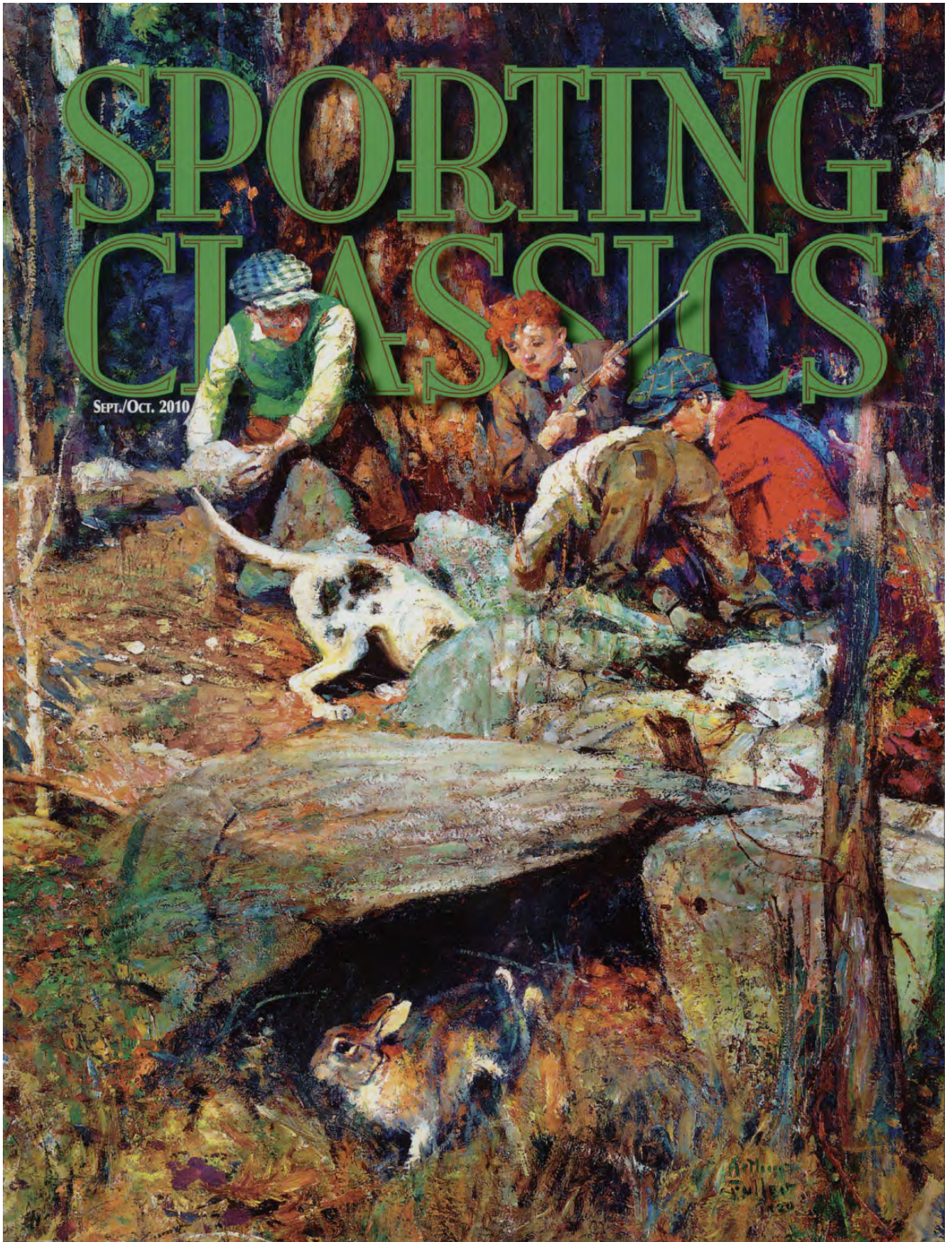
