

AS SEEN IN



Above: Barton Tuck
Below: The first fairway is just the beginning of the amazing views found at Bright's Creek Golf Club.

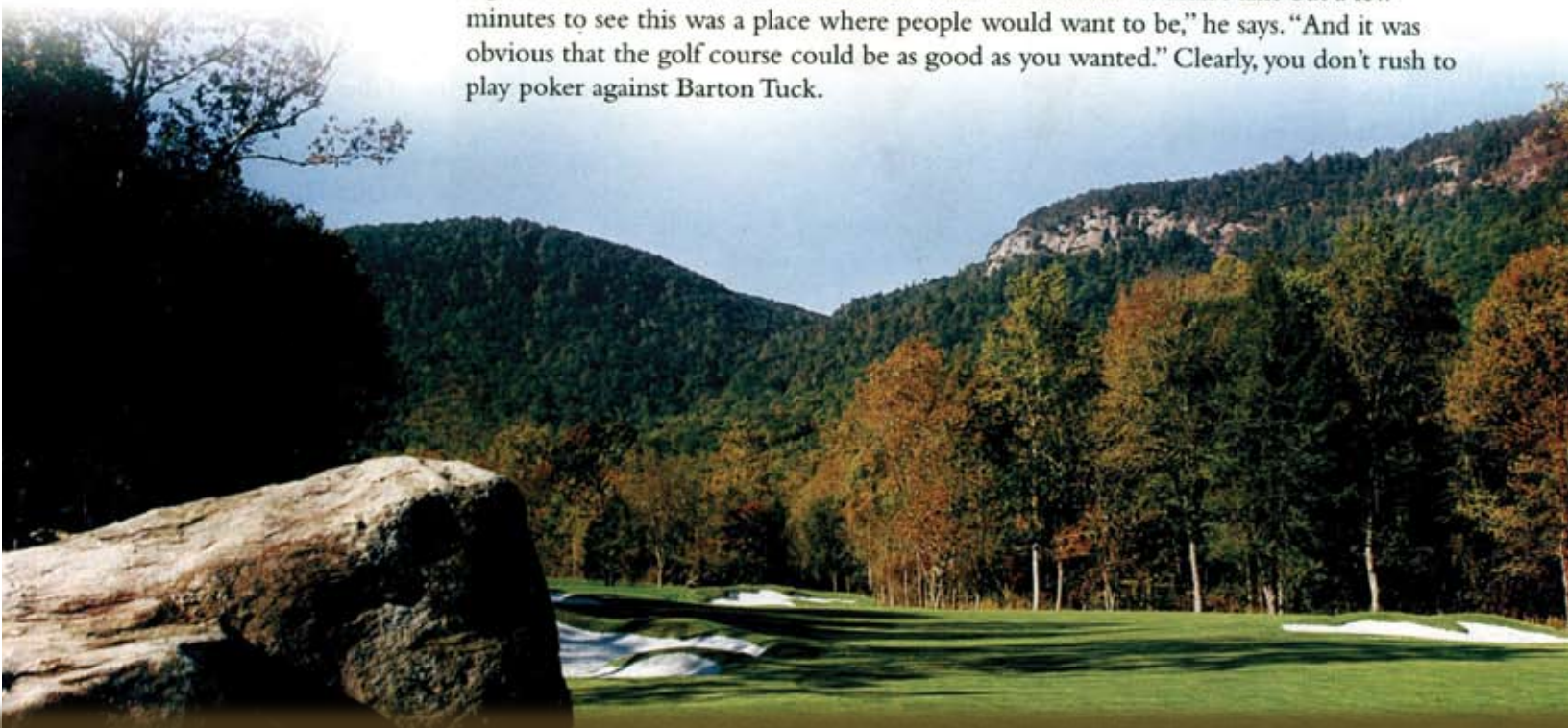
TUCK EVERLASTING

BY TRENT BOUTS | PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRIGHT'S CREEK GOLF CLUB

When Barton Tuck first toured the property now known as Bright's Creek Golf Club, he spent half a day bouncing around in the passenger seat like a lottery ball. He didn't say much. Didn't smile much, partly because, at 66, his joints aren't what they used to be – surgeons will replace both knees this winter. And by all accounts, Tuck didn't say a lot at lunch later that day either.

