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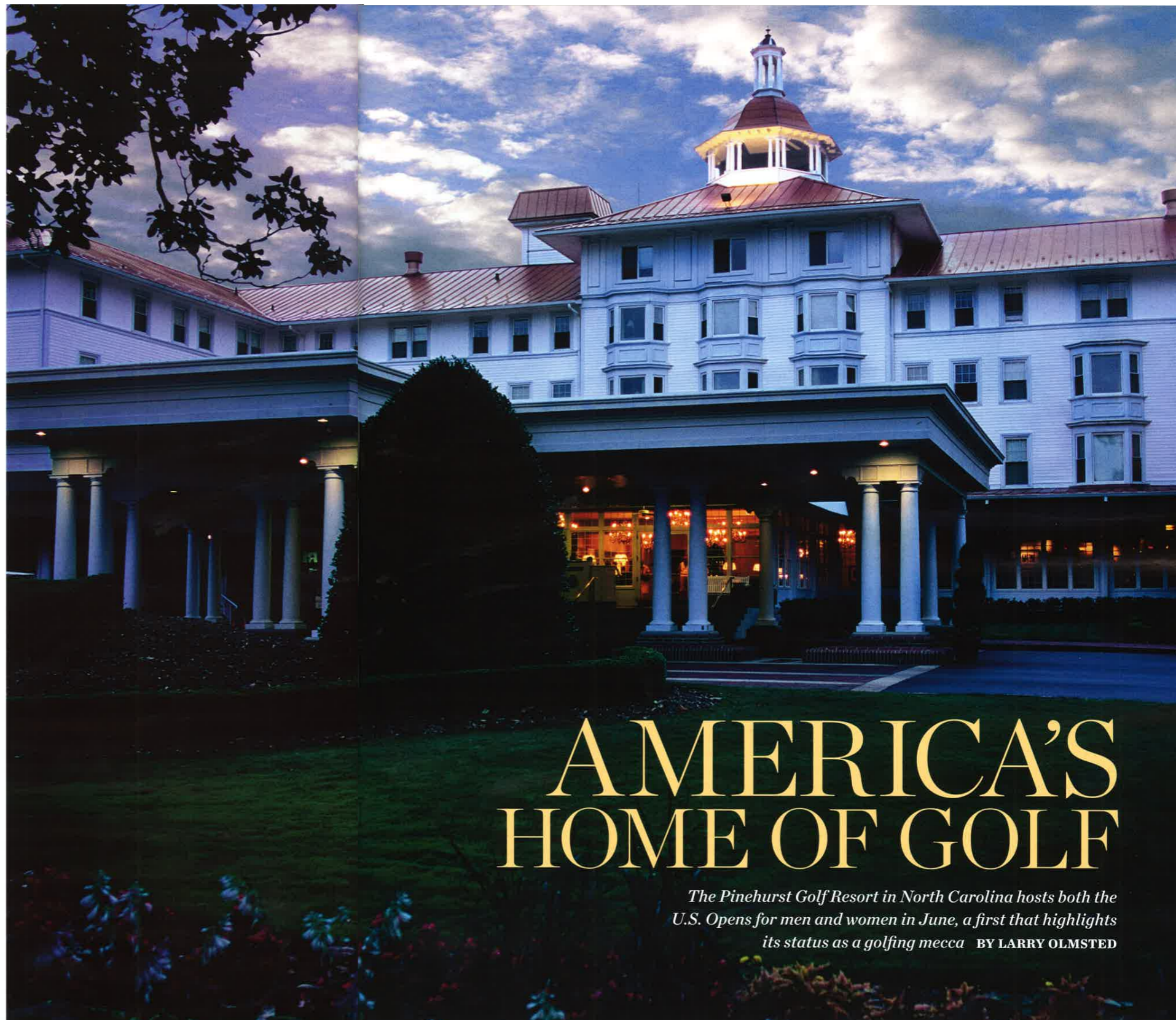


**A**lmost every recognizable name in the pantheon of golf has walked the hallowed fairways of Pinehurst, names like Jones, Nelson, Snead, Nicklaus, Woods, Watson, Travis, Palmer, Stewart, Zaharias, Crenshaw, Sarazen and many more. But since the great names of golf and the game's history are never far removed from each other, they help make this quaint village in North Carolina a place like no other place in the United States—not Pebble Beach or Pine Valley or even Augusta—and they easily justify the resort's longtime nickname, The Home of Golf in America.

