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GRAND DESIGN

Ensuring Service and Operating Excellence at **The Grand Del Mar**

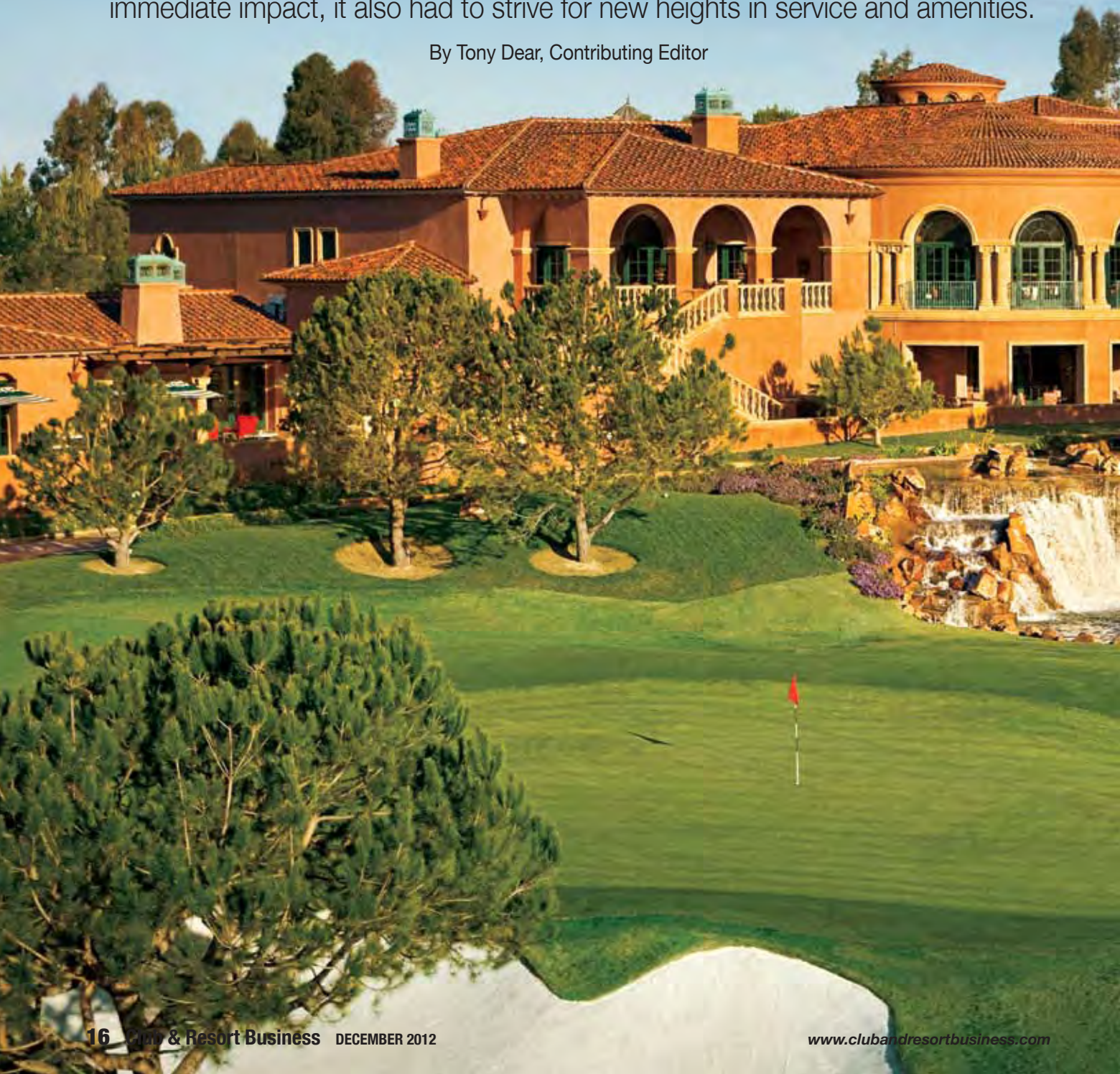
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Grand Design

Magnificent architecture, masterful interior décor and inspired landscaping can create a wondrous property—but aren't enough on their own to become a player in the high-stakes, high-end resort game. For **The Grand Del Mar** to make an immediate impact, it also had to strive for new heights in service and amenities.

By Tony Dear, Contributing Editor



The handful of members on the practice putting green at The Grand Golf Club include a Division One college golfer, two LPGA Tour members, and three of the highest-ranked instructors in Southern California. The tall guy in the blue shorts and white t-shirt on the far side of the green looks familiar, too. Turns out he's a former U.S. Open champion, in search of his former short-game magic.

