

THE LUXURY LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

PRIME

LIVING

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TRAVEL

FROM COLLEGE TOWNS
TO THE OZARKS

fall
FAVES

RED-HAUTE FASHION &
BEAUTY MUST-HAVES

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ENTERTAINING & TAILGATING TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS

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Ozarks

Golf Wonderland

Story | ART STRICKLIN

The fall season with the Ozark Mountains and lakes have always been a powerful lure for tens of thousands of visitors who arrive each autumn to capture the fish, look at the birdies and drink in the natural scenic beauty.

But Missouri businessman Johnny Morris, who grew up in nearby Springfield, is now seeking a new generation of upscale visitors looking to conquer birdies and green grass scenery of a different kind. Morris built a national hunting and fishing empire under the title of Bass Pro Shops into the largest privately held chain of outdoor shops in the country.

When Morris and Bass Pro Shops originally purchased Big Cedar—located adjacent to the massive Table Rock Lake—in 1987, Morris immediately fell in love with its beauty and natural setting. Today, the 4,600-acre facility contains all manner of waterfront cabins, dining opportunities and nature trails, as well as a spa, hotel lodge, fishing dock and pool.

The par 71 Buffalo Ridge Springs Golf Course reopened in 2014 after it originally began life as Branson Creek Golf Club designed by Fazio in 1999. At the same time, Morris began to do some extensive work to his Top of the Rock facility, which is close to his resort, and also reopened after large-scale renovations in 2014.

Along with the natural caves which dot the facility, accessed by a golf cart tour, and the artifact museum, which takes up part of the two-story facility, Morris commissioned Jack Nicklaus to design a rollicking and tumbling par 3 golf course. Also titled Top of the Rock, it is nine holes of pure fun with many of the short holes looking directly out at Table Rock Lake. In addition, Morris included the Arnold Palmer Driving Range, which also opened in 2014 and has 16 target greens ranging from 50 to 325 yards over caves, sink holes and bunkers along with Arnie's Barn where you can eat and drink while talking about your incredible Ozarks round.



Right next to the hilly Fazio Springs Course is the 13-hole par 3 short course designed by Player. It wraps around the Buffalo Springs clubhouse and can be walked and played with only a couple of short irons. The Crenshaw and Coore course is scheduled to open in early 2018 and takes over some of the land which was once occupied by John Daly's Murder Rock Golf Course.

Golf Mecca

The golfing mecca he is currently constructing near Branson may one day eclipse, especially with golf destination travelers, what he has previously constructed for the hunting and fishing crowd. Using the updated Big Cedar Lodge resort as his luxurious lodging headquarters, Morris, age 69, is in the process of assembling the highest profile and highest priced golf architects in the country. They will descend on his scenic Ozarks mountaintop canvas to design what one national publication has already labeled as America's next great golf destination.

Morris and his wife Jeanie are the first to admit they are far from avid golfers, although their son John Paul has taken up the game, but the lure of the outdoors and the chance to build another recreational empire, with the money to do it, has been too much to resist. Taking a cue from fellow Midwestern golf visionary Herb Kohler, Morris is embarking on a multimillion dollar golf tourism quest to provide Branson and Big Cedar Lodge visitors the best and most scenic public golf destination anywhere.

Golf architect Tom Fazio has already finished his hugely scenic work at Buffalo Ridge Springs Golf Course, the current site of a PGA TOUR Champions event. Gary Player recently completed his short course, the Player Mountain Top Course at Buffalo Ridge. Next up is Texan Ben Crenshaw and Bill Coore, whose hilly layout, Ozark National, will open early next year.

Still to come is the recently announced Tiger Woods championship layout, which would be his second in the U.S.



Payne's Valley, named for native son Payne Stewart, will also include a Woods-designed par 3 short course at Big Cedar Lodge.

If you can think of it when

it comes to golf and outdoor adventures, then Morris can and probably will build it, all open to the public in a most unlikely and scenic location. ♣



We are building an experience unlike anything that's been done before that will bring golfers of all ages and skill levels together and create lasting memories.

JOHNNY MORRIS

SEE & DO

When golf is done for the day or if rain interrupts your round, there is plenty to do off the course as well, with the Big Cedar Lodge cabins perched right on the water for fishing or boating.

Nearby is the massive Dogwood Canyon, which straddles the border of Missouri and Arkansas and includes all manner of wildlife that can be viewed in a one-hour covered tram ride.

Dogwood offers fishing in its wild streams, charging by the hour or the number of fish caught. There is a museum showcasing Morris' extensive arrowhead and animal skeleton collection, the main reason Morris got involved in the outdoors to begin with.



BIG CEDAR LODGE

