

## **Streamsong Blue Streamsong, Florida**

Architect: Tom Doak (2012)

	Par	Rating	Slope	Yardage
Green	72	74.1	131	7176
Black	72	72	127	6698
Silver	72	69.7	123	6285
Gold	72	71.6	122	5531

### Overview:

At the lowest point of the economic downturn in 2007, with virtually no new golf course development going on, the management of Mosaic Company called the two design firms of Tom Doak and Bill Coore/Ben Crenshaw to come out and look at a reclamation project of vast acreage in central Florida from which they had been mining phosphate for a half a century.

Mosaic had made a deal with the state that, rather than expend the money to bring the ground back to its original condition, they would be permitted to build a golf resort on the property. Mosaic had in mind kind of Bandon Dunes East, multiple, free-flowing sand based golf courses in the middle of central Florida to attract the high end retail golf community. They could not have picked two better modern, old-school architects to help put this resort on the map in a very challenging economic environment.

Doak's reaction, when he stepped off the helicopter that brought his team for the first site visit, was a "Dorothy you are not in Kansas anymore" moment. There is just no way they would have expected to see such a turbulent piece of sandy topography in the state of Florida.

Given four parcels to consider, the two groups set about a collaborative process of identifying the best ground and prospective routings for the first two courses. The central part of the property had the tallest piles of sand and the deepest crevices from the mining days, so this was what they identified as the most opportune place to create 36 holes of walking golf with plenty of width and plenty of drama.

Tom Doak will tell you that his team got the more cohesive and dramatic part of this parcel which meant he could route greens and tees in close proximity to make the walking efficient. Better still, the width and elevation changes already existed to support his preferred design style, open and accessible green complexes with lots of adjacent short grass contour which would require careful thought by the players off the tee to get to the optimal approach line for the day's flag positions.

With very little perimeter boundary in this part of the property and few absolute forced carries, he could provide players of all caliber a way to get around without the anxiety of penalty shots and searching for Titleists and Srixons. Nice feature in a resort golf experience.

The hike up to the first tee box may leave you winded but the view unfurling beneath your feet will set a tone for this Blue Course experience. The hole is only 330 yards and there is plenty of open ground on which to land

this drive, but the steep slope up to the green complex and the angle to the day's flag that avoids the offset greenside bunkering puts a premium on picking the advantage approach line. As Jack Nicklaus used to say, you have to play the holes backwards in your mind if you are going to be successful on a course with so many strategic options in play.

A couple of sprawling holes in the next two bring you to the middle of the outward half, which is one of the most unique sequences on the course. It speaks to Doak's ability to draw from the existing terrain natural looking holes with strategic challenge for the strong players while giving the lower trajectory players plenty of options for success.

The fourth hole could have come straight out of the Coore-Crenshaw Bandon Trails Course at in Oregon. After hitting the drive into a generous upramp framed by bunkers on the left, the player who wants to challenge the flag has a super steep elevation approach to a blind green complex perched on a corner plateau above a constellation of nasty sand bunkers. For those with less adventure in mind there is a diversionary option to play at the huge bail out area right and long from which making a bogey should be a cinch.

What follows is a short pitch 120 yard Par 3 that most architects would not have the temerity to present today. The narrow serpentine green is 74 yard long stretching along a spine on the hill below that falls sharply away from the line of flight of your tee shot. If the wind is blowing at all the exposure of the green will make getting a ball to find and stay within a particular section of this green an act of pure golfing wizardry. Many a big hitter will be walking off this green writing down an above par score, scratching their head wondering what went wrong.

The next short, quasi-driveable Par 4 is where Tom alighted from his helicopter on his first site visit. From the tee you are looking up and across the brow of the hill to a wide landing area that feeds down to the foot of one of the most prominent dunes on the property. Given the juxtaposition of the slope of the green to your approach angle this could be one of the most difficult 75-yard pitch shots you will have to hit all day.

