

BLAIR WISH PROJECT | CAL CLUB'S CENTENNIAL | KAY COCKERILL PROFILE

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Great Escapes

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Meadowood proves wine isn't
the only reason to head to Napa

Instruction: How to putt like a champ



Meadowood

Wine isn't the only reason to head to Napa Valley

BY JAY STULLER

Most nine-hole courses are proletarian treasures that welcome golfers from across the demographic spectrum, the kind of facility typically featured in this *NCGA Golf* series. However, in the northern reaches of the Napa Valley, just two miles from Calistoga and in a foothill valley above the Silverado Trail, is an exclusive nine open only to Meadowood Napa Valley's resort guests and its roughly 1,000 members. For those fortunate enough to play the walking-only course—and especially with turn-of-the-20th century hickory-shafted clubs and replica gutta-percha balls—a round here is like stepping back in time.

Wandering through stands of firs, oaks, pines and willows, this intimate little course has three sets of tees and stretches from nearly 1,000 yards to about 1,500. It features eight par 3's and one par 4. With a brisk hour-and-ten minute pace of play, it's the perfect course for introducing a youngster to golf—or perhaps a new spouse while honeymooning after one of the weddings held on a Meadowood fairway.

There is, to be sure, much more here than golf. Opened in the early 1960s as the Meadowood Suburban Club, the 250-acre private resort was purchased in 1979 by William Harlan, the Pacific Union real estate founder whose namesake Cabernet sells for nearly a grand a bottle, and Stan Kroenke, an entrepreneur who owns the Denver Nuggets, the Los Angeles Rams, English Football's Arsenal and the Screaming Eagle



STEVEN ROTHFIELD

covered two-bay Golf Performance Studio at the top of the range is well-used, and is what Pike calls “the most peaceful place at the resort.” The head pro and his associates give more than 1,200 lessons annually, using TrackMan technology and a keen eye for improving individual abilities. Lessons are also open to the public.

Although the Meadowood course is short by today’s standards, it is considered a triumph of design over distance. “Most golfers take a full set of clubs because they may end up using every one in the bag,” Pike says.”

The fourth is Meadowood’s signature hole, with a downhill tee shot that’s about 100 feet above the green, which makes judging distance difficult. On the sixth hole, a menacing wall of evergreens flanks the right side of the fairway. And the ninth, says Pike, “just might be the most intimidating par-3 in the entire Napa Valley.” It’s a 195-yard tee shot over two ponds and usually a gaggle of geese.

And then there are the hickories, for which this short course seems to be made. Pike purchased 25 sets of authentic hickory-shafted clubs from a collector, and a supply of replica gutta percha balls.

“Which can be hard to find,” Pike says, “but the ball is really soft and gives you a lot of feedback. And they’re a lot of fun to play.”

The sets rent for \$125, and have become a popular novelty item at the club. Members and guests often dress in plus fours for hickory rounds. And among the trees of Meadowood, they slip back in time. 🍂

winery. Under the pair, Meadowood’s upgrades have been many and marvelous.

Today, the resort, a member of the Relais & Chateaux collection of luxury boutique hotels, has 85 guest rooms, suites and cottages, most featuring high ceilings with exposed beams. It also has two championship croquet lawns, seven tennis courts, two swimming pools, hiking trails, a health and fitness center, and a 14,000-square-foot all-suite spa. Under Chef Christopher Kostow, the Restaurant at Meadowood—which is open to the public—has held three Michelin stars since 2010, attracting foodies the world over.

Living in luxury at Meadowood comes at a price. Room rates start at \$750 a night. Memberships go from \$26,000 to \$44,000, and the roster includes the who’s who of the wine industry. In fact, during the first week of June, Meadowood hosts the fabled Napa Valley Wine Auction, which generates up to \$15 million for charity.

For hotel guests, it costs only \$65 for unlimited loops around the golf course.

Set on a former rice plantation and Christmas tree farm, the original track was designed by Jack Fleming, who as San Francisco parks superintendent designed, built or remodeled about 60 courses in

Meadowood attracts foodies to its three Michelin-star-rated restaurant and hickory club enthusiasts to its renovated fairways.

Northern California. “It originally had five par 3’s and four par 4’s,” says Doug Pike, Meadowood’s head golf professional for the past two decades. “The greens were round mounds with pins.”

The routing and greens have changed considerably, thanks to a total renovation that concluded in 2015, under Louisiana-based architect Jim Lipe, who was Jack Nicklaus’s senior design associate for 26 years. “The old third fairway is now our driving range,” Pike says. “Jim also enlarged many of the greens and added contours, which puts challenge into the putting.”

While the course accommodates only about 6,000 to 8,000 rounds per year, the