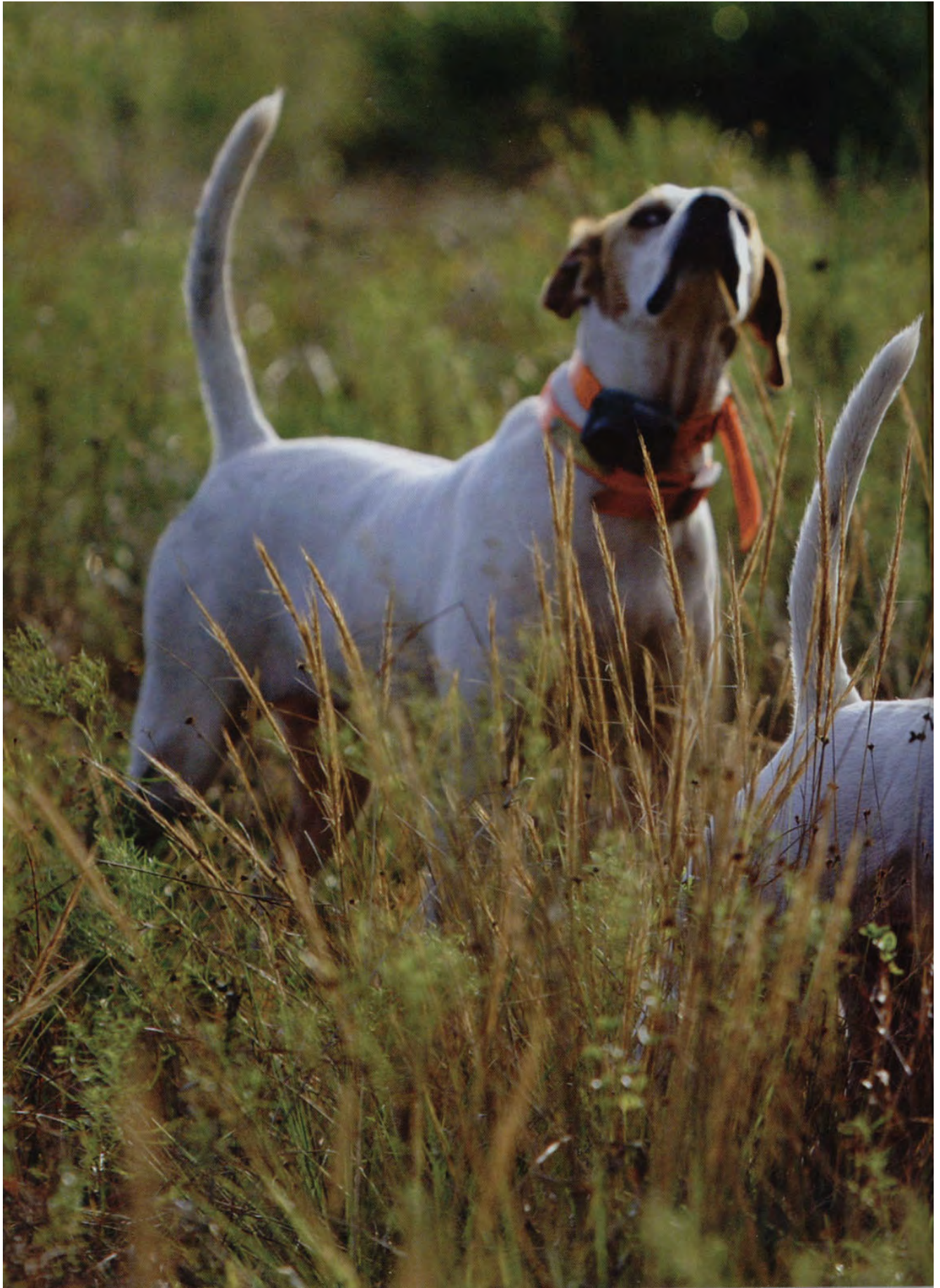


