



The golf courses at Palm Valley helped sell 1,266 homes in less than five years.

## *Palm Valley: A Community Centered On Golf*

**R**eal estate developers have been responsible for much of the growth in the golf course industry during the past 20 years. By building new communities around golf facilities, they offer home buyers a much-sought-after country club lifestyle. Experience has shown that not only are buyers willing to pay more for homes in golf communities, they are less likely to be discouraged by poor economic conditions. This has given developers and home buyers a more reliable return on their investment and helped finance construction of new golf courses.

Palm Valley Country Club in Palm Desert, CA, is a good example of the power of golf in selling new homes - 1,266 homes to be exact, in less than five years. Sunrise Company, with the assistance of golf course architect and community planner Ted Robinson, created Palm Valley to appeal to the health-conscious home buyer of moderate means. In addition to an 18-hole championship course and 18-hole executive course, the community features a full-service spa and racquet club, 85,000-square-foot clubhouse, and impressively landscaped, gated grounds.

Palm Valley is the most recent project  
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by Sunrise. The company was founded in the '60s by William Bone, a young graduate of Stanford University and Harvard Business School. Bone had witnessed at first hand the power of golf in the hotel/resort industry. He reasoned that an untapped demand existed for moderately priced homes in a country-club-type community.

Bone selected a site in Rancho Mirage near Palm Springs for his first major venture, Sunrise Country Club. The plan was to enhance the sale of 750 moderately priced homes by including country club membership rights. Homeowners would not have to pay an initiation fee, just an affordably-priced membership charge for golf and tennis.

Robinson was commissioned to polish Bone's design concepts. His education and background in urban planning and landscape architecture, as well as his experience as a golf course architect, were unique and fitted Sunrise's needs perfectly. For more than 25 years, Robinson has been the consultant for all of Sunrise's projects in the Palm Springs area.

In 1973, when the typical development in the area sold one home per week, Sunrise Country Club sold 196 homes on open-

ing day. The remaining 450 homes sold in just 30 months. By 1976, the project was sold out and Bone was planning more developments.

The company's next venture was one of the desert's first master-planned destination resorts, Rancho Las Palmas Country Club. Using a 27-hole golf course, 25 tennis courts, and two clubhouses as a base, Sunrise constructed 858 condominiums and a 465-room resort hotel with Marriott. The condominiums were all sold within 18 months.

By 1986, Sunrise had completed two more golf communities in Palm Desert: Monterey Country Club and The Lakes Country Club. Monterey consists of 1,206 condominiums surrounding a 27-hole golf course. At The Lakes, 900 homes were built adjacent to an 18-hole golf course dotted with 21 man-made lakes. The value of golf to the communities was clearly established. Furthermore, the quality of its golf courses had to meet the high standards of the region.

Palm Valley was the culmination of everything Sunrise had learned in more than 15 years of developing country club communities. It boasts the largest array of re-

creational amenities found at any of its clubs. The 4,232-yard, par-63 North Course was designed to provide a challenging short game of golf at lower cost than the tougher test presented by the 6,545-yard championship South Course.

In addition to the golf courses and driving range, there are facilities for tennis, racquetball, aerobics, and weight training. Members and their guests are also pampered with massages, facials, suntanning, and access to steam rooms, saunas, and whirlpools. Owners of Palm Valley's 1,200 homes and their guests can take advantage of any or all of these facilities based upon a variety of initiation and monthly membership fees.

Yet the most impressive thing about Palm Valley is the oasis-like landscaping of the community and the golf courses. More than 2,200 palms and 900 other specimen trees tower above the grounds loaded with annuals, flowering shrubs, and turf regardless of the season.

Robinson incorporated 21 lakes into the 36 holes of golf. All but five have waterfalls constructed of granite boulders to match the rocky face of the nearby mountains. He brought in consultant Roger Gordon to design the massive irrigation system for the golf courses.

Except for the month of October when one course at a time is closed for overseeding, Palm Valley's turf carpets the rolling desert floor within its perimeter. During the summer season, Tifgreen (T-328) hybrid bermudagrass covers the tees and greens. Common bermuda serves as the ground cover for the fairways, roughs, and clubhouse grounds. From October through May, every square foot of turf is converted to a blend of perennial ryegrasses.

