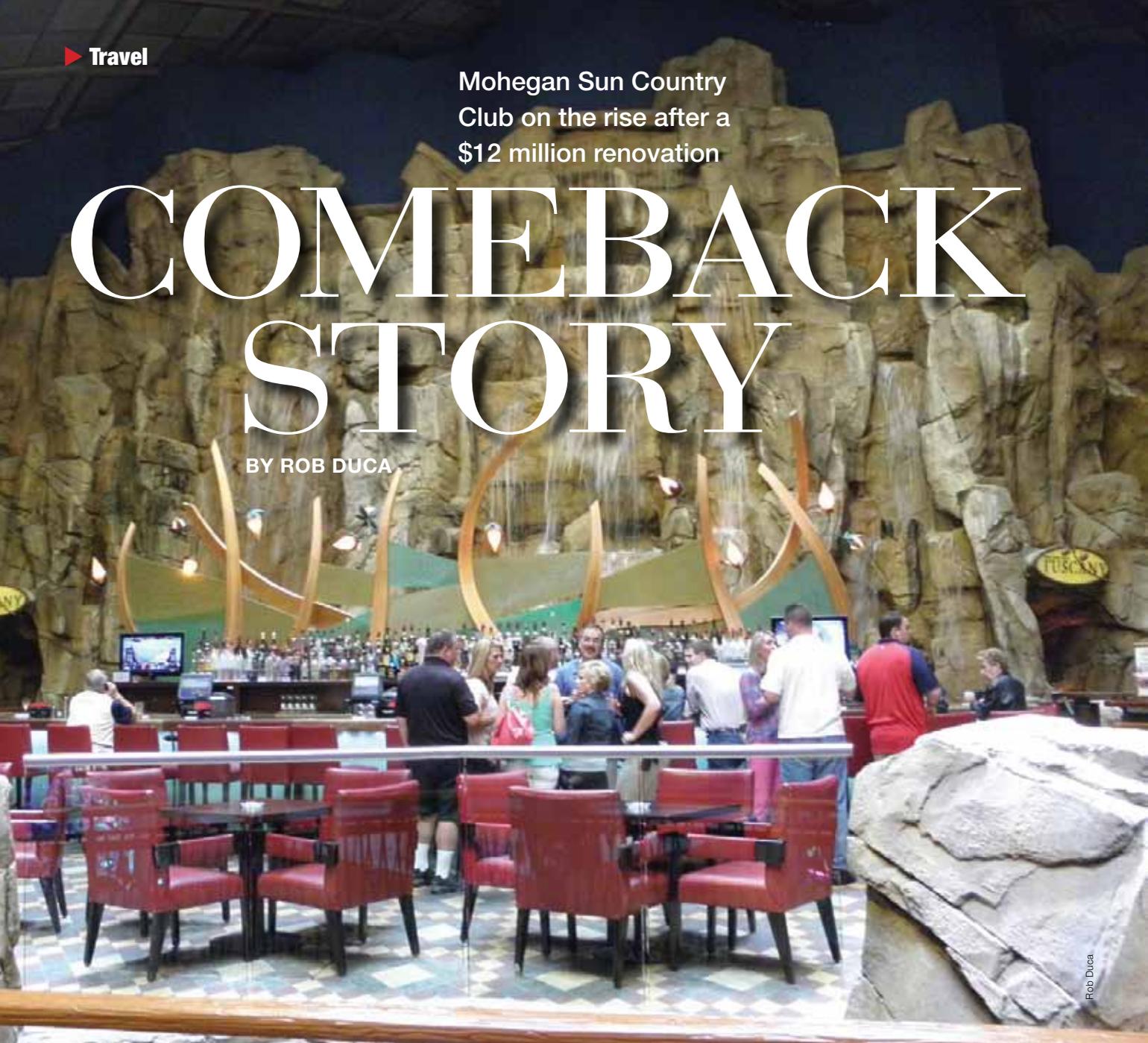


Mohegan Sun Country Club on the rise after a \$12 million renovation

COMEBACK STORY

BY ROB DUCA



AT FIRST GLANCE, the Mohegan Sun Country Club is a sleepy, straight-forward course, something of an ugly duckling compared to the picturesque Lake of Isles North course only a short drive away.

