

Los Angeles Country Club-North Course Los Angeles, California

Designer: George Thomas (1927)

Tees	Par	Yardage	Rating	Slope
Black	70	7010	74.6	139
White	70	6466	72.4	135
Red	70	6089	70.2	131
Green	70	5610	67.7	122

Overview:

George Thomas, an east coast native who cut his design teeth with others from the Philadelphia School of Design back in the teens, moved to the west coast in 1919 to establish a beachhead of quality designs in California in the full Golden Age tradition. With Bel-Air and Riviera already under his belt he took on the job of redesigning the two courses at Los Angeles Country Club at the request of their members. What he and his sidekick William Bell created with the North Course at LACC turned out to be the centerpiece of the George Thomas design portfolio in California.

Over the next 80 plus years a combination of meddlesome board decisions and some nature-based changes mollified the character of the course to the point where it had lost it's soul. In the early 00's an initiative by some younger members sought out Hanse Design to propose a plan to restore the North Course to the original design. Gil Hanse, with the capable help of his longtime associate Jim Wagner and some historical perspective from Geoff Shackelford, put together an ambitious restoration plan to bring the course back to it's original character and full grandeur. The board had the good sense to fully embrace the restoration plan and in 2009 a staged restoration began to take place.

The work included rediscovering and restoring the original Billy Bell bunkering, returning to their rightful homes greens that had been senselessly relocated, thinning out the 80 years of overgrowth of trees and related ground vegetation that had compromised the views on the course, and establishing throughout the course the influence of the dry wash that had given this course it's distinct character.

There is so much talk these days about recapturing the look and playability of courses of the Golden Age of Golf Course Design and that is precisely what Hanse and Associates have done at LACC. The fact that the USGA and R & A are bringing a Walker Cup to LACC in 2017 and the U.S. Open in 2023 would tell you that the restoration was a roaring success.

Built on hundreds of rolling acres of some of the most valuable urban real estate in America LACC sits in the middle of Beverly Hills in the shadow of apartment buildings, palatial homes, and commercial development. They have maintained a reasonable buffer for the most part-while on the property you feel relatively secluded from all that with a few notable exceptions. The ground itself is a wonderful hilly piece of property that presented interesting possibilities for Thomas and Bell for the routing of holes and placement of tees, hazards, and greens. The genius of the design is that they used the flow of the land, the dry wash, and nature's assets to create holes that do not intrude on the environment, they look like they were always there.

Stepping onto the first tee you take in the flavor of the course immediately. The grass platform for the teeing grounds are not distinct from the fairway in front of you. The vast continuum of short grass just melds into the course that is unfolding below your feet. The placement of the fairway and green side bunkers is very creative. They give clear direction to your strategic options off the tees and on approach. Many times you will realize that the movement of the pin 30 feet on the green can change both the preferred distance and angle of the approach you are trying to set up. This is why an investment in a good caddie is a must when you play LACC.

As you get out through the second and third holes the presence of the dry wash makes itself very apparent. Fortunately there is no water running through it and the fact that they do not seem to let it get overgrown means you can technically play from it without grounding your club. Having said that it is incumbent upon you to give the presence of the wash full consideration when weighing options of approach lines and club selection. Both of these holes will taunt you in terms of carry to reach the putting surface, especially if you are not in the fairway. First lesson to be learned at LACC is a bogie is an acceptable result when double or worse is possible taking on a shot that is just beyond your skill set.

The par three fourth is one of the signature holes on the course—from its teeing ground the full splendor of LACC is apparent. Elevation change, wash, sand, even some exposed sand hills thrown in for good measure makes for a true Kodak moment. Once again Thomas gave you options that allow you to mitigate risk and protect your scorecard. Getting it close is a real risk/reward deal but hitting it to the fat part of the green should mean making par is very doable. If you forget what neighborhood you are in take a gander back up the hill from this green—that is Lionel Richie's little bungalow looking down at you.

In 1927 Thomas wrote a book called "Golf Architecture In America" at about the same time he was doing this course where he talks about the notion of designing a course within a course. The idea was that holes could play to different strategy, even different par depending on how they set the tees and pins on a given day. As you will read in the Hole-By-Hole Analysis below, five through nine are all half par holes that speak to this notion—depending on set up and your degree of chutzpah they can be very different day-to-day.

Six is a drivable par four where you have to be certifiable to try to go for the green. Seven is a par three where laying up may be the best option depending on the wind influence. Eight is a truncated, switch back, shish-link of a five par that throws all strategic convention out the window and dares you to play with a sense of abandon. If you survive the tee shot on tourniquet approach to the par three ninth a double has turned into a three with one swing of the club. The only thing I will guarantee is that once you have played through this fungible part of the course you will have goose bumps or the sweats depending on how you fared.