SPORTING CLASSICS

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Pine Creek Shoot A'Round

*The author partners with Hall of Famer Nick Price at a shooting
retreat with all the attributes of a great golf club.*

by John Steinbreder • Photography by Denver Bryan



The gunshots throw me off a bit.

After all, I am in Florida, and the only sounds I usually hear during visits to the Sunshine State are those of waves breaking onto sugar-sand beaches and titanium drivers crushing urethane-covered golf balls.

But the reports of shotguns are unmistakable. A quick pair, followed almost immediately by two more. I pour myself a cup of coffee and walk out to the porch of the three-bedroom cabin. A small herd of white-tailed deer ambles by in the distance, skirting a grove of loblolly pines that rise across the field before me. Half-a-dozen silky white ibis coast overhead, and I listen to a pheasant cackle in the distance. Then, there are more blasts.

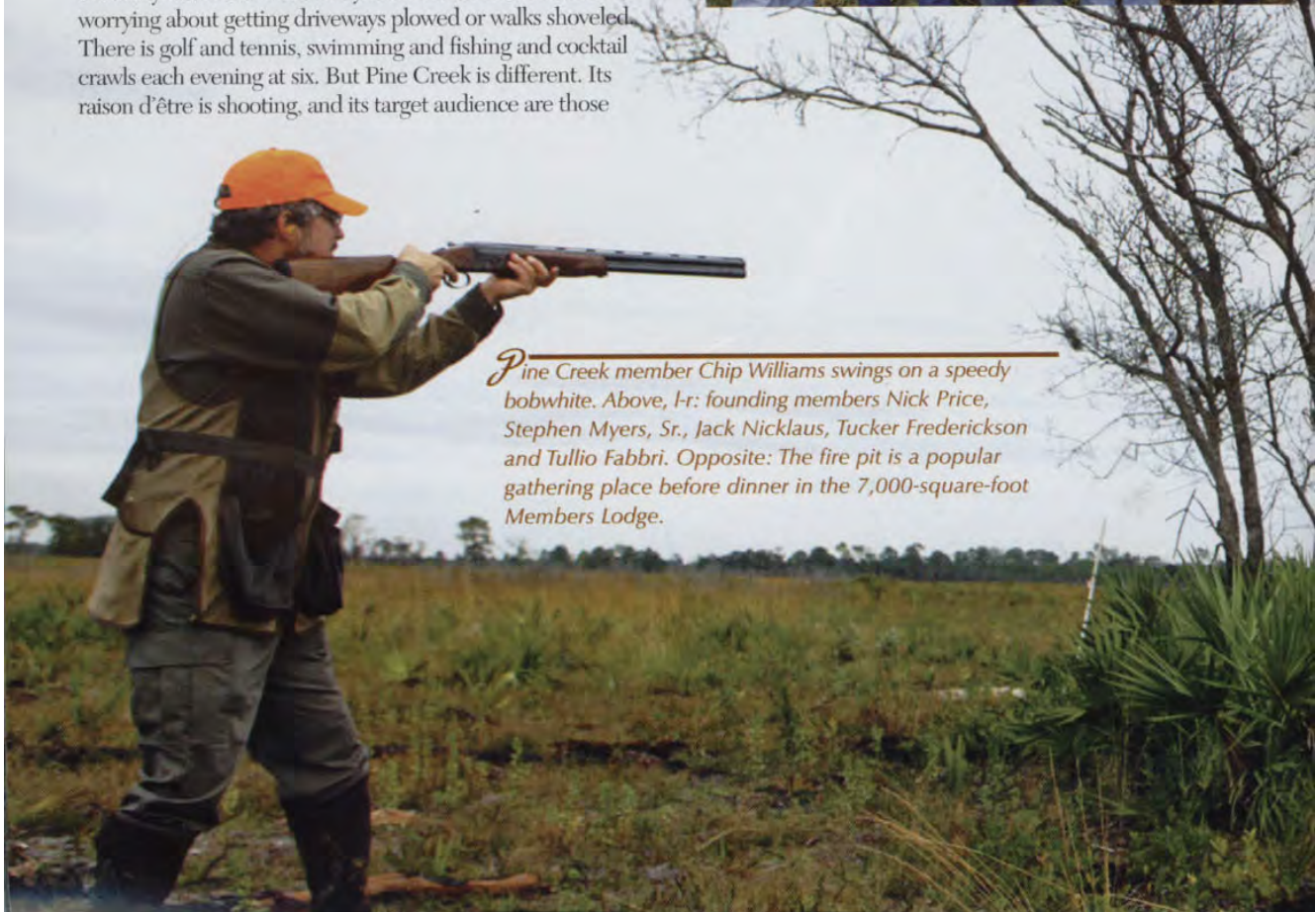
"Someone's shooting," I say out loud. Then I smile, knowing I'll be doing a bit of that myself today. In fact, shooting is the only thing on my agenda during this trip. And it's pretty much the only recreation at this luxurious retreat.

