

Looking at Manhattan: The 16th at Bayonne Golf Club



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The dynamic 16th hole at Bayonne Golf Club grew literally out of the Hudson River. Eric Bergstol, the owner and founder of Empire Golf who designed the Bayonne course, explains that the 16th green was created from dredge material brought by barges from the New York Harbor. After importing the fill used to build the golf course, the area where barges docked became the 16th green complex, the rear tee for the 17th hole and the marina where members and guests arrive on ferries from Manhattan.

The par-4 16th, called “Heaven’s Gate,” is a dogleg right of substantial length—424, 453 or 486 yards, depending on the tee position. “The intent was to create a strong, challenging golf hole and have it feel like it went right into the harbor, right into the Hudson River, which is exactly what it does,” Bergstol notes. “My goal was to capture the vistas, so the tee box is one of the highest locations on the golf course, which gives you 360-degree views of the entire New York Metropolitan area looking over to Newark, to Staten Island and Brooklyn. It’s a grand, very spectacular, one-of-a-kind hole. Very few golf holes that I know of are starting with your tee shot going toward Manhattan by way of the Statue of Liberty. It’s a grand tee shot, and it’s a championship-size hole.”

From the elevated tee, Bergstol points out, “It’s a driver hole—all you can hit. You really want to get it down the fairway as far as you can. The landing area is very large. You want to keep it as close to the right side of the hole as possible to shorten the distance. There are bunkers protecting the right side. There’s also a native-grass area, some dunes and a fall-off.” Landing the drive on the left side is a safer option but results in a longer approach to what becomes an island-like green from that angle.

The green, dunes and approach area cover about two acres. “Any errant shots can give you a lot of problems,” Bergstol says. “The green is typical of what we try to do—make it large enough to accept various shots with some significant undulations. We want players to have an opportunity to hit the green. There’s enough challenge in the golf hole with the distance, visibility, the strategy of where to place the ball, and as we often get in Bayonne, various winds. The hole is always playing differently.”

On top of all the demands placed on golfers by the design of Bayonne’s 16th, they have to remember to keep their mind on the hole and not on the spectacular scenery all around it.

— Fred Behringer 