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# The Desert Sun

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The Desert Sun lists 100 top valley holes, but players vary on what draws them

The 8th hole of the Mountain Course at The Vintage Club in Indian Wells. MARILYN CHUNG/THE DESERT SUN

## Stirring a hole-y debate

By Larry Bohannon  
The Desert Sun

Clive Clark has played great golf holes as a touring pro, commented on great holes as a BBC broadcaster and now designs holes as a La Quinta-based course architect. But even his definition of what makes a hole great is anything but concrete.

"A great hole should have personality, spirit and soul," Clark said. "And if it's aesthetically pleasing, that is an added bonus. The criteria, though, will undoubtedly depend upon who the judges are."

Ask someone what makes a great golf hole and you are likely to hear as many answers as there are golf holes in the Coachella Valley. And sometimes it depends on a person's position in the game. As The Desert Sun unveils its list of the top 100 holes in the golf-rich Coachella Valley today, local golfers, designers and club operators weighed in with their ideas on what makes a truly great golf hole. Not surprisingly, the opinions and theories varied widely.

"For me, if you make par and say, 'that's a good par,' that's a great hole," said LPGA touring pro and two-time Solheim Cup player Nicole Castrale of Palm Desert. "Therefore it has to be a challenge, whether it's a par 4, a par 5, a par 3."

"My criteria is aesthetics. It starts with aes-

thetics," said Jim Colbert, a member at Bighorn Golf Club in Palm Desert and a winner on the PGA Tour and Champions Tour. Colbert's golf course management company operates more than 20 courses. "Not everybody has the ocean or the mountain. It's hard to really, really get the aesthetics artificially."

"Length is always what a lot of people equate with how good a golf hole is," said desert resident Johnny Bench, the Hall of Fame baseball catcher who later turned pro in golf. "But I love the framing. I love the framing of a golf course, and I love the fact that there are doglegs and there are risk/rewards."

Trying to define a great golf hole is like trying to define what makes a great meal. One player's filet mignon might be another player's bowl of cold cereal.

"The best players in the world, such as Tiger and Rory, may consider a great hole to be one that provides the greatest challenge, a hole that gives them a sporting chance of separating themselves from the crowd," said Clark, a Ryder Cup player whose local golf designs include courses at Indian Wells Golf Resort, The Hideaway in La Quinta and Eagle Falls Golf Course in Indio. "Club golfers, on the other hand, may link a great hole with their favorite hole, a hole that inspires them to play well."

*"I like a hole where you stand on the first tee and it just feels good. It just ought to feel good."*

**AL GEIBERGER**  
former PGA Championship winner



Jim Colbert, whose company manages more than 20 courses, says the aesthetics of a course are key to him. WADE BYARS/THE DESERT SUN

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Visit [top100golf.mydesert.com](http://top100golf.mydesert.com) to plan your next golf outing using our new, interactive golf guide curated by The Desert Sun's Larry Bohannon. This useful resource details 100 holes of premiere golf in the valley. It also can help you improve your game via video instructions tips on clubs to use for that special layout that will give you an edge whether you live in the Coachella Valley year-round, are a seasonal resident or just visiting for a week or a weekend.

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### Let Larry be your golf guide

Go to [top100golf.mydesert.com](http://top100golf.mydesert.com) to access the full interactive golf guide curated by The Desert Sun's Larry Bohannon. Bookmark the site to refer back to 100 holes of premiere golfing, world class fairways, greens, lakes and bunkers.

Our golf guide features video instructions to help you master the valley's top holes, maps to plan your golf outing and tips on clubs that will give you an edge whether you live in the Coachella Valley year-round, are a seasonal resident or just visiting for a week or a weekend.

The guide allows you to:

- » pinpoint courses and holes;
- » get Larry's insider tips for dealing with each hole;
- » browse the list your way — by par, city, hole number or public/private courses.

Not buying it? Follow Larry on Twitter @MyDesertGolf. Then tweet him the holes you would have included at #my100holes. He'll use them to write an upcoming blog post.



### DIVE RIGHT IN

Our new golf guide at [top100golf.mydesert.com](http://top100golf.mydesert.com) has an interactive interface that allows you to watch videos, check out course maps and browse any way you want — by city, hole or public/private access.



Course architect Clive Clark speaks about his course design at a November 2005 reception for the Golf Resort at Indian Wells. JAY CALDERON/THE DESERT SUN



Golf legend Al Geiberger plays a round in June 2007. OMAR ORNELAS/THE DESERT SUN



LPGA tour player Nicole Castrale of Palm Desert embraces a challenge on the course. MARILYN CHUNG/THE DESERT SUN

### Holes

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For others involved in the desert show, the answer to what makes a great hole interesting is not in what a hole is, but in what a hole isn't.

