

Ocean North-Pelican Hill Newport Beach, California

Architect: Tom Fazio (1993-renovated 2005)

Tees	Par	Yardage	Rating	Slope
Black	71	6945	73	135
Blue	71	6563	71.3	130
White	71	6270	69.9	127
Yellow	71	4951	69.4	124

Overview:

There is nothing at Pelican Hill that is understated and the Ocean North Course is no exception. It was originally done by Tom Fazio in 1993 without much fanfare but when it got renovated in 2005 it took on an awesome character all it's own. Not as visually scenic at the Ocean South because it lacks the close-to-the-Pacific drop dead looks, but to the discriminating eye the rocky gorges the course traverses give it a Plantation Course at Kapalua feel that is undeniable. As with the Ocean South the hardest thing is blocking out the visual drama so you can focus on the shot at hand.

The dramatic elevation changes and the definition to the holes created by the adjacent gorges on both of these courses reiterates the strategic element and makes angle of approach and shot shape germane to efficient play. One of the greatest shot shapers in the game today, Bubba Watson, recently played one of the courses at Pelican Hill from the tips with just a 20-degree hybrid and shot 81. You ever try putting with a 20-degree hybrid? I am sure Bubba had a barrel of laughs doing this especially on a course where shaping a shot can make a huge difference to getting it close.

Fazio designs are a master of strategic play for me. His greens are generally accessible, from a specific angle, which means there has to be forethought standing on the tees or hitting the lay ups on the five pars. The green complexes are angled to the approach positions often with bunkers only on one side. But many of the greens have rounded shoulders that influence the finishing path of balls away from their intended target. To complicate matters further the Poa Annua greens are like a house of mirrors to read and will leave you scratching your head when obvious breaks go the other way.

An early piece of the shock and awe comes on Number 2, the first Par 3. This is a knee knocker standing of the tee peering over the gorge at the green slightly below on the other side. Doubt creeps into mind as you decide if the elevation change or the wind direction is more significant in your club selection. For sure it favors a right to left curve to work up the angle and pitch of this 40-yard long putting surface.

The Par 4 fourth is typical of the Fazio design swagger. The hole doglegs left of the tee favoring a draw but the green below the approach area is set back right which means a soft high fade works the best into a green with a high bank on the right. You need the full bag of tricks here, sometimes on the same hole.

Unique architectural composition makes the Par 4 seventh the number one handicap hole of the day. Standing on the tee you see a fairway split by a 40-yard long bunker goading you to pick your poison. The left fairway is the shortest and most accessible route home but this puts the full threat of the bunker in play off the tee. From the safer right fairway you have to manipulate a high fade into the front left corner of the putting complex and let it feed onto a very small green. Corporate CEO money is well represented in the McMansions set in the hills all around this green-Pelican Hills is the high rent district.

As the course turns south with the Pacific just over your shoulder on the right my favorite hole is the rough and tumbling Par 4 ninth. This is full Pine Valley look with a drive off a high perched tee down a log flume which, if you can hold the center line of the fairway, will allow your Titleist to roll forever. The second will be a club and a half more played off a down slope into a shelved green set half way up a monster hill laden with trees, folds, and an occasional mean bunker. There is absolutely no margin for error in your distance control or towardness on this approach-anything less than 95% of intention is looking at trouble.

The back nine plays about 250 yards shorter than the front mostly because of a couple of quality short par fours and only one five par. The first of the short fours is the eleventh, a swooping dogleg right thrill ride heading to the ocean. The very shallow green here is set on a shoulder above a deep bunker on the right so a well position tee ball on the left will set up nicely for a left-to-right approach into the center of the green. The slopes off of this green into surrounding hollows create bedeviling recovery pitches if your approach shot lacks articulation. Two holes later is the second portion of the short par four feast. This time the dell green complex is wrapped around a deep bunker front left with a stepped surface working from front right to back left. The opposite shape coming in will work it's way up to this pin.

Turning back to the ocean the 14th hole would feel at home on any Irish links course. The hole is delineated by trees set high on the hill tops but there is a vastness to the playing area all the way to the green. The approach is played up to a shallow false front green draped on the crest of the hill above a hideous bunker. Fazio provides a closely mown chipping area long and right where many smart approach shots will end up. While standing on the green take a peek over your shoulder, the view of the Pacific is breathtaking.

After meandering inland for a couple of holes, the postcard hole of the day is the only par five on the inward half. A pond in the elbow of the dogleg right wards you left off the tee and the hole then ambles uphill to a green perched on a ledge above the ocean. Positioning the second to the left gives the best angle for a short iron into a very narrow green with nastiness all around. There is a single spread tree standing high above the green which gives this hole a very coastal California flavor.