Founded in 2008, Pine Creek Sporting Club is located just outside rural Okeechobee, where pastureland for dairy farms and cattle ranches stretches in all directions, the monotonous expanses broken only by oak hammocks and cypress stands.

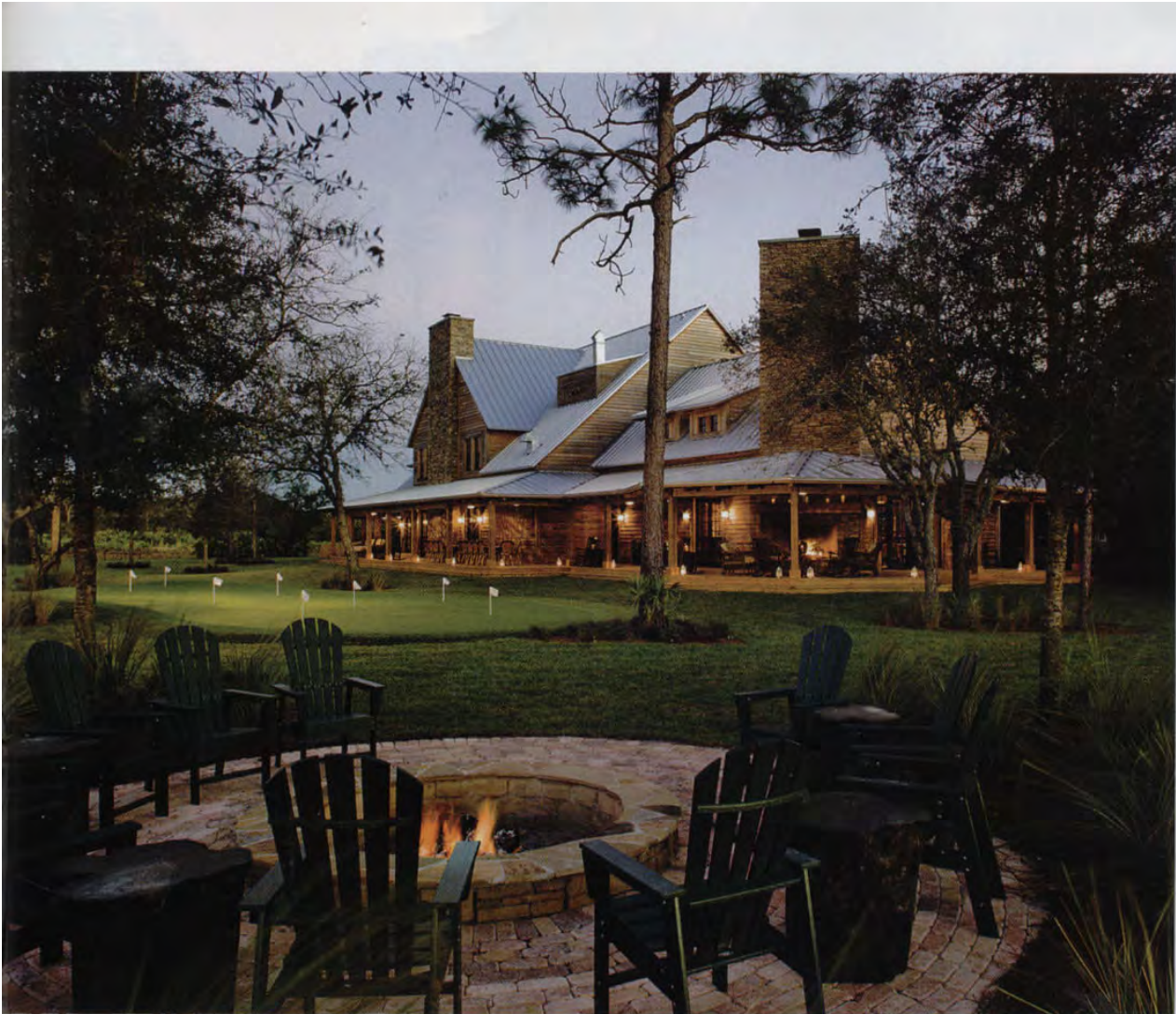
Most clubs I know in Florida are formed around the game of golf, especially those as close as this one is to Palm Beach, only 70 miles away. They are places where escapees from the chilly north can while away their winter months without worrying about getting driveways plowed or walks shoveled. There is golf and tennis, swimming and fishing and cocktail crawls each evening at six. But Pine Creek is different. Its raison d'être is shooting, and its target audience are those

