

Golf Range



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Short-Game Showcase

**Tom Fazio Sculpts a
Gem at Emerald Dunes**

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Learning Center Gets VIP Treatment in Emerald Dunes Upgrade

The standout practice grounds at this rejuvenated Florida award-winner even has a namesake Tom Fazio Short Game Center, where golfers enjoy the great architect's signature scoring-shot complex. **BY SCOTT KRAMER**





During Tom Fazio's long and stellar career as a course architect, many a design concept has come in and out of favor. One such trend is the ultra-functional, highly amenitized practice facility. In fact, its rise in popularity is partly owing to Fazio's skill and aptitude for designing them. Certain West Palm Beach, Fla., residents are now quite familiar with Fazio's vision and technique for building practice complexes. On any given day you will find these people, wedges in hand, at the Tom Fazio Short Game Area that opened this past fall at The Emerald Dunes Club.

Emerald Dunes debuted in 1990 and was soon placed among "America's Top 100 Courses You Can Play" by *GOLF Magazine*. In the time since, the course and its practice complex matured, wore down in spots, changed ownership and even went private. In 2011, new owners invited Fazio back, giving him a blank canvas and a big budget – some \$15 million – in the

name of major upgrading and rejuvenation.

Their long punch list of requested renovations was surely familiar to the well-traveled Fazio. Irrigation, regrassing, bunker work and the like was all necessary to achieve that top-shelf look and feel owners deemed necessary for attracting new members. Just as important, however, was

the perceived need to expand and polish the game-improvement facilities available to members. The new Tom Fazio Short Game Area is testament to that desire, situated as it is beside the clubhouse veranda, which also overlooks No. 18 green.

This world-class amenity offers five Champion Bermuda greens, comprised of multiple target greens and chipping greens. A 9,500-square-foot putting surface complements various short-game practice options, and is flanked by six sand traps plus a grass pot bunker, so that golfers can work on every scoring shot from 100 yards in.

The short-game area also features a dedicated 135-yard, par-3 bet-setting hole. It can be played as short as 85 yards – calling for skill with the dreaded half-wedge. What's really special about this short-game area is

that Fazio made sure all the greens and other playable areas were constructed to USGA specifications and mirror the course's exact playing conditions.

"We've mimicked anything you will encounter on the course," says Fazio. "Practice is an integral part of the game, and this is a spectacular amenity that allows golfers to tune up their scoring techniques. The assignment to build this amenity gave me a chance to make a significant addition to the golf experience at Emerald Dunes."

Golf also involves long-carry shots, we must remember, and this club's driving range is man-sized. Measuring 310 yards long and double-ended, it encompasses eight acres of land. From the front, golfers choose among five target greens, which range from 50 to 225 yards from the center of the tee. A shallow bunker to the side of the front tee is ideal for practicing fairway bunker shots. The range is stocked

with an ever-fresh supply of Titleist Pro V1 balls.

At the range's back end is a 1,500-square-foot Golf Learning Center.

"There was a range here at Emerald Dunes before, but nothing like this new facility." —Lee Rinker

Coaching takes place there in two 500-square-foot teaching bays. They're equipped with high-speed video and state-of-the-art computer training tools, such as the V1 coaching system and a Flight Scope Launch Monitor.

Alongside is a clubfitting and club repair area. A 3,116-square-foot chipping green with a greenside bunker is adjacent to the building, as are four mini chipping greens. Without a doubt, the addition of the Tom Fazio Short Game Area plus the renovation of the range have turned this into one of America's most extensive practice facilities.

"Tom Fazio took the gem of his original design and perfected it," says Emerald Dunes' executive vice president, Ken Green. "We've created a sanctuary for golfers who appreciate a pure golf experience that's challenging yet fun to play on a daily basis. While we've added length for scratch golfers, the course remains playable for all skill levels. And the new world-class Tom Fazio Short Game Area, along with the two-bay indoor Golf Learning Center, generously complements the club's variety of practice





The Learning Center (left) has boosted private-lesson activity at Emerald Dunes. Scoring-shot areas have inspired members to keep improving.

We did a lot of planning up front, and executed it pretty well so that everything has worked out kind of like we were envisioning. There weren't too many surprises."

And how has the addition of the Golf Learning Center boosted Emerald Dunes' instruction business? "We have been doing a lot of teaching in the building," says Rinker. "The video system is very easy to work with and a lot of good golfers really like working with the launch monitors for club fitting and help with their swing." It's quite likely that the celebrated architect Fazio will be called upon to work similar short-game magic at other clubs where he's planted his flag. The standard to match, as he well knows, is Fazio's namesake practice haven at Emerald Dunes. ■

facilities and game improvement amenities that rival any in Florida, if not the nation."

The range now accommodates up to 35 golfers, 15 on the front end and 20 on the back. "There was a range here before," says Lee Rinker, the former PGA Tour professional who serves as director of golf at Emerald Dunes Club, "but nothing like this new facility." All involved knew that top-grade practice is a new requirement for clubs with high aspirations. "We felt that to be a great club, we needed to have a practice facility where our members would be able to work on all aspects of their games," Rinker explains. "Luckily we had a nice piece of land right next to the clubhouse, and that's where we decided to build the short game area." The rest of the decision-making flowed from there.

Like Fazio, Rinker is truly pleased with the realism of the Fazio Short Game Area, plus the variety of on-course simulation opportunities that it offers. "The short game area has all of the same features as the course," says Rinker. "The grass is the same, the sand is the same and the greens are the same." Seeing the maintenance crew sweep through assiduously, Rinker is witness to the fact that the facility is maintained exactly like the course, meaning green speeds will match what golfers find during their round.

"Many amateurs and pros have told me it is one of the best practice facilities in the state now," Rinker says with notable pride. "Everyone has loved it.