The array of talent on the club's practice green—which has 150 members and is also open to guests of The Grand Del Mar resort—provides the first clue that this 6,400-acre property, situated in the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve 20 miles north of San Diego International Airport, and a couple of miles inland from the affluent coastal village of Del Mar,

has quickly ascended to the upper echelon of resort properties, even though it just turned five years old.

More substantive confirmation of that status comes from learning that The Grand Del Mar is one of just five resorts in the U.S. to have earned Five-Star ratings from *Forbes* for its lodging, spa, and fine-dining restaurant, Addison (named for Addison Mizner, the acclaimed architect from the 1920s whose distinctive Mediterranean style served as primary inspiration for Grand Del Mar structures). The resort was also voted number one in the U.S., and number five in the world, by TripAdvisor's Traveler's Choice ratings in 2012.

All of this has affirmed not only the foresight and good timing of the Manchester Financial Group (MFG), which spent

PHOTO COURTESY THE GRAND DEL MAR RESORT



“We are a privately held, independent resort, so we do not have the resources of a large corporate brand. That means we have to work especially hard to garner national and international recognition.”

—Tom Voss, President



\$300 million to build The Grand Del Mar Resort, but also the infallible follow-through of the management team to bring to life exactly the type of property that Doug Manchester, Founder and Chairman of MFG, wanted to create.

“My vision was to bring a world-class resort to San Diego,” Manchester, known as “Papa Doug,” says simply. “I wanted to offer a top-quality hospitality experience with the very finest in golf, fitness,

equestrian, culinary and other amenities. It is highly unusual to have a Five-Star hotel/restaurant/spa all situated at one resort property, and it is something we are very proud of.”

The first signs of just how serious MFG was about achieving those goals were revealed as the property was created. To carry out the Mizner-inspired design, 30 types of masonry, marble and limestone were imported from around the world, along with more than 2,000 pieces of custom-designed furniture, dozens of commissioned paintings framed by an Italian artisan, 25,000 sq. ft. of handcrafted wood floors, Roman pan-tile roofing, more than 50 elaborate chandeliers, over 500 fabrics, and Portuguese glazed tiles. Over 120 carpenters skilled in working with 16 different woods and 35 different finishes were

brought in to put it all together, along with 24 artists to stencil and decorate the ceiling frescoes.

All told, it took 800 workers, working over one million hours during a two-year period, to build The Grand Del Mar and bring to life interior designer Warren Sheets’ intention to “create a resort that felt like a grand Italian Villa where, once guests arrived, they would forget they were in Del Mar, California.”

The Voss Man

Creating that impression and making it last through the entirety of a guest’s stay and beyond, however, would also require equal attention to the amenities and service side. That’s where Manchester turned to Tom Voss, a native of Hamburg, Germany who worked in various capacities at his father’s oceanfront

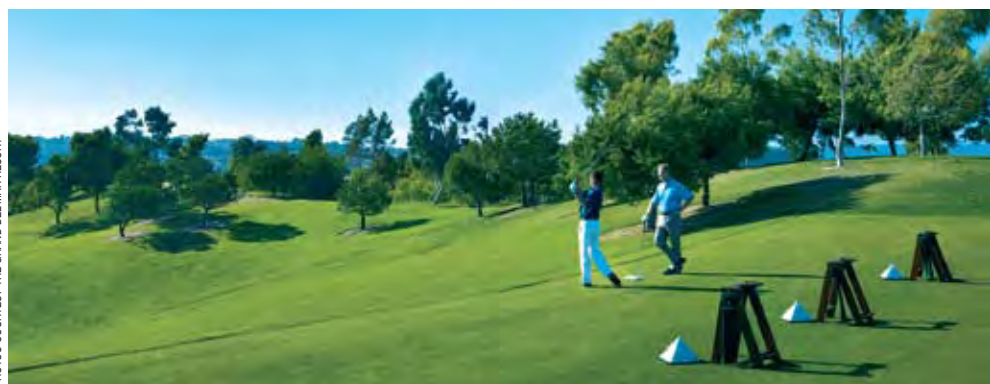
The Grand Del Mar AT A GLANCE



- Location: San Diego, Calif.
- Opened: 2007
- Guest rooms: 249
- No. of golf holes: 18
- Course Designer: Tom Fazio (Course originally designed in 1999 as Meadows Del Mar; redesigned in 2003)
- Annual golf rounds: 29,000
- President: **Tom Voss**
- Director of Golf: **Shawn Cox**
- Director of Agronomy: **David Yanez**
- Director of Food & Beverage: **Ekrem Tercanoglu**
- Wine Director: **Jesse Rodriguez**
- Director and Executive Chef, Addison Restaurant: **William Bradley**
- Director of Spa & Recreation: **Jim Croghan**
- Director of Catering & Convention Services: **Charles Stuart**
- Director of Sales & Marketing: **Kenan Simmons**
- Equestrian Center Manager & Trainer: **Jessica Odum**



Director of Golf Shawn Cox (left) and Director of Agronomy David Yanez (above) have built up the look, and reputation, of a Tom Fazio-designed course that opened as Meadows Del Mar in 1999.



