw design), opened in 2017; its second layout, Mammoth Dunes, opened last spring. Designed by David McLay Kidd (the architect who penned the first layout at Bandon Dunes), Mammoth Dunes stretches to 6,935 yards from the back tees and features wide fairways, playable rough, and green complexes shaped in such a way that players are not penalized if they hit somewhat errant approach shots. Those characteristics, Kidd reveals, align with his design philosophy to assist average players and high handicappers. "Making birdie is the best thing in golf, no matter how you do it," he says. "And the minute that you're not chasing birdie, I'm going to try to help you."

Most recently, the resort announced plans to build a third 18-hole course—this one designed by Tom Doak and modeled after England's Heathland courses, which generally measure around 6,000 yards. When it's complete, that par-68 layout will further enhance the resort's golf-centric lifestyle. "The purity of the experience is like nothing else," Kidd says of a visit to Sand Valley. "It's all about, and only about, the golf."

Top Accommodations: Four-bedroom cottages, from \$900. ▶

Clockwise from top: A four-bedroom "cottage" at Sand Valley in central Wisconsin; the villas' interiors feature a modern rustic aesthetic; hole 3 at Sand Valley's Mammoth Dunes.



Courtesy Sand Valley (3)



TEXAS

When considering a Lone Star State getaway, golf travelers likely think of the Four Seasons at Las Colinas in Dallas, which is home to two courses: the TPC Four Seasons Las Colinas and Cottonwood Valley. Just 215 miles south, outside of Austin, **HORSESHOE BAY RESORT** (hsbresort.com) may garner less attention; however, the 400-room property is unique in that it's the only destination in the continental United States to feature three Robert Trent Jones Sr.-designed courses, each one distinct in its appearance and the challenges that it presents.

"That's the coolest thing about this property," says Anthony Holder, the resort's director of golf operations. "There's a course here for everyone."

The resort spans 7,000 acres of varied terrain, a characteristic that the owners wanted to preserve when they began developing the property during the early 1970s. For that reason, they commissioned Robert Trent Jones Sr. to design the first course, Slick Rock, since the architect championed a design strategy that valued the preservation of a site's natural topography.

Slick Rock immediately became (and still is) a resplendent American parkland layout, while the subsequent two 18-hole courses, Ram Rock and Apple Rock, were built on stretches of land defined by meandering creeks, pronounced changes of elevation, and untouched, native areas.

All three courses recently benefited from restorations and renovations that were carried out by Robert Trent Jones Jr., the original architect's oldest son (work on Apple Rock, the last course to be renovated, is expected to wrap up this year). "Slick Rock went back to what it originally was," says Ken Gorzycki, the resort's director of agronomy. "We were able to expose the old skeletons of the bunkers that were lost over the years, and we uncovered and reclaimed a lot of what Mr. Jones had originally designed."

Top Accommodations: Private rental homes, from \$485.

Clockwise from top left: The clubhouse at Horseshoe Bay Resort; The Loop, the newest course at Forest Dunes Golf Club in Roscommon, Michigan; the million-dollar hole at Slick Rock, originally designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr.



Courtesy: Horseshoe Bay Resort/Tony Secker, Opposite Page: Courtesy Forest Dunes Golf Club/Evan Schiller



MICHIGAN

The name of the newest course at **FOREST DUNES GOLF CLUB** (forestdunesgolf.com) in Roscommon, Michigan, aptly describes the shape of its layout and reflects its reversible nature. What The Loop does not convey is the course's striking similarities to Scottish links, both in appearance and playability. Designed by Tom Doak, the 6,704-yard or 6,805-yard layout (depending on the direction being played; the course is set up to play clockwise one day, counter-clockwise the next) opened in 2016 and is a stark contrast to the club's namesake course, Forest Dunes, which was designed by Tom Weiskopf and opened in 2002. The pristine fairways, greens, and tee boxes on the 7,116-yard Forest Dunes course established the club's reputation. "You drive into the middle of nowhere and then about 30 miles more and all you see is scrub pine and rough-looking native areas," says Elliott Oscar, the club's head golf professional, of the Au Sable State Forest that surrounds the club. "Then you have these vibrant,

green fairways that are cut through the trees."

The 18th greens of the two courses are only about 500 yards apart, but separated by a parking lot.

"We have a member who calls the parking lot the Atlantic Ocean," says Oscar, "because that's the equivalent of what you're crossing when you go from one side to the other."

On the east side of the parking lot, golfers familiar with American parkland courses feel right at home, hitting shots on the Weiskopf course that will succeed or fail based on the distance they fly in the air. On the west side, the fescue fairways and firm terrain surrounding the greens on Doak's more rugged layout will condition golfers to embrace (and rue) unpredictable bounces.

"It looks so simple when you're standing on the tee boxes," Oscar says of The Loop, "but the more you play the course, the more you can see Doak's intention and the genius behind it."

Top Accommodations: Four-bedroom villas, from \$475. ▶

OREGON

A tee shot on the 95-yard fifth hole at McVeigh's Gauntlet—the new, seven-hole short course at **SILVIES VALLEY RANCH** (silvies.us) in east-central Oregon—lands pin high about a yard from the green. Given the strong headwind coming in from the north and the vast expanse of sagebrush that encircles the green only a few yards from the putting surface, the outcome is pleasing. The caddie, Mike, is less impressed. Maybe that's to be expected. After all, Mike is a goat.

The Gauntlet is the fourth golf course at The Retreat & Links, the official name of a 34-room resort nestled inside 140,000 acres of a working cattle ranch. The facetious caddie program only highlights the rugged and extreme nature of the course's seven holes—a layout that course architect Dan Hixson describes as "fantasy golf." Outfitted with leather-and-canvas packs that can hold six clubs, a dozen balls, tees, and six canned beverages, the goats make an already memorable round of golf even more distinct.

"It's really not about my architecture," Hixson says, acknowledging that, aside from the areas used for the tee boxes and greens, he moved and cleared little land to create the Gauntlet course.

"It's the experience of being out in frontier Oregon and seeing fantasy holes



to play golf and have fun on. The goats add to that."

The ranch's two reversible, 18-hole courses that opened in spring 2018 deliver a more traditional links experience, playing just over 7,000 yards in both directions and utilizing nine shared greens. Wide fairways and large putting surfaces accompany dramatic vistas of the surrounding Ponderosa pine-covered hills. "This is the only place in frontier Oregon," says Colby Marshall, vice president of livestock and guest services, and general manager of The Retreat & Links, "where you can have this type of experience and play 54 holes of unique golf."

Top Accommodations: Two-bedroom lakeside cabins, from \$950. ♦

From above: The Retreat & Links features 34 cabins; Mike, the goat caddie; Gauntlet, a new, seven-hole short course in east-central Oregon.



Courtesy Silvies Valley Ranch (3).

NEW YORK CITY

LAS VEGAS

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BOSTON SEAPORT

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PLANO

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