Your day ends with a kitchy, truncated par four that will stick in your memory all the way through dinner. After a bold drive up the left to the high ground you are left with a three story down approach iron to a green that looks like the under belly of a large Labrador sleeping on it's back. Hitting the pink part is just plain hard.

The Ocean North is of a decidedly different character to the South, less obvious drama but all the tactical punch. On a daily basis this is probably the course of choice to good players because wise tactics are rewarded and good scores should follow.

Hole By Hole (BlueWhite):

#1 Par 5 517/497 Yards

The day begins with a sharp dogleg right par five off the tee hitting to an uphill blind landing area left of a big bunker around 230 that defines the first corner. The hole ambles along a plateau as it makes it's way the rest of the way to the green. The next joint is around 100 yards from the green where the hole bends slightly back to the left-there is a bunker on the right that defines this point. The long, slender green is set back to the left on a diagonal with one bunker collaring the left side of the putting surface. The green boomerangs around the bunker and is stepped as it transitions to the back creating a phone booth location back left.

#2 Par 3 179/154

An early gut check with a carry par three to a green hanging perilously over a troll infested gorge about a half a club below. Sets up for a right to left curve aimed at the right corner of the green as it angles that way and the bunkers shadow the left side of the green. You have to control your curve because little hands wait in the bush left of the green and a high number will result.

#3 Par 4 381/362

Beautiful sweeping hole below you that gives a hint of an ocean sighting. Drive across a drop to a fairway below aiming at the right edge of the big bunker on the left. This hole has a slight bend left but I think the best approach is from left center if you can handle a teenie draw to work from the front right of the green up to the left. Once again the green side bunkers are on the left. There is a high bank right of the green that feeds balls onto the putting surface that slopes away from you. Be wary, putts from front to back will develop runaway speed.

#4 Par 4 395/392

This hole has some swagger in it-almost a double dog leg that bends left around a big bunker about 230 out. You have to try to drive it past that bunker but close to it to have any angle at the green that is tucked back to the right well up the fairway. The second is a long downhill carry across the environmental abyss on the right to a green set against a mound on the left with a long fronting bunker across the front face. You have to hit it hard at the back left mound to avoid the forced carry and control your entry line onto the green . This clearly is a potential for a high number early in the round so defend yourself accordingly.

#5 Par 4 419/402

Another full measure par four with a wide driving area so let the big dog run. Drive it hard to center and the second will be a long shot to an accessible green but the fairway and green hang above another canyon on the right from which there is no return. Looks like another fade approach over the bunker about 50 yards short of the green on the left. There is bail room back and left of the green. The putting surface has a serious slope from back to front and right to left which you must take into account on approach shots and putting.

#6 Par 3 147/142

Fortunately this is a short carry over the troll gorge to a long green perched up and draped over a ridge making for segmented pin positions each day. Three bunkers shaped like an alien signature sit below the perch on the left to collect any pulls off the tee. The green is very long and segmented as it sits on a 5 to 11 angle to your approach line. There is a containment hill that is useful on back left pins. Balls played off of the hill will die back onto the green and to the left where those pins reside.

#7 Par 4 429/421

This is the number one handicap hole of the day and has the potential to spend a large chunk of your account if you don't play with your head. Fairway is bisected by a 40 yard bunker running up the center of the fairway-the left side of the bunker in the center is the short route home but visiting that bunker is a double waiting to happen. From there you get a straight look up to the green set back to the right. If you go right of the bunker you have to hit a massive draw to hopefully clear the ridge at the end of the bunker and trundle further down the fairway. I like the second option. From this side you are going to have to aim a long club downhill at the pitching area left and feed onto the green or hit a Calc fade. This is a very small green for a long hole.

#8 Par 5 526/516

A stunning zig-zag par five with a wide driving area. Hit it over the environmental canyon to left center at the bunker on the left. From there you want to aim a lay up at the bunker on the left to about 100 yards-this gives you an attack angle at a slender green perched on a ridge to the right. The green shoe tongue is 43 yards long and lays between a bunker on the left and a deep grass swale short right. Any approach without sufficient verve will slip to the right down into the evil swale. This is a scoring opportunity if you get into the right positions and execute shots.

#9 Par 4 406/387

Maybe one of the coolest holes all day, a strong hole to finish the first nine. A bit of Pine Valley look here with a George Crump difficulty factor. The first 300 yards is like the start of the Olympic downhill, you just need to blast it down the generous landing area and watch it go. The second will be a long club off a downslope lie to a green perched on a shelf in a hill above. The back drop of a monster hill laden with trees and brush is very imposing. This is a club and a half more no matter if it is your second or third shot. The green sits above a bunker to the right of the green. Note that the other bunker you see on the right is embedded in the hill about 75 yards from the green.