The history of golf at Pinehurst could fill a book, and indeed it fills several. But the highlights alone are noteworthy. At a time when private clubs ruled the game, it was America's very first golf resort, and ever since the first course opened in 1898 it has also been the largest, now with eight courses, several more than any competitor. It is home to the world's first practice range, "Maniac Hill," and remains the only public course on earth that has hosted the Ryder Cup and two different majors—the PGA Championship and U.S. Open. This feat alone would cement its tournament-rich status but Pinehurst has also hosted the U.S. Amateur, U.S. Women's Amateur, U.S. Senior Open, PGA Club Professionals Championship, the TOUR Championship and the nation's longest running amateur championship, the North & South, held here for more than 110 years.

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The Pinehurst Resort was America's first public golf destination, and has hosted numerous tournaments, including the PGA Championship and U.S. Opens. The landmark Carolina Inn is pictured here.



# AMERICA'S HOME OF GOLF

*The Pinehurst Golf Resort in North Carolina hosts both the U.S. Opens for men and women in June, a first that highlights its status as a golfing mecca* **BY LARRY OLMSTED**



The famed No. 2 course at Pinehurst was considered by its designer Donald Ross to be his greatest creation, and he lived adjacent to the course during his later years, constantly tinkering with it to make it even better. It was restored under an “original intent” philosophy in 2012 by Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw.

This year, Pinehurst is making history once again, and in a big way. For the first time ever, from June 12 to June 22, the Men’s and Women’s U.S. Open Championships, golf’s toughest Majors, will be contested on the same course, the fabled No. 2, and in back-to-back to weeks. “Two national championships on one course in the same year is unprecedented. To do that in two weeks ... well there just has never been anything like it. It’s going to be huge,” says Michael Patrick Shiels, a veteran golf journalist, broadcaster and author of numerous books including *Secrets of the Great Golf Course Architects*. “Fans watching on television will get to know the course so much more than in the typical four-day event, and it will give viewers a side-by-side look at the men’s and women’s game in a whole new way they never get to see. To call it historic is almost an understatement, and I can’t think of a better venue than Pinehurst No 2.”

Pinehurst No. 2 is widely considered the pinnacle achievement of one of the greatest designers of all time, Donald Ross. Ross came to Pinehurst from his home at Scotland’s vaunted Royal Dornoch, where he was superintendent (after an apprenticeship in St Andrews with Old Tom Morris), and he never left. In addition to the first four courses at the resort (he rebuilt the first two), he would go on to design over 400 more, but spent the rest of his life in a house alongside No. 2, tinkering with and improving his masterpiece for decades. No. 2 has never left the Top 10 public rankings of major golf magazines, but over the years nature and Father Time conspired to encroach on Ross’ work. Two years ago the highly respected design team of Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw restored the layout to its designer’s original vision, poring over old photos and documents. The effort received near universal accolades, and *Golf Magazine*



Clockwise from top left: Donald Ross came to North Carolina from Scotland's famed Royal Dornach course, and completed the No. 2 course in 1907. The Holly Inn at Pinehurst is a smaller hotel on the property but is favored by many who visit. Arnold Palmer, left, and Harvie Ward Jr. competed against each other in the annual amateur tournament, known as the North-South. The 1895 Grille at the Holly Inn is usually judged to serve the best food at the resort.

catapulted it from seventh best in the nation to third. It is fair to say that, with the eyes of the world on Pinehurst for two straight weeks, the course will receive more attention than ever before. And in the lifetime of everyone watching, competing and reading this, the course has never been in better shape.

