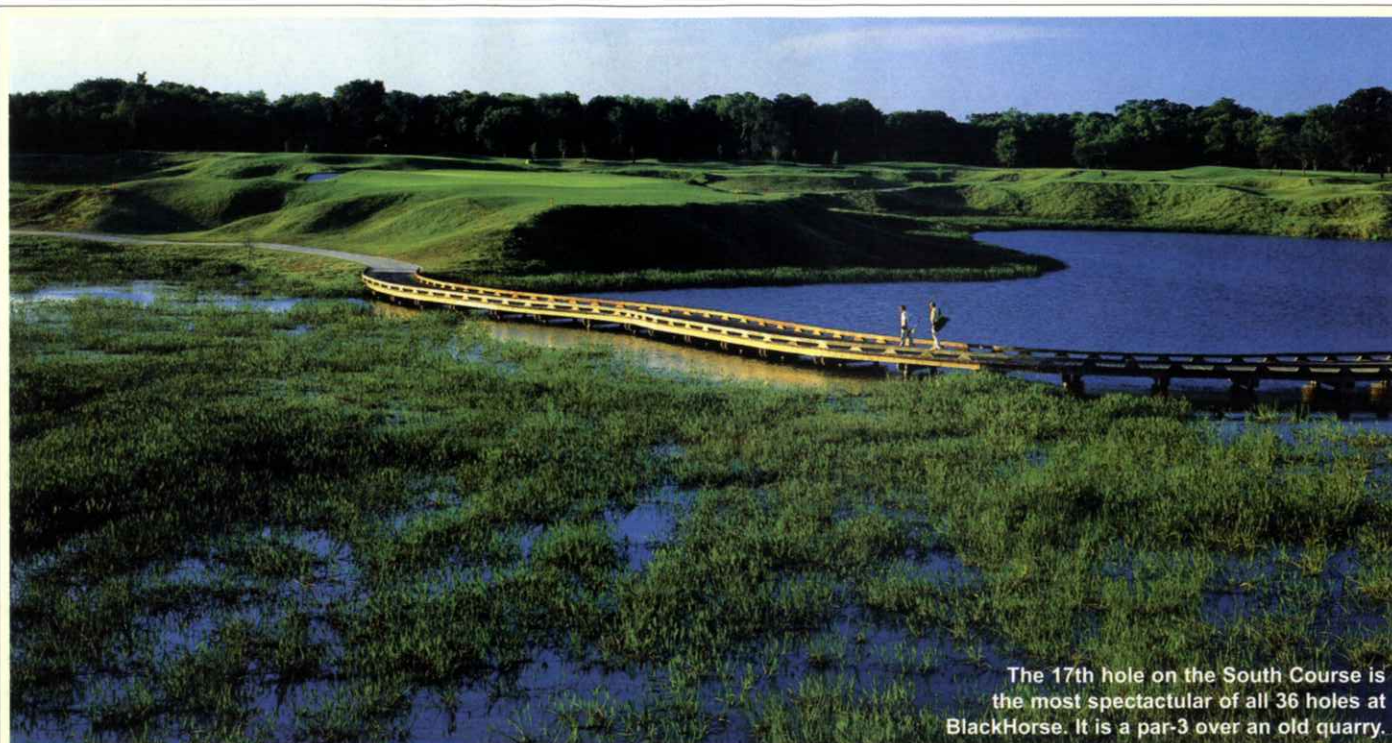


COURSE REVIEW

BlackHorse Golf Club



The 17th hole on the South Course is the most spectacular of all 36 holes at BlackHorse. It is a par-3 over an old quarry.

A HORSE OF MANY COLORS

Shaped and sculpted from meadows, wetlands and prairie once used for raising cattle and drilling oil, BlackHorse Golf Club is a top-tier, 36-hole daily fee course located a firmly struck 3-wood from Highway 290 in Cypress. The inspired layout opened for play in 2000, spans 296 acres and resembles England-like parkland courses from the Old World.

"We want people, when they leave our courses, to say that it sure was fun," said Jim Hardy, who, along with partner Peter Jacobsen, designed both courses. "I want people to want to come back and play here again."

If you've played either BlackHorse track—the North or South Course—chances are strong that you've returned to experience it a few more times. They're that good.

After all, the courses weren't named among America's Top 10 courses under \$100 (for green fees) by *Travel + Leisure Golf* magazine by accident.

Hardy, a former PGA Tour professional and author of the highly popular *The Plane Truth of Golfers* instructional book and DVD series, considers his work as a golf course architect an art of sorts. It's not a stretch. All golf course architects—well, the good ones, at least—are artists.