A short walking path brings you around the dune to the most awesome Kodak Moment of the day. From the precipice tee on #7 you get to watch the majestic flight of this 175-yard shot plummeting into the pocket of a catcher's mitt green nestled into the base of the nasty dune complex on the other side of this mine-made lagoon. If you end up on playable turf it will be a big fish story to share at dinner tonight.

As you finish the opening nine, make sure to saunter over to their halfway hut that features an interesting array of southwestern fare. These tasty and homemade these tacos are not your typical dog at the turn.

When you look at the work of Tom Doak and his associates the real architectural genius is often displayed on holes where they did not manipulate the ground very much at all. Such was the case on the 11<sup>th</sup>, the number 1 handicap hole on the course where they draped a rumpled fairway over and across a low hill leaving just enough landing area blindness to put doubt in your mind of the best line to play. What follows is a long downhill approach to a bunkerless green that drops away with the natural flow of the land. Picking the right landing area short of the green with just the right release to let your approach leak onto the putting surface requires great judgment and skill. The brilliance in this hole was letting the ground speak for itself and not adding any unnecessary static to what nature presented.

As you approach the middle of the back nine the two courses coalesce as the Blue Course is working just inside the perimeter of the property and the Red Course is circling back along the property line toward the clubhouse. The short Par 4 13<sup>th</sup> is probably one of those holes that could have fallen into either man's route plan and I expect there might have been pretty fiesty conversations on just how to handle it.

Standing on this tee the expansive driving area goads you into reaching for the big stick and maybe have a go at the green. Adhering to the adage "restraint is the better part of valor" is the way to go since even an 80-yard pitch into a slender, long green suspended above a seriously nasty waste bunker and the lagoon is all you can handle. The bail area to the right may comfort you but a recovery pitch from there brings the bunker across the narrow green back into your mind. This is a cleverly designed short hole which demands two controlled and accurate plays to get on without any serious scorecard damage.

The finish is very strong-three of the four hardest handicap holes on this side are in front of you. The sequence begins with a very natural looking minimalist presentation of a Par 4 that plays similar to the 6<sup>th</sup> with about 50 additional yards on the approach. No bunkers to avoid in the green complex but the short grass surround contours and the pitch of the green surface make using the ground to control where your approach will come to rest of crucial importance.

The longest Par 3 of the day-plays effectively over 225 yards with the uphill green setting-is followed by a very kitchy truncated 575 yard Par 5 that requires three strong and accurate blows for a par opportunity.

Courses that finish with a grand look of the clubhouse are rare, but Doak was blessed with a perfect piece of sloping ground to create a memorable and difficult finishing hole to do just that. Standing on the tee it just looks like an horizon of fairway in front of you, there is no hint of what is to come if you can land your ball at the top edge of the hill that looks down at clubhouse green setting below.

The long approach shot must carry a distracting bevy of bunkers almost 100 yards from the green complex and one solitary pot directly on line to the center of the green about 40 yards short. Doak provided plenty of bail room to the left but that is the devil's bargain since even a short pitch from there is straight down the fall line and it will be difficult to keep a recovery pitch anywhere close to the flag. No, this approach shot is a hitch up your pants moment where a draw working around the pot bunker straight at the flag is the only sensible shot to play.

Taking the short walk off this green to the clubhouse staging area barely gives you enough time to exhale and appreciate how vigorous a golf experience Doak orchestrated in the Blue Course at Streamsong.

Hole-By-Hole Analysis: (Black/Silver)

#1 Par 4 330/330 yards

In the realm of opening holes that can get your heart pumping this is one of them. After the aerobic climb up the mountain to the tee box it is hard to focus on a particular spot in the vast landing area presented below. Temptation is to hug the left side, just past the bunker at 122 yards, to give yourself a side door look up the hill at a sprawling green set past a furry bunker short right. The front pin is really hard because of a false front on the left but the rest of the surface is receptive as it leans towards you and to the right.