outdoors-minded snowbirds who may have second homes in Florida, but no homes where they are able to sate their passions for covey flushes and sporting clays. And its mission is to provide a ranch lifestyle to those folks in a club-like setting.

Now, I am a fanatical golfer, and there is no place I'd rather be most winter months than on a course somewhere warm, keeping my game honed and myself out of the frigid cold. But it takes only a day at Pine Creek to demonstrate that the sporting club concept created here by cable

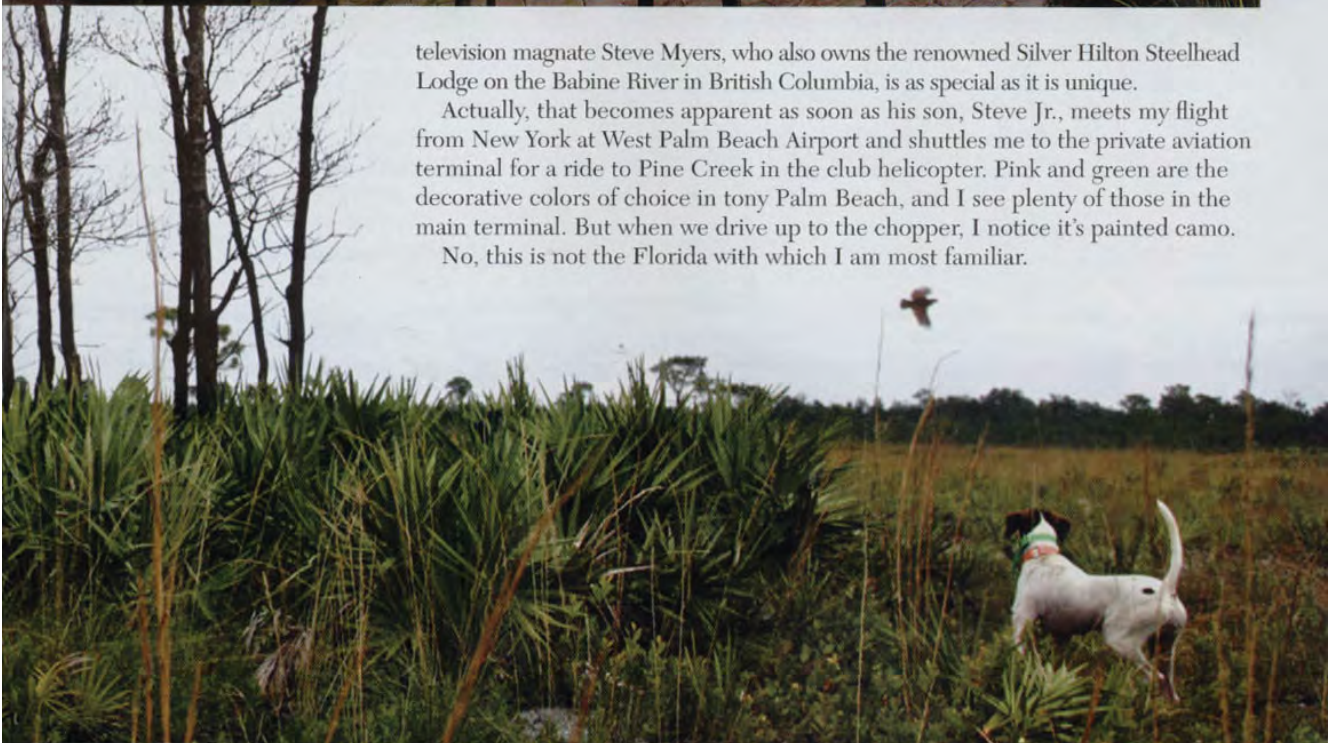


Pine Creek member Chip Williams swings on a speedy bobwhite. Above, l-r: founding members Nick Price, Stephen Myers, Sr., Jack Nicklaus, Tucker Frederickson and Tullio Fabbri. Opposite: The fire pit is a popular gathering place before dinner in the 7,000-square-foot Members Lodge.



television magnate Steve Myers, who also owns the renowned Silver Hilton Steelhead Lodge on the Babine River in British Columbia, is as special as it is unique.

Actually, that becomes apparent as soon as his son, Steve Jr., meets my flight from New York at West Palm Beach Airport and shuttles me to the private aviation terminal for a ride to Pine Creek in the club helicopter. Pink and green are the decorative colors of choice in tony Palm Beach, and I see plenty of those in the main terminal. But when we drive up to the chopper, I notice it's painted camo. No, this is not the Florida with which I am most familiar.





I feel that even more strongly when I finish my coffee on the porch of my cabin that first morning and head to the clubhouse for a breakfast of pepper bacon and eggs freshly gathered from the chickens that wander the grounds. There is no walking to the first tee on this journey, however. Instead, I go straight to the five-stand facility for some mid-morning shooting, starting at station three.