#10 Par 4 405/371

The back nine begins with another shimmering uphill par four that rolls out below your feet. Best drive is a slight draw at the right edge of the fairway bunker embedded in the hill on the right to have a look up the opening of the green on your second shot. The approach shot in has to be strong right to left to work around the lone bunker front left and the false front of the putting surface. Like so many of the greens on this course it sits

in a little hollow creating an amphitheater effect. The long green wraps around the bunker and he has provided an overflow pitching area back left.

#11 Par 4 349/327

Fantastic swooping downhill dogear right that requires two very technical shots. Drive to left center to get a good look at the green setting to the right. The green is accessible with the bunkers on the left and one deep one embedded in the face of the hill on the right. The green sits on a right shoulder pad above the bunker and it is fairly shallow especially on the right. Pretty ocean view is a backdrop as you look down to this green.

#12 Par 3 184/166

Strong hide-n-seek Scottish par 3 that sets up for a draw. The green is slightly obscured from view by the trees on the corner and there is a long bunker running up most of the hole that should not be in play. This green is very accessible to a right to left shot since there are no bunkers in front. The green surface drops off in the back half so any pitch shots have to be aware of too much momentum carrying them to the back edge.

#13 Par 4 320/311

Another breathtaking short par four that leans to the right as it works up the hill. Drive into the hill on the left at the right edge of the bunker on the left for the best angle of attack to the green. This small green sits in a dell perched just above a deep bunker on the left and a smaller one on the right. The green wraps around the deep bunker front left and is stepped as it works from front right to back left.

#14 Par 4 381/360

The trees that line the top of the hills all the way up the left side beautifully delineate the line of the hole. There is a distinct Irish flavor to this one. This might be a good one to hit a long drive over the corner constellation of bunkers if you feel you can make that carry. If not hit the power fade up the left working back to the right. The green is set on a 4 to 10 diagonal to the driving area and there is a big bunker fronting the green on the left that must be carried. The correct shot is a low aggressive play into the face of the false front on the right side of the green. Beware that the green is not very deep and there is a retention pitching area provided over the back right scapula. Great ocean view behind once you have putted out.

#15 Par 4 421/403

This is the second handicap hole on the course and has lots of stern character to deserve this. Par 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ for sure. Lovely duck pond just off the right of the tee for a little ambience. Drive is over the water to a landing area on the right for a look back to the left of this dogleg. Bunkers and mounds strewn up the right delineate the road home. A very long green raised up from the fairway with a false left front that will feed balls into the green side bunker. The green tilts right to left and there is a chipping area long left to collect overly aggressive approach shots.

#16 Par 3 152/138

Easily the most bland looking hole on the property but it is not without testing challenge. This is a short par three with a full carry shot over a sand abyss that dominates the entire left side of the hole. You have to aim at the right edge of the bunker behind the green and try to turn one up the front right edge. Anything left is a bad score in the making. The green tilts back left to front right and is stepped so there is a back stop provided by the transition for pins in the center of the green. There is a bit of a false front on the right so you will have to carry the front edge from the tee.

#17 Par 5 540/525

This has to be the poster hole of the day with a strong three-shot five par with all the elements-marsh, strategic bunkering, and a promontory green setting against the horizon. The hole doglegs around a massive bunker and Walden Pond before heading toward the ocean. Drive wide left off the tee to get the best look up the hole. Your layup is a draw into the side hill aimed at the bunker on the left just inside of 90 yards. Long and narrow green sits on a spine with sand below the green on the right a grassy knoll to the left and real evil long and right. The small narrow green banks sharply back to front and left to right so manage your approach and pitches accordingly. One lone spread tree standing sentry on the left above the green give the hole a castle turret look. The only thing missing are trolls pouring burning oil on you as you approach the green. A magnificent hole.

#18 Par 4 412/396

One last piece of drama to finish. A difficult truncated par four dogleg right where you must play left off the tee to set up the angle of approach at a cloistered green setting at the bottom of a walled gorge. Aim your drive across some scrub at the bunkers on the left of the driving area. Anything to the right is dead. Second will be a strong left to right shot that carries a transition and drops precipitously to the target below. Green is enveloped by bunkers on the right and behind the green and the steep side hills of the gorge on the left. A pitch shot from the front of the green will find great influence from the hillside on the left resulting in sweeping lines that may need to be played through the left fringe. All balls seem to drift to the back right corner of this green.