

THE CAT'S MEOW

Tiger Woods kicks off U.S. design efforts with Augusta-inspired Bluejack National

By Bradley S. Klein

Montgomery, Texas

Tiger Woods has worked on a second career in his considerable spare time the past few years.

After a few projects started and stopped, he debuted his first design in 2015: Diamante - El Cardonal in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. Now he's opened his first American design, Bluejack National, in

the Houston exurb of Montgomery.

This one proves that in the course of winning 14 professional majors and a total of 79 PGA Tour titles, Woods has learned a thing or two about the ground game. For a guy who seemed to work awfully hard every time he hit a shot, the course he built here in the middle of an upscale community is an awful lot of fun.

No. 5 at
Bluejack National

It helps to have a real estate land plan that gives breathing space to a core golf course and places the home lots on the perimeter. Credit for that goes to Fullerton Architects, P.C., which worked closely with Woods' design associates, Beau Welling and Shane Robichaud, in fashioning a 200-acre parcel for golf amidst a 755-acre master-planned site. The tract sits on what was formerly Blaketree National Golf Club, a late 1980s Bill Coore-Ben Crenshaw design that struggled as a standalone private club. Mike Abbott and Casey Paulson of Beacon Development and Andy Mitchell of Lantern Asset Management picked up the moribund project, signed up Woods in the spring of 2014 and went to work converting it.

The biggest issue in golf design today is how to accommodate a wide range of players. The spread between Tour-quality and everyday play is bigger than ever. The answer at Bluejack National is to spread the field, rely upon the strategic placement of only 49 bunkers and create enormous room for the ball to roll out. Bluejack's 91 acres of fairways are more than twice that of a normal course. The tight, firm Zeon Zoysia fairways ensure a lot of roll when the ball lands.

As Woods explained to *Golfweek*, "Although the landing areas are wide to enhance playability, players must take the right lines off the tees to give themselves the best angles into the greens and chances at birdies."

Miss a green by 5 yards and it might roll out another 15. Here at Bluejack National, recovery is played from firm, fast L15 Zoysia grass that frames the greens.

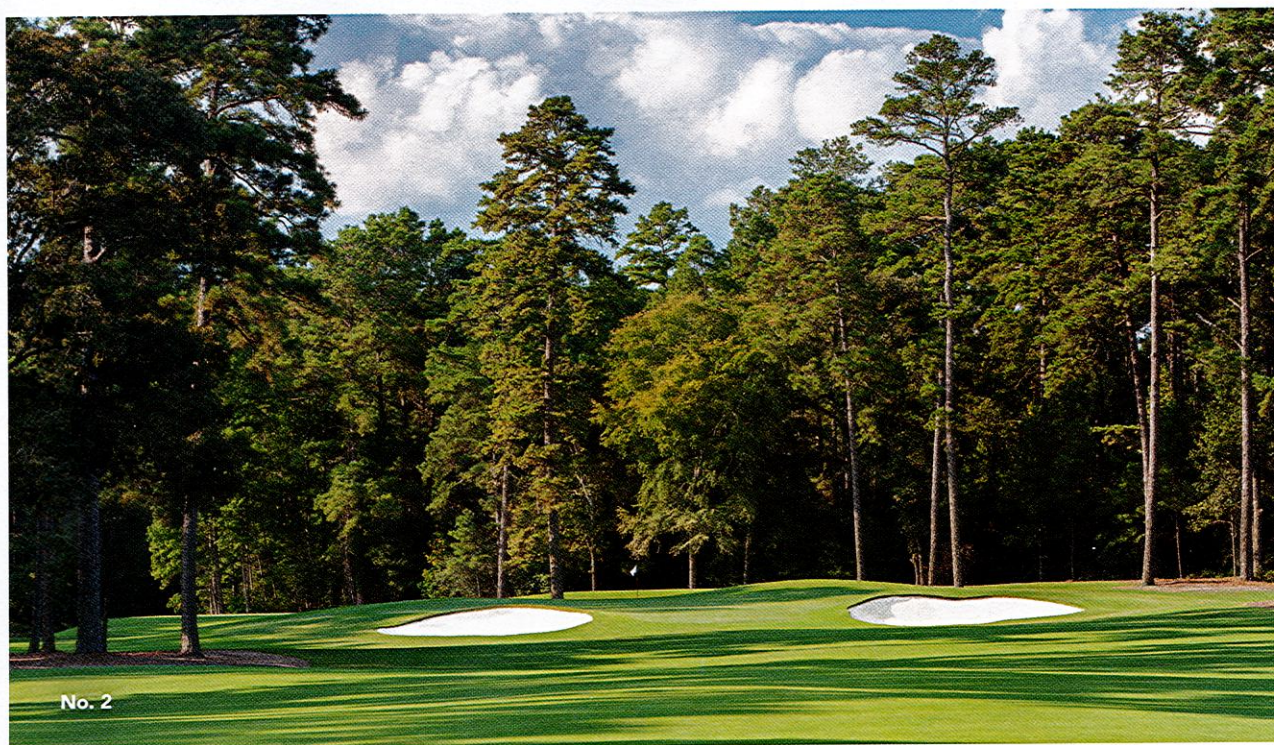
"The green complexes themselves are subtle," Woods said. "But the green surrounds and 'fore-greens' are filled with feeder slopes, deep lows and undulations. This makes management of misses into the greens very important and leads to fun, creative shots into the greens as well as challenging recovery options from the tightly mowed green surrounds."

A player learns this quickly. The opening hole, a 458-yard par 4, showcases a large lake down the left side and a greenside bunker front left as well. There's plenty of space to the right, but outside the fillpad of the green the ground breaks away, exaggerating the outflow of a marginally wayward approach.

The influence is decidedly Augusta National in terms of scale and sparse bunkering. The downhill par-3 12th hole, 180 yards, is a doppelgänger of its Georgia counterpart in terms of pond setting and greenside bunkering. A gesture like that is fine; the rest of the holes at Bluejack National are site-specific in terms of character. And afterward there's the lure of a generous practice area or, even more fun than that, a family-friendly, 10-hole par-3 layout called The Playground, with holes running 35 to 105 yards long and totaling all of 747 yards.

It all makes for a place where golf is fun and part of a diverse outdoor culture, 55 miles northwest of downtown Houston. That sounds like a long way off, but with Exxon setting up a new corporate campus nearby, that will bring 13,000 jobs to the area, bolstering Bluejack National's prospects. **Gwk**

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