One on side of me is Nick Price, the Hall-of-Fame golfer who lives in Hobe Sound just an hour's drive away. And on the other is Tucker Frederickson, the real estate developer and former No. 1 draft pick of the New York Giants who resides just down the road from Price. Both are founding members of Pine Creek, along with Jack Nicklaus, Tullio Fabbri and principal owner Stephen Myers, Sr.

We start working off the five-stand menu, rotating among the eight stations. Frederickson chides Price for missing a rabbit that hops excessively high on one throw and then piles it on when the golfing great whiffs on a left-to-right. They both heckle me as I lose a target among the pines in the background and fan on a bird going away. In time, I get into a groove, and so does Price, who suddenly rips six targets in a row.

"My shooting is like my golf," says the South African native. "Very streaky."

I keep barking, "Pull!" until I realize I have run through two boxes of shells. I look over at Nick and see that he's out, too. But there is no way we're putting the guns away.

"Let's get more ammo and shoot some trap," he says.

That's the beauty of Pine Creek. And the idea behind it.

"Steve Myers and I own a ranch not far from here called the Flying G, and it was a great place to hunt and do as little or as much shooting as you wanted," Frederickson says. "The only problem was, it was only Steve and myself so if we wanted company, we had to bring people with us. So, we thought of putting something together like a golf community, only with hunting and shooting as the primary focus, where you'd have other people around you who shared the same interests."

