

## Oak Creek Golf Club Irvine, California

Architect: Tom Fazio (1996)

| Tees   | Par | Yardage | Rating | Slope |
|--------|-----|---------|--------|-------|
| Black  | 71  | 6850    | 72.7   | 132   |
| Gold   | 71  | 6543    | 71.3   | 129   |
| White  | 71  | 6187    | 69.4   | 125   |
| Silver | 71  | 4989    | 69.0   | 120   |

### Overview:

Visiting the Newport Beach/Orange County area and looking for another course to add to your dance card? This Tom Fazio design at Oak Creek Golf Club in Irvine is a place to seek out. Without the ocean views and the rugged coastal terrain to work with Fazio did a brilliant job orchestrating a golf course through subtle rolling terrain, framing trees groves and flora, and an array of creeks and lakes to create a course that will challenge both your mind golfing skills.

Tactically this is a positional golf course with clever offsetting angles of approaches to greens. Plotting your strategy from the green backward gives yourself the best chance of success into difficult green constellations. Buy the yardage books so you have some idea of the layout of the holes and hazards-better yet hook up with a seeing-eye-member who can be your Sherpa guide for the day. The bulldozers had their way here so as was the case with so many courses created in the 90's the fairways are sculpted giving a lyric flow to the ground that affords very few level lies. The greenside bunkering is described as bull-nosed on the web site and you can take this literally because playing a recovery out of the nostril of a massive male cow is no picnic. Having said that, these green complexes are not overdone. There is, as the great golf architect Max Behr would say, a line of charm into each one of them if you thoughtfully position yourself for the approach.

The front side begins modestly enough with a couple of manageable par fours but climbing to the tee overlooking the Par 3 third your heart will get to racing taking in the view of the green jutting out precariously into Brady's Pond. Think Alcatraz with grass. This begins a sequence of holes which make it evident that positional golf is the order of the day.

From the tee of Par 4 fourth, called The Grove, you see a driving area framed by a pair of towering goal post trees that have little tolerance for wayward tee shots. The trees behind the green is where the hole get's it's name but the low mountains in the distance give it some southern California romance and remind you that the ocean not so far away.

A quick switchback and the challenge ramps steadily up from here to the turn with a stout par four that which calls for length off the tee and careful precision into the green nestled on the other side of Brady's Pond. Lowell's Creek is the prominent feature on the long par 5 sixth as it wends it's way up the right side from the beginning of the fairway all the way to the green surface. Even with a short club in your hand this is a dicey approach as green leans right feeding balls to the edge overlooking. The front side ends with a monster of a par four calling for a long drive to reach the top of the hill revealing a compelling look at a green nestled just below the tile roofed Adobe clubhouse .

The back nine will capture your focus early and not let it go until the last drop falls on the finishing hole. The Par 5 Breakout is a mind bending three shot hole for most of us. The key here is staying out of the sand on all three shots. A strong drive on the left sets up a lay up well to the right for a short downhill pitch into one of the tightest green settings you see all day. The eleventh is a subtle and picturesque par 3 where the green sits below the tee carved out of the foot of the hill behind. The shot shape is left to right and you must use the green contour to get it close.

Two long par fours with plenty of issues bring you to Chicanery a short par four that will drive the big hitters bonkers. The tee shot is into a narrow neck of the fairway just below a hidden fairway bunker on the right. From there Fazio stuck the green into a narrow closet below the fairway that will require a lawn dart approach to get close. The canopy of eucalyptus trees create a feeling that you are hitting into the Hollywood Bowl during sound check. Just a fabulous golf hole.

It only gets harder from here with a long par four called Outback, the number 1 handicap hole. This is a full par 4.75 and a bogey will feel like a par. The middle sized par four that follows is like a cape hole without the water. Named Crescent Moon it adequately describes the profile of the hole and the two slinging right-to-left shots it will take to get on to the green.

One more long and strong Par 3 sets up the dramatic finish into Fortitude a dicey short Par 5 that will remind you of the finish at Bay Hill. The drive is a power slinger from the right to try to catch the power slot and chase one down within reachable distance of another peninsula green. More likely you are laying up in the neck of fairway cordoned off by the water that defines the right side of the hole the last 175 yards in. If you land the approach on this green in regulation and you can finally exhale.

