



Primland Resort ~ Eminence Hunt

J. Eric Eckard

When Primland Resort owners were looking for an architect to design a golf course on its 12,000-acre resort in southwestern Virginia, most of the designers looked at the flatlands and valleys of the property. Donald Steel had another idea. "He saw enough room to put a course on top of a mountain when all the others wanted to do something down below," said Brian Alley, Primland Resort's head golf pro. "He put 18 holes and a driving range in an area that could fit 18 holes and a driving range. But it's not cramped."



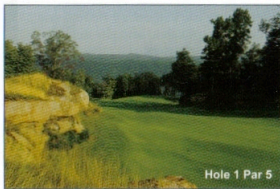
That was a little less than 10 years ago. Since it opened in 2006, Primland's Highland Course has collected several national awards and a reputation as a challenging golf course with a view. "It's one of the hardest and most fun golf courses that I've played," said the 28-year-old Alley, who began as an intern at Primland and started running the course about a year ago. With magnificent vistas of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Highland Course at Primland makes it difficult to remember one of golf's golden rules — keep your head down. Your downhill second shot on number one, a long par-5 that measures 536 yards from the back tees, definitely will challenge that mantra with its spectacular backdrop behind the green. Along the way, golfers will have to carry valleys with their par-3 tee shots, negotiate trees on a few doglegs, and maneuver Primland's rollercoaster ride as they move between elevated tee boxes or greens and sometimes both.

Alley's favorite hole is the sixteenth, a dogleg right with another great view from the tee box. "It's the perfect risk-reward hole," Alley said of the 426-yard par 4. "You can take it to the right with your driver or not take the risk and go with your 3 wood down the left. Then, it has a very tough green." Steel's written comments about sixteen echo Alley's sentiment: "There is reward for the perfect drive, but margins are slender around the dogleg. There is a slope down to a well-guarded green." The right side of the course's closing hole, a par-4 that plays 484 yards from the tips, gives you one last chance to enjoy the beauty, as the fairway drops off to a valley below, with a lush mountainside forest in the distance. Steel calls eighteen a "rousing finishing hole" and "a suitable ending to a momentous experience."



In all, the course measures 7,053 yards from the back tees. But with four sets of tees, Primland also allows less-skilled golfers to play the course without making it impossible to enjoy. Although golf plays a huge role for Primland's visitors, outdoor activities still attract many to this remote section of the state near Meadows of the Dan, Virginia — just as it did 250 years ago when the governor of Virginia granted the land to William Austin. Fast forward to the late 1960s when the first modern access roads and utility lines began popping up where lumber companies had been farming trees since the early part of the 20th century. The Primat family bought the land in 1977, and they created a hunting preserve and offered horseback riding, clay skeet shooting, and fishing for visitors to this outdoor Mecca tucked away in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

In addition to the golf course, Primland has added several cottages, a 26-room lodge, a luxury treehouse for overnight guests, a spa, and an observatory for star-gazing. Isolated from the outside world — a six-mile drive along a winding road leads to the lodge, Primland features an all-inclusive resort philosophy out of necessity. "They've always wanted to become a complete resort," Alley said of his bosses. "They're always



looking for something. But golf was a huge part of their plan." So, Primland started looking around for a golf course designer about 10 years ago. After discussions with several architects, officials decided on Steel, who has enjoyed as much success over the years as a golf writer as he has as a golf course architect. The author of 10 books on golf and the Sunday Telegraph's first golf correspondent, Steel has designed more than 70 new courses in 20 countries. Known primarily for his links-style designs in the United Kingdom, Steel's United States' courses basically follow those same attributes — except Primland. "There is a remoteness about Primland, a sense of escape, that is special," Steel said in a written statement. "Golf courses have been built in every landscape imaginable, but only rarely on mountain peaks." Primland is one of four Steel designs in the United

States, and it's the only public course he's built here. The others — Cherokee Plantation in South Carolina, Carnegie Abbey in Rhode Island, and the Vineyard in Massachusetts — all are situated near a U.S. coastline. Steel also redesigned the Greensboro Country Club.

But Primland sits at 3,000 feet above sea level, right on top of the highest peak on the resort property and hours from the East Coast. In fact, there are no lakes on the course, so water hazards are nearly non-existent. But golfers will have to navigate tall native fescue along the fairways, bunkers, and plenty of trees. Because of the higher elevation, Primland uses bentgrass on its tee boxes, fairways, and greens. Bluegrass marks the first cut of rough. Alley said he gets almost as much positive feedback about the course's condition as he does about the views. "It's about 60/40 — 60 percent views and 40 percent condition," he said. "The elevation helps us." And while golf attracts a huge chunk of Primland's visitors, activities like hunting, fishing, horseback riding, skeet shooting, ATV riding, mountain biking, bird watching, and geocaching all draw guests to this isolated resort. "It's an outdoorsman's dream," Alley said. "And now that the lodge is open, husbands and wives can come in and enjoy the spa."

The lodge opened in 2009, and there you'll find the Pinnacles Suite, an 1,800-square-foot set of rooms that's located below the observatory. The observatory features a 40mm eyepiece with 70x zoom for a true up-close view of the nighttime sky. "We'll get people that come in and want to do research on astronomy because there are so many books about the subject up there," said Alley, whose pro shop also sits directly below the observatory.



The spa, which opened in 2010, features treatments that pay homage to local American Indian tribes, and therapists use local organic and natural oils in the 40 to 50 treatments available to guests, including hot stone therapy, deep tissue massage, and a treatment designed for pregnant women. The Treehouse opened in the summer of 2011, and this one-bedroom building features a living area, 340-foot deck and is accessed by a wooden walkway just off the golf course's fourth green.



Packages are available for Primland visitors, and guests can combine a myriad of activities to customize their stay at the resort. You can book golf and spa getaways, hunting and fishing deals, holiday specials, or a combination of any of the activities and accommodation options available. Despite the plethora of amenities at Primland, the resort still has a rustic aura. But for Alley, it's still about the golf course. "We're not flashy," Alley said. "We're not shoving it in your face. But once you play the golf course, you're hooked."



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