The dual U.S. Opens are going to be a spectacle worth seeing in person, and while logistically challenging, this is far from impossible. All of the hotels in and around Pinehurst are already sold out for the Men's week, but as of this writing, there are still resort condos and villas available, and many locals are putting their homes and condos up for rent through local realtors on websites such as AirBnB. The local visitors' bureau is keeping up-to-date hotel and rental info on a special page of its website ([HomeofGolf.com](http://HomeofGolf.com)). There is also an enormous amount of lodging within the one- to two-hour drive market including Fayetteville, Raleigh and even Charlotte. Because the layout of the resort lends itself to spectators, there are also a lot more tickets available than usual, more than twice as many as the 20,000 per day

offered at Merion in 2013. So far, interest in the Men's Open has far outpaced the Women's Open, for which tickets and lodging will be easier to come by—with some hotel rooms still available—and be less expensive, running about a third of the inflated rates during the Men's week.

The downside of going to Pinehurst this June is that you will miss the chance to play the main attraction, the much-improved No. 2. After the Opens, the resort and the surrounding region immediately go into shoulder season, as summer is typically slow compared to spring and fall. That might not be the case this year, since golf travelers' passion for Pinehurst is already running at an all-time high.

There was an uptick in visits after both of the U.S. Opens held here, in 1999 and 2005, but a similar surge will not follow this year's historic dual Opens—the surge has already begun. "We've been a partner of Pinehurst's since 1997," says Dan Costello, vice president of Caddiemaster, the company that runs the acclaimed caddie operation at Pinehurst. "The golf industry was booming back in the late 1990s and early 2000s.



Among the other resort courses in the immediate vicinity of Pinehurst are Mid-Pines, (top) with the characteristic unmanicured traps at the 16th green. The In the Rough lounge, lower left, is a favorite place to relax at Pine Needles. The main buildings at Pine Needles, lower right, overlook the practice area.

Every high-end resort was making hay—there weren't enough tee-times in the day. And Pinehurst had the added injection of two U.S. Opens in 1999 and 2005. In both instances our company had record years of caddie rounds subsequent to those championships. That being said, in 2013 we surpassed all those previous marks—before the U.S. Opens. My opinion is that it's a combination of the great press the renovation of No. 2 has received, the rankings and the historic dual Opens. I think 2015 will be off the charts."

The allure of the much-improved No. 2 and Pinehurst's history, now even richer, is enough reason to pack your golf clubs. But there is more. "A lot of people watching on TV are going to say 'I haven't been there since 1995, it's time to go back,' and they are going to be right," says Costello. "The changes that have occurred in the past few years have been very positive, not just the course, but new and renovated hotels, new restaurants, more nightlife. If you have not been lately, you will be very surprised."

There is more of everything that's good in today's Pinehurst, and its sister village of Southern Pines. If there has been one longstanding

criticism of the destination, it has usually involved the word "sleepy." Peace and quiet still abound in the picture-perfect village of Pinehurst, laid out by famed landscape architect and designer of New York's Central Park, Frederick Law Olmsted, as a planned pedestrian-friendly town full of lush trees and winding sidewalks. But the suddenly revived Southern Pines next door offers visitors more action, a yin to Pinehurst's yang just minutes away. Main Street in Southern Pines is thriving with a slew of new restaurants and bars, many featuring modern farm-to-table cuisine, mixology cocktails and long wine lists, as well as outdoor seating and plenty of live music.

David Woronoff, publisher of *The Pilot*, the local paper of record, has seen the change firsthand. "The paper is headquartered in downtown Southern Pines, and it used to be that when I got in my car at 5:30 there would practically be tumbleweeds rolling down the street," he says. "Now it is just as crowded at night as during the day. We had a surge in visitors after the last two Opens, but someone who comes back this time will be surprised at how vibrant Southern Pines has become. Here we view it as one town with two distinct neighborhoods." Brad Klein, the nation's

foremost golf course design critic and architecture editor of *Golfweek* magazine, has spent a lot of time here and agrees. “The revival of Southern Pines is just amazing. It has cafes, bars, feels overrun with artists, writers and musicians, like a smaller version of Asheville, and I think that’s great,” Klein says.

Then there is the golf. If you consider the upper echelon of all courses, those universally considered the best in the world, from the great links of Scotland and Ireland to giants such as Pine Valley and Royal Melbourne, they have one thing in common. Surprisingly it is not a stunning coastline that unifies these greats, it is sand. Depending how strict your geologic criteria are, 13–16 of the top 20 courses in the world, public or private, are built on sites best known for sand, from Nebraska to the Ailsa coast (*Golf Magazine’s* list). Pinehurst No. 2 is one of those, but there are more than 30 such courses—including half a dozen Ross designs—in North Carolina’s aptly named Sandhills, a concise region that includes Pinehurst and Southern Pines, along with nearby Aberdeen and exceptional area courses such as Mid Pines, Tobacco Road and The Dormie Club along with the eight at the Pinehurst resort. The amount of standout public golf in this small area is virtually unrivalled anywhere in the country.