#2 Par 5 530/516

The visual challenge off this tee is characteristic of what you will see all day, a lack of definition of the driving areas. In fact you have to ask the caddie where to aim to make sure you are heading down the right fairway. The lay up area is littered with mounds and furry aberrations so you have to focus on carrying it into the 125 yard and less zone which can give you an unfettered lie. The green complex is very challenging as he wrapped a horseshoe green around the nose of a bunker in front. The worst mistake is missing right where the bunkers are deep and well below the green surface.

#3 Par 4 370/359

This is a hole configuration you will see throughout the day. Drive is left center just inside the pot bunker at 145. From there you have an open approach to a skyscraper green complex with a surface that stretches 45 yards. Predominant lean is back left to front right so a soft draw on the approach should work up the green.

#4 Par 4 417/369

As described in the overview this rugged, uphill long par four would feel right at home at Bandon Trails. Drive is to center of the uphill ramp, anything left in the adjacent fairway bunkers is five or worse. The plateau green is a club plus above you and wedged to the left behind a wall of bunkers. The conservative play is over the bunker hive on the right at 40 yards and using the ground right of the green to feed it to the front. Pars here are likely made with a pitch and run and a putt.

#5 Par 3 121/115

The queasy feeling you get standing on this next approach and putt three par is understandable. A serpentine 70-yard green that rolls away from you presents a real challenge in finding the flag even on a short shot like this. It will take a truncated swing that feeds the ball down to the flag to get into the flag section of the green. If you have not figured this out yet, the ground is your friend. Likely that your ability to lag putt to a three-foot circle will determine whether you walk off this tee shaking your head or not.

#6 Par 4 317/295

There is something about the way this hole clings to the topography that will grow on you. A short, possibly driveable, Par 4 where the green is hidden just around the corner to the right, at the bottom of a downslope behind the pot bunker in the center of the fairway. Big hitters might consider taking on the challenge with a

bleeding power fade over that bunker, but I like the 220 yard drive just left of the pot. This leaves a downhill 80 yard pitch and run over an elephant's butt and into a bunkerless green that pitches right to left. Getting it close enough for a true birdie putt is a task.

#7 Par 3 188/176

Pull out the camera, this one needs to be added to your photo group on the phone. When you get to the tee the look down across the lagoon is breathtaking. The view of a full forced carry to a green complex nestled into the base of a furry dunescape will make your heart rate quicken. The downhill is a club less so I like 175 to the center of the catcher's mitt but what the contour of the green surface does to your ball once it touches down matters a lot. There is a big mound right center that can be used to feed the ball to center and left. The pins on the right and the back have no reliable approach line so play center and get ready for serious hump putting. A par here makes the entire Blue Course experience worth it.

#8 Par 4 437/414

As the #2 handicap hole this slightly dogear left Par 4 is a stiff challenge. Drive at the bunker you see in the fairway-just right of it will give you the best look up the steep hill to the green tucked to the left. A long and narrow kidney shaped green works back to the right between the bunkers. A right to left approach into the first third of the green is probably the safest play to all pins.

#9 Par 5 541/510

The outward nine ends on a fairly lengthy Par 5 whose blind driving area masks the routing of the hole. Drive it over the left edge of the bunkers embedded into the hill in front of you to hit it to center. No wandering to the right off this tee on that line or you are reloading. From over the crest you see the hole meanders a bit left below you. Lay up to an attack distance since this green is a very shallow approach target elevated slightly from the fairway. Halfway house is just past the 10<sup>th</sup> tee in the woods and they serve some delectable tacos that are highly recommended.

#10 Par 3 161/129

A very non-descript three par begins the inward nine, but that by no means is to say this is not an interesting challenge. The hole plays on level to the teeing ground so you do not get much sense of the length of the shot required into a long green set on a 4 to 10 angle. The left green side bunkers is a deep carve out so to you have to avoid that one, the ones to the right are shallow and more manageable. A soft draw follows the line of the hole but it is important to get it into the correct section of the green

#11 Par 4 454/427

For those with a love of links design this very simple mid-range Par 4 will really fit your eye. It is tagged the #1 handicap hole but it is by no means the hardest one you will play all day. The drive is once again semi-blind with a couple of directional bunkers out around 200 yards. Best line is either side of the one in the middle of the fairway. From there you are looking across a rumpled piece of approach ground to a green without bunkers that sits below and slopes away from you. The approach must land short and trundle onto the putting surface-getting proper measure of the roll out to the day's pin is just pure feel.

