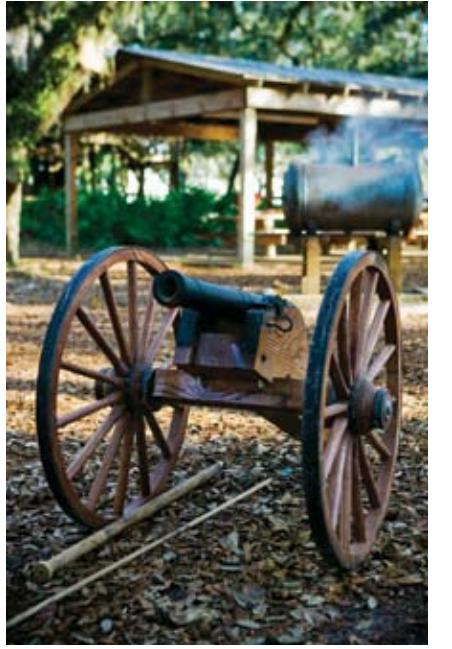
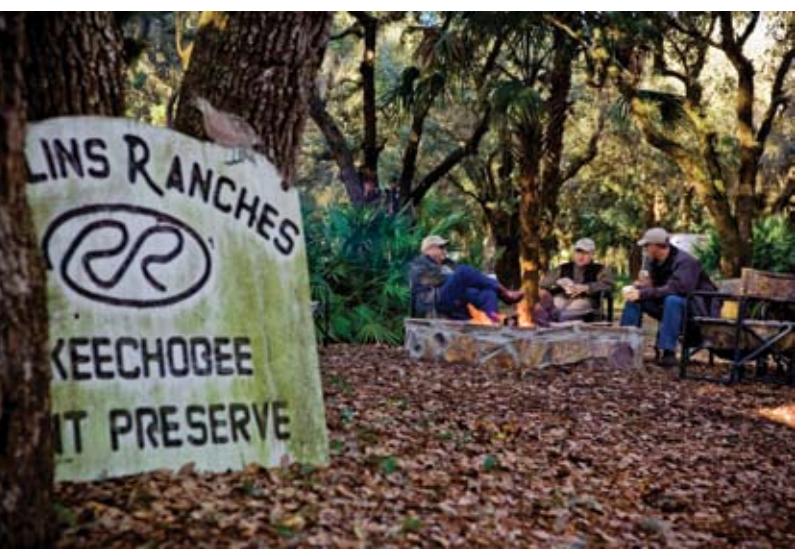


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In Good Taste
The Food & Wine Issue

FEATURING PINE CREEK SPORTING CLUB



Down to EARTH

Friends and family gather at Pine Creek Sporting Club for a traditional hunt.

BY LOLA THÉLIN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY SIG BOKALDERS

No one wears tweed jackets, velvet hats or cream breeches at the newly created Pine Creek Sporting Club in Okeechobee, but despite the lack of customary hunting attire, the club is deeply rooted in the sport's most important attributes—camaraderie and respect for tradition.

On this particular Saturday in December, the temperature is a cool 40 degrees. The air is crisp with late autumn smells, and the ground covered in the morning dew. At seven in the morning, the fire pit is already crackling to keep guests warm. This is the ideal weather for an early morning wing shoot. Inside the manager's ranch, a chef is preparing light morning snacks, and the pot of fresh brewed coffee is kept full.

A steady stream of vehicles is heard on the gravel road leading to the main ranch, and Pine Creek mastermind Stephen Myers is on hand to welcome his guests.

"It's not just the shooting," says Myers, a Palm Beach resident and cofounder and chairman of New Jersey-based U.S. Cable Group. "It's the whole experience of getting out there and getting in those beautiful live oak hammocks and cypress heads and experiencing something that's so different than the day-to-day hustle and bustle of the city."

