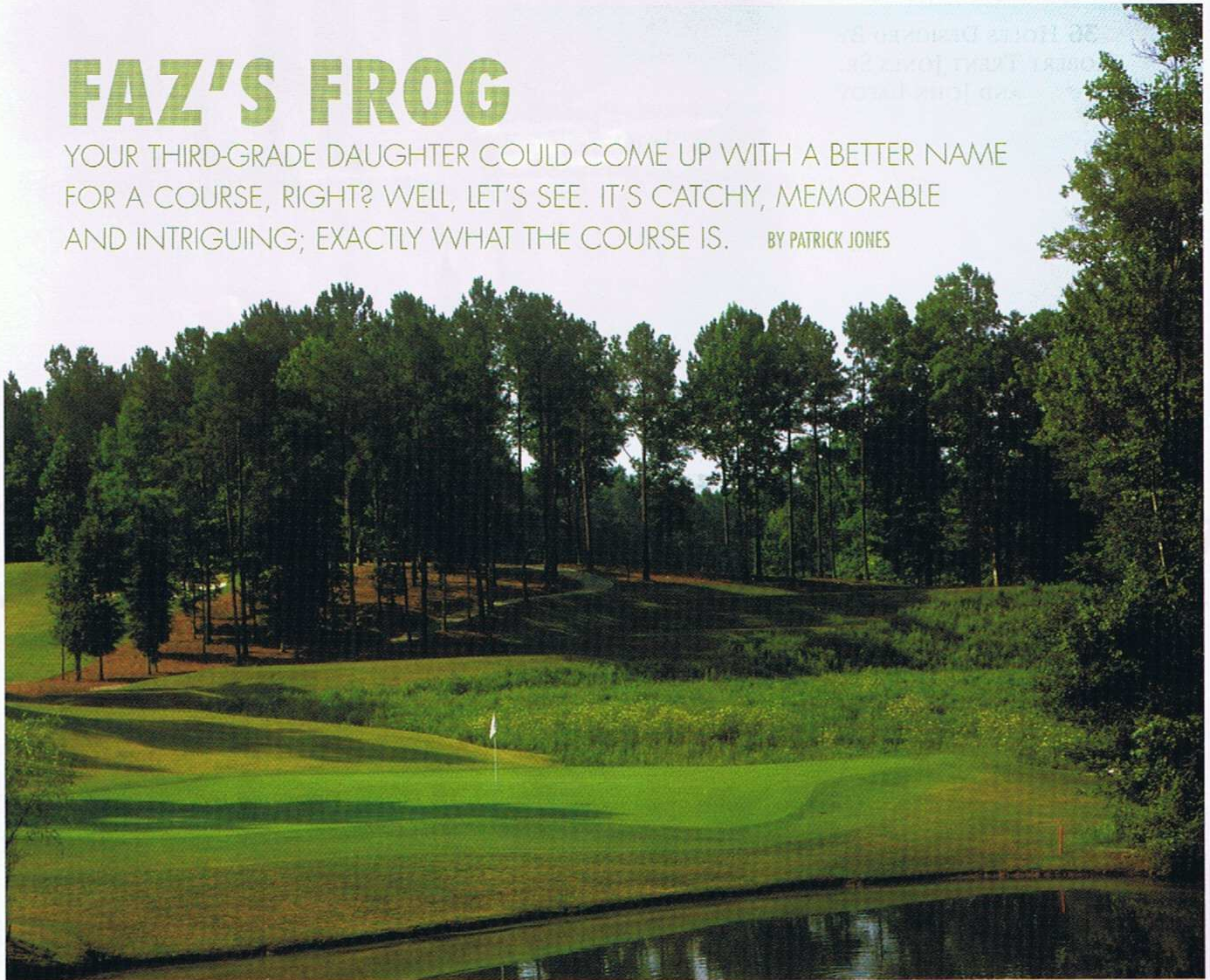


FAZ'S FROG

YOUR THIRD-GRADE DAUGHTER COULD COME UP WITH A BETTER NAME FOR A COURSE, RIGHT? WELL, LET'S SEE. IT'S CATCHY, MEMORABLE AND INTRIGUING; EXACTLY WHAT THE COURSE IS. BY PATRICK JONES



The first operation at hand is to dissect The Frog – at a minimum to put the golf course's unique name under the microscope. Let's face it, Tom Fazio's exquisite layout in Villa Rica, 35 miles west of downtown Atlanta, is oddly labeled.

There is, of course, a legend, a tale, a yarn – take your pick – behind the amphibian moniker. The most accepted version is that the chief executive officer of the property's original developer was a collector of trinkets that featured the greenish creatures. When he first saw the course routing in the master plan, he decided that the layout reminded him of a leaping frog. (And what tadpole minion with a mortgage would be first in line to tell the boss to rethink his vision?)