In essence, Myers and his cohorts strove to create a spot for high-net-worth individuals with a love for shooting and hunting who truly wanted to get away from it all — but without having to get very far away at all. They wanted a place that felt like Old Florida, wild and undeveloped, where the recreational culture revolved around the outdoors — and where members could teach their grandchildren how to handle a .410, for example, hunt bobwhites with their friends behind some of the club's champion pointers or try to bag the wary Osceola turkeys and feral hogs that roam the woods and fields nearby.

"I wanted a place in Florida where I could really be in the outdoors," says member Erich Boehm, who visits Pine Creek from his winter home in West Palm Beach. "For my wife Nancy and I to buy a ranch on our own would be prohibitively expensive. And we would go crazy being there by ourselves. Here, we get the best of both worlds."

Adds Tim Williams, a former cable television executive who lives most of the year in Boca Raton, Florida: "I like that I can get to the outdoors without having to travel very far, and that everything is taken care of when I am here. It's casual. Everybody is wearing bluejeans. Everybody is carrying a gun."



Pine Creek members can build a home on any of the nearly two-dozen, 40-acre ranch lots available for purchase, or buy one of the 23 two- and three-bedroom cabins on the property. And they are able to do it without all the hassle and cost that comes with owning an individual spread, because they're able to share the so-called common areas, where much of the recreation at Pine Creek takes place. Operating expenses are covered for the most part by dues payments from the members, which will probably peak at 75, and by fees for extras, ranging from food and beverage purchases to the staging of private shoots.

Service at Pine Creek is a key consideration, and the club does everything from stocking refrigerators to chopping and stacking firewood for members before they actually arrive. It will even arrange for Christian Watson, Pine Creek's chef, to come to their residences to cook for them.

Nick Price isn't worried about anyone cooking for us as we leave the five-stand. But we do need someone to pull as we head to the trapfield, so we recruit club manager Jeff Butz. The game is P-I-G, and we play it with Frederickson and Steve Jr. The idea is to each shoot twice at a clay target, one after the other down the line. If you missed your shot while the guy standing next to you makes his, you get a letter. Once you have all three, spelling PIG, you're out.

I like the game right away. Not only for the competition, but also for the bantering that comes before and after each shot. The guys unleash any number of verbal barbs whenever we miss a shot, and they hoot when one is made, especially when that comes after someone else's miss. It gets a little rowdier as the game goes on, reminding me of the different games my friends and I play during our weekend rounds of golf. Allegiances change with each shot, and no one is immune from abuse.

Once we declare a winner (Steve Jr.), Nick and I head to the sporting clays field, talking along the way about how he got into shooting.

"Though I was born in South Africa, I grew up in what is now Zimbabwe, and a lot of my friends lived on farms," Price says. "So I spent a lot of time shooting guineafowl and francolin. Just for fun, and for the pot, too. Years later, in the late 1990s when I was not playing as much on the regular PGA Tour, I attended a driven shoot for ducks and pheasant in England. That really got me into bird hunting, and I started going as often as possible, and wherever the birds were flying. Duck and quail in Georgia, dove in Colombia. I just fell in love with it all."

Price's enthusiasm for shooting is very apparent as he and I sample a couple of the sporting clay stations. "This is my favorite," he says at one. "Let me pull a few for you." He tells a few jokes, mostly of the unprintable variety, and then we move to the next station. "It's like hitting balls on the driving range," Price says. "And now, it is time to go onto the course."



The course, in this case, is actually a quail field. Or more accurately, several quail fields arrayed among the 1,100 acres Pine Creek has set aside for hunting bobwhites. Nick and I hop onto a buggy with Tucker and Steve Jr. as well as guide Bill Thacker and six of his dogs, and start motoring down a dirt road, past stands of palmettos and sable pines as well as stretches of brown sage and blue chalky grass, with food plots of milo and sorghum scattered in between. I hear a strange bird call and look to the west to see a pair of sandhill cranes slowly crossing the sky. Then the buggy stops, and I start thinking of a much smaller, and much faster-flying bird.