The inward nine is even more dramatic and just as thrilling. The tenth shares fairway with the sixteenth, a characteristic you see repeated a number of times through the round. This gives the course the appearance of great width and allows you to see through to others holes as you play. It reinforces the seamless character mentioned with continuous tee boxes to the fairways and reinforced often by continuous short grass between greens and the next teeing round. Thomas is playing with your mind because in spite of the width presented there is always a favored area, usually 20 to 25 yards wide that you want to place your tee ball in to have a sporting chance of taking on the challenge of the hole.

The other postcard par three is the downhill eleventh. Here they reversed the classic Redan with an abruptly downhill tee shot that must be played off a side hill short left of the green to feed the ball onto a green

that runs away to the right. Like most Redan holes, trying to take on the pin directly will likely put you in the nasty short side bunker or over the green with a thankless recovery shot at hand.

You cannot talk about LACC without paying homage to the Billy Bell Bunkers. They are deep, intimidating, thoughtfully placed, yet totally playable. The toothy edges and gnarly brow grass is what people notice but the steep faces tend to avoid plug lies and the playing condition of where you end up-both sand and slope-lends itself to a typical bunker shot swing as long as you are wisely willing to accept 25 feet for the first putt.

On many of the par fours Bell embedded a bunker in the center front of the approach creating a notched arrangement in the front of the green. This provides a pinable section on either side of the bunker but often one of those sides hangs perilously above nastiness you do not want to engage. More decisions....this course is all about making clear headed decisions. Jim Wagner, with the help of Geoff Shackelford, labored tirelessly to restore the sod walls on the bunkers to support the signature jagged look that Bell had originally built into these hazards.

The three par fives are all holes you can try to reach in two if you are very long and very disciplined. The fourteenth is one of my favorites because even as a three-shot hole the lay-up and approach are fraught with difficulty if you bite off more than you can chew. It looks so simple yet the slightest deviation in execution can mean severe consequences to your scorecard.

I have read elsewhere that the genius of George Thomas was his ability to create something special on a short hole with little topographical feature. He did this repeatedly at Riviera and the short approach and putt fifteenth is another gem. The slender, crescent shaped green orients to tightly fitting bunkers with just enough elevation to mask what should be a simple, short iron approach. The hole can be as short at 75 and as long as 135 but I guarantee you more people are shaking their heads side-to-side rather than up-and-down when they are walking to the sixteenth tee.

Every great entertainment experience has a memorable finish and on that score LACC will not disappoint. With the Nassau bet in the balance the last three holes will determine the winner based on judgment, execution, and a little bit of existential fate. The walk to the house encompasses three par fours where success comes from thoughtful drive position followed by flawless execution on approach leaving an uphill putt where you can threaten the hole.

If you find the fairway off the tee on the sixteenth the approach is a repeat of the tee shot into the reverse Redan arrangement you saw on the eleventh just off your left shoulder. From the tee on the seventeenth the full monte of LACC sits below your feet-the wash, layered bunkering, and a wide driving area with a very focal sweet spot. The second is one of the most articulate approach shots you will hit all day as the green is set on a diagonal to your aiming line behind a nasty bunker front left and no bail out salvation anywhere. The finish is a walk back up the subtle ramp you played down on the first with a driving area that makes the 18th at the Old Course look narrow. Once again the position of your tee ball is critical to getting an accessible angle at a green tightly ensconced by furry sand.

The ambiance of this place is traditional with a kitschy twist. The unusual pennant style of the LACC logo is everywhere on the course- on hole stanchions, tee markers, pins, practice green flags, scorecards, hats, and the shirt you will want to take home with you. This theme lends a youthful collegial feel to the facility that

just seems to fit. Most important George Thomas created a course that is a graceful combination of raw nature and good, balanced design, a golf experience that will cling to your memory long after you have left the property.

Hole-By-Hole Analysis (White/Red)

#1 Par 5 509/494 yards

A simple but majestic opening hole gives you the feel for the course from the get go. It shares fairway with the 18th so it presents an ocean of short grass with four bunkers that define the line of the hole. Drive is left center and the best layup is near the bunker on the right about 80 yards from the putting surface for the open look into the green. The green sits behind one last bunker on the left and leans from right to left. The shots in are generally to the front right and let the ground feed the ball toward the left and center of the green. Beware of attacking a deep pin because the back left of the green falls away sharply.

#2 Par 4 428/419

This is a difficult 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ to me. Need a strong drive to center if you want any chance on your second to clear the wash that envelopes the front and right side of the green complex. The fairway is shared with 17 on the left so a big hook off the tee can actually be played back to a lay up spot. Laying up here is no embarrassment especially early in the round. The green has a distinct tilt from 2 to 7 which can help close on the pin if it is on the left. This must have been a five par before the restoration because there is an alternate green to the right that is still maintained for those with memory issues that want to play it that way.