"You don't want a hole that is too severe, that is just unfair," said former PGA Championship winner Al Geiberger. "There have been times on the tour where golf courses have goofy holes and you get a bad bounce and you are dead and toast. But you also don't want a hole where everything just funnels down (to a common landing area)."

As a course management specialist and the co-designer of Colbert Hills, the Kansas State University golf course, Colbert is worried about making sure people want to play his courses again and again.

"Too many times the courses are way too hard for the customer. Way too hard," Colbert said. "If you want to build the toughest course in the world, that would be easy. Just make it impossible. But that doesn't make the course great. It just makes it hard."

Castrale's view of a great hole is reflected in her LPGA career. The former Palm Desert High School star has five top-10 finishes in major championships, and courses for majors such as the U.S. Women's Open are notorious for being difficult and demanding. That might scare a 20-handicapper, but Castrale embraces those kinds of holes.

"When a hole is great for a tour pro is when you walk off the hole, you've made par and gained one (stroke) on the field," Castrale said.

Castrale points to two holes at the Dinah Shore Tournament Course at Mission Hills Country Club in Rancho Mirage, the home of the LPGA's Kraft Nabisco Championship, as demanding for even a skilled player like her.

"The 15th at Kraft, or at the Shore Course, is a great hole," she said about a hole lined by eucalyptus trees with Gerald Ford Drive just beyond a wall on the left side of the fairway. "You have to hit a demanding tee shot. I think that one of the hardest tees shots, obviously at the Kraft, is 18 (the course's famed par 5) when they play that back tee. You don't have much room up there to get it into the fairway with trees and water to the left and those bunkers to the right."

Geiberger, the first player to shoot a fabled 59 on the PGA Tour, said the hole that springs to mind for him as great is actually a hole that was played under and replaced by a new hole.

"Everybody picks 16 at Cypress (Point in Monterey). I will pick one that is gone, the fifth hole at Pebble Beach, the old fifth hole," Geiberger said. "That made me nervous. It was uphill and it was lined with trees. To me they tore out one of the toughest holes."

Colbert's two great holes are both shorter par 3s on the Pacific Ocean on the Monterey Peninsula.

"All the great 3-par on every touring pros' list are max 150 yards, max," Colbert said. "The two holes that jump out at me right away are the seventh at Pebble and the 15th at Cypress. I mean they are both wedges, 9-irons, 8-irons, whatever, but the elements are there. The greens are the size of a nickel. You've got a wedge or a 9-iron or an 8-iron in your hands and you are really aiming. And there is always some kind of breeze affecting the ball."

In Bench's playing days for the Cincinnati Reds, he was known for slugging long home runs, and he became a long hitter of the golf ball as well. Not surprisingly, Bench is impressed by holes that require quality shots. An example for him is the demanding uphill par-4 sixth hole at Spyglass Hill in Monterey.

"You turn that corner and come up to No. 6, and you realize you have to hit a good drive and then it is a quality second shot," Bench said. "The quality second shot to me is the fact you know you have to hit it in a quadrant of the green."

For all the golfers, it is the requirements of the full shots on a hole, not the shots on the putting greens, that make a hole great.

"Usually, it is a demanding tee shot, and then your approach shot into the green is usually demanding," Castrale said. "I think it should force you to hit a good shot."

"You don't want to put it on a green that is hokey, where you've got a 20-foot break," Bench said. "That can destroy a hole."

Clark said the greatness of a hole can often be played up by what fans see on television.

"The TV commentators and media are not opposed to looking at a hole that may become pivotal and lead to high drama that changes the course of a tournament," Clark said. "Examples of that type of hole are the 17th at St. Andrews, the finish at the TPC Sawgrass, and the 18th at Carnoustie."

Still, with all the possible elements for a great hole, sometimes greatness is quality that is elusive to describe, Geiberger noted.

"I like a hole where you stand on the first tee and it just feels good," he said. "It just ought to feel good."

### Coachella Valley golf lore

There are a thousand stories in the desert, and these are just a few. Golf courses are notorious for being places where things happen — not all involving a wedge or a putter. We pulled these interesting tidbits from the new Top 100 Holes guide. Use them to regale pals on your next golf outing or find more at [top100golf.mydesert.com](http://top100golf.mydesert.com).

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