#12 Par 4 490/351

As they say in luge, you are now getting into the technical part of the course-controlling your ball is vital to staying within the confines of the rack on these next two holes.. The first one is a drive to center into what appears to be a narrowing driving area between some fairway bunkers. What is left is a one club more elevation shot into a tiered green tucked to the right on the hill with a partial forced carry over an encroaching water element on the right. The bail out is left of the green but the aggressive approach is a right-to-left shaped shot working up the line of the long green.

#13 Par 4 293/279

This one falls into the drivable category for those with large kohones and little brains. The hazard tightens your target line severely the closer you get to the green so any miss left off this tee is a disaster. I prefer a 200 yard shot to center which will leave you a very short attack club into a 50 yard long green draped over the hill above you. He provided a safe area to the right of the green but the recovery pitches across the narrow green can be very tricky. The cavernous pit short left of the green is an absolute No-No, recover from there is unlikely. This is a hole that should give you a birdie opportunity but you have to play the shots with good sense and clear purpose to succeed.

#14 Par 5 510/489

On this next tee ball you must avoid focusing on the forced carry across the lagoon, it is actually a very doable shot and the rest of the hole becomes a simple task as this Par 5 steps it's way up the hill. Drive to left center at the power poles in the distance. The lay up is to about 110 just to the right of the fairway bunkers pinching in from the left. A short elevation pitch into a green set slightly to the right is what is left. This green has a pimple bump in the dead center of the putting surface that can deflect approach shots in either direction.

#15 Par 4 398/357

This mid-length Par 4 is another of the very interesting links style holes out here. You will see a pair of cross bunkers 75 yards from the green in the left center of the fairway, drive it to center at the right edge of those bunkers. There is plenty of ground contour in the approach across these bunkers and a huge elephant rump in the center of the fairway. The bunkerless green is set on a left-to-right downslope, so aim to the left and let the ground feed the ball right onto the putting surface. You will marvel at the movement of your ball on this approach once it touches turf.

#16 Par 3 215/205

If you were waiting for a long Par 3, here you have it. It is made even longer by the severe uphill you must traverse to get to the ledged green complex set above. If you have a driver or three wood in hand your aiming point is the bail area left of the green. Recovery pitches from there are quite doable. Missing right of this green is a complete disaster-very high scores are lurking there.

#17 Par 4 573/525

The last five par is a bit of a design outlier for me, it looks more like something you would see at Pine Valley then on a links course. That in no way takes away from the dramatic look and challenge of a very memorable three-shot hole. Drive is to center adjacent to the sand intrusion pinching from the right. Now you have to make a decision how much risk to take on to enhance your chances of an aggressive approach into the green. The shish-link string of bunkers that diagonally crosses the fairway from about 150 yards on the left to 75 yards on the right is a full forced carry. Do not take it on unless you are sure your fairway metal can fully clear it. If you lay up short you will have about 165 yards up the hill to a green setting pinched by more constellations of sand. Your approach needs to carry into the middle of the green since the front left is a steep false front.

#18 Par 4 453/439

As I said in the overview it is rare to have a majestic final hole that ends up at the foot of the clubhouse but you have one here. This is as technical of a finishing hole as you will ever play. Smash a drive up the hill along the left side of the fairway. If you hit it far enough you get a glorious view of the hole tumbling below you to a naked green set to the right below the clubhouse. Another lay up decision-either play it to 130 behind the nest of bunkers in the middle of the fairway or blow it over them to the right of the lone bunker about 40 yards short of the putting surface. Everything feeds left to right and onto the green once you get past that last pot. The green itself is steep left to right and back to front so even a short third shot needs to be engineered on the ground to end up close to the day's pin.