"There's an excitement in the air," adds Giana Allen, Myers' partner and creative director for Pine Creek. "In the morning, you get up early and the sun is rising. You can hear the dogs rustling." For Allen, who



A formal dining table is set on the second floor of the tree house. Opposite page (clockwise from top): A rosemary grilled quail prepared by Executive Chef Christopher Collier. Early risers sit around the fire pit for warmth. Pine Creek mastermind Stephen Myers and partner Giana Allen. The cannon is fired, marking the beginning of the day.



Clockwise from top: French roasted country ribs by Chef Collier; animal head shot glasses by Four Points Pewter; the three-story oak tree house; dining set featuring items from Mary Mahoney, Palm Beach, representative of what will be chosen for the lodge and available for personal ranches; Pickard's Lockhart Bird plate, Lappas' Tulip charger and Puiforcat's Cardinal flatware.



grew up hunting with her grandfather and father in upstate New York and New Hampshire, this is the ideal family environment. “Being out here brings you down to earth and back to basics. If it’s a family, it’s a tool to get them together. Friendships become much deeper when you are spending long hours with somebody and it’s not in a social meeting like a party.”

Pine Creek Sporting Club opened in November 2008 as an exclusive, members-only shooting club nestled on 2,400 acres in rural Okeechobee. The club also is a community with 22 40-acre lots available for ranch-style homes and 23 two- and three-bedroom cabins located on one 40-acre tract. This is Myers’ second club. The first is Silver Hilton Steelhead Lodge in British Columbia, which he bought in 1998. The fishing facility is one of the top lodges in the world, and Pine Creek members receive special guest privileges there. He also owns several ranches, including a nearby cattle ranch with Pine Creek founding member Tucker Frederickson.

Back at the manager’s ranch, the sun’s rays are beginning to pierce through the oak branches. It’s time to head out for the morning’s high tower shoot featuring a pheasant and pigeon release. Property manager Jeff Budz recites the safety rules, reminds everyone to take precautions and assigns each member to a blind location. Traditionally, pheasant shooting is experienced with drivers and beaters—people with dogs who push pheasants out of the field in the direction of the shooters. Since Florida is flat, pheasants are released from an 80-foot tower that is located in the middle of a field with wooden blinds circling the tower. Shooters are positioned behind the blinds, waiting for a pheasant to fly nearby.

“As I’ve gotten older, I’ve found myself rooting for the birds,” says Frederickson. “Some of them you’ve got to hit, but I’m mainly rooting for them.” Frederickson, who once played for the New York Giants, is one of the five founding members along with Myers, golf legend Jack Nicklaus, Italian gun maker Tullio Fabbri and golfer



Clockwise from top:
Chef Collier's handmade
chocolate torte; Arte
Italica candle holders,
Varga martini glasses,
Four Points Pewter shot
glasses, Vagabond butter
dish and tray, and Ercuis
martini shaker; raspberry
chocolate cheesecake;
Vagabond steer butter dish
and Queen Lace Crystal
wine glasses.
Opposite page: Key lime
seared jumbo gulf shrimp.

Nick Price. Each founder has a profound respect for the outdoors and many of them, as well as many members, grew up hunting or shooting quail. Pine Creek is a gentle reminder of their youth and a way to relax and reconnect with friends and family.

"It's wonderful. Even though we have different occupations and different political opinions, we can all brag about what we shot or commiserate about what we didn't shoot," explains Bill Koch, who lives in Palm Beach and frequents Pine Creek. "I love to share [the outdoors] with my kids and friends. That's one of the reasons I come out here."

Both Koch and Desmond Keogh, an annual member, have brought their young sons to experience the outdoors. Keogh, a Palm Beach

resident and owner of Haifa General, has fond memories of growing up on a dairy farm in Ireland and wishes the same experience for his boys, ages 8, 7 and 5, and even for his 2-year-old daughter. "We had sheep and lamb. It was a necessity to have guns and know how to use them," says Keogh, who owns a ranch in Loxahatchee. "We don't have that here but I would still like my kids to understand the outdoor world. It's a bit of a challenge for me raising kids on Palm Beach because it's so far removed from where I grew up in rural Ireland."