“The comparisons to St Andrews are unavoidable, mainly because they ring true,” says Shiels. “Both towns are literally built around golf and steeped in its history, full of trophy-laden display cases, vintage canvases and black-and-white photos, with antique shops selling brassies, spoons and featheries. Both have held far more important tournaments than any place in their respective countries. The Links Trust has seven courses in the heart of town plus independent layouts like the Duke’s, while Pinehurst has the eight at the resort plus Pine Needles and Mid Pines. They are both haunted by the ghosts of Bobby Jones, Payne Stewart and Donald Ross,

both are charming towns that live and breathe golf, but both have so much more. In St Andrews you can stay in the huge Old Course Hotel with its spa, restaurants and full-service facilities, or opt for the more intimate Rusacks, a quaint B&B, or rental flat. Pinehurst has the grand Carolina, scaled-down charm at Mid Pines, The Pine Crest Inn and plenty of rental condos. They both have many great 19th holes and fish and chips—only St Andrews does not really have any good barbecue.”

If you turn on your TV this June, there is a good chance you will soon be part of the wave of newfound interest in Pinehurst as a golf destination. Here is what you need to know:

## Pinehurst No. 2

Donald Ross’ masterpiece has always been infamous for its devilish green complexes, hard to hold on approach, hard to read, tricky to chip and putt. This was illustrated in unforgettable fashion during the 1999 U.S. Open when two-time Major champion John Daly made an 11 on the 8th after failing to hold the green with two putts from off the fringe, incurring a penalty for swatting his ball while moving, finally chipping it onto the putting surface and three putting from there. If you have played the course, the greens are probably what you remember, because the rest of the design was somewhat featureless, fairways transitioning to thick Bermuda rough to stands of pines. Not anymore.

According to Klein, the restoration does not harken back to the birth of No. 2 but rather to 1935, the climax of Ross’ lifelong tinkering, when he made the last of his drastic renovations, including building the current 4th and 5th holes in preparation for its first major, the 1936 PGA Championship. Some 35 acres of Bermuda rough that had overtaken the edges of the fairways have been removed, but more dramatic to returning visitors



Tobacco Road is considered another of the outstanding golf courses in the Pinehurst area, and may be the best work of the late golf course designer Mike Strantz. The course, on the site of an old sandpit mine, appears to erupt from the earth, and provides a host of challenges. A true hidden gem.



The beautiful hotel at Mid-Pines welcomes visitors there.

## WHERE TO GOLF, STAY AND EAT

### COURSES

#### **Pinehurst Resort**

(855) 235-8507  
pinehurst.com

#### **Mid-Pines**

(910) 692-2114  
pineneedles-midpines.com

#### **Pine Needles**

(910) 692-7111  
pineneedles-midpines.com

#### **National Golf Club**

(910) 295-4300  
nationalgolfclub.com

#### **Southern Pines Country Club**

(877) 502-3552  
southernpinesgc.com

#### **Talamore**

(800) 552-6292  
talamoregolfresort.com

#### **Tobacco Road**

(877) 284-3762  
tobaccoroadgolf.com

#### **The Dormie Club**

(901) 215-4587  
dormieclub.com

### LODGING

#### **Carolina**

(855) 235-8507  
pinehurst.com/  
accommodations/  
the-carolina-hotel/

#### **Holly Inn**

(855) 235-8507  
pinehurst.com/  
accommodations/  
the-holly-inn/

#### **Manor Inn**

(855) 235-8507  
pinehurst.com/  
accommodations/  
the-manor-inn/

#### **Mid-Pines Inn**

(910) 692-2114  
pineneedles-midpines.com

### DINING

#### **Full Moon Oyster Bar**

(336) 712-8200  
fullmoonosterbar.com

#### **P.zza**

(910) 684.5030  
artisanwoodfiredpizza.com

#### **Southern Prime**

(910) 693-0123  
southernprimesteakhouse.net

will be the many lost sandy waste areas dotted with wiregrass that have been replaced, giving a raw feel that while original, has not been seen in decades. "People will be surprised to see it with a lot less green grass and a lot more sand and wire grass. It's a bit of a shock but it's great," says Klein.