Whether it's a painter, a composer or sculptor, all artists begin their projects with a palette loaded with many colors. How the various shades and hues are used to create the masterpiece is part of the



BLACKHORSE GOLF CLUB

**Artistic design approaches and
dramatic bunkering highlight
Jim Hardy and Peter Jacobsen's
36 holes of splendor at
BlackHorse Golf Club**

By Bob E. Jones

genius at work. The hope always is to create something memorable and thought-provoking. Sometimes, however, artists can fall in love with one style or mode of artwork. They often make a fatal mistake of trying to create that same piece time and again.

This, too, is true for some golf course architects.

Not Hardy and Jacobsen, however. Hardy and Jacobsen set out to create 36 different works of art at BlackHorse. Hardy, a Houstonian, loves to discuss the creative process of building golf courses. He talks about using what is available to him—the land and its surrounding elements—in order to create his "painting." He'll refer to a palette loaded with natural steams, clear lake water, wetlands, oxbows, grasses and old-growth trees, all these colors available to create a good painting.

In the mid-1990s an investment group purchased 1,800 acres of prairie land northwest of downtown Houston, along the highway 290 corridor. The land, formally known as the Josey Ranch, was a property used for cattle ranching and had a few oil wells scattered about. The group gambled to hold the land until the market turned for residential development and it wasn't long before the gamble paid off. The Redstone Group came along and purchased 600 acres in the late '90s.

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High-end golf was headed to Cypress, along with an upscale residential community.

"When it was initially built, I think it might have been considered a little far out, in the proximity to downtown, but the place is growing," said Evan Johansen, CEO of Redstone Golf Management. "We feel that our decision early on to put the course out there based upon what we anticipated the development around there would be has been a good one."

Although the ultra-swanky Shadow Hawk Golf Club and Houstonian Resort & Golf Club opened prior to BlackHorse (see sidebar), Johansen said the 36-hole public facility in Cypress continues to serve as an integral cog in the Redstone Golf Management machine.

"BlackHorse is the club where we get the opportunity to touch the most people," he said. "We do about 62,000-63,000 rounds a year there, so it's our best opportunity for Redstone Golf to touch the most people. It (BlackHorse) has been a critical part of the growth of the company."

Formed in 1995, Jacobsen/Hardy Golf Course Design has a portfolio of almost 20 projects either in operation or under construction. As players, Jacobsen won seven times on the PGA Tour and Hardy won All-America honors at Oklahoma State and played six years on the Tour.

Playing more 300 courses during his career has helped Jacobsen understand what makes a great course and what brings players back to play them again. After Hardy's days on the Tour ended, he began teaching golf professionally and co-founded one of today's most

widely attended golf schools. Hardy has played a key role in developing more than 40 golf course projects.

Hardy explains that he is the architect, Jacobsen the designer. Having been commissioned to build the 36-hole layout at BlackHorse, Hardy sat down early on with Redstone management to talk about design and construction of the course. Dave Shindeldecker, President and CEO of Redstone Companies, indicated to Hardy and Jacobsen that he would like the course to be equal in difficulty, but he would also like for the courses be different.

"We took that suggestion by Dave and actually we ended up building four different nine holes of golf," said Hardy. "The four nines are extraordinarily different from one another, not only in how they play but how they look."

A common thread among great course designers is the ability to utilize natural terrain and landscape as much to preserve the integrity of the surrounding environment. With wetlands, natural creeks, old-growth trees and a former sand/gravel pit located on the property, the Jacobsen/Hardy design team has had much with which to work.

"Almost 40 percent of what is now the South Course was heavily wooded with old-growth oak trees," said Hardy.

Wanting to preserve as many of the old-growth trees as possible, the design team worked off an aerial map and sometimes had to shift holes around in the heavy trees to preserve the beautiful specimen trees. Excavation and construction didn't happen without difficulties. Part of the land was in a flood plain with wetlands areas and the designers had to comply with Army Corps of Engineers regulations.

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| Tees | Slope/Ratings |
|----------|---------------|
| Big Jake | 130/75.0 |
| Black | 128/73.8 |
| Blue | 123/71.8 |
| White | 120/69.6 |
| Red | 125/73.0 |
| Green | 119/69.8 |

BlackHorse Golf Club
12205 Fry Road, Cypress, Texas 77433
281-304-1747
www.blackhorsegolfclub.com

Directions: From downtown Houston, take Highway 290 North, exit Spring Cypress and stay on the access road to Fry Road. Turn South (left) on Fry and go approximately one mile. Take the second entrance on your right.

