

Green's Day

With its 18-hole course now completed, Magnolia Green Golf Club is set to debut its full collection of holes this spring | by **BRIAN McCALLEN**

Located 30 minutes southwest of Richmond in historic Chesterfield County, Magnolia Green is promoting itself as central Virginia's premier multi-generational, active lifestyle residential community. Its road to prominence has been anything but smooth, but golf-wise, the club's centerpiece is a unique collaborative design that will likely be embraced by players.

First conceived as Westham Golf Club, the 3,000-acre development had its plug pulled for six years by the financial meltdown. The property is now owned by iStar Residential, one of the nation's largest investors in luxury condominiums, multifamily and master-planned developments.

The original routing for the golf course was devised by architect Tom Clark, who has dozens of mid-Atlantic design credits to his name, dating back to the 1970s. Nine of the 18 holes opened in 2010. Even half-built, the daily-fee facility received favorable reviews.

On a spacious parcel with a 60-foot elevation change marked by regenerated loblolly pines and classic Virginia hardwoods (oak, beech and a few maples), Clark pushed the holes to all corners of the property.

"I had the flexibility to explore the entirety of the site," Clark says. "Holes cross wetland corridors, climb hilly sections and descend to flatter areas. It's good golf course topography."

CREATIVE CHALLENGES

While Clark was responsible for the layout's clearing and grading schemes, the new ownership group brought in Nicklaus Design to collaborate with Clark to finish the course, which is now known as Magnolia Green Golf Club. Clark's basic routing was retained, but the design features and strategic intent changed considerably. Now promoted as a Nicklaus Design in association with Tom Clark, Magnolia Green is a one-of-a-kind hybrid that draws from different schools of golf course architecture.

For example, ever since Nicklaus teamed

with Tom Doak on the design of Sebonack Golf Club in Southampton, N.Y., 10 years ago, his greens have become more undulating, even wavy. For his part, Clark is pleased that, while the putting surfaces have plenty of "movement," there are no steep terraces or pronounced whalebacks.

Clark firmly believes the average player deserves a relatively flat putt and a few decent looks at par or birdie during the round. Nicklaus Design came in with the clout of the game's greatest champion behind it.

"Eighty percent of the dirt was already moved, and the clearing lines for the hole corridors were completed, so we redeveloped

a new strategy for each golf hole and massaged what was already here," explains Chris Cochran, a senior design associate for Nicklaus. "For example, we worked on the yardages quite a bit to create more variety in length on several of the holes.

"The seventh hole was shortened to create a 'reachable-in-two' par 5 for big hitters, and we shortened the long par-4 ninth to create an interesting drive-and-pitch hole."

The end product to complete the first nine was a developer-mandated change that created room for the club's extensive short game practice area.

Among the holes that show the Clark influence are the par-3 third, a reverse Redan that invites players to aim their tee shots well left of the target and let the slope feed the ball toward the tilted green. Meanwhile,

The holes at Magnolia Green Golf Club have a distinct feel and eye-catching aesthetics, including at the par-4 18th hole.



MAGNOLIA GREEN GOLF CLUB

the sturdy par 4-18th (previously the second hole) is a long, straightforward hole with water in play that calls for two stout shots to reach the elevated, well-defended green.

Some golfers select a tee box based on its color. Thus, the design team wisely mixed up the paint box. The back tees at 7,150 yards, which present a firm test to the scratch player, are green. The next set, at 6,724 yards, are black. The blue markers, the tees favored by average campaigners, are 6,216 yards. The white tees are 5,640 yards, while the red tees, considered ideal for ladies and novices, measure 4,783 yards.

UNIQUE NICHE

Cochran pointed out that the facility was originally conceived as an upscale private club, which meant a tee-to-green bentgrass grassing plan along the lines of Kinloch Golf Club, Spring Creek Golf Club, Hermitage Country Club and other top private clubs in Virginia.

“After the reset, we simplified the agronomic palette to make it easier to take care of the course,” Cochran says.