"No. 2 is relatively the same golf course as before our renovation. Our goal was to return it to its natural origins," says Ben Crenshaw. "The course to us through the decades reflected the fairgreen; in other words, lines of play, with ample fairways encased on the borders with the region's natural environment which is sand, wire grass and pine needles. Donald Ross explained that the goal of No. 2 was to test the expert, as well as those players of a lesser ability, and deal with both fairly." Ross did that, Coore and Crenshaw breathed new life into it, and you will be hard pressed to find anyone in the golf business who is not impressed, including Brandon Tucker, GolfChannel.com's managing editor of courses & travel. "I had the chance to play it right

before it shut down and again right after it opened," says Tucker. "I think what it does is bring a lot more wow-factor to each tee box. It's just a lot more visually spectacular compared to wall-to-wall turf between trees."

## Other Area Golf Courses

Within the Pinehurst resort, the most popular courses after No. 2, are No. 4 and No. 8—the latter an original Tom Fazio design also known as The Centennial, built for the resort's 100th birthday in 1995, and the former a Fazio rebuild of a Ross design, now mostly Fazio's work. If you are skipping rounds here, the ones to miss are No. 5 and No. 7, while No. 1 and No. 3, though homey, simple and very understated are both fun, easy walks steeped with Ross' touch. Their lack of drama and length does not earn them many accolades but Klein is a fan. "I love One because it's the oldest and most established, and I love Three because it's short and fun and feels like it has been there forever."

But if you want to experience the Ross genius beyond No. 2, your first stop should be Mid Pines, one of two adjacent single-course golf resorts owned by living icon Peggy Kirk Bell, a former professional golfer and teaching legend who was the first woman voted into the World Golf Teaching Hall of Fame. Mid Pines' classic Ross course was restored in very similar fashion to No. 2 even more recently, and to near identical acclaim. "The big surprise in the region is the resurgence of Mid Pines," says Klein. "Kyle Franz, a shaper who did much of the bunker work at No. 2 did a similar job here, and now it looks so much more like it fits the Sandhills, and the greens were greatly improved." Shiels agrees: "I've always loved Mid Pines, both the resort and the course, but it is better than ever. It's hard to call such a historic design by such a great architect a hidden gem, but if you haven't played it you should." While not designed by Ross, sister course Pine Needles across the street is well worth a round, extensively renovated in 2005 by respected architect John Fought. The final must-play Ross course is Southern Pines Country Club, formerly the Southern Pines Elks Club and once tricky to get on, but now completely public and a local's favorite. "It's the other Ross course and it's really cool," says Klein.

There are several other notable area layouts including Talamore and semiprivate Pinehurst National, with two Jack Nicklaus Signature Courses. But the must-plays are Tobacco Road in Sanford and The Dormie Club, just minutes from Pinehurst Village. The best work of the late Mike Strantz, Tobacco Road occupies a former sandpit mine and seems to have erupted from the earth. This is one of the most dramatic, creative and unforgettable golf courses anywhere, and oddly also remains a hidden gem. The Dormie Club is the area's newest course, by the same high-powered duo responsible for the No. 2 facelift, Coore and Crenshaw, and while it showcases the Sandhills feel, it has a dramatically different topography, rolling with marked elevation changes and a large lake. Built as a private club, it has remained open to the public due to weak membership sales, and is simply excellent.