Responsibility for the condition of all Sunrise golf courses since 1981 has been in the hands of Dennis Orsborn, vice president of golf course operations. The graduate of Cal Poly University in Pomona joined Sunrise as its first director of golf course operations when the company was reevaluating its long-term role in owning and managing its golf courses.

It is common for developers to sell golf courses to homeowner associations once their projects have been sold out. When Orsborn arrived, Sunrise was wrapping up construction at Monterey and getting ready to start The Lakes. It still owned and operated Sunrise Country Club and Rancho Las Palmas. The company decided to sell Sunrise Country Club to its association that year. Marriott wanted full ownership of Rancho Las Palmas, so that was arranged.

However, Sunrise wanted to hold on to Monterey Country Club and to begin building the courses at The Lakes and then Palm Valley. The company also hoped to be the exclusive builder for the homes around five championship courses at Landmark's much-touted PGA West in La Quinta. Orsborn's job was to concentrate on the golf courses, in order to preserve the company's country club image in the highly competitive desert.

By 1983, The Lakes course was nearing completion and work had begun on Palm Valley. The Golf Operations Division was growing. For the next four years, Orsborn and his family lived at Palm Valley, where he coordinated planning and construction with Robinson, Gordon, and the contractors. Paul Quill was Orsborn's superintendent of golf course construction until Landmark hired him to set up its own golf operations department. Gary Peterson took



**Palm Valley's two golf courses feature 21 lakes.**

over for Quill and managed construction of Palm Valley's championship course and the first nine of the executive course.

Golf course developers were taking notice of Sunrise's organizational structure. Carlacio Landscape, Inc., of Placentia, CA hired Peterson to be its director of golf operations. In 1983, Orsborn had hired Collier Miller, a graduate in ornamental horticulture from Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, as assistant superintendent at Monterey. In three short years, Miller rose through the ranks to become superintendent at Monterey and then superintendent of construction for the second nine at Palm Valley. He is now superintendent of both courses at Palm Valley.

Since Sunrise intended to keep the

courses once the development was completed, Orsborn had to anticipate and control future maintenance costs during construction. Palm Valley's courses were designed to serve the golfers in the community, not professionals on tour. They had to be impressive and challenging to attract members, but they also had to pay their own way down the road. Sunrise wanted to find the point at which quality was not compromised by economy. By doing so, it could make country club living and golf affordable in an area where \$100-plus greens fees are common.

Extravagance is an important part of business around Palm Springs. It plays a large part in attracting buyers of second homes, retirement homes, and resort condominiums. But behind the glamour of the golf courses and the lush, landscaped community grounds, there is a concerted effort to conserve - chiefly water, energy, and



**Lakes provide golfers dramatic shadows at dusk.**

pesticides.

Robinson, Gordon, and Orsborn were charged with finding ways to conserve where possible. Turf area was reduced by the addition of numerous large bunkers. Palm Valley was fortunate to have two productive wells to supply the lakes and irrigation system. The waterfalls act to aerate water without large losses of water to evaporation. Two of the 21 lakes serve as irrigation reservoirs. The remaining lakes are maintained at appropriate levels through supply lines from the pump station.

Computerized control was considered a must for the thousands of impact rotors at Palm Valley's golf courses. Gordon chose a Rain Bird Maxi III System to permit maximum adjustment of run times either at the central or one of 74 field satellites. The irrigation schedule is altered daily to fit evapotranspiration (ET) rates determined by a local weather station. Stopmatic sprinklers were used generously to prevent low head drainage.

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The fairways and roughs were seeded with common bermudagrass to avoid some of the high-maintenance requirements of hybrids. Of the 170 acres under the care of Miller's 22-man crew, only eight acres are planted with hybrid bermuda. Since bermudagrass tolerates salinity and alkaline soils common in the desert, it's not necessary to overwater. Divots can also be repaired with seed as they occur. Each cart on the course carries a mixture of sand, mulch, and seed which golfers are required to use.

Tifgreen was planted only on tees and greens because its aggressiveness, recovery rate, fine texture, dark green color, and low growth habit. Due to the frequent winds and low humidity of the desert, diseases rarely occur. Since the rest of the course is common bermudagrass, the crew can devote more time to the Tifgreen's higher maintenance requirements.