Oak Creek does not have much national notoriety but Fazio did an excellent job composing a visual golf experience that will be an enjoyable afternoon for players of all skill levels.

### Hole By Hole (Gold/White):

#### #1 Par 4 360/342 Camino Real

The course starts with a rudimentary four par that favors a tee shot down the left. A large fairway bunker makes the right side less appealing, however second shots onto the green are better from the right. On the approach don't miss to either side coming in because both sides are guarded by deep bunkering, the green slopes from back to front.

#### #2 Par 4 371/353 Runaway

A cozy tee box ensconced by landscaping looks down the fairway at this dogleg left with two bunkers on the corner tempting the big hitters to try to fly the corner to be rewarded with a short pitch. The preferred drive is right center for a look back to the green set to the left with one lone horseshoe bunker in front. The green wraps around this bunker and falls away to the back left. This is a dicey approach even with a short club in hand.

### #3 Par 3 163/154 Brady's Pond

Biggest wow of the day in another signature par three. From a high tee you are looking at a green stuck precariously out into Brady's Pond. It is probably a club less down the hill but you cannot afford to underclub unless your Titleist can swim. Bunker back left to contain an overactive draw and a couple of bunkers long and right which will only come into play with a back right pin. No options here but to figure a distance and hit an aggressive shot at the front third of the green.

### #4 Par 4 415/397 The Grove

The driving area of this long par four is framed by goal post trees and sets up for a draw working to left center. The shot in to a severely tiered green, protected on the right side by two cavernous bunkers if very unnerving. With a front pin placement, players can use the steep slope in the middle of the green as a backstop to spin the ball back. There is a tiny top shelf with a chipping area long left and a heel print front left.

### #5 Par 4 419/391 Alice Springs

A beautiful long par four awaits from this high tee to a wide landing area below. Best drive is center not left-anything in the rough makes reaching the green problematic. Brady's Pond dominates the right side the last 180 yards as the access narrows considerably the closer you get to the green. If you don't feel comfortable reaching the green in two choose a lay up club that can carry the bunker on the left at 80 yards and leave yourself a pitch into this raised long green. The green has a couple of bunkers between the green and pond on right and a pitching area left of the green. The back right pin is a real sucker don't be tempted to take aim at that.

### #6 Par 5 541/506 Lowell's Creek

There is a lot to like about this long meandering par five. Drive it to left center and let the banking of the fairway feed it to center. You now get an increasing dose of Lowell's Creek encroaching from the right the rest of the way in. The layup needs to be aggressive down the left past the first bunker to leave a short club into a small green that leans to the water on the right. Be careful and don't let your approach drift right because Lowell is a magnet for balls without sufficient enthusiasm.

### #7 Par 3 199/180 Long

This is another handsome slightly downhill par three. Bunker short right and long left emphasize the oreo arrangement of this green and the soft fade that will have the best chance of success off this tee. The wind usually comes left to right as well to support the preferred flight line.

### #8 Par 4 355/332 Hourglass

The eucalyptus trees frame the fairway on the drive to this picturesque fairway. Hit a draw to right center across the dip to a landing area on level to the tee. The second half of the hole is dominated by sand up the entire left side leading to a green slightly raised from the fairway. Two absolute no-no bunkers are buried in the

face of the hill left of the green. The green has a ridge that makes putts break toward the bunkers so play an approach from the right feeding up the green.

#### #9 Par 4 431/401 Bunker Hill

Great looking strong finishing hole for the outward half, this snaking par four is long and demanding. A right to left tee shot will leave players sitting atop the hill with a perfect look at a majestic green sitting at the foot of the clubhouse. Eucalyptus trees, bunkers and high fescue rough guard both sides of the fairway. The small mushroom shaped green is protected by a deep bunker on the right and a bevy of bunkers on the left. There is a deep recession in the back right corner behind the bunker.

