

Elgin's Dynamic Duo A Study In Contrasts

By Neal Kotlarek



The distance from Chicago to Ireland is approximately 3,710 miles by plane. Over the past eight years, golfers from across the city have figured out a way to reduce that journey to a 45-minute drive.

In 2010, the city of Elgin unveiled the second of two dramatic and expansive courses that imme-

diately made the community a golf destination. The Scottish links-inspired Highlands of Elgin Golf Club was embraced with national accolades only a year after the traditional parkland-style Bowes Creek Country Club on the city's western edge was opened to similar acclaim. Today, the courses serve as models for high-end championship public golf at affordable green fees.





Built when other municipalities struggled to keep their courses operating, the Highlands of Elgin and Bowes Creek have continued to thrive due to the city's expansive vision. The two properties aren't merely golf courses; rather, they are community centers featuring high quality dining as well as instruction programs for players of all ability levels.

Bowes Creek Country Club is two miles west of Randall Road, built as the centerpiece of a housing development. Libertyville golf architect Rick Jacobson crafted a remarkable layout characterized by prairies, wetlands and towering trees. Smooth, contoured greens and expert conditioning provide the course with a country club look and feel.

The Highlands of Elgin contrasts dramatically from its sister course as land that once served as a stone quarry was sculpted into a sweeping course featuring breathtaking landscapes. Four holes tower above a 12-acre quarry lake while others wind across rolling terrain edged by native brush and grasses. Designed by Art Schaupeter and Keith Foster, the tract is partially located on the former site of

the Spartan Golf Course which had been a community mainstay for 30 years. Listed among *Golfweek* magazine's "Best Courses You Can Play," the layout ranks among the top 10 tracks in all of Illinois.

Perhaps the only way to appreciate the scope and diversity of Elgin's top golf offerings is to experience both courses on the same day. My foursome booked an



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early morning tee time at the wide-open Highlands of Elgin course with full intention to have our swings geared up for the tighter and thus more penal Bowes Creek course. Four tee areas on each hole allow for players of all skill sets to enjoy a fun round. The first hole, for instance, plays to a tough 414 yards from the black tees and to a friendly 277 yards from the whites. Three fairway bunkers to the right side of the landing area tighten the hole

significantly as do three bunkers around the putting surface.

Our group's favorite hole on the front nine was the visually stunning No. 4, a 155-yard par 3 which calls for a tee shot over water, scrub bushes and native grasses to an undulating green protected by bunkers and rough. The green's location in a punch bowl setting helps to funnel slightly errant tee shots toward the flagstick. This feature served as a benefit to all members of our foursome, each of whom somehow managed to eke out pars from various positions on and around the green.

While listed as the 15 handicap hole on the scorecard, the No. 15 hole gave our foursome fits due to the variety of hazards located around the putting surface. One ball found the pot bunker located to the left of the green while a second ball bounded into a stone wall edging of the lake protecting the front edge of this massive green. The other two members of the group were able to scratch out pars by placing our tee shots on the proper side of the two-tiered putting surface.

No round should be played without a visit to the club's elegant clubhouse, which towers above the course. The menu for the Grumpy Goat Tavern features a variety of dishes with a Cajun/Creole flair. Beverage offerings include a generous array of craft beers including some fine local offerings.

The short drive to Bowes Creek ensured our swings were still in tip-top form as we teed off on the relatively open 385-yard first hole. The terrain changes dramatically by the 440-yard No. 2 as wetlands and fescue-lined bunkers call for precision shots off the tee and to the green. While the primary challenges on the front nine are water, sand and wetlands, the back nine is positioned in a forested parcel of land which provides both more tranquility and challenge. At 344 yards, No. 12 looks on the scorecard like a surefire birdie opportunity. In actuality, this dogleg right is a make-or-break par 4 as the tee shot must be threaded over wetlands and short of bunkers to setup a nifty short iron around a tree towering above the left side of the green. The dangers of this hole were underscored by our foursome's scorecard which read: 4, 4, 6, X.

The 435-yard final hole begins from an elevated tee and calls for a drive avoiding water on the right and bunkers on the left of the landing area. The huge green offers an inviting target, with the exception of a large bunker on the right side. All members of our foursome missed the green and needed deft wedge shots to the flagstick. Alas, only one of us was able to place his shot within a few feet of the hole. Happily, that member was yours truly.

Our dinner inside the elegant Bowes Creek clubhouse featured ice-cold micro-brews poured at the classy, English-style restaurant and bar known as Porter's Pub. As we hoisted our beers, we gazed through the dining room window at the course below and toasted to the dynamic duo of Elgin: Bowes Creek Country Club and the Highlands of Elgin.

ON THE CORKSCREWS

STEPHEN HAWK

If you are looking for affordable, approachable, easy-drinking wines, I suggest you seek out those from Paso Robles. This large but lesser-known appellation was established in 1983 (a mere toddler in wine years), and is located around the town of Paso Robles in the northern part of California's San Luis Obispo County. Most of the growing area is classified as Region III, equivalent to France's Rhône region. At last count, there were over 18,000 acres under vine.

Rabble Wine Company encompasses four labels: Rabble, Stasis, Amor Fati, and Tooth & Nail. Rabble's estate winery and visitor center is regarded as one of the region's leading destinations, featuring a somewhat kitschy castle-like building that includes an expansive tasting room.

Rabble was founded by Rob and Nancy Murray in 2011. In addition to becoming a vintner, Rob has been a grower and vineyard owner for over 18 years. He continues to own and manage properties from Paso Robles to Santa Maria, with his own brands utilizing roughly five percent of the grapes he farms. He's obviously doing something right, as Rabble is one of Paso Robles' fastest-growing labels.

Speaking of labels, I'm almost always more interested in what's in a wine bottle than what's on it. However, the iconoclastic labels for Rabble and its sister brands have attracted a lot of attention in the wine press. The Rabble labels are rendition of historical woodblock prints from the Nuremberg Chronicle, dating to the late 1400s. They have been faithfully reproduced, including a full-embossing rarely seen in this context. The images depict nature's wrath, as a reminder to work in concert with her at all times.

2015 Rabble Red Blend \$18
This disorderly mob member hails from Mossfire Ranch, about three miles southwest of Paso Robles. A mix of 90% merlot and 10% syrah, it greets you with its bright red-purple color and aromas of red cherry and cocoa on the nose, with just a hint of anise. The rich cherry continues on the palate, adding red berries and delicate spice notes. The flavors, lively acidity and firm but sweet tannins are remarkably balanced. An excellent value. The label illustrates the

Rousing Rabble

Apocalyptic Comet falling upon Florence with the Unicorn and Phoenix.

Try this wine with cranberry-cheddar brats with bell peppers, New Mexican rubbed pork tenderloin, or grilled chicken with Fresno chile/plum sauce.

2016 Rabble Cabernet Sauvignon \$25
Another Mossfire offering, on first approach currant, cocoa, and a hint of tobacco drift from the glass. Again, the taste of cherries, but this time of the tart variety, supported by vanilla, dried sage, blueberry, and cassia. These are complemented by woody notes from the French oak, which also supplies lively and supple tannins and a nice long finish. The label? Mount Vesuvius Erupting over Pompeii.

Enjoy this wine with venison and black bean chili with toasted cumin crema, pan-roasted chicken with blackberry-ancho sauce, or red chile and honey-glazed salmon.



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