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Tom Fazio

A conversation with golf's preeminent course designer.



TOM FAZIO COUNTS himself among the fortunate few whose passion and profession are perfectly aligned. "My hobby happens to be golf," says the 65-year-old course designer, whose nearly 200 layouts include Shadow Creek in Las Vegas, Pinehurst Nos. 4 and 8 in North Carolina, and Fallen Oak in Mississippi (site of a Champions Tour pro-am event highlighted in "Above and Beyond Par," page 153). The father of six grown children, Fazio resides with his artist wife, Sue, in Hendersonville, N.C., where in 1993 the couple founded the local chapter of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America. Now that his own children have moved out, Fazio finds he has more opportunities to fit in his favorite pastime. "My priorities were always family, job, and then playing golf," he says. "I never felt like I was sacrificing anything, but it's kind of fun to hang out with my friends and play golf on a regular basis, because now, unfortunately, the kids aren't home." —BRUCE WALLIN

What hobbies do you have other than golf?

My whole life is a hobby. But the other main thing for me is raising money for children's charities, which is kind of a hobby and a job. I'm getting ready to do a golf event at Pebble Beach with some friends of mine, where we raise a million dollars for the Boys & Girls Clubs of America. We buy the U.S. Open golf course two weeks or so before the Open and invite a bunch of people to come out and play.

Where do you travel for fun?

Wherever my wife tells me we're going—that's usually number one. Las Vegas is one of my favorite places because I go there to play golf; I'm not much of a gambler. But whether it's Palm Springs or Palm Beach or Newport Beach, there are just so many great places to go.

What is next on your list?

We're going to Venice with some friends and then going on a boat to Greece. I look at the places in *Robb Report* all the time and think, "Someday, I'm going to get to those places." But I don't use the term *bucket list*, because I don't like the thing that follows: After that bucket is filled, you check out. I'm not planning to check out. My bucket is a barrel, a great big barrel.

What is the one Tom Fazio course you would recommend to your fellow readers?

Well, certainly, the *Robb Report* type of personality, if you go to the Resort at Pelican Hill in Newport Beach, and you're

right there on the oceanfront, it's second to none. Now having said that, if you happen to be on the East Coast, where you want to go is Sea Island, Georgia, to the Cloister. I've taken people there who have never heard of it, and they echo the same thing that I say: Anyplace you go, you'll never find a place better than Sea Island.

Is there a course you haven't built yet?

As a fun thing—most people think I'm going to say Bandon Dunes or someplace in Scotland or Ireland—but honestly, I would love to go to the Mall of America and build the world's greatest golf course right in the parking lot. Going to a dunes site on an oceanfront property with natural terrain, that's fun, and I've done that at Wild Dunes [in South Carolina], I've done that at Sea Island, and they're wonderful. But the Mall of America parking lot would be exciting and fun and a challenge.

What is the greatest luxury your job has afforded you over the years?

I was able to run my schedule and not have to be away on weekends, so I could always be home for my kids' sport of the season, whether it was soccer or baseball or football. I'd tell my clients that if they wanted me to be somewhere on the weekends I couldn't do it. They'd have to hire someone else. They'd look at me like, "You're kidding." And I'd say, "No, that's the way it is." Can you imagine somebody working for you saying that? You'd fire them in a minute. ☐