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Vineyard Golf Club Opens Course To Early Round of Rave Reviews

By CHRIS BURRELL

THE WAY GOLF ENTHUSIASTS TALK ABOUT THE ISLAND'S NEWEST COURSE — which officially opened just over a week ago off Edgartown-West Tisbury Road in Edgartown — you expect to see guys walking around the clubhouse wearing kilts.

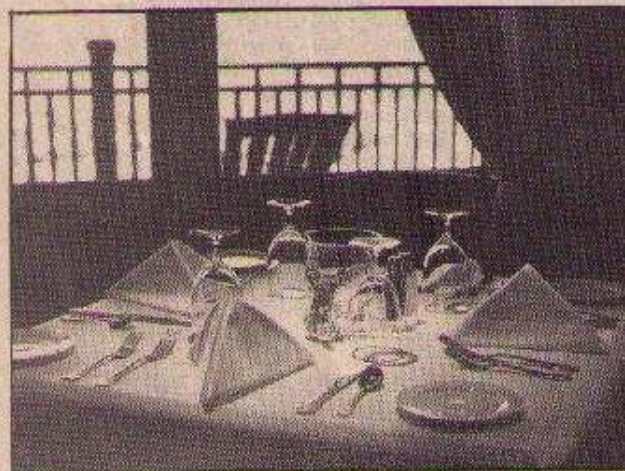
Well, don't worry. The course at the Vineyard Golf Club may be an unforgiving Scottish-inspired design, but the garb is just the kind of pastel microfibre blends you'll find on most any golf course in the country.

Make that private course. A membership costs about \$300,000.

This is not a place begging for public attention. The sign marking the main entrance is no bigger than a shoebox. Not one of the greens is visible from the road. But in magnitude and cost, the Vineyard Golf Club is hardly negligible. Investors paid more than \$16 million for 245 acres of land in what was supposed to be a housing subdivision that never got built.

Construction costs alone totaled over \$5.5 million, according to building permits filed in Edgartown.





200, well shy of a full roster, which would be 300 members paying full price. "There's lots of interested people," says Jeff Carlson, the club superintendent.

Sure enough, last week, a shiny red Chevy Tahoe with New York plates pulled up to the clubhouse, and the two men eager for a game of golf started quizzing Mr. Carlson about memberships.

Even with a shortfall in members, Vineyard Golf Club doesn't hand out brochures, but their web site does carry a marketing pitch that plays up the Island's status as a destination for the well-heeled and well-known: "Famous the world over as a summer playground for Americans and the holiday home of the Kennedy family, a retreat of elegance and peaceful solitude. Island law precludes advertising boards as well as all fast-food outlets."

With ad copy like that, it's obvious that the key facet at the club is luxury. The 20,000-square-foot clubhouse is trimmed out in birch-paneled walls and hickory floors. A 75-seat dining room features two fireplaces and a bar with a wide-screen Sony television. There's another fireplace in the adjoining library.

Downstairs are locker rooms loaded with features that seem intent on dispelling high school memories of steel doors and smelly sweat socks: flat-screened TVs, puffy couches, telephones and lockers with brass plaques engraved with members' names.

In sharp contrast, the staff lunch room is furnished with two gray Formica-topped tables and plastic chairs. On a tour last week, the clubhouse's third floor was off limits. According to Mr. Carlson, it's office space and housing for top-level staff.

A massive wrap-around porch looks out over the course. The teak furniture is so new you can still smell the freshly-cut wood. But the most amazing part of this vista is the tall grass called fescue. The brown-topped blades blow in the breeze, creating a technicolor show.

"It's mesmerizing, like watching the water," says Mr. Carlson.

Grass is a big factor in the course itself. The course is littered with deep sand trap bunkers that make escape difficult.

"The bunkers are typically Scottish, placed right where you tend to hit the ball," says Tony Fisher, a seasonal resident of Chilmark and a golf club member who's already played the course five times.

In other words, golfers here better have good aim or they'll get eaten up in these revetted bunkers.

"It's what I would call a shot-maker's golf course. It's not a course where you can just spray it around," says Mr. Fisher in a telephone interview from his office in Manhattan. "If you don't pay attention, you're going to take a penalty and just chop it out."

The setting and the fescue grass may be pastoral, he says, but the course itself is rugged.

It takes about four hours to play a full round of golf here, according to Mr. Carlson. Among the most challenging holes is number 17. One of the few tees with any elevation, there's a wind tunnel effect with the prevailing southerly breeze whipping the fairway.

"That's the brilliance. It's where the terrain tends to take you," says Mr. Fisher. "I believe that in the next five years, this will be one of the top 100 courses in the country."