PHOTOS COURTESY THE GRAND DEL MAR RESORT

golf resort before moving onto hospitality roles in Switzerland, the Middle East, and the U.S., eventually becoming General Manager of the Manchester-owned Grand Hyatt in downtown San Diego.

"I have worked with Tom for many years, and believe he was ideally suited to help open and oversee The Grand Del Mar," says Manchester. "With more than 25 years in the industry, he has a vast range of international hospitality experience, and understands all aspects of the business, including marketing, operations and staff development, and guest services. I was very pleased we were able to promote someone from within our own ranks, and I'm thrilled with what he has helped achieve for The Grand Del Mar."

Voss sees his core mission at The Grand Del Mar as creating "the ultimate in guest service." That's a familiar refrain chorused by countless managers, public-relations executives and marketing personnel working in today's upscale resort industry, and it can ring hollow in many cases. But The Grand Del Mar got early affirmation that it was walking the walk when the resort earned a perfect service score of 100 on *Condé Nast Traveler's* 2009 Gold List.

"That was one of the proudest moments of my career, as the resort was still new and somewhat unknown," Voss says. "And I was very humbled that we appeared alongside a number of great hotel properties around the world. Most of all I was proud of the staff and the training we had implemented."

The Grand Del Mar has sustained that early success thanks to Voss' hands-on management style and unyielding commitment to the standards that were established from day one. He starts each day by meeting with 20 department heads to discuss arriving guests and in-house events. "I always ask the team what we can do to produce a 'wow' with each of these guests/events," he says.

Voss then meets briefly with the sales team to discuss incoming business, and how the resort can meet each new lead's demands. He also talks every day with key personnel in accounting and finance, food and beverage, spa and recreation, golf, the Addison restaurant (which is run separately from the rest of F&B), and marketing and PR.

Voss also makes a point of walking the grounds multiple times a day, taking

photos with his iPhone when he sees something out of place, and instantly alerting the appropriate department head. "I also stay in the resort from time to time to check out the rooms and make sure everything is working properly," he says. "And I work in the various departments for a day at a time, so I can stay close to the operation and be familiar with all the staff."

All of this is essential, Voss says, to keeping The Grand Del Mar at the level it established for itself from the start. "We employ 650 colleagues from around the world," he notes. "It is sometimes quite challenging to find staff that can meet our exacting standards. We work hard to hire staff with a gracious, caring personality and authenticity, with keen focus on individuality, personalization and customized service. To achieve this high level of service, we provide an intensive staff training program that includes 1,400 service standards.

"Our goal is to go well beyond the standard services and amenities common to most luxury hotels," he adds. "Instead of reacting to the needs of guests, we anticipate them upon reservation and strive to customize each guest's stay." Staff members contact guests prior to their arrival, to ask what activities they might like to include during their time at the resort. "We then make arrangements for each person, based on his/her likes and dislikes," Voss says.

Words Into Action

Evidence of how staff members are implementing their training can be seen at every one of The Grand Del Mar's impressive amenities. It's hard to say which showcases the resort the best, but the golf course is probably the logical place to start, as it actually pre-dates the resort. Originally a public-access course named Meadows Del Mar, it was designed by Tom Fazio and opened in 1999.

Four years later, Manchester purchased the course and brought back Fazio's design team to make numerous upgrades. It was lengthened to 7,160 yards, and the bunkers were rebuilt and filled with crushed white marble, to give them a distinctive, Augusta National-like look. A 15-foot waterfall was built at the back of the 18th green, to enhance the view for golfers as well as those sitting on the clubhouse patio.

The course was renamed Del Mar Na-

PHOTOS COURTESY THE GRAND DEL MAR RESORT



Wine Director Jesse Rodriguez (left) and Executive Chef William Bradley (right) have established Addison as Southern California's only Five Star/Five Diamond restaurant, by providing a menu that is "100 percent driven by the seasons" and a carefully selected wine list of 3,500 vintages that have "not been overly exposed."

tional in 2005, and remained open to the public until 2006, when Manchester decided the time was right to take it semi-private and open it only to the 150 members of The Grand Golf Club and resort/corporate guests.

The Director of Golf is Shawn Cox, a PGA member with a special certification in instruction, and recipient of the 2007 and 2010 PGA President's Council on Growing the Game Award. Cox, who has been at the course since 2006, is also a Titleist Performance Institute Level 3 Certified Fitness, Biomechanics and Junior Instructor.