The only disease of importance is Pythium blight, which can develop during overseeding in the fall. Preventative fungicide treatment after overseeding but before germination is all that is needed for the perennial ryegrasses throughout the winter season. Miller also reduces irrigation run times three weeks prior to overseeding to help dry out the course.

The greens are mowed daily at 1/8-inch with Jacobsen triplex greens mowers. For tournaments they are double cut. Clippings are always removed. Pin placements are changed daily. Palm Valley was one of the first courses in the desert to experiment with grooming attachments on its greens mowers. Greens are lightly verticut once or twice a week during the summer and topdressed at least once a month with sand. They are aerified three times a year.

Greens receive an average of one pound of nitrogen per month from a combination of granular and liquid formulations. Iron and micronutrients are applied as needed. In the spring, when irrigation times are increased, Miller's crew will spray with wetting agents or apply them through hose-end proportioners on dry spots. The greens are spot watered as needed from April through July, when temperatures can soar to more than 120 degree F. Gordon included quick-coupler valves near every green and tee and along fairways for hoses for hand watering.

Tees are cut three times each week at 3/8-inch. They are never aerified. Instead, they are verticut to the dirt when the course is closed for overseeding. Tee positions are

changed every day to distribute compaction and wear. "Our tees are large enough to allow for recovery," says Miller, "but we do ask golfers to repair divots with a sand mix."

Fairways are mowed at 1/2-inch three times per week with a Toro 450D. Clippings are not removed. High-traffic areas on fairways may be aerified six times per year, while the rest is cored twice a year. Prior to overseeding, the fairways are verticut heavily and scalped. The roughs are maintained at 1-1/4-inch throughout the year.

Desert heat brings with it the threat of algae in the club's lakes. All but five of the lakes have waterfalls, and those have built-in fountains. "We try not to use chemicals to control algae," explains Miller. "The wind in the early summer promotes wave action and helps a lot. The lakes are also stocked with amur, talapia, blue gill, and



The abundance of water makes golfers forget they are in the desert.

goldfish to keep vegetation from getting out of hand. More superintendents are hiring contractors to take over weed control in their lakes."

Summer play at Palm Valley has increased, as it has on other desert courses. Therefore summer condition of the courses is growing in importance. To use only the water they need after four years of below-average rainfall, members of the Hi-Lo Desert Golf Superintendents Association chipped in to purchase a weather station operated by the College of the Desert in Palm Desert. Miller calls the college every day for an ET rate to adjust his irrigation schedule.

"The water district also recognizes superintendents who conserve water on their courses," adds Miller. "There are probably

more computer-controlled irrigation systems in this region than in other parts of the country. The reason is water conservation, even though the valley has a good supply of water. Many courses are also upgrading their pump stations to conserve energy. We are trying to manage consumption now to prevent any need for rationing in the future."

Palm Valley's success in attracting golfers and controlling maintenance costs is now being duplicated in Chula Vista, CA, at Eastlake Country Club. Sunrise is building and will operate an 18-hole public golf course for the Eastlake Development Company. This Robinson-designed community outside San Diego will eventually include 11,300 homes.

Sunrise plans to begin the first of two country club communities in the desert city of Indian Wells, CA, in 1991. The Heritage



Dennis Orsborn (center) is vice president of Golf Course Operations for Sunrise Company.

Club will feature 680 homes surrounding two Jack Nicklaus signature courses. Indian Ridge Country Club will be a larger development centered on two courses designed by Arnold Palmer.

The ultimate proof that Sunrise is on the right track when it comes to the role of golf in real estate development is its selection by Mitsubishi Estate Company to be part of Sunrise Desert Partners. The limited partnership will develop its own projects in the desert beginning this decade.

Sunrise, and companies like it, have their work cut out for them if the industry expects to develop nearly 4,000 golf courses needed to meet demand by the end of the century. Furthermore, they have to address problems with water, energy and the environment in the process. Home buyers are attracted to country club communities, but in today's world many also want to know that their community is environmentally responsible. Superintendents like Orsborn and Miller, working with consultants like Robinson and Gordon, are trying to find a way to do both. ●