Thacker has told me all about the quail hunting operation during the buggy ride. In essence, the club is resurrecting what had once been a very productive bobwhite plantation before it fell into disuse.

"We are doing all we can for our quail," he says. "We burn the fields every spring and work hard to provide good cover for the birds and easy walking for our hunters at the same time. Right now, we have 75 callback boxes as well as water and feed around each one, to nurture the birds and to build good coveys. We are looking to create those big bird flushes."

To be fair, Pine Creek cannot hope to sustain wild bird hunting on a property this size. So, it spends a lot of time "populating" its land with birds and working to establish a superior put-and-take situation.

"We start in September, and by the end of the season we will have put out some 25,000 birds," Thacker says. "They come from a game farm in North Carolina, and they're raised in the dark so they do not have human contact. We try to help them adapt out here as best we can, and we only put out birds every ten days or so. Most of the quail we'll see today have been out in the wild for a while."

Thacker stops talking when it comes time to stop the buggy, and Nick and I step down, following a pair of pointers as they nimbly quarter through the brush. It isn't long before they lock up, and as I creep into position to the left of the lead dog, I hear what had to be a substantial number of birds tweeting – and a few scampering away. Thacker slashes the ground with a leather strap, and about 30 bobwhites burst from the ground, darting off in groups of sixes and sevens. Nick pulls down a nice double, while I manage to fell the first bird I swing on.

Tucker and Steve Jr. applaud, derisively I am sure, from the buggy 100 yards behind us. There are some questions as to why we don't have four birds in our bag.

But Thacker is pleased. "Good start," he says, stuffing the dead quail in his vest. "Let's move on."

For the next couple of hours we rotate dogs and hunters as we look hard for birds. There were plenty of covey flushes, lots of challenging targets and some pretty good shooting, too. The highlight for me was a covey of about two-dozen birds that exploded from cover and veered in different directions. Nick and I each doubled,

and we high-fived after that feat, like golfers in a best-ball match who have just won an important hole.

By sunset we are back at the clubhouse, sipping drinks around a fire roaring in an outside pit and nibbling bits of pan-fried quail and fresh-grilled shrimp. It's a hunter's 19th hole, a place to review the shots of the day and savor the friendships built in the outdoors.

Nick and Tucker keep ribbing each other about targets – live or otherwise – they both missed. There was some animated discussion about Tucker using a .410 as opposed to Nick's 28-gauge, and what impact that might have had on their individual performances. And we talk about doing it all again the following day.

My right cheek feels a bit tender from all the shooting, and so does my right shoulder. But I can only smile as I listen to the back-and-forth and nurse a supple Cote du Rhone. The founding members at Pine Creek wanted to create a sporting retreat with all the ambient attributes of a great golf club. And at this moment I cannot help but think they've gotten it just right. 🦋



IF YOU WANT TO GO

Pine Creek boasts a 7,000-square foot lodge, with four guest rooms, as well as 40-acre ranch lots, ranging in price from \$800,000 to \$1.2 million. In addition, it offers two- and three-bedroom cabins in a 52-acre village area, with prices starting at \$595,000. Shooting is the primary recreation, and there is an abundance of cover set aside for quail hunting, but also championship sporting clays as well as trap, five-stand and a quail-flush course. Pine Creek stages pheasant tower shoots several times a year and operates a pistol and rifle range. Hunts for deer, feral hog and turkey can be arranged on and off property, and Pine Creek can organize a variety of other activities, from airboat rides and gator hunts to deep-sea fishing. Hiking and riding trails are also available.

Other amenities include charter use of the club's Bell 407 helicopter, which makes getting to and from the club almost as fun as the hunts there. And Chef Christian Watson prepares every meal like a five-star treat, especially when they're served in the treehouse dining room Myers had built in a live oak hammock using Seminole Indian techniques.

For more information call (561) 346-9365, or visit www.pinecreeksportingclub.com.

