

FAIRWAY FASHION

Pairing a penchant for fashion with a keen business mind, Elton Hill's Charlene Lewison is taking her company to the top.

A vegan for the last 30 years and an ex-model to boot, Charlene Lewison is the unexpectedly quirky and delightful director of Birdi Golf Apparel.

She's a keen businesswoman who was a finalist in South Africa's Most Influential Women in Business and Government 2011 Awards and has had the honour of having Birdi chosen as a Preferred Supplier of the PGA South Africa. Charlene lives in the 'leafy suburb' of Elton Hill. She loves it because it means she's close to her much-loved family, her friends and her work.

The last is important to her as, with a lot of family businesses, her work is far more than just a pay check to her. It's something she loves.

She's been the director of the company for 17 years and started working there when her dad, Len Lewison, was still at the helm.

She says, 'On some level I always knew I would work with my dad one day. After running a women's fashion boutique for four years, I decided to take a break. My dad and his partner asked me to assist them with merchandising and it wasn't long before I realised the brand's growth potential.

'I'm very proud and blessed to have had the opportunity of being guided by my intelligent and intuitive dad. He trained me in all aspects of the business so that he could hand over the marketing and merchandising reins with confidence.'

With a strong background in fashion, Charlene knows what it takes to run a clothing label. You can be sure that the golfers decked out in Birdi Apparel look good, with jewel colours for men and pastels for women - in everything from natty golf shirts to dapper shorts, skorts and capri pants. 'My parents both have a background in clothing. My mother has always owned boutiques and my father has always bought and sold fashion in volume,

so it was almost a given that I would have a career in the fashion and textile industries.'

The company sponsors pro golfer Jaco van Zyl, currently one of the top players on the European tour. They also sponsor professionals playing in the Sunshine Tour, like Grant Muller, Titch Moore, Omar Sandys and Solly Sepeng. Young and up coming talents who wear the label are Marco Loubser, Daniel Veretnik and Siphwe Siphayi.

Confident, talented and with an acute business mind, Charlene has this to say to young women who aspire to be in her position one day.

'Listen with clarity and tap into the power inside of you. Spread your wings, never be too scared to fly and remember to keep your work and play separate.' And make no mistake, while work is important to Charlene, so is play! 'I'm a true African bush baby,' she laughs. 'I love Pinda's Rock and Forest Lodges in Kwa Zulu Natal, The Waterberg, Knysna Forest and of course my favourite hang out is Muizenberg in the Cape. Internationally, I enjoy London for the arts and culture and Los Angeles for my incredible friends.'

Spread your wings, never be too scared to fly and remember to keep your work and play separate

She also likes to shop when she travels and naturally, with so much fashion in her life, she's developed her own sense of style. 'It's natural, organic, contemporary and edgy with a touch of sophistication,' she

says. She shops locally at Hyde Park Shopping Centre, with London being one of her favourite international shopping destinations.

If Charlene's not hard at work or out marketing her brand like mad, you'll find her practising her swing at Killarney or tucking into a fab vegan meal at Yamato, 'an authentic Japanese restaurant in Atholl' and Fresh Earth in Emmarentia. The Birdi range is available from several golf shops on top courses in Joburg, like the Killarney Golf Club. Visit www.birdigolf.co.za for a full list of stockists.