The clubhouse looks straight out of the 1950s, which is when the course was built. The practice facility is ordinary and the opening hole, a basic par-4, lacks wow factor, revealing little of what lies ahead.

But initial impressions are definitely deceiving. The course has undergone extensive renovations since being purchased by the Mohegan tribe in 2009. The tribe has poured more than \$12 million into the layout during the past two years, and on the spring day when I visited, work was continuing on virtually every hole.

Today, the Mohegan Sun Country Club is a dramatic, stimulating course, with deep, Scottish-style bunkers, severely undulating greens, numerous doglegs, fescue-framed fairways and breath-taking elevation changes.

Nearly 90 percent of the greens were redone for consistency, with half changing in size, while slopes were

added to others. There are some fairly brutal swales to some of the greens, and pin placements can be nasty depending on the mood that day of the golf course superintendent. No question, this course demands strategy. Shots must be played to the proper sides of the fairways and greens, or making par becomes problematic.

Tougher than it looks

The layout isn't long at 6,790 yards from the back tees, but it plays beefier than that due to the doglegs and elevated greens. Nowhere is that more evident than on the par-5, 495-yard sixth hole, which is considered the signature hole. Before the renovation, this was a straightaway downhill par-4, with an approach of less than 100 yards after an average drive. Now, the fairway bends 90 degrees to the right, with the



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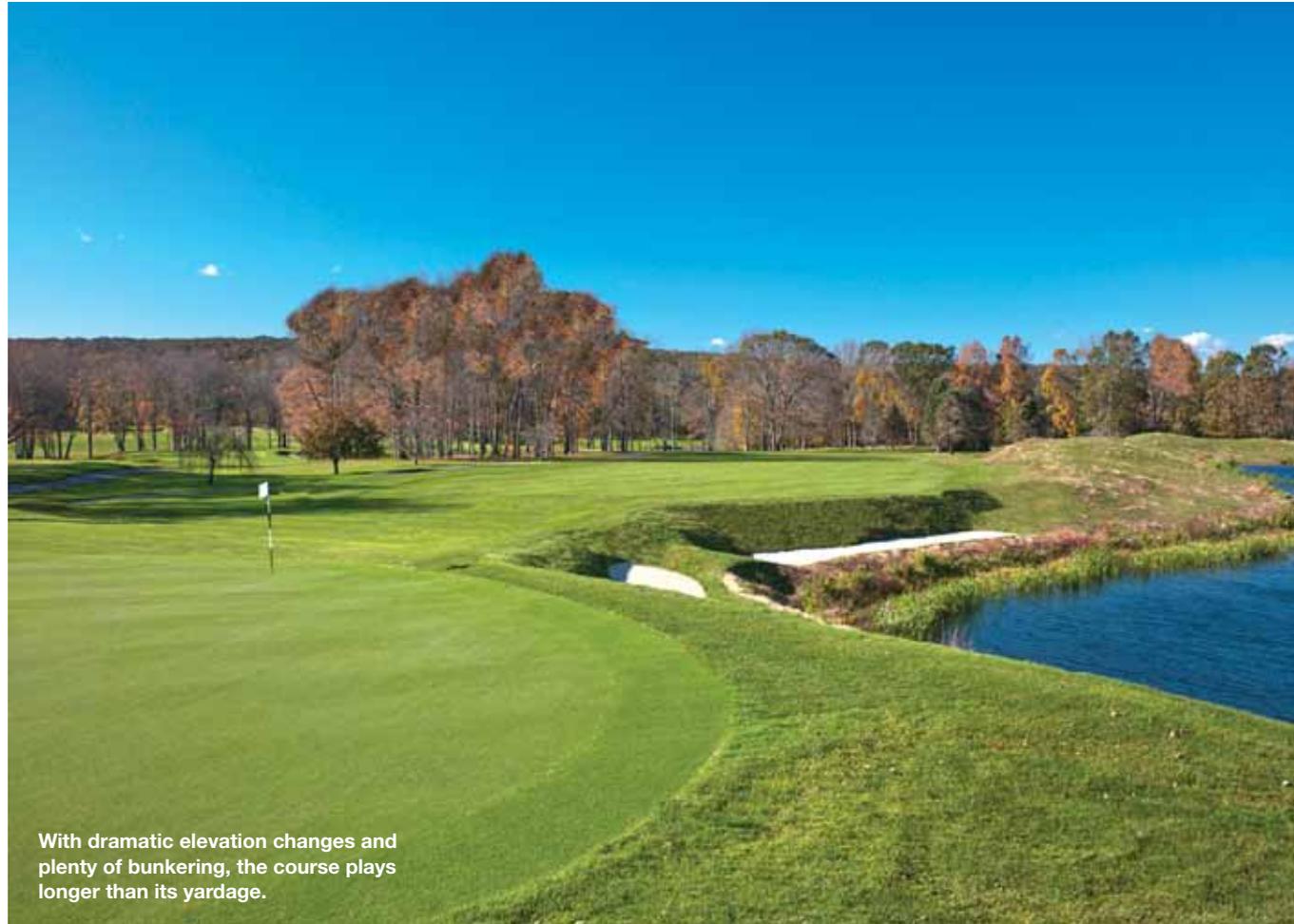
second shot a blind carry over a hazard. A new, elevated green was carved out of the woods and it is fronted by a steep bank that repels shots into a man-made pond. The green is reminiscent of a classic Irish links course. Long and narrow as a bowling alley, it is surrounded by grass mounds and features a series of significant dips and swales.