Course Architects: Peter Jacobsen, Jim Hardy
Opened: North Course, July 2000; South Course, December 2000

General Manager: Mike Whitson

Director of Tournament Sales: Troy Mathews

Head Golf Professional: Russell Roten

Greens Superintendent: Johnny Walker

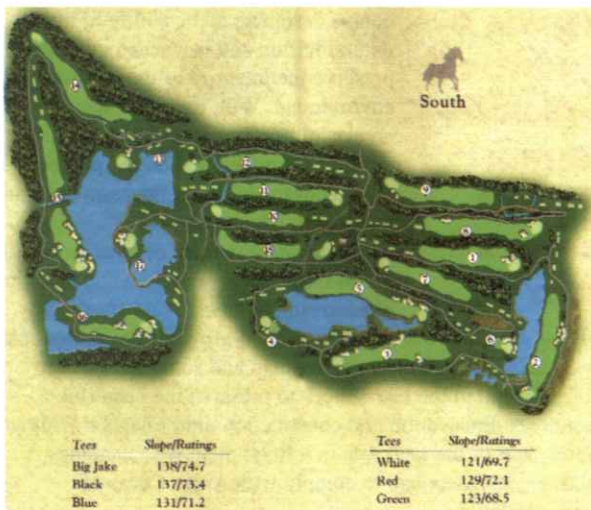
Director of Instruction: Marty Fleckman

Teaching Professional: Jennifer Burdette

Greens: TiffEagle Bermuda

Fairways: TiffSport Bermuda

Memberships: BlackHorse offers different types, including "unlimited play" memberships and individual, family and executive memberships.



| Tees | Slope/Ratings |
|----------|---------------|
| Big Jake | 138/74.7 |
| Black | 137/73.4 |
| Blue | 131/71.2 |

| Tees | Slope/Ratings |
|-------|---------------|
| White | 121/69.7 |
| Red | 129/72.1 |
| Green | 123/68.5 |

"Laying out the routing plan several things had to be considered," Hardy said. "The old oxbows were designated by Army Corps of Engineers as areas that we couldn't touch and we had to stay away from the natural creek itself. Anytime you are changing the character of the land in a floodplain, you cannot cut and fill in those areas without guidelines and permits. You have to design holes and be able to prove you have not impeded the capability of water to flow."

The North course opened in 2001—approximately six months ahead of the South.

"We take a lot of different palettes besides just the turf and we create different looks to the course," Hardy said. "When the holes look different, people remember that. The back nine on the South Course is very different with the wetlands and gravel/sand pit, than the back nine of the North Course, which is very much a meadow course."

"The North Course has unusual holes around Nos. 4-5," Hardy continued. "We created the lake and the wetland between No. 4 and No. 5, and No. 6 has a South Carolina look, a kind of Hilton Head par-3. Each one of the four nines looks very different."

The design team likes to give a lot of different drama in what is demanded of the player, going from black to white—"easy to hard"—as Hardy described it.

"As far as play goes on the South Course, the drive from the teeing area is demanding, and you have to hit it a lot straighter (than on the North), but the iron shots are not as demanding,"

Hardy said. "I want to level out the playing field between the short straight hitter who is going to do really well on the South Course, and the bomber who is going to do well on the North Course. The South Course front nine plays through a tight corridor of trees, out to the meadow, and back onto the trees."

Many regulars consider No. 17 to be the South's stiffest test. It's almost assuredly the prettiest and most visually intimidating hole on either course. From the back tees, the player stands 229 yards between his golf ball and an elevated island green, completely surrounded by a swampy, lily pad-covered lake and wetlands.

Hardy's advice for the 17th is to take an extra club...perhaps even two.

"If you're not playing very good that day, take out two more clubs because if you miss long, you're going to make a three or four," he said. "If you miss short, you're looking at four, five, six or ball in pocket."

Another reason to miss long here, Hardy explained, is that there are bunkers placed behind the green. They're unseen from the tee box, which makes the sand traps hidden hazards, but they are more favorable than the watery grave that awaits any tee ball that comes up short of the green.

No. 17 on the South is surrounded by a driveable par-4 at No. 16 and a two-shot par-5 finishing hole. Hardy equates the design of putting difficult holes, followed by easier holes, to hitting you over the head and then giving you a piece of candy so you won't be mad at him.

"So you have two holes that are potential eagle holes on the shoulder of No. 17," said Hardy. "We do these things on purpose, when we're talking about how we want to lay out golf holes."

Mike Whitson, BlackHorse's general manager, said he continues to find new and interesting features about Hardy and Jacobsen's creation.

'We take a lot of different palettes besides just the turf, and we create different looks to the course. When the holes look different, people remember that...we do these things on purpose when we're talking about how we want to lay out golf holes.'

BlackHorse Golf Club

COURSE REVIEW

"I think they did a nice job of working the natural terrain into the course design, Whitson said. "On No. 17 green, for example, they cut out around that kind of island, gravel pit and sand quarry area. There are several holes that play around it and there are wetlands everywhere.

"The terrain is unique for a course; some of the creeks run through it, and Little Cypress Creek, separates the two courses," Whitson continued. "I would say the North Course is going to favor the average player, maybe because there is very few forced carries. The better player prefers the South Course. It's a little more challenging and the South is probably a little more scenic. I would say the best 18-holes out here are the front nine of the North and the back nine of the South."

