

Make Par Not War

John Ashworth brings the Zen to golf apparel.

BY JEANNE FERRIS



Some people think, “Golf is a good walk spoiled.” John Feinstein borrowed this famous assessment of the game by Mark Twain as a title for his book regarding an inside look at the life of a pro golfer. In it, Feinstein wrote about his days and nights as an insider of the PGA tour with some of the world’s greatest golfers. Pro golfers like Davis Love III, Curtis Strange, Nick Price, Fred Couples and many others.

Escondido native and golf apparel tycoon, John Ashworth, is an internationally renowned designer and founder of Ashworth, Inc. and Fidra brands. Ashworth prefers a good walk to the fast competitive, corporate pace of the retail world. In fact, Linksoul has a company policy called MGF, which means MANDATORY GOLF FRIDAY. At a minimum one is required to hit a bucket of balls, putt and or, play nine holes. Often it is 18 holes.

“It’s so therapeutic on many levels. I think it should be a Federal Law,” said Ashworth. “Never [use] a cart, golf is for walking.” This policy certainly ensures the company motto: make par, not war.

Linksoul is a little over a year old. It’s a new brand and a new company with Ashworth heading it as the lead designer. He describes it “as more of a philosophy than a brand.” Explaining the mission statement is classic Ashworth: “reconnecting people to the art and soul of the game.” Famous for his understated and sophisticated designs, the new Ashworth collaborates with the literati, artisans and like-minded-souls --- this includes friends and immediate family members like his brother, Hank and his nephew, Geoff Cunningham, a gifted artist as well.



The Linksoul collection combines pale shades of blue and white and in fact, “their color palette is borrowed from the traditional Japanese color theory where the colors have a direct relation to nature,” said Rebecca Bray, a Linksoul fashion designer and friend.

Polo shirts, shorts, featherweight jackets and sweaters are displayed on headless free forms hanging on wooden stands. Luxury performance innosoft cotton (an Ashworth textile signature) with easy to care finishes and a “hybrid” boardshort/walkshort of 100 percent polyester is also featured.

The Linksoul Club, formerly known as Pima Direct, LLC and an operational partner, offers a brighter color palette and uses more traditional golf fabrics such as Supima 60’s double mercerized cotton knits. Also available in the tech category, a 100 percent bamboo charcoal infused polyester plus a sumptuous selection of Cashmere and Merino wool sweaters. The vintage Ashworth fashion signature reigns still today: golf-inspired lifestyle sportswear, blending the modern with classic. On every collar, a label with hand stitching in cursive Latin below the company name: *tempus fugit*. Translation: time flies.

Captured time is evident in the sepia-toned artwork of golfers (some are nostalgic works of art by Cunningham) which are displayed along with golf collectibles of hickory stick and American persimmon all contrasting sharply yet showcased by the spare and modern interior of the Oceanside store, which fronts “the Lab”. A 5,000 square foot storefront, design center, work space, art gallery are all rolled under one roof---which is in keeping with the linked souls philosophy.





“Everything we do here is to promote the game,” said Ashworth. “The roots of the game influences everything.”

Going back in time to 1987, Gerald Montiel and John Ashworth took an idea and launched Charter Golf, Inc. The idea was actually an observance of how uncomfortable golf clothes felt and the lack of style. Montiel raised the funds for this idea and Ashworth began designing clothes with soft collars and a relaxed look. This proved to be a successful niche and in 1994, the name was changed and formalized to Ashworth, Inc.

However, in 1997, after Montiel had taken the company public under the symbol CGOL, and with several corporate changes in hand and citing “philosophical differences”, Ashworth departed from Ashworth, Inc.

Moving the time machine forward to 2001, Ashworth stayed with Quicksilver for four years, and founded another brand of golf apparel called Fidra. He left after five years before Cleveland Golf acquired it. During this time, he helped to design a golf course in Scotland: the ultimate dream for a true links fan.

Ashworth returned to Ashworth, Inc. in 2007 for a brief stint. In 2008, Ashworth, Inc. became a wholly owned subsidiary of TaylorMade-Adidas Golf, which acquired it for \$72.8M, including \$46.3M of its debt.

Ashworth maintains his love of golf was the reason for his venture into fashion 25 years ago. His great grandfather worked in a knitting mill outside of Boston when he first came to America, so textiles was already in Ashworth’s blood. Textiles and golf has been a lifelong pursuit and a natural marriage. His desire to infuse his clothes with the spirit and camaraderie of the game remains timeless and indeed, an integral part of the present.

Ashworth’s biggest pet peeve on current golf course trends? White belts and neon. And gentlemen, baggy shirts don’t make you look thin. Fitted is better.

Sorry, ladies. As of right now, no feminine garments are in the works. You can always steal your husband or your boyfriend’s butter soft Linksoul Cashmere sweater to wear over leggings. For the future of Linksoul, Ashworth is interested in bringing back natural fabrics that have performance attributes. Wash and dry, but doesn’t shrink; no fading, no pilling is the goal. Shake and fold, no iron needed --- isn’t that what every global traveler wishes for?

Seems like Ashworth is still the man to fulfill these wishes.