The driver of the four-wheel-drive, David Gillespie, was looking to sell the land and with some urgency. With 4,600 acres and a price tag around \$20 million, Tuck was one of the few individuals in the country who could close such a deal on a tight deadline. The signs weren't good. Gillespie recalls going home glum that night. "I said to my wife, 'Well, we won't be seeing that guy again.'"

Around the same hour, Tuck sat back in the den of his Greenville home and over a glass of wine told his wife that he was "sold" in no time. "It didn't take but a few minutes to see this was a place where people would want to be," he says. "And it was obvious that the golf course could be as good as you wanted." Clearly, you don't rush to play poker against Barton Tuck.



South Carolina Magazine



2nd fairway at Bright's Creek Golf Club

Less than three months and \$18.5 million later, he was "drop dead tired," but he was also the principal in what could become one of the most ambitious golf projects the Carolinas have seen since Kiawah Island Resort. Bright's Creek, just north of Spartanburg and the North Carolina state line near Mill Spring, could one day be home to as many as four courses. The first, designed by Tom Fazio, opened last year and is in contention for best new course of the year honors nationally. A second is already in the planning stages. Home sites, averaging two acres each, will number around 1,100. The first phase of nearly 300 sites is sold out.

A RARE BREED

It takes a rare breed to see in "a few minutes" what could play out over the next decade. Rarer still to make it happen. But Tuck has the knack and the nerve. Since moving to Greenville from Chapel Hill as a certified public accountant in 1960, he has built a series of successful businesses in real estate and golf touching much of the Southeast.

That same drive and Midas touch also benefited Greenville directly. He was among the instigators behind the revitalization of the downtown area and was on the board of directors that brought the highly-rated Chanticleer

course to Greenville Country Club. He also served eight years on the State Development Board.

While Bright's Creek may be on the other side of the border, there is already a significant Palmetto state influence. At press time, more than 50 members were South Carolinians with many more expected to follow, just as they did at Forest Creek Golf Club in Pinehurst, N.C. There Tuck has two golf courses by Fazio with both rated in the best 100 modern courses in the country. He has been quietly looking for the ideal mountain site since wrapping up the first course at Forest Creek in the mid-90s.

The reason he says he found it at Bright's Creek is simply that the property provides, quite naturally, a marriage of golf and residential living that some mountain developments need to contrive. "Your residential buyers want the long range views and the elevation, all the things that you expect with mountain living," he says. "But those views and the elevation can make the golf so rough that you're playing a game that has to be manufactured by the architect. That's if he can do it. But here, the golf course was already here in the land. Tom Fazio just simply moved a little dirt here and there, built some greens and put his wonderful touch on it. It really was impressive to watch him and his team bring it out."

PEACE, TRANQUILITY AND WORLD-CLASS GOLF

Tuck's appreciation for watching the land bear fruit stems from his childhood on the family tobacco farm in Henderson County, N.C. He probably also learned a little stoicism back then, a little of that ability to appear indifferent, to keep a straight face. At a minimum you learn patience from growing what you need to eat, from not having electricity in the home until you're eight years old, from having to walk a mile to the store in 100-degree heat when you want an ice cream.

In many ways, Tuck's own upbringing is not that far removed from the people who originally settled the terrain at Bright's Creek. Just to get down the mountain pass at what is now the back of the golf course, pioneer travelers had to slow their descent by dragging heavy timbers behind their carriages. Many of life's challenges were steep back then and you know Tuck empathizes when he wonders out loud about the scenes that would have played out as people built their lives.

That bone-deep understanding of rural life, of community and the caring that comes with it, might explain why a development that could halve again the population in the ZIP code, could land so gently. For a wealthy man with mighty big fish to fry, Tuck maintains a genuinely common touch. He farms work to local contractors where possible, maintains an open relationship with the local press and went to great lengths to preserve and protect the graves on site of those who came before him. You can see where he comes from by the way he looks at the land.

"When you're outside in the forest you see so much, you feel so much of what's around you, it's got to have an impact on what your mind is doing," he says. "It's got to." And it's precisely that positive impact people are buying at Bright's Creek. "If you don't want to drive 20 minutes to get your groceries then this is not the place for you," Tuck says. But if it's peace, tranquility and what Tuck unashamedly calls "world-class golf," that's another matter. **SCM**

GETTING THERE

Located just over the border in Mill Spring, N.C. Visit www.brightscreek.com for more information on availability of lots, or call 866-302-7335.