

THE **GOLF LIFE**



BIG AND BOLD

WITH ITS
216-ROOM
LODGE
NOW OPEN,
STREAMSONG
TAKES AIM
AT NATION'S
TOP RESORTS

A few days after Streamsong Resort opened its new lodge in January, some members of the Southern Seniors Golf Association were enjoying drinks at Fragmentary Blue, the resort's rooftop bar, which borrows its name from a short Robert Frost meditation on heaven and spirituality. The bar's manager stopped by to check on the group, then did something unexpected: He recited Frost's two-stanza poem from memory.

"That says something about the creativity they brought to the project," said Dulany Hall, the Southern Seniors' executive secretary. "Whether you're a poetry fan or not, it says something about the way they're going about creating experiences."

The opening of Streamsong's 216-room lodge marks the culmination of the most significant golf resort opening in years, and certainly one of the most unusual projects in decades. The resort is part of a reclamation project on a 16,000-acre phosphate-mining site operated by The Mosaic Co. in a rural section of central Florida.

The lodge follows by a year the opening of Streamsong's two golf courses – one by Tom Doak, the other by Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw – that quickly won acclaim, placing among the top 40 on Golfweek's Best Modern Courses list in 2013.

"If we didn't get that (the golf courses) right over there, everything that we did here (at the lodge) probably didn't matter," Rich Mack, executive vice president of Mosaic and the man responsible for shepherding the project from its infancy, said during the lodge's grand opening.

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Mosaic located the lodge on Little Payne Creek, a short drive from the golf club, so as not to detract from the golf experience. The resort also has bass fishing, a sporting-clay range, four restaurants, a grotto-style spa and 24,600 square feet of meeting space.

"Given the fact that we are viewed to be remote, when you come here there needs to be an attention-getter," Mack said. "We needed to do something bold. I hope that golfers walk into our lodge, they overlook this lake, and they say, 'Holy cow!'"

Executing Mack's vision fell to Alberto Alfonso, the Tampa-based architect who not only designed the clubhouse and lodge, but also did 240 paintings for the rooms and public spaces, designed employees' uniforms and named the restaurants.

Despite the freedom he was given, Alfonso said he was



"careful that I didn't scare these people" with a "muscular" lodge design that might garner a lot of attention but not stand the test of time. He instead sought to create a "timeless" structure, drawing inspiration from the lake and open horizon.

"Sometimes it

looks like the Amazon; it's a strange, kind of mystical place," Alfonso said. "And then the night sky, just the clarity of being out here with no city light, is a dream for an architect."

Lodge rooms range from 530 to 1,167 square feet. Hall noted that even the smallest rooms felt comfortable thanks to a clever design, with TVs facing a seating area and the bed. Rather than drapes, louvered wooden slats line the exterior wall.

Everyone associated with the project seems to have studied their talking points. When queried about the resort's location, Streamsong officials invariably have a pat reply: It feels remote, but it's accessible.

And that's true, relative to some of its competition around the country. Streamsong is 55 miles (about 70 minutes) from Tampa International Airport, and 83 miles (about 95 minutes) from Orlando International. Mack noted that resorts such as Pinehurst, Whistling Straits and Bandon Dunes require similar, or much longer, drives from the airport. Only time will tell whether golfers place Streamsong in the company of properties such as those.

