



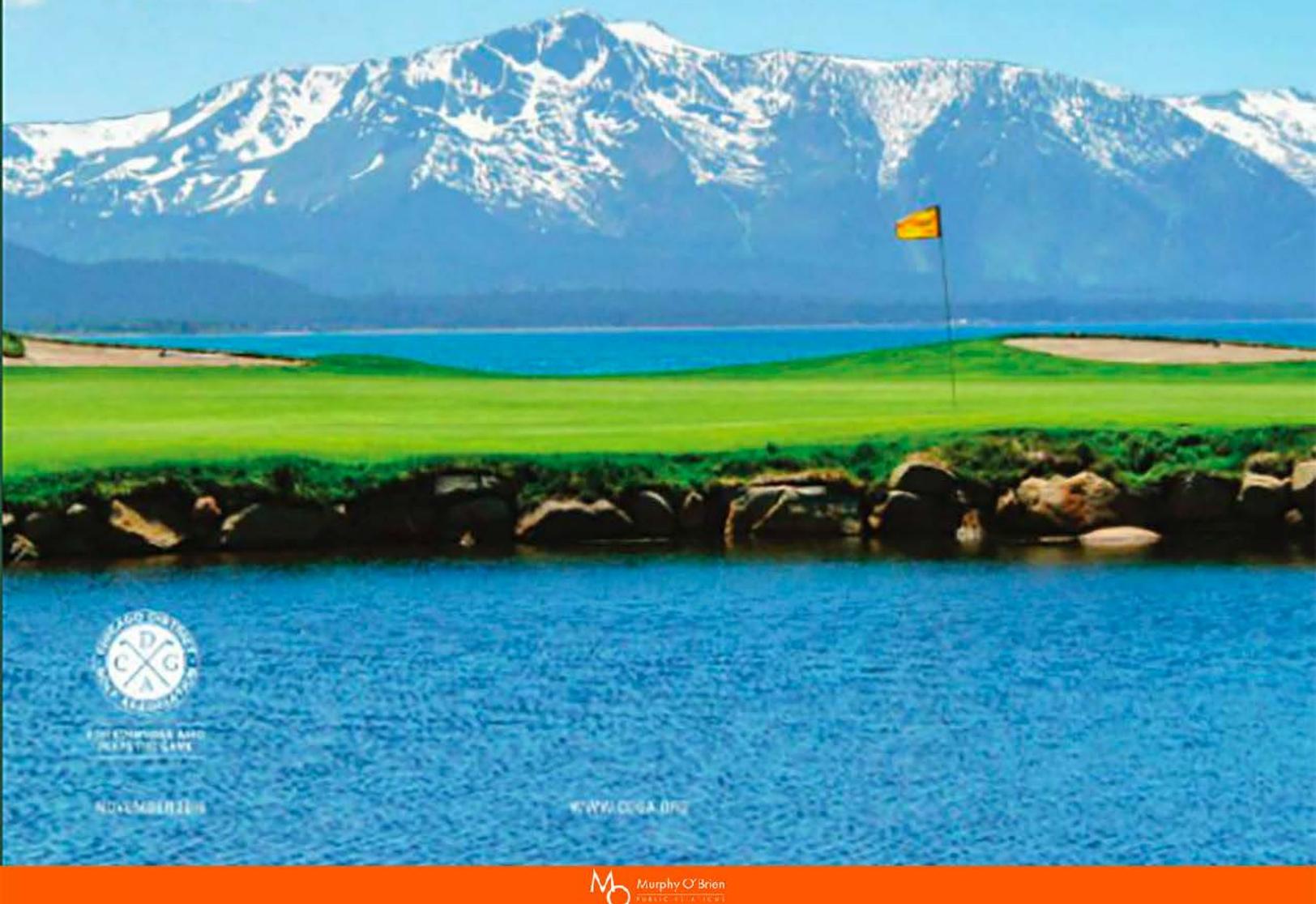
CHICAGO DISTRICT GOLFER

• • • SPECIAL WINTER TRAVEL ISSUE • • •

INCREDIBLE VIEWS AND WIDE-OPEN SPACES
MAKE RENO AND

TAHOE

A MOST INVITING
GOLF EXPERIENCE



FOR MEMBERS AND
NON-MEMBERS Alike

NOVEMBER 2016

WWW.CDGA.ORG



HEAVEN ON EARTH

From start to finish, a visitor to Missouri's Big Cedar Lodge can't help but be awestruck

BY ADAM SCHUPAK



There are places in this world where the length of the journey is quickly overshadowed by the reward of the destination. Tucked in the Ozark Mountains of southwest Missouri, Big Cedar Lodge and its views of the heavens is one such place.