## Lodging

The Pinehurst Resort is comprised of three hotels and a large array of rental condominiums, all linked by a free on-demand shuttle service. In order to play No. 2 and the other resort courses, it is easiest to spend at least part of your visit at one of these properties, probably on a golf package. In addition to an unrivalled array of golf, the resort also offers guests world-class tennis and croquet facilities, a large lavish spa, and a 200-acre private lake with beach club, rowing sports and fishing. The main lodging



The Dormie Club is the area's newest course and is the work of the same team—Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw—which did the renovation work on Pinehurst No. 2. While it captures the Sandhills region feel, this course has bigger elevation changes and a large lake to challenge golfers.

option is the Carolina, the town's grand hotel, cut from the same cloth as the Homestead or Greenbrier, a huge white sprawling building of open porches, columns and copper-accented peaked roofs, set on an imposing circular driveway behind perfectly manicured topiary spelling out "Pinehurst 1895" in larger-than-life living letters. The Carolina has 230 rooms and suites, plus 11 freestanding four-bedroom villas adjacent to the main building. The resort's spa is located here, and the hotel includes the Ryder Cup bar, a coffee shop and the formal Carolina Room, where prix fixe dinners are served by uniformed waitstaff in an atmosphere frozen in time.

While steeped in history and the path of least resistance, the Carolina is an upscale rather than luxury property, catering to a lot of group business, and many Pinehurst devotees prefer the resort's Holly Inn—including most Tour players. This is the original resort hotel, built in 1895 and is grand on a smaller scale. It is more a mansion than White House, with 82 rooms, but also has the best restaurant in the resort's portfolio, the 1895 Grille, and an atmospheric tavern featuring a vintage bar shipped over from Scotland. The 42-room Manor Inn is the most casual, with only one room type (standard) and no restaurant. A better choice is probably the many condos throughout the vast property, especially for golfing foursomes and groups. Courses No. 1 through No. 5 emanate from the main clubhouse, in the heart of the village and equally convenient to all three hotels, while No. 6, No. 7 and No. 8 are all off-site.

Outside of the Pinehurst Resort, the top choices include Mid Pines and Pine Needles, the Peggy Kirk Bell-owned twin resorts across the street from one another, each with a golf course, though both share all facilities. The 103-room Mid-Pines Inn was another grand hotel built just before the Depression and retains all of its Georgian mansion charm, and is especially beloved locally for its intimate bar—so obscure many guests never notice it. The Lodge at Pine Needles is more woodsy, casual and lodge-like, with a big fireplace, popular outdoor bar overlooking the golf course, and an old-fashioned Southern dining room famous for its decadent fried chicken. Located between the Village of Pinehurst and Southern Pines, the properties are isolated and quiet. "I love Mid Pines, but there's a liability in that there is nothing to do at night and the bar closes at 10:30," says Klein.

The final option of note is the Pine Crest Inn, a historic bed-and-breakfast in the Village which just renovated all of its guest rooms. Donald Ross himself bought the property in 1921 and operated it for several years, catering to a who's-who of his famous golfer friends. It remains very popular with a devoted repeat following, and all room rates—which are extremely reasonable for the area—include breakfast and dinner. Many regulars stay here chiefly because of the food and the Inn is known for its braised pork chop, an enormous piece of meat more akin to osso bucco. The bar, Mr. B's, is an iconic 19th hole, a must-visit, dark, worn and cozy, usually with live music.

## Dining & Libations

Most of the popular dining options within Pinehurst Village are in the hotels, most notably the Pine Crest Inn and its famous braised pork chop, and the fine-dining 1895 Grille at the Holly Inn. This is an intimate space with first rate service and a focus on both local ingredients and local specialties, including an array of quality cheeses from North Carolina's Piedmont, paired with traditional dishes such as fried green tomatoes. Cornmeal- and pecan-crusted fried oysters and a gourmet take on shrimp and grits are examples of the regional touch.

The best of the established standalone fine dining spots are on the periphery of Pinehurst, though that is still quite close to the village, just a short drive or cab ride. The standouts are Elliott's on Linden, which heartily embraced the farm-to-table aesthetic before it was trendy, and Ironwood, a very consistent local's favorite with steaks and upscale American cuisine, and a deep by-the-glass wine program that has made it the wine lovers' top choice in town.

Most of the region's burgeoning food and nightlife scene is down the road in Southern Pines, with several new bars and new dining establishments like Southern Prime, a high-end urban style steakhouse; P.ZZA, an artisan wood fired pizza place; and Full Moon Oyster Bar, which Caddiemaster's Costello describes as "a really good addition, a great place to sit at the bar after a round of golf and have a drink and some oysters." ❖

*Larry Olmsted is a CIGAR AFICIONADO contributing editor.*