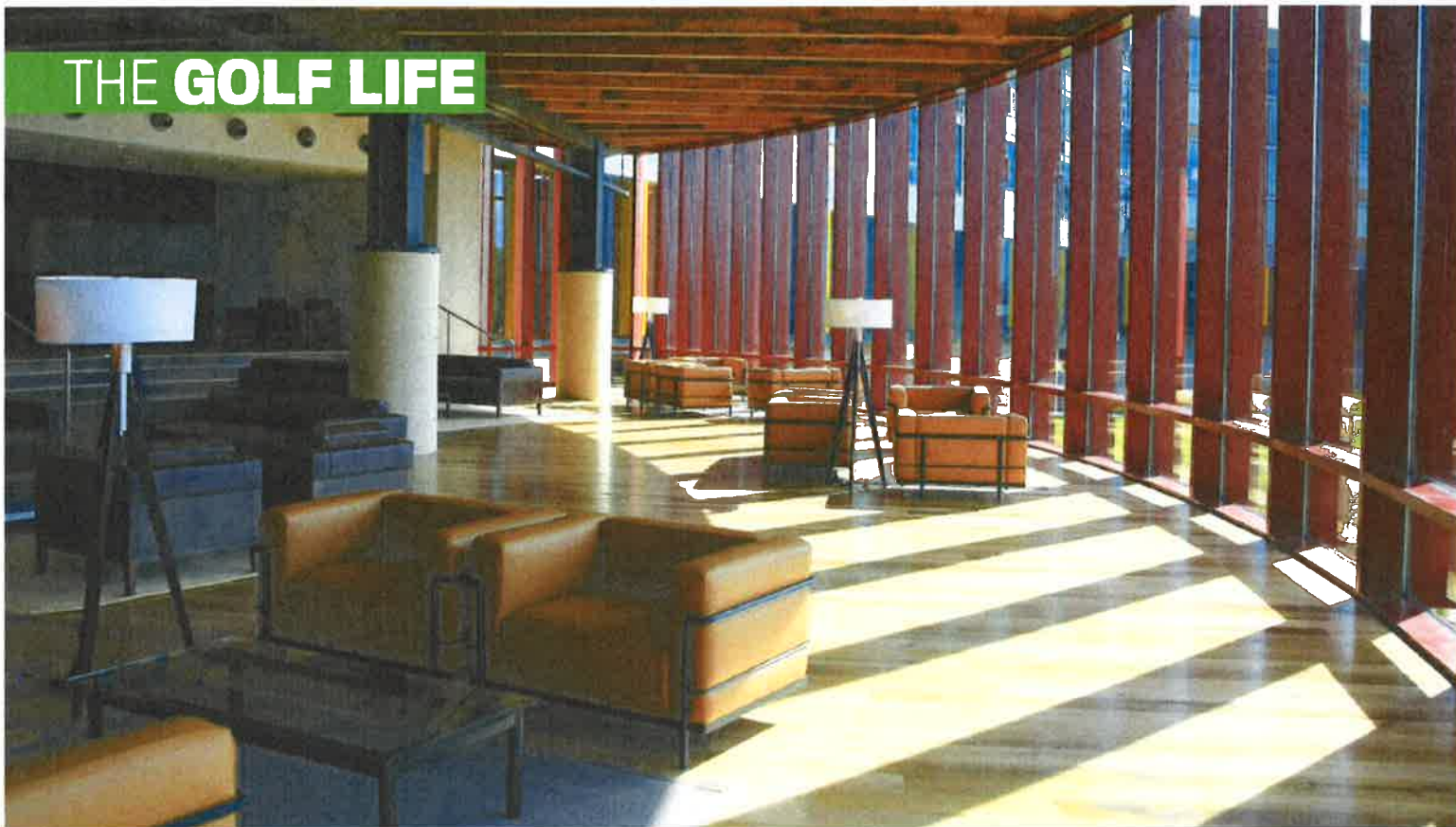
Streamsong certainly has premium pricing: A stay-and-play package – 36 holes of golf and breakfast – is \$575 per person.

Now that the resort is fully open, the job of making it a success falls largely on Richard Mogensen, the general manager who previously held a similar position at Desert Willow Golf Resort in Palm Springs, Calif. This is the fourth hotel that Mogensen has opened in his career.

Mogensen said Streamsong received nearly 8,000 applications to fill 300 jobs (not including about 100 for caddies). He and his leadership team spent the eight weeks before the opening coaching the new hires.

"The training process for a lot of them is a little challenging in that many of them

Streamsong, P40 >>>



The Leaf Lounge, located off the main lobby, overlooks Little Payne Creek. Golfers also can relax at the grotto-style spa (below).

<<< **Streamsong, P39** have never worked in a resort of this stature,” Mogensen said.

The staff was thrown right into the fire. Streamsong was almost fully booked its first week; the Southern Seniors alone brought 168 people and occupied 100 rooms for three nights, Hall said.

“Normally you have a soft opening where you open gradually over a four- to six-week period,” Mogensen said. “When you open hot, which is what we did, to 85 percent-plus occupancy, it’s a little bit of a daunting task.”

Hall booked his group into Streamsong nearly two years ago, before construction had even begun. He said there were “moments of anxiety” before the visit because he had expected the property to be open two months earlier.

There were some predictable snafus that can be expected when any new building opens. Hall said thermostats needed to be reprogrammed and some showers didn’t drain properly, and Mogensen said there were minor issues with kitchen equipment and elevators. Another guest said shuttle service between the lodge and golf club was slow, and a visiting hotelier said he had to help his waiter open a bottle of wine.

But Hall emphasized that he was pleased with the staff’s responsiveness.

“The management and staff went over and above to interface with me as the individual responsible for the

group . . . to make it right,” Hall said.

Hall said that the food “was way beyond our expectations,” both for catered functions and at the restaurants, particularly at Sotto Terra, Streamsong’s Italian fine-dining option.

A key for Streamsong will be attracting more group

business, a task made more difficult because the lodge is not aligned with any major hotel company and doesn’t currently offer frequent-visitor points. Mogensen recently hosted some travel companies that could book corporate and incentive-travel groups into the resort.

In the meantime, Mogensen and his staff already have won over at least one important ambassador for the resort. Hall

said he plans to go back to Streamsong in April as part of a 56-man group – another preopening booking – and said he was so pleased with his initial experience that he will consider taking more groups to Streamsong.

“I have a hard time containing my enthusiasm,” Hall said. “The building itself is a real work of art. This is really, really a neat place.”



GOLF WEEK PHOTOS/TRACY WILCOX

The courses

For photos and a review of Streamsong’s Red and Blue courses, visit golfweek.com/streamsong.