

## Las Posas happy with facelift

By Bob Buttitta

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In 1957, golf architect Cary Bickler was just 14 years old when he got his first look at Las Posas Country Club.

Bickler and his father Henry were invited by Lawrence Hughes, the original architect of the course, to come up and see the new venue he was building in Camarillo because Hughes was going to be designing a course for them as well.

Fifty years later, Bickler was back at Las Posas, but this time he was the architect putting together a plan to rejuvenate the course he had seen before it opened.

Bickler headed the club's revamping of the front nine in 2008 and earlier this year he came back to complete the renovations on the back nine.

The redesign was part of the plan established by the club's membership to spruce up the course to make it more fun and enjoyable for existing members and to hopefully attract new members as well.

Work on the back nine started March 1 and took several months to complete. The reopening was June 22.

While members only had nine holes to play for several months, none of them is complaining about it after seeing the completed work.

"Everyone is extremely happy with the way it turned out," said club president Michael Andonian. "It turned out great."

Amazingly, the redesign did not cause members dues to increase because they had the money in reserve to handle the redesign.

Las Posas is considered a classic old-style course, one that has some unique history.

For example, in 1963, a made-for-television program called "Challenge Golf" was filmed at the course. The four players who took part in the competition were Arnold Palmer, Gary Player, Bob Charles and Bruce Crampton.

Such historical notes are part of the course's fabric and members were insistent that any changes made took that into account.

"When membership was selecting an architect to handle the work, our No. 1 goal was to find someone who would preserve the character of the course," Andonian said.

"Some architects came in and proposed moving thousand of yards of dirt. What they proposed would have meant it would not be Las Posas anymore."

Bickler's ideas were much more in tune with the membership's wishes. So too was his "connection to the club," which also included playing in the high school golf championship for Tustin High in 1962 at Las Posas.

"Cary's connection made us feel even better about hiring him because we knew he understood what Las Posas is about," Andonian said.

Being involved with a course with so much history made Bickler's job more fun.

"These classic venues are becoming more popular because most people can't play these 7,000-yard courses that have opened," Bickler said. "A course like this sets up more realistically to allow all levels of players to enjoy it."

One of the more noticeable changes of the back-nine redesign is on No. 14, an uphill par-4. Prior to the renovation, golfers had an obstructed view of the fairway because of a hillside behind the 13th green.

Bickler pushed the hill back and opened up the view for golfers. He also added six bunkers.

One of Bickler's main goals was to create more contrast between bunkers and greens, making it easier for players to know where to aim and to play shots. For example, on the par-4 16th the three bunkers used by players to aim off the tee were raised to make them stand out more.

"Making the bunkers more visible gives players a much better road map of where they need to play and aim," Bickler said.

On many of the approach areas in front of greens, Bickler created what he calls "whiskers," which are very subtle ridges that help funnel well-played approach shots toward the green rather than off and into bunkers.

"The idea of the whiskers is to give a player with good shot direction some reward for hitting a shot there rather than penalizing them for a good shot.

Such changes are subtle, but have been well received by members.

"The spirit and beauty of the course was already here. What we did was enhance it and give it a touch of artistry."



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Golfers walk to the 13th green at the renovated Las Posas Country Club. Golf architect Cary Bickler was in charge of the redesign and one of his objectives was to create more contrast between bunkers and greens.



PHOTO BY CHUCK KIRMAN, CHUCK KIRMAN / STAR STAFF

Cary Bickler, the architect for the renovation at Las Posas Country Club, hits a tee shot during a recent round.