

Texas Golf 2002

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Section M

MAN with the PLANS

With his latest works, Tom Fazio aims to put Texas golf on the national map

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No. 1 course

Houston's Champions Golf Club moved to the top of the list for the second time. 4-5M

Best and toughest holes

Our panel of 27 voters picked the best and toughest 18 holes in the state. 10-11M

Building boom continues

Sixty-one courses were under construction statewide as of September 2001, and more are on the way. 15M

Golf course architect Tom Fazio stands above the fifth green at Dallas National Golf Club, his newest Texas creation.

"I am super-charged about Texas. My goal is that the three new courses will be 1, 2 and 3 in the state..."

—Golf course architect Tom Fazio on his three newest projects in the state: Dallas National Golf Club, The Vaquero Club and Briggs Ranch Golf Club

Designs on the top

With Dallas National and other Texas layouts, Tom Fazio's out to put the state on a new course

By BRAD TOWNSEND
Staff Writer

It is a clear early-December morning, crisp but not cold. Tom Fazio, arguably the Cadillac, the Waterford crystal, the *crème de la crème* of living golf course architects, is in bliss.

He is walking down a fairway with 24-year-old son Logan, 16-year-old son Gavin and the family's yellow Labrador, Baxter. The alluring backdrop of rolling hills and autumn-hued trees is reminiscent of Fazio's hometown, Hendersonville, N.C.

But on this day, the Fazio aren't in North Carolina. They're in Dallas, specifically Dallas National Golf Club, a 7,200-yard private course scheduled to open late this spring or early summer just 6½ miles southwest of downtown.

Less than 30 minutes to the north, in Westlake, is another new Fazio tract, The Vaquero Club. It debuted late last November.

"All of our projects are special," says Tom Fazio, pausing on Dallas National's 18th green to enjoy views of downtown and Texas Stadium. "But in Dallas this past year, having Logan working on both projects has made it extra special."

Dallas National and Vaquero aren't the only new Fazio courses generating buzz in Texas. Briggs Ranch Golf Club opened in San Antonio on Dec. 26. A few weeks earlier, Fazio had completed a remodeling of a course his uncle George designed in 1963, Champions' Jackrabbit Course in Houston.

Hence Texas Golf has anointed 2002 the Year of Fazio. Just three years ago, Texas had only one Tom Fazio-designed golf course. Now there are seven, counting Jackrabbit.

Regardless of opinion about Fazio's work, there is little question that his growing presence enhances a Texas golf landscape that, bluntly put, has little national dis-

tingtion. The only Texas course that ranks among *Golf Digest's* current 100 Greatest Courses in America is Fort Worth's Colonial Country Club, at No. 40.

At the very least, the influx of Fazio courses is likely to scramble *The Dallas Morning News's* annual state ranking once Dallas National, Vaquero and Briggs Ranch become eligible for consideration in 2003 and 2004.

"Nothing better could happen to Texas golf than to have Tom Fazio build three or four courses," says Michael Abbott, general manager of The Vaquero Club. "It just puts golf at a different level."

Fazio's work is familiar with the 58-year-old Fazio's work, but golf connoisseurs need no introduction.

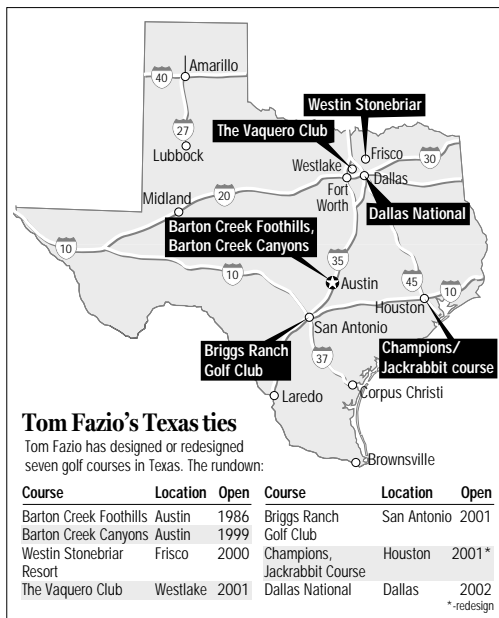
In 36 years, he has designed more than 125 courses. Nine of them rank among *Golf Digest's* top 100, tying him with Pete Dye for the most among living architects. Jack Nicklaus is next with six.

Fazio also has become America's foremost course makeover man, overseeing renovations at perennial national top-10 courses Pine Valley, Winged Foot and Merion. Last spring, he supervised the most extensive makeover of Augusta National since it opened in 1933.

Not that the Texas projects took a back seat. Fazio estimates he made 25 trips to Dallas, San Antonio and Houston during 2001.

