

IN THE CLUB

Everything old is new again

With a foot in two centuries, *Hacienda Golf Club* is a jewel that holds tight to its familial traditions. By Patrick Mott

Editor's note: This is the first in an occasional series of features offering our readers a look at various private golf courses and country clubs around Southern California. Many of our readers do not have an opportunity to visit these clubs or play a round on the courses, while others may be considering a membership in a private club but are unsure what to expect. We hope that our brief visits will provide an accurate sketch of what life is like on the courses and at the clubs.

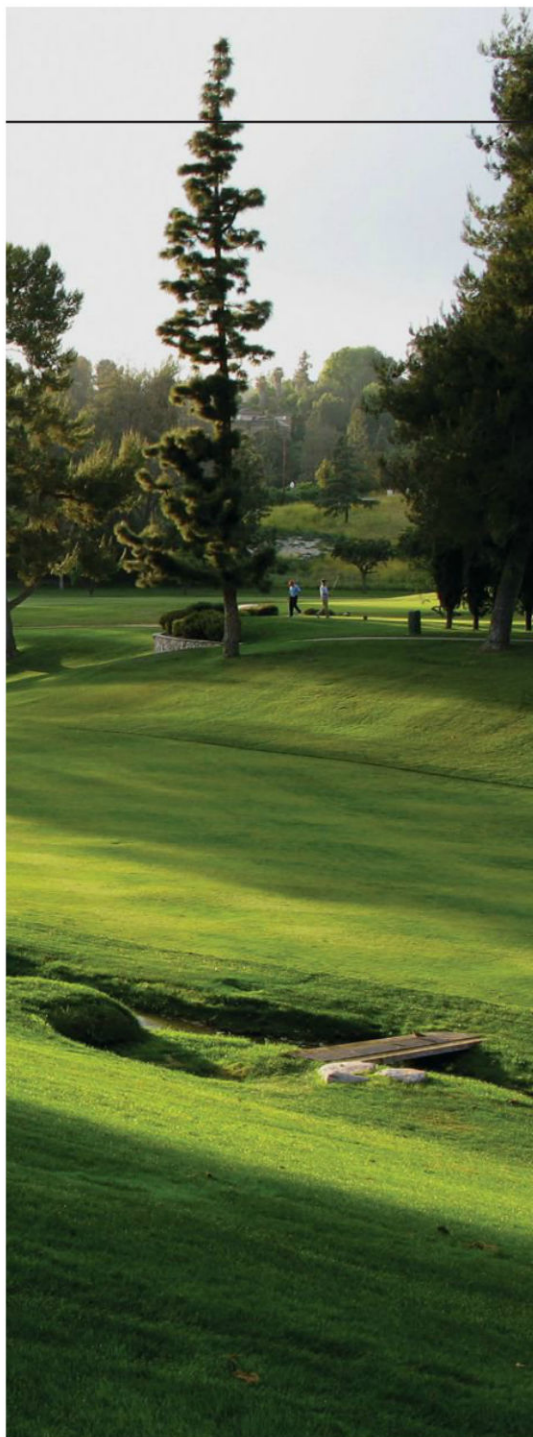
The road to the Hacienda Golf Club in La Habra Heights has changed little over the decades. After a right turn off Hacienda Road, the thin two-lane blacktop winds—sometimes tightly—up a gentle

hill and into a quiet wooded neighborhood that was once home to a sheep ranch. That ranch, nestled in the bottom of a long, green canyon with a southwestern view all the way to the Palos Verdes Peninsula, is

today the Hacienda Golf Club, a cheerful and comfortable private enclave with feet in two centuries.

Co-founded in 1920 by oil and land developer Alphonzo Bell, Hacienda is steeped in tradition, from its up-and-back course layout to its impressive trophy case to its gallery of large framed black and white photos of such early luminaries as Gene Sarazen (who set the first course record of 70 in 1923) and color photos of latter-day stars such as Tiger Woods (who set a new

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course record of 63—which still stands—in 1994 when he was 18).

There's a settled, relaxed calm about the place, even on a windy day. The canyon walls not only block wind, but also sound, and the mature trees on the hillsides screen the hilltop houses. The effect is one of dramatic isolation, a feeling of playing golf in a kind of sonic and atmospheric cocoon where time slows down.

Still, Hacienda appears decidedly modern. As a result of a sweeping renovation in

2005, the original clubhouse was replaced by a 36,000-square-foot stone-accented structure with a viewing tower, a large patio area, a wine tasting room, a 200-seat ballroom and formal dining room, a casual bistro with an exhibition kitchen, men's and women's locker rooms and a pro shop.

The renovation also included a make-over of the course by designer John Harbottle, who increased the length of the course by 200 yards (bringing it to 6,925 yards from the tips) and redesigned the bunkers and all 18 of the greens. The original Willie Watson layout from 1920 was kept intact, however.

Which makes Hacienda a smiling killer. The course's location in the canyon makes necessary many elevation changes both subtle and dramatic, and flat lies are the exception rather than the rule. Trouble lurks nearly everywhere in the form of tree placements, deep irregular bunkers, thick hillside vegetation, a meandering creek, sloping fairways and even in bailout areas that may save your shot but that also add punishing length to the course. Accuracy on almost every shot is an absolute must, and the greens are quick and subtle. It's not a course for beginners.

Nor is it a course for anyone who discounts beauty. The first hole alone is one of the most breathtaking in Southern California, with its elevated tee, its straight-as-a-string fairway and its long, long view to Palos Verdes. Most par-3s offer welcome breathers and there are several holes nestled in hollows that are peaceful enough to almost force golfers to linger.

All of which is reason enough for many to want to become a member of the club. There are three levels of membership: 1) regular equity with unlimited access to all club facilities, 2) young executive membership, a golf and social membership

available to people between the ages of 21 and 40, and 3) a non-equity social and dining membership that includes access to the pool, driving range and golf practice facilities.

Equity memberships generally are by invitation from a member or one of the board of directors. Potential members also can request membership and go through a vetting process by the members and the board of directors.

What members get is the golf, the swimming, the clubhouse amenities and one other intangible that general manager Frank Cordeiro says has been a part of the club since its founding: a familial and family-friendly atmosphere and operating philosophy. Where at some other clubs use of the facilities might be restricted to adults, at Hacienda it's common to see family members of all ages making use of everything the club offers, he says. There are bingo games, poolside barbecues, outdoor concerts, Mother's and Father's Day brunches, Fourth of July celebrations, family campouts and cooking classes, and other activities that have nothing to do with the golf course.

And on the course, says Cordeiro, it's common to see fathers and sons, and mothers and daughters, playing a round together.

The club, adds Cordeiro, also casts its eyes beyond its front gate and regularly participates in activities that involve the wider outside community. Recently, Hacienda hosted a golf tournament to benefit the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, a group that offers support and assistance to wounded service men and women and to the families of fallen soldiers, sailors and air crews.

The tournament raised more than \$112,000. **SG**