Scott McCarron, a three-time PGA Tour winner, and his fiancée, Jenny Klein, took one look from the first tee at Top of the Rock after arriving for the Bass Pro Shops Legends of Golf in May and were smitten. From that vantage point, one can see the three-story wedding chapel with its bell-towered steeple, along with sweeping sunset views of Table Rock Lake.

"When we got there . . . we saw the chapel and said, 'Wouldn't it be a beautiful place to get married someday?'" said McCarron, 51. The couple got married four days later in a spur-of-the-moment ceremony at the Chapel of the Ozarks after he completed the second round of the tournament.

The McCarrons aren't the only ones to be seduced by this 800-acre haven of natural beauty. Residents and visitors are bowled over by the endless array of activities, from fishing to hiking to shooting to horseback riding and water sports. It's like being at summer camp.

Big Cedar, designed in the style of a grand wilderness hunting lodge, is located 40 miles

south of Springfield, Mo., and just 8 miles south of Branson, a tourist hotspot known for its country music theaters. Turn right out of Top of the Rock's back entrance and the Arkansas border is 2 miles away. It is a sprawling resort, complemented by golf courses, a marina, multiple restaurants, a spa, stables, a conference center and much more. The resort offers 246 guestrooms across a collection of lodges, cozy cottages and private log cabins.

Mounted fish, a deer antler chandelier and my own wood-burning fireplace gave my cabin a rustic feel. Gingersnap cookies at the nightstand are a homey touch — as is the recipe in the room.

Johnny Morris, the founder of Bass Pro Shops, acquired the property in 1987 and it has grown from 10 cabins to what it is today. Big Cedar's development mirrors that of Bass Pro Shops, which Morris started by renting 8 feet of shelf space in his father's Brown Derby liquor store in Springfield, Mo. Thus, a legendary outdoor retailer was born.

"About half the population of the U.S. lives within a day's drive," Morris said. "I go back to what's going to draw people here: nature, the reservoir, the fishing, waterskiing and the genuine Ozarks hospitality."

Prepare to be awestruck by the scenery, wildlife and endless possibilities for outdoor fun. There's also plenty of golf to play, including a miniature golf course where players putt into the mouth of a bass.

Top of the Rock and Buffalo Ridge golf courses are home to the Legends of Golf tournament, a two-man competition conducted over 54 holes. In the words of PGA Tour commissioner Tim Finchem, "If there was ever a par-3 course worthy of PGA Tour tournament play, Top of the Rock was it."

The nine-hole masterpiece designed by Jack Nicklaus sits above Table Rock Lake and is a treat for the senses. An Arnold Palmer-designed practice facility with 18 target greens (lit for nighttime enjoyment) and a 70,000-square-foot "Himalayas" putting course designed by Tom Watson, which has 20 feet of elevation change from top to bottom, are stunning. Most golfers have never seen anything like it.

"Wait until you see the course," the starter said.

Azaleas, flowering dogwoods and redbuds add to the beauty and give it more than a hint of being at Augusta National's famed par-3 course. No less than Gary Player, a three-time Masters champion, has said Top of the Rock might be better. The sixth hole is an island green and players take a boat ride there to stalk their birdie putts. Nicklaus began building the course in 1996 and is pleased with how the course turned out, even though, as he states, "Johnny



has been fiddling around with that golf course for a long time."

The pros also play one round of the competition at Buffalo Ridge, which is appropriately named as it brings players in contact with free-ranging buffalo literally roaming on the adjoining fields of native grass. It originally opened in 1999 as Branson Creek Golf Club. Course designer Tom Fazio spearheaded a renovation in 2014.

Morris has two more courses in the works — a Player-designed, 12-hole family-friendly course set to open in 2017, and an 18-hole Bill Coore/Ben Crenshaw design targeted for 2018 — that will give the resort legitimate billing as one of the premier golf destinations in the United States.

On the ride back to my cabin, guests Charlie and his wife, Myrna, told me how they frequented the resort annually to enjoy the lazy river in the afternoon, read a book by the fire and listen to Clay, the singing cowboy, who performs nightly at the Devil's Pool Bar. In 2014, the first year of the tournament, Myrna recognized Morris and approached him.

"I said, 'I just want to say thank you for what you've done for this part of this country.' Big tears ran down his face. I thought to myself, 'Well, I didn't mean to make the man cry,'" Myrna said.

Tears at Big Cedar? It happens to me, too, each time I leave and lament that summer camp is over for another 365 days. 🍓

INFO: bigcedar.com

Adam Schupak was formerly a senior writer for Golfweek in Orlando, Fla.

"If there was ever a par-3 worthy of PGA Tour tournament play, Top of the Rock was it."