Family links

Of course, Fazio had ulterior reasons to visit Dallas. Logan has lived in the area since September 2000 (you can see his house from



Vaquero's No. 4 tee box) while working as an associate designer and day-to-day overseer at Vaquero and Dallas National.

Gavin Fazio moved in with his brother in January 2001 and attends Southlake High School.

"They've even taken Baxter," laughs Tom Fazio, motioning toward the Labrador. "He used to be my dog."

While taking a reporter and a photographer on a tour of Dallas National, Tom Fazio basks in the 388-acre property's steal-your-breath scenery and 160-foot elevation changes. He also is in afterglow from a visit to Vaquero the previous day.

"The sun was going down, the



Tom Fazio (left) and Discovery Land chairman Mike Meldman tour The Vaquero Club in Westlake. The course opened in November.

The Vaquero Club

up in rankings. He knows it is a subjective process. Some golfers like a course because they happen to play it well. Others favor courses that are pleasing to the eye.

But Fazio, who commands up to \$1 million per project, understands what separates a good course from a great one. He has a strong opinion of how his four recent Texas projects should fare in future *News* rankings.

"It sounds facetious, it sounds bad, but there's no reason why they all wouldn't be in the top 10," Fazio says. "It's certainly not fair, it's not logical. But it's a matter of opinion."

"I am super-charged about Texas. My goal is that the three new courses will be 1, 2 and 3 in the state — and I'm not going to pick the order, obviously. We're going to let you and your compatriots pick it."

So what is different about these courses? Certainly, they aren't the first ballyhooed courses to open in Texas in recent years.

Champions Golf Club co-founder Jackie Burke Jr. hasn't seen the new courses, but he knows why he chose Fazio for the Jackrabbit project.

Foremost, he knew Tom would work within the intent of George Fazio's original design. Second, Fazio's work and reputation speak for themselves.

"Tom builds for some awfully wealthy people," Burke chuckles.

Wealthy clientele

Case in point: Dallas National co-developer John MacDonald. The 56-year-old Dallasite is a *Golf Digest* panelist who helps select the magazine's top 100.

MacDonald estimates that he has played 65 of the current top 100. He understands what separates a good course from an elite one, which explains his no-shortcuts approach to building Dallas National.

Besides, with initiation fees of \$100,000 to \$150,000 per person, Dallas National's 350 members will expect nothing less. They include Tom Hicks, Richard Rainwater, Lee Trevino and Roger Staubach.

When the club broke ground in October 2000, Fazio promised members that the course would exceed their expectation. It has.

Built on a site of a former cement quarry, it's decidedly un-Dallas-like: cliffs, canyons, densely wooded. It has what Fazio calls "the wow factor" on virtually every tee box.

"We're going to have 14 holes where you can't wait to hit the shot," MacDonald says. "The other four are very, very good, but I'm going to have 14 that'll put a knot in your throat because of the challenge, the beauty, the thrill of it."

Here's the intangible that has many labeling Dallas National a potential major championship venue: no houses. It will have first-class practice facilities, but no flamboyant clubhouse, no weddings or banquets, no tennis courts. Just golf.

Like Dallas National, Vaquero has plenty of visual impact (though the elevation changes are not as dramatic), including a 300-yard long bunker between the sixth and seventh fairways.

Both clubs pay homage to golf tradition with strong caddie programs. Vaquero hired its caddie master, Peter Faherty, from Seminole (ranked No. 12 on *Golf Digest's* national list). Vaquero's superintendent, Brandon Goodyk, trained at Augusta National.

Yes, Vaquero is part of a development, a gated 335-unit community on 436 acres of what used to be Ross Perot Jr.'s Circle T Ranch.

But it's anything but just another course surrounded by houses. For one thing, the homes start

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Fazio helps build Texas' reputation

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at \$850,000.

Among those building homes at Vaquero are PGA Tour players Brian Watts and Brandt Jobe and Japanese tour player Todd Hamilton. General manager Abbott, former director of golf at TPC Four Seasons at Las Colinas, says the players were attracted by the quality of the 7,064-yard, par-71 course and practice facilities.

The pampering doesn't hurt, either. While playing rounds at Va-

quero, members can have their car washed, have someone do their grocery shopping or have their clothing tailored.

During fall and winter rounds, members can get a cup of soup or smoked tri-tip hash at the first tee (prepared by the on-site chef), or some grilled brats at the turn. Oh, and the on-the-course bathrooms have heated toilet seats.

"What they bring," says Logan Fazio with a smile, "is a different level of service."

Jack Burke probably would scowl about the heated toilets. But he is the first to agree that the boom from one Tom Fazio course to seven is a significant step toward enhancing Texas' golf reputation.

Certainly, there soon will be some fresh faces in Texas Golf's top 10. And who knows, perhaps Colonial will have some Lone Star company in the national top 100.

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