Winner of the America's Cup yacht race in 1992, Koch, who owns a ranch in Colorado, says the camaraderie has helped him bond with his sons, William, 11, and Liam, 12. "I've brought them





here because it's a great father-and-son experience," he explains. "Sometimes it's hard to find things that the adults and the kids want to do together. They really want to do this."

After the morning shoot, guests are escorted on ATVs back to the main ranch, where lunch is served. A favorite dining spot at the club, the tree house is quickly filled up. Built into a live oak tree using Seminole Indian techniques, the chickee structure has a thatched roof and three stories. The downstairs serves as an

Desmond Keogh practices his aim from the five-stand. Stephen Myers and Bill Koch discuss the day's events. Opposite page (clockwise from top): An 80-foot tower featuring pheasant. Dog handler Bill Thacker commands his dog. Guests listen to the safety rules. Children practice their archery skills. Founding member Tucker Frederickson looks on. Annual member Jay Cochran, wife Diahann and son Rafe leaving Pine Creek.



outdoor bar and lounge, upstairs is dining and the third level is a cocktail area. On this day, Allen has transformed the upstairs into a formal dining setting with elegant silverware and tableware alluding to the beauty of the great outdoors.

The key to Pine Creek's success is Myers' eye for detail. After years of hosting friends at their Flying G ranch, Myers and Allen realized many people were intrigued by the ranch lifestyle but not by the responsibilities. They created a concept where families could purchase a lot to build a home within a sporting club, similar to a golf community. Homeowners and cabin owners would pay an annual membership fee, which entitles them to an ownership stake and use of amenities including quail fields, a five-stand facility, horse trails and a field house, which sits on three acres and houses every type of sports equipment desired, and much more. The concept also includes a luxury and convenience unheard of before Pine Creek. "We do everything for you," says Myers.

Before the owners' arrival a concierge stocks their refrigerator. The firewood already is chopped. The dogs are prepared for a quail hunt. At the equestrian center, horses are prepared for a trail ride. The 7,000-square-foot clubhouse, which is scheduled to open in September, offers spa services, a library, a pool and a porch overlooking the lake. Executive Chef Christopher Collier, who currently cooks in the manager's ranch, will prepare meals daily upon request of each individual customer in the clubhouse. A club membership sans home ownership also is available.

Myers says he has brought back a way of life that many fear is disappearing.



**Stephen Myers aims at a quail.
Dogs head out into the quail
fields to find a covey.**



"When I grew up in Palm Beach, you could go out, right off of PGA Boulevard, and go quail hunting," says annual member Jay Cochran, who also is a Palm Beach resident and professional racecar driver. "It's all gone. It's all golf courses now."

The property adheres to conservation practices, with 50 percent of Pine Creek under protection and accessible only by foot. "This property encompasses a huge amount of wetlands, all of which are protected," says Myers. "We have a responsibility under our environmental research permit to protect these areas." This means no hunting, vehicle traffic or built structures, and involves the removal of toxic plants and weeds.

Myers also makes sure that no game bird goes to waste. Once the bird is stripped down, it either is prepared at the clubhouse or members can take them with them. Any excess game goes to a correctional facility or a needy cause.

John Reynolds, a ranch owner who serves on the membership committee, describes Pine Creek as a family legacy. "This is like old Florida. This type of property is disappearing, so it's like saving something for [the next] generation," says the Palm Beach resident and real estate developer. "People look at this place and say the time you spend out here is quality."

It is nearing dusk, but Myers, Allen, Reynolds and Keogh are not ready to retire. They climb aboard a custom hunting truck with an observation deck and head back out. Quail hunting features two shooters, a dog handler and trained Labradors, English Setters and English and German Pointers. Myers and Allen are up first. "Watching the dogs is the greatest thing," says Allen. "When a dog gets locked on a bird and a smell, he freezes [with] his tail up and head down. Then the labs come up behind him and sniff the birds out. It's quiet and then there's a burst of birds that come up. There's an excitement in the air." ♦

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