



■ A CHANCE TO PLAY CORDEVILLE IS A FANTASTIC PERK FOR RESORT GUESTS.



## UP TO THE CHALLENGE

BY ERIC TRACY

**W**hether your visit to the Central Coast is a golf getaway or you're on the way to the Bay Area and want an interesting diversion, the Challenge Course at Monarch Dunes Golf Club is worth the trip.

While par-3 courses typically are nondescript pitch-and-putts, the design team of Damian Pascuzzo and Steve Pate have fashioned a 12-hole layout in Nipomo that is pleasing to the eye and a test for golfers of all abilities. The holes range in length from 65 to 205 yards, and you can play all 12 in about 90 minutes.

Built as a complement to the Monarch Dunes Old Course, the Challenge Course has the same rugged and rustic feel as its 18-hole partner. There are dozens of Scottish-inspired dunes, tall fescue grass and five lakes, and the fairways and roughs are planted in a blend of fine fescues. The course features four tee boxes to accommodate good players or beginners just learning how to play.

But it's the bentgrass greens that are the most memorable feature of the Challenge Course. All are about 8,000 square feet, or 30 percent larger than average greens, and the ridges, swales and elevation changes will test your putting acumen. There are also two holes on every green – a standard cup and an 8-inch counterpart for beginners or other players looking to have more fun. Because of the size of the greens, one cup doesn't interfere with the other.

The Challenge Course green fees are \$16, with a \$10 replay rate. **SG**

Paso is known for a bit of winery diaspora in contrast to the compact ease in and around Lompoc, with far more producers. Justin Vineyards and Winery and Turley Wine Cellars are two to visit for those seeking the liquid bounty.

An uninterrupted two-hour drive from Paso yields the next round, in San Martin, though, along the way, veer off and get acquainted with Hahn Winery, Paraiso Vineyards or other vintners and winemakers of the Santa Lucia Highlands along the western shoulder of Monterey County's Salinas Valley. Like the Sta. Rita Hills American Viticultural Area, this AVA is exposed to cooling coastal fog and wind, making it another prime spot for Bourgogne varieties.

San Martin's CordeValle is a one-time host of the PGA Tour's Frys' com Open and an upcoming U.S. Women's Open. It's a private club but guests of the on-site Rosewood Resort get playing privileges. Braided with streams, shaded in stately sycamores, thick in big-shouldered strategic, risk/reward design elements, CordeValle is one of the state's best layouts. Before getting to San Martin, double up your day at San Juan Oaks Golf Club between Hollister and the 101, where the theme of big views, grand sweeps, oaks and ocher-hued hills continues.

The capstone of the Central Coast is somewhere around Monterey Bay, be that Santa Cruz or the southerly

bay demarcation at Point Piños. Logistically, before we turn to head back to the shore, San Martin and Hollister stand as a good bulwark, the place about where the inland-from-the-coast agriculture that dominates the economy and the scenery all along El Camino Real gives way to the Silicon Valley.

Pacific Grove Golf Links sniffs out toward Point Piños, a city-owned marvel of low-cost and high-fun, notably on the closing nine that can be treated to Scottish-grade gales amid a backdrop of twisted, stunted pines and crashing surf; ground capability does not play unfavorably here across the timeless rumples. And of course since this is the Monterey Peninsula, some of the neighbors go by names like "Pebble Beach," "Poppy Hills," now newly and strikingly revamped, and "Spyglass Hill."

Heading inland through Monterey, and after additional stops at Bayonet and Black Horse golf courses, to Salinas and the return on 101 South – unless you've opted for Big Sur and Highway 1 – any question as to where you are goes away. This is not the Bay Area. It's not the Southland. It's definitely not Bakersfield. And while it might not always be on the coast, this is the Central Coast.

Geography. Weather. Open spaces. Oaks and vines. Reasoned pace. All tolled, it's a way of life or state of mind. **SG**

COURTESY CORDEVILLE