

*Cabo's Newest
Golf Destination*
Twin Dolphin

by Adam Schupak



There are times in the life of a golf writer when it feels as if you’ve just won the Powerball. My visit to Montage Los Cabos at Twin Dolphin in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, was one of those occasions. While I was there, they were setting up for a beachside birthday bash for a member who’d flown in the band Barenaked Ladies for the occasion. That’s how they roll here.

Set on the shores of Santa Maria Bay, where the Baja desert meets the Sea of Cortez, Twin Dolphin Golf Course was created by architect Todd Eckenrode and Fred Couples. It’s a private club that extends a members-only experience to resort guests during limited times.

Or as Couples puts it, “It’s a small piece of paradise.” When the 1992 Masters champ is asked to describe his design philosophy, he jokes, “To have everyone stare at the ocean.”

Mission accomplished. Eckenrode did the heavy lifting and drafted numerous routings. He had plenty of time as the project sat dormant for nearly a decade as the global recession and Hurricane Odile rocked Cabo. Eckenrode calls it the best piece of land he’s ever worked on. Eckenrode set out to do something different from the typical Cabo design style. While he manufactured a few humps and bumps, he established a sensitive clearing plan and left the surrounding native landscaping intact. He sketched a routing designed to integrate and highlight rock

outcroppings, native vegetation, and arroyos (rocky valleys) that cut through the golf course.

Every version of the blueprints included the second and third holes, a pair of stunners that look out on the Sea of Cortez while demanding thought and precision.

Eckenrode is a master of illusion, making the course look more intimidating from the tees than it actually plays. Take No. 10, which he modeled after the 11th at Pasatiempo, the Alistair MacKenzie design in Santa Cruz, Calif., where Eckenrode grew up playing the game. Twin Dolphin’s version presents a tee shot slightly uphill to a landing area where the optimal angle requires hugging the left side of the hole (overcook it and you’re dead in an arroyo), followed by a diagonal uphill carry over the same canyon-like arroyo to a green guarded by a sea of sand.

Eckenrode and Couples also successfully walk the tightrope of making the course both fun and challenging for various skill levels. Take the par-five 16th, with a split fairway that rewards those attempting the heroic route while leaving an option for the risk-averse. My one knock would be the final



hole, a pushover at 356 yards. The 19th bye-hole provides a more fitting conclusion to the round.

Good as the course and the views are, I was a sucker for the two on-course “Red Door” comfort stations. The one at the 5th hole is where Couples filmed an episode of Golf Channel’s *Feherty* show, a lavish setting that many assumed was Fred’s home. Its selection of sugar-laden treats would make Willy Wonka blush, and Couples, it turns out, is a candy addict. “I like the Snickers and Hershey Kisses, but I try to stay the hell out of there,” he says. “If I’m there seven days, it’s a losing proposition.”

The bar is stocked, too, and manned by a full-time attendant who made me a salty margarita and talked me into what he billed as the best tequila I’ll ever taste. Did I mention the fresh guacamole, fish tacos, and octopus ceviche? In case anyone could possibly be hungry or thirsty again, there’s a second Red Door between holes 12 and 13 and also accessible

when moving from 15 to 16. (Don’t skip the sliders!)

The entire resort is like a playground for the rich and famous. There are miles of hiking and biking trails and outdoor recreational activities ranging from a paintball course to axe-throwing and archery. Couples says he prefers playing pickleball and going “glamping” at the club’s private camp site.

There’s a reason the southern tip of the Baja Peninsula got its start as a fishing village. The region is a haven for more than 800 species of fish and is considered the “Striped Marlin Capital of the World.” The area is so rich in fish that four top sport-fishing tournaments take place in Cabo each fall.

The property has five pools, including three at the resort, but my favorite was the one that practically cascades into the bay. Spa Montage, the largest spa in

the Baja, offers 40,000 square feet of bliss. I regret not getting to dine at Marea, a beachfront gathering place with Baja-inspired cuisine; I opted for Mezcal, a Mexican kitchen with modern takes on ancestral culinary traditions. You can’t go wrong here.

Also part of the 1,400-acre resort community is Maravilla Los Cabos, a private residential community and club. The units I toured were modern and bright, with plenty of open space. Couples spent the week between Christmas and New Year’s here, returned for the inaugural member-guest in March, and figures he will spend 35–40 days a year in his little slice of paradise—maybe more once his playing days conclude.

Lucky guy.