#3 Par 4 375/363

Lively contour to this fairway that will define your path on this hole. Driving left is a disaster because the wash encroaches from that side and the fairway slope will feed the monster. Your drive is up the right at the two Christmas pines on top of the hill. This will feed the drive to right center where it belongs. The table top green complex is an upside down saucer around a vicious Bell Bunker that eats into the heart of this green. Any pin on the front right is radioactive because of the front bunker and another sand pit to the right. One more bunker flanks the left but is far enough off the green that you can feed an approach in the gap and try to nip the front of the green. Love the back drop of the tall palms-very California. For those young enough to remember..... It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World.

#4 Par 3 199/186

The view of the first of the delicious par threes will just astonish you-it encompasses all the character of LACC in one look. From the high perched tee you see a green complex below draped across the rawness of the wash with exposed sand hills behind. The green is flanked by bunkers on either side with a wide access from the front left. A high cut of full distance club-it really does not play less club in spite of the severe downhill-will feed to the right once it is on the green. The array of recovery shots you can be required to hit here seems endless.

#5 Par 4 440/420

The next five holes render the par on each hole meaningless, just play your shots one at a time and see what ends up being written on the card. This long and difficult par four heads to the farthest reaches of the property. The drive is to the top of a Jai Alai wall in front of you. What is left is a long carry to a green complex similar to the third hole with the notched green haunted by deep bunkering front right. You may be best to layup to the left and then pitch in using the side hill on the left to feed to the pin. Once again a right front pin is a sucker.

#6 Par 4 320/292

Now it gets funky. A wonderful short hole with lots of character that will drive the aggressive player bonkers. This is a sharp dogleg right around a large hill that obscures your visual of the green. The drive position is crucial to getting an aggressive attack line at the day's pin. You want to drive it hard to the left to leave a short pitch with wide angle view into a green set slightly above the wash. Driving at the green over the trees that top the hill is reason for clinical admission. The green is a shallow shelf hung on the hill behind with the wash and nasty bunkering fronting the whole thing. The green is sloped off to both sides so getting an approach close and two-putting is a chore. Just a wonderful example of the fact that distance alone does not make a hole a challenge.

#7 Par 3 219/205

From a short technical par 4 you go to a long demanding par 3-very difficult to get a rhythm in this stretch of the course. This long par three plus ramps up beautifully from the low point of the property across the wash that diagonally bisects the hole. A good piece of fairway remains front left between the wash and the putting surface which, given the long club you are playing, is a good place to land and let it pitch onto the green. The green itself is long, ramped, and tilted left to right with one bunker collaring the right.

#8 Par 5 504/484

Probably one of the coolest designs on the course with an unusual switchback truncated fairway. The par five favors fade off the tee and draw for a second. Position on each shot is crucial to the success of the next one. The drive needs to be a strong fade working off the side hill on the left of the fairway bunker. Unless you have really killed it off the tee you are likely laying up towards a single tree overlooking the second section of fairway on the side hill right at about 100 yards from the green. The second is often played off a hanging lie below your tootsies and calls for a draw which is a hard combo to pull off. Approach is across broken ground to a teenie green tilted toward the bunker on the left. As you walk this hole make sure to look back at where you came from on each shot, this is a very special hole.

#9 Par 3 165/153

Inward nine concludes with a lovely uphill challenge across the barranca to a long and narrow green pinched tightly by deep bunkers. An extra club is needed from the tee and you must hold your line at the center of the stepped ribbon green. Long is better than short to take the bunkers out of play. The office building that dominates the skyline behind the green and clubhouse is a major visual intrusion.

#10 Par 4 374/362

Grab a replenishing sports drink and a piece of fruit at the halfway house because the best and most difficult is yet to come. The view off the tee box on the tenth is just jaw dropping as the expanse in front of you includes the shared acreage with #16.. The fairway you are playing looks like a table cloth draped over the back of a couple of kitchen chairs. They put two bunkers in the end of a knob just before the first chair back. A drive behind these bunkers would have a level look at the green but a much longer approach length. Left of the bunkers the ball trundles into a valley below the putting surface and makes the shot in uphill, semi-blind, and more difficult to judge. Having said that I think you aim at the right edge of the right green side bunker and let the hill have it's way with your ball. The elevation change into the green calls for an extra club to a green sitting behind a nasty Bell Bunker you do not want to experience. The approach is a right to left ball off the bunker 30 yards short of the green turning into the opening. This green is banks sharply back to front so be careful putting above the hole. Once again a very crafty green complex.