There are many such fascinating holes on this course. After what might be considered a tame warm-up to the round, the meat of the course comes into play beginning at the 413-yard third hole, where long, deep

bunkers guard a slightly raised, contoured green. The 505-yard fifth hole bends left and has a stream cutting diagonally across the fairway at 280 yards. The seventh, which was formerly a par-5, is now a par-4 of 399 yards, with rows of bunkers running along the



A series of bunkers dot the fairway and protect the green on the testing dogleg left seventh hole.



With dramatic elevation changes and plenty of bunkering, the course plays longer than its yardage.

entire right side, and another cavernous bunker and drop-off left of the green. And the 424-yard ninth is an uphill dogleg left, with fairway bunkers 150 yards from the green swallowing shots.

The back nine continues in much the same manner. The 11th and 12th holes veer right, with water coming into play on both, while the approach on 13 must carry water to a green that slopes back left to front right. Likewise, the 420-yard 14th features an absolutely treacherous back-to-front slope.

What does it take to score well here? Precise irons and a hot putter.

Unlike Lake of Isles, which is a five-minute drive from the Foxwoods Casino and lodging, the Mohegan Sun Country Club is a 25-minute trek from the Mohegan Sun casino and the property's hotel.

Many post-golf options

The Mohegan Sun casino is newer, cozier and, in many ways, more relaxing than Foxwoods. That doesn't mean you can't walk forever past an endless stream of slot machines, blackjack tables and roulette wheels. The casino also includes a race book room for wagering on the horses and dog racing, and a 42-table poker room with daily Texas Hold 'Em tournaments.

Dining options are plentiful, from burger and pizza joints to more upscale spots like Jasper White's Summer Shack, Todd English's Tuscany and Michael Jordan's Steak House. A tip: Michael Jordan's 23.Sportcafe, located next to his steakhouse, has much the same menu at lower prices in a more casual setting.

The Taughannick Falls bar outside Tuscany features a 55-foot waterfall that represents a treacherous crossing point during the tribe's migration. While a spectacular setting, it makes conversation a bit difficult. A more ideal spot is the nifty Lansdowne Pub for a Guinness and traditional Irish fare. With three long bars, dark wood, red-cloth seating and dartboards, you'll think you've landed in Dublin. For a completely different atmosphere, visit the Vista Lounge. It is set inside a planetarium-like domed ceiling that utilizes fiber optics to display the sun, the moon, and the stars. Nearby is Wombi Rock, a three-story high crystal mountain crafted of alabaster and more than 12,000 individual plates of hand-selected onyx from quarries in Iran, Pakistan and Mexico that were fused into glass.

Sip a cocktail while watching shooting stars. It just might be the perfect antidote after a day of negotiating Mohegan Sun Country Club's taxing, roller-coaster greens. ©