



[Return to article](#) | [Return to Larry Bohannon](#)

Change is good at Mountain Course

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What will just under \$1 million buy you on a classic desert golf course? At the Mountain Course at La Quinta Resort and Spa, the answer is renovated greens and tees and at least one new spectacular tee nestled into the Santa Rosa Mountains.

Those are some of the changes made during the last year at the storied Mountain Course. Some of the changes are highly visible, like the new mountain tee on the par-3 fifth hole, and others are less obvious, like some reshaped greens.

The new tee not only adds about 20 yards to the fifth hole, but provides an elevated tee with a spectacular view that can only be matched by the famed par-3 16th on the course. The course has reactivated a high tee on the 16th, providing one of the best scenic views in the valley.

Three greens, including the surface of the demanding par-3 second hole, have also been reshaped.

"As we go through the season, (the changes) will impact the overall condition of the golf course and the visual impact on the course," said Jeff Zamensky, director of golf sales at both La Quinta Resort and PGA West.

Renovations at a course like the Mountain Course have to be a little scary for golfers and course managers alike. Long considered one of the best golf courses in the state, much less the Coachella Valley, owners CNL Hospitality and management team Hilton certainly didn't want to do anything that could damage the reputation of the Pete Dye design that holds national events.

A desert classic

Opened in 1980 as one of the first Dye designs in the desert, the Mountain Course has some of the most breathtaking desert views in the Coachella Valley on the stretch of holes from the 14th to the 17th. Some believe the Mountain Course was a tougher layout than Dye's TPC Stadium Course at PGA West. For a few years, the Mountain Course was the highest-ranked desert course on Golf Digest's Top 100 course list. For most of that time, the layout was a private course with fewer than 20,000 rounds a year played. For more than a decade, it has been a resort course with about 30,000 rounds annually. A switch from 328 Bermuda grass to tifdrawf Bermuda should help maintain conditions despite the extra play.

The Mountain Course retains the Dye hallmarks of target golf off of many tees and into every green. There is no bouncing the ball onto the greens at the Mountain Course. Some might say Dye's designs are responsible for the advent of the 64-degree wedge.

The changes at the Mountain Course should enhance the event.

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