The outstanding features provided by natural surroundings, and how they have been blended into the sculpting and shaping of the holes, reveal themselves to the player. The designers set up natural hazards and utilize the features as a way to penalize the player for hitting errant shots. Fairway and greenside bunkers are a major part of the course design and hole setup, Hardy explained. He and Jacobsen were influenced by bunkering they saw in the Scotland and the U.K., especially seaside links courses.

"When you play a links course in Scotland, the caddies will tell you which (bunkers) to avoid and which ones aren't really bad," Hardy said. "On the 17th hole at St. Andrews, you put it in the greenside bunker on the front left ...well, pack a lunch. If you put in another bunker on another hole, you might putt out of it."

Strategic placements of bunkers are a part of this design process.

"Deception bunkers' may be next to a green, hiding something, he said. "It may hide an area the player can bounce their ball on; it may hide the distance over the bunker to the green, and what is short of the green. 'Directional bunkers' give the player directions: where to hit their drive, kind of



Some holes at BlackHorse wind through a thick corridor of trees, while others play into a meadow and yet others play over and around an old quarry.

COURSE REVIEW

BlackHorse Golf Club



turn signal on the hole. 'Saving bunkers' are described as keeping the player out of worse trouble than the bunker itself. They may be placed to keep a player from bouncing his shot out of bounds or into a water hazard.

There's another family of bunkers, too. Hardy calls those "gambling bunkers."

"They're placed to reward the player with a short approach shot to the green. If the players decided to gamble and carry the fairway bunker, the reward is a short approach to the green. If the player chooses not to carry the bunker, the design may force the player to choose a shorter shot from the tee because he has shortened the fairway, or placed another problem outside the bunker. If you are going to use your driver, you got to gamble."

Suffice it to say, the scratch golfer and high-handicapper alike must navigate through and around all types of bunkers in order to score well at BlackHorse.

'We try to ensure customers have a friendly and enjoyable experience, that we're providing good conditions for them. We are in an industry that is not growing rapidly...and it's in the best interest of all of us that we do everything we can to make it a pleasurable experience to add value to what they feel they are paying.'

Besides one of the well-stocked pro shops in the state, one of the treats of playing BlackHorse is the first-class service and attentiveness of all the staffers.

"We really work on personalized service," Johansen said. "We try to ensure that we take care of the customers while they're there, that they're having a friendly and enjoyable experience, that we're providing good golf course conditions for them."

"We are in an industry that is not growing rapidly," he continued. "It's probably declining in playership overall, and it's in the best interest of all of us that when someone comes to our facility, we're doing everything we can to make it a

BlackHorse Golf Club

COURSE REVIEW



The appeal of BlackHorse Golf Club is its diversity of terrain, dramatic bunkering, impeccable playing conditions and playability for a broad range of golfers.

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Johansen, Whitson and the Redstone Group get it. Golf is not just a game—it’s an investment, both in time and money. So from conditioning, service, food and practice facilities, BlackHorse routinely

went the extra mile to give customers the best experience possible.

“You know none of us today have enough free time,” Johansen said. “If you take that (fact) and expound to our business, it’s a half-hour drive to the course, four-and-a-half hours to play, half-hour in the grill and another half-hour drive home.

Redstone Gathers No Moss

Since breaking into the Houston market with the Houstonian Resort & Golf Club and Shadow Hawk Golf Club in 1999, the company has grown to become one of the preeminent golf management companies in southeast Texas.

| Club | Designer | Opened | Accessibility |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|--------|------------------|
| Houstonian Resort & Golf Club | Rees Jones | 1999 | Private |
| Shadow Hawk Golf Club | Rees Jones | 1999 | Private |
| BlackHorse Golf Club | Hardy/Jacobsen | 2000 | Public/Daily Fee |
| Redstone Member Course | Hardy/Jacobsen | 2002 | Private |
| Tournament Course at Redstone | Rees Jones | 2005 | Public/Daily Fee |
| Vanderbilt Legends Club (Tenn.) | Tom Kite/Bob Cupp | 1992* | Private |

* – Redstone Golf Management acquired the contract for Vanderbilt Legends in late 2005 and became the club’s official management group on Jan. 1, 2006.

“So when you go to give a five-and-a-half or six-hour experience, you’re gobbling up a chunk of a player’s free time. You need to do a good job to make sure that’s enjoyable or it’s going to be pretty quick for a person to say they’re not interested in paying the \$95 fee at BlackHorse.”

Set against a colorful canvas, all the risks, rewards, shot values, hole varieties and first-class service are available at the two highly-respected courses, you won’t find many players in the area who would pass up a visit to BlackHorse Golf Club. And once they’ve come once, we’re betting they’ll be back time and again. **HL**