Magnolia Green features bentgrass greens, bermudagrass fairways and tees and fescue accents in the rough and along the back edges of the bunkers, giving the course a rustic, naturalistic look.

According to Bobby Kidder, Magnolia Green’s general manager “the golf course doesn’t remind you of anything else in the Richmond market. With the pines, elevation changes and distinctive bunkers, the layout has more of a Carolinas look and feel.

“This is a strategic, second-shot golf course designed for shotmakers,” Kidder notes. “It rewards good iron play. The fairways are wide and the rough is cut short, about an inch to an inch and a half, but you need a vivid short game imagination to score. The greens are tough to putt.”

Couple the sloping, slippery greens with numerous “deception” bunkers à la Donald Ross that appear closer to the green than they actually are, and Magnolia Green will debut as a tactician’s delight. It’s a layout that will need to be played more than once in order to unlock its secrets.

“In the high-end, semiprivate category, we’re aiming to become one of the top courses in the commonwealth,” Kidder says. “We’d love to attract a State Open or a State Amateur after the clubhouse opens, likely by late 2016 or early 2017.”

He says the extensive practice facility, which includes three practice putting greens, will likely develop into one of the region’s best. In time, the club plans to package itself with area hotels.

On the real estate side, Magnolia Green offers a variety of townhomes, single-family homes and custom-built residences ranging from just under \$200,000 (townhomes) up to \$1 million.

While a soft opening of the course is slated for mid-May, Magnolia Green’s grand opening is scheduled for June 12. Green fees are priced at \$60 on weekdays and \$70 on weekends, with reduced rates after 12 p.m. and in the evening.

Magnolia Green is cause célèbre. Other than the opening of Potomac Shores Golf Club in northern Virginia in 2014, Magnolia Green, located just minutes east of Interstate 95 in Moseley, is the first new 18-hole course to open in Virginia in six years. ♣

Author Brian McCallen is a writer from Stonington, Conn., and a regular contributor to Virginia Golfer.

Golfers are forced to make smart, strategic choices in order to successfully navigate the layout, a trait particularly evident at the par-3 11th hole.



IF YOU GO

At the par-4 16th hole, players are required to play exacting shots to set up a scoring opportunity.

MAGNOLIA GREEN GOLF CLUB

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➤ **Website:** www.magnoliagreengolfclub.com

➤ **General Manager:** Bobby Kidder

➤ **Head Golf Professional:** Mike Russell

➤ **Superintendent:** Jay Wade

➤ **No of Holes:** 18 **Par:** 36-36-72

➤ **Yardages:** 7,150 yards (green); 6,724 yards (black); 6,216 yards (blue); 5,640 yards (white); 4,783 yards (red)

➤ **The Playing Surface:** Bermudagrass (tees, fairways and rough); bentgrass (greens)

➤ **Architect(s):** Nicklaus Design in association with Tom Clark

➤ **Type:** Semiprivate

➤ **The Shot You’ll Need:** Magnolia Green is built on rolling terrain. However, most holes allow for strategic plays to generally flat areas of the golf course. When players encounter uneven lies, they still have a chance to hit a quality shot with the correct fundamentals.

“If you’re on an upslope, take at least one extra club because the upward angle of the hill effectively adds loft. Play the ball slightly more forward than normal, and try to set your shoulders parallel with the slope,” says Mike Russell, the club’s head golf professional. “If your shoulders are too level, you’ll tend to drive the clubhead steeply into the ground, and likely hit behind the ball. Due to the angle of the slope, it will be more difficult to rotate and transfer your weight on the downswing. An extra release with the hands and arms will tend to curve the shot to the left. Aim right of your target to compensate for this type of ball flight.”

➤ **Betcha Didn’t Know:** The new practice putting green is 13,000 square feet, which is nearly one-third of an acre.

➤ **To Get There:** From Route 288, take 360 West (Hull Street/Amelia) for six miles to Magnolia Green Parkway. Turn right onto Magnolia Green Parkway, make a left onto Memorial Tournament Drive and the club is located on the left.

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