#### #10 Par 5 513/498 Yards Breakout

The back side begins with a tactical reverse S par five that requires careful positioning from tee to green. This drive sets up for a big hit from left to right off the fairway bunker on the left. The big eucalyptus trees on the right confine what appears to be a large driving area and being incarcerated on that side will leave you little chance to make a par. If you blast it off the tee the green is reachable in two, but demands a long carry over the three precarious bunkers. Upon choosing to lay up you play to the high right side of the fairway to avoid the bunker decree on the left at about 75 yards. What is left is a semi-blind pitch over a mound to a diagonally set green where the surrounding hills create a three-quarter dell effect. The green has a sharp tilt from the right that creates a funneling effect toward the bunkers that front the green on the left. All pitches and putts will trend toward the low above the bunkers so play approaches accordingly.

#### #11 Par 3 189/179 Great Depression

This is a beautiful downhill par three that plays into an amphitheater green complex created by surrounding hills. It plays one club less down the hill so hit a long club left to right at the left edge to work around the one nasty buried into the face of the hill supporting the putting surface. The wind blows predominantly from left to right which can accent this strategy. The green is very shallow and tilts from back left to front right behind the bunker. The recovery pitches off the back hill will test your skills.

#### #12 Par 4 400/375 Grand Banks

This long, dogear left par four reflects many of the subtle and not-so-subtle design features Fazio used on this course. The corner of the dogleg is guarded ominously by two large bunkers so you don't want to take on any shortcuts here. The landing area is like the first turn at Daytona banking right to left so a drive at the right edge of the fairway should feed to center. This green complex is typical in that one punishing horseshoe pit protects the left side and the right side is accessible to an articulate approach. Aim your second at the tall mound front right with a baby draw and feed onto the green. Anything visiting the sand chamber in front will be a double in the making. This is just a demanding technical golf hole.

#### #13 Par 4 368/360 Right of Way

Somewhat similar to the last with a dogear left proclivity but considerably shorter. Drive right center off the tee and the fairway will feed it toward the layered bunker on the left. A very small green sits on a 5 to 11 angle behind another nasty bunker short left of the green. There is a false front that makes the front pin very difficult to manage. The green is very small and falls to the back right where a footprint collects balls.

#### #14 Par 4 344/316 Chicanery

The name of this one is appropriate because this short par four is a collection of veiled trickery. The drive is at the concealed fairway bunker up the right to get a peek around the corner to the hide-n-seek alcove green setting below to the left. The second is a lofted club into a deep narrow green with a distinct slope from back to front. Hit it close here and you will swear that the tall eucalyptus trees that surround the green are cheering like an enthusiastic gallery. The view down to this green is just majestic.

#### #15 Par 4 415/398 Outback

This is a twisting long par four and a half-number 1 handicap hole on the course. Tee is protected on the left from the leafy arms of the bordering eucalyptus trees, and on the right from an imposing bunker, so hit a strong right to left one that feeds to center. What is left is a long club to a sharply elevated green protected by two very deep bunkers front left. Timid shots to the right will be repelled down the slope to the right leaving an elevation recovery pitch. This green slopes from the back left to front right with a small retention hollow in the back left making a phone booth pin location back there.

#### #16 Par 4 360/349 Crescent Moon

This is one of my favorite holes out here as the crescent shaped fairway shadows a massive waste bunker that dominates the left side of the hole from tee to green. Drive is right center following the curve of the hole. A short iron left to a green of similar crescent shape that wraps around the big toe of the waste area greenside left. The green surface saddles over a ridge across the center and strong approaches to center will feed to a hollow in the back left of the green. All two putts on this contoured green are a real challenge.

#### #17 Par 3 211/175 Saddle

Somewhat non-descript long par three is protected in the front by a bear of a bunker. Up and downs from here are unheard of, so it is play a draw at the right side of the green. The green has a fall line from the back left to front right.

#### #18 Par 5 489/481 Fortitude

This signature hole wends its way down from a high tee box to a picturesque green complex that will remind you of the 18<sup>th</sup> at Bay Hill. Big hitters can blast it over the corner and with a little overspin get to within 200 yards of the green. For the rest of us it is a power draw to right center and a layup to around 110 down the left. Either way the shot into this green is harrowing because of the diagonal set of the green to the rock trimmed pond and a single deep bunker back right. Green is wide but without much depth so you have to pick a club you can spin if you are on the short approach.