While the resort hosts a respectable 29,000 rounds a year, Cox says increasing the round count would be worthless if it meant diluting the experience. "We always consider the experience more than the amount of play we get," he says. "We want to make golf fun and approachable for our guests."

To enhance the natural enjoyment that comes from the course and its views of the Canyon Preserve, as well as the firm conditions provided by Director of Agronomy David Yanez and his staff (who also built the 18th-green waterfall), members and guests can also take advantage of a popular forecaddie program; ten-minute intervals between tee times that help prevent on-course delays; practice and teaching facilities that include a 5,000-sq. ft., double-ended driving range; special clinics, including a golf and wine experience for women only; and complimentary club fitting.

Serving Up the Sublime

The same attitudes toward providing added touches that contribute to guest indulgence are in ample evidence throughout other departments at The Grand Del Mar. Jim Croghan, Director of Spa & Recreation, describes the resort's spa operation as "devoted to [delivering] a sublime experience of relaxed, renewed and restorative wellness." The menu is treatment-based as opposed to product-based, he notes, with all treatments designed exclusively by Anne Bramham, founder of the American Spa Therapy and Education Certification Council.

Croghan's responsibilities also extend to include "life-enriching programs that incorporate spa experiences with resort activities, such as joining others in an early morning Tai Chi

class, riding on horseback, or taking a solitary sunset walk through the canyon." An extensive range of special twists to more traditional resort guest amenities and activities is also available, including personalized tennis lessons, family fun (outings to the beach or one of the San Diego area's local attractions, for which lunches are provided), hikes through the Preserve with a qualified naturalist, kids' adventures at the Explorer's Club, and equestrian lessons.

An emphasis on options also extends to The Grand Del Mar's food-and-beverage offerings. Amaya, an all-day restaurant, features the cuisine of Executive Chef Camron Woods, who began his career at the Woodlands Resort and Inn in



Director of Spa & Recreation Jim Croghan (above) oversees a wide range of "sublime experiences" and "life-enriching programs" that are made available to resort guests.



South Carolina before moving to Four Seasons properties in Atlanta and the Bahamas. Woods makes full use of the resort's herb garden to serve American fare with a Mediterranean twist that he calls food "people can enjoy and understand."

The Grand Del Mar's stunning 50,000-sq. ft. clubhouse houses a nightclub/restaurant/sports bar, Club M, that offers both casual and exotic fare under the direction of Chef Ernest Lopez. Then there's Addison, Southern California's only Five-Star/Five Diamond restaurant. Here, Relais & Châteaux Grand Chef William Bradley offers dishes with mostly French influences that change throughout the year. "Our menu is 100 percent driven by the seasons," Bradley says. "We have a true understanding of our region, and utilize it to the fullest."

Bradley began his career at Loews Coronado Bay Resort in San Diego County, and then spent three years as sous chef of the award-winning Mary Elaine's at The Phoenician in Scottsdale. Before coming to Addison in 2006, he was Executive Chef of the Vu restaurant at the Hyatt Regency Scottsdale Resort & Spa, where he was nominated for the James Beard Award "Rising Star Chef" honor three consecutive years.

Addison now serves about 60 guests a night during the week and as many as 80 on weekends, Bradley reports—but the food engenders far greater volume. "Guests tend to order the Seven-Course Tasting Menu," he says, "so we probably serve upwards of 350 plates on a weeknight, and 560 on a weekend."

Putting the Wine in Wine and Dine

The dining experience at Addison is further enhanced by wines chosen specifically for each menu by the restaurant's Wine Director, Jesse Rodriguez. The former head sommelier at The French Laundry in Napa, Calif., and also a sommelier for The Phoenician, Rodriguez selected over 3,500 vintages for Addison's list, favoring those that "have not yet made an indelible impression here in San Diego."

"By finding and showcasing wines that have not been overly exposed, it consistently puts us on the cutting edge," he notes. "I try to keep it in the realm of classical regions and grape styles, though. We don't look for obscure varietals necessarily, just whatever works well with the cuisine."

Most importantly, though, Rodriguez makes it a point to put guests at ease and not have them feel overwhelmed. "Writing a list that satisfies my personal desires is not my goal at all," he says. "Ultimately, your wine list has to deliver to your guests. They should feel comfortable and excited when ordering wine, and not apprehensive."

That same approach to guest relations pervades the entire Grand Del Mar operation—and, as much as the spectacular physical nature of the property, explains how the resort has been able to establish itself so quickly, and through a particularly bumpy period for the business, as a major new player in the field.

"We are a privately held, independent resort, so we do not have the resources of a large corporate brand," Voss notes. "That means we have to work especially hard to garner national and international recognition. We do that by taking care of our guests, and always with a smile on our faces." **C&RB**

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