Anyway, the name The Frog Golf Club stuck...like a fly on the tongue of a cold-blooded vertebrate.

Almost a decade since its opening in 1998, The Frog has earned a reputation as one of the most respected designs on this side of the state. There were initial plans for a second

18 holes in the development, along with a resort hotel, but both ideas have since been retooled. The decision not to increase to 36 holes, for course owners potentially interested, still leaves naming rights to The Salamander and The Newt golf courses ready to be giggered for usage.

The daily-fee course, to its credit, makes the most of its distinctive trademark. For instance, it serves the frosty Frog Lager in the clubhouse bar. It once relied on the slick slogan of “The Frog: Grip It and Ribbit” in its marketing efforts. Yes, it was corny, and a toadal takeoff on John Daly’s famous “Grip It and Rip It” catchphrase, but memorable nonetheless. And – almost time to focus on the course itself – there is a tradition for golfers to rub an obese metallic frog squatting alongside the cart path leading to the first tee. It was placed there to bring good luck. However, a more fruitful affection might be to smack the Kermit the Buddha fixture squarely on the lips for improved fortune because, alas, Mr. Fazio created a prince of a wake-up call off The Frog’s first tee.

No. 1 is a 457-yard par 4 that is handicapped as the toughest test on the course.

“I think it was (Fazio’s) intention to get your attention right off the bat,” says Craig Forgash, general manager and director of golf at The Frog, which is managed by Marriott Golf. “Number one is straightforward. There is not a whole lot of trouble. The fairway bunkers are there, but there is still plenty of room to swing away. It is like, ‘OK, here you go. It’s right here in front of you. It is 450 yards away, but it’s right in front of you. Go get it.’”

At The Frog, Fazio did not shy away from his fondness for frequent gaping bunkers that swallow wayward shots.

“On this course, and on most Fazio

designs, the green complexes are very fair,” says Forgash. “In our case, the greens are not severely sloped and there is usually an obvious place to miss if you don’t reach the green. From the tee it might not be as obvious, but as you play the hole, it is easy to look back and go, ‘This is where I should have missed it, or this is where I should have played to give myself the best chance to par or birdie the hole.’ I don’t think you ever look back on a Tom Fazio course and say it wasn’t a fair test. As long as you pick the right set of tee boxes (five at The Frog), you keep the integrity of the course intact and then you also hit the

THE FROG GOLF CLUB

Villa Rica, Georgia

770.459.4400 or golfthefrog.com

The course is one of the few modern designs unspoiled by development. It is a pleasing, pure golf experience from start to finish.

The designer Tom Fazio

The numbers range from 5,336 to 7,018 yards with corresponding rating and slope of between 68.2/118 and 73.7/137.

Experience the Georgian Grill for a relaxing atmosphere and post-round meal. The menu offers a diverse selection of sandwiches, salads, soups and entrees.

right set of clubs into the green as the course was designed.”

It is not a leap to say that The Frog is a stimulating test for golfers of all skill levels. *Golf for Women* voted it among the country’s “Top 100 Fairways.”

“We routinely receive compliments on the conditions of the golf course, and particularly the conditions of the Crenshaw bentgrass greens that are kept at a good speed,” says Forgash. “You can’t blame any bad shots or bad putts on the quality of the surface. And we pride ourselves on our service. We try and take care of everybody’s needs when they come out.”

The front nine features back to back par 5s in Nos. 4 and 5. The latter plays to a relatively short 477 yards, though it is lengthened by an uphill rise to the green. It offers a good birdie chance to players who can avoid the ever-present bunkers that restrict the landing area on the tee shot.

Forgash called No. 7, a 404-yard par 4, one of his favorite holes. “It is an understated hole with a slight dogleg left,” he says. “The green is very narrow as you are looking at it, but it is probably 40 yards deep, meaning you can leave yourself a very long putt if you don’t hit the right club on your approach.”

One of the pleasures of playing The Frog is its solitude. It is just a short drive off busy Interstate 20, but retains a small community feel. The nearby hamlet of Villa Rica (rich town in Spanish) was the site of a gold rush in 1826. Nature abounds around the course. With the exception of a few holes on the back nine, there is no residential development in sight. Plans eventually call for 1,400 homes by Cousins Neighborhoods, but none forthcoming will parallel the course, according to Forgash.

In its short history, The Frog has hosted the 2001 Georgia Open, the 2004 Georgia Senior Open and the John Smoltz Celebrity Players Tournament. The Tournament Directors Association of America awarded The Frog the APEX award for its excellence in hosting events. It is well suited for tournament activity.

The Frog features a 100-seat restaurant with dual plasma TV screens dutifully tuned to The Golf Channel. There is also a covered veranda with ceiling fans and hanging ferns and a large stone-walled outdoor patio overlooking the closing hole, a great par-5 closer on a worthy course with the slippery name. ■