#11 Par 3 225/197

To me this is the most innovative par three of them all a Reverse Redan with all the fixins. Hanse and Wagner did a marvelous job retrieving this design from the misguided natural and man-made changes that happened over the decades. The toothy bunkers restored to the original Billy Bell look make this an intimidating sight to behold from the tee. The opposite of a classic Redan, you must land your approach on the side hill short left and feed it onto the putting surface. The downhill plays a club and a half less than the distance and the roll out of the 40 yard deep green is generous to containing the shot.

#12 Par 4 362/358

This is another blind driving hole, you hit it over a huge hill in front of you to right center of this dogleg left. Aiming line is most left pine in the stand of trees on the right of the fairway. From there the crescent shaped green wraps around a deep fortress bunker and is flanked by another bunker on the left. This approach must be elevated into the green since there is no space to try to run one on. The green has a Nascar break from front right around the crescent to front left.

#13 Par 4 431/412

You backtrack slightly to get to the tee on this stout par four-number two handicap hole-that hugs a very hilly piece of the ground. From the tee the hole appears to get wider toward the green as you see the shared fairway with the 14th left of the fairway bunker. Drive needs to be long and up the left at the left fairway bunker to get an access angle to the green set back to the right behind a constellation of deep layered bunkers. There is open access from the left if you do not feel you can fly it all the way in.

#14 Par 5 532/499

Another of the really cool holes of the day-the routing of this Par 5 heads back towards the clubhouse. A dramatic three-shot hole for most mortals, the drive is hit just off the left edge of the string of bunkers in front of you to a wide landing area. The rest of the hole angles to the right and plays along a fairway that narrows from the right with a series of bunkers and severe drop offs. Layup is a long club up the left for a look at a green that hangs perilously off the hill on the left. The third shot is a short club up the opening front left of the

green, there is a slight lift in the back left that should hold your approach and feed it to the right. Super nasty bunker digs into the center of the green creating an unreachable pin position front right. Anything on this approach missed right is dead of dead.

#15 Par 3 121/104

It is truly amazing what a talented designer can do with a flat piece of featureless ground. As he did at Riviera Thomas and Bell created a deft little pitch and putt hole that has some teeth. From the tee the surface of the tilted crescent shaped green is obscured by the top edges of deep bunkers across the face and on both sides. . The green presents itself as long and narrow and the hole can play from 75 to 130 yards depending on the whim of the superintendent. The tilt of the green is back to front and left to right so you have to shape your short approach to work into both of those angles. There is a curious dimple mound they left in the center of the crescent that will deflect approaches to either side so a pin in the back third must fly to the back third. Putting across this bump is a three-putt in the making. If you hit a precise short iron that finds the straight and narrow this is a birdie opportunity, but any wayward flight will leave you a difficult short sided up and down.

#16 Par 4 437/420

From here to the finish you have to maintain focus as these are the hardest stretch of holes all day. You walk a balance beam on this one as it runs perilously along a spine with the 10th and 11th holes below it on either side. You have to hit two long and true shots and the first is best right to left aimed at the edge of the spread tree down the right and turning back toward the collection bunker in the left center of the fairway. Missing left is no option because the steep drop left of that bunker tumbles to no where. If you have a look at the green it is likely a long club that should start on the left edge and turn right up into a the green ramped from 1 to 7 nestled behind a deep bunker front right. Most likely way to make a par is a pitch and run from short left of the green working up to the pin.

#17 Par 4 412/350

As you walk over the back of the 16th you arrive at the elevated teeing ground and peer down one of the coolest natural designs you will see all day. The view of the hole is framed by hardwood trees on either side as the fairway ramps up your intended landing area framed left with bunkers and right with the wash. From an elevated tee this favors a fade off the tee starting out at the bunkers that ends up close to the wash on the right. It is a long club with a draw from there that must carry a cross bunker well short of a diagonally set green bordered on the right by a line of bunkers and the wash. No room to let this approach wander or you are playing a recovery from the schmootz. The green is banked from back to front so it should hold a long club coming in.

#17 Alt Par 3 120ish

If you have the time and the group behind you is not pressing drop a ball behind the 17th green and play into the alcove green setting in the trees hanging over the wash-it was the pitch par three that was originally here. They maintain this green for your recreation so give it a try. It is very narrow if the pin is up in the back.

#18 Par 4 413/371

The last hole is a big expanse that shares fairway with the 1st hole so you have oodles of room to hit your drive. The green is tucked to the left in front of the clubhouse behind fierce bunkering so a long and precise drive up the right center gives you the best angle into the green. The second is a controlled draw that starts at the right greenside bunker and turns up the opening to feed onto the putting surface. The left greenside bunker actually begins about 50 yards before the green so do not underestimate the carry to your target.