

Fit to a T



Cathy Reynolds



Muffin Spencer-Devlin



Jan Stephenson



Janet Coles

Women golfers show another side of the athlete

When the Ladies Professional Golf Association inaugurated its annual *Fairway* magazine in 1976, a fashion feature using several LPGA players as models was included.

In the years since, the practice has continued, and the fashion section has become perhaps the most recognized and eagerly awaited aspect of the publication.

The setting for the fashion photography has varied, from the beach at Malibu to a fashion photographer's studio to the casinos of Las Vegas. All captured different moods and showed the models in a different light.

However, the location for the 1981 photo session was perhaps the most interesting — and certainly the most bizarre.

The setting was the Winchester Mystery House in San Jose, Calif., a cathedral for the spirits, built from the instructions of Sarah Winchester. She was the widow of Oliver Winchester, whose Repeating Arms Company produced the Winchester rifle, the "gun that won the West."

As *Fairway* explained it, Mrs. Winchester was grieved at the death of her infant daughter and, later, her husband, Oliver. She apparently was comforted little by the tremendous fortune she inherited. She reportedly sought the advice of a spiritualist, who told her there was a curse on her life because of all the lives that had fallen before "that blasphemous instrument of death," the Winchester rifle.

The spiritualist advised her to move away from her Connecticut home and build a house for herself and for the spirits of those who had been slain by the rifle.

"As long as you build," the spiritualist reportedly said, "you will live. Stop, and you will die."

In 1884, Mrs. Winchester moved to San Jose, purchased an eight-room farmhouse and hired 22 carpenters to start adding rooms. Today it is estimated the house contains 160 rooms. An exact count is said to be impossible because of the bizarre structural oddities: rooms inside

rooms, staircases leading nowhere, windows and doors that open onto a brick wall or dark void, secret passageways and trapdoors.

Into this unworidly Victorian setting, *Fairway* brought Los Angeles photographer Bob Gardner and LPGA players Janet Coles, Cathy Reynolds, Muffin Spencer-Devlin and Jan Stephenson to step back in time and re-create the atmosphere in which Sarah Winchester and her spiritual friends resided.

The first shot of the day was a group portrait in front of the house. According to Ernie Blitzler, art director for the project:

"Just as we were about to start shooting, the lawn sprinklers went off, scaring the pants off everyone. It was as if someone was saying, 'OK, go ahead and take your pictures, but stay on your toes and expect the unexpected.'"

All the models agreed the setting made it very easy to slip into the desired mood.

"Being in the Winchester house made it seem natural to play the role of a Victorian lady in lace," says Ms. Spencer-Devlin.

It was her first shooting for *Fairway*, although she did have prior modeling experience. In the summer of 1971, she was *Glamour* magazine's "college makeover" girl — "you know, when they take some frumpy girl just out of high school and overhaul her to make her look exotic," she says.

During a stint in college, Ms. Spencer-Devlin caught the acting bug, tried it as a career, and supplemented her income by doing catalog and runway modeling.

"But the day at the Winchester house was the most unusual I can remember: simply fantastic," she says. "Just being there in those wonderful old clothes and this incredible house, you really felt like you had gone back in time."

No one has appeared in more *Fairway* fashion shootings than Australian Ms. Stephenson. In fact, she has participated in all six.

"And every one has been different," she says. "One year on the beach with invigorating salty air, and last year the glamour of Las Vegas. But

this year, for some reason, was special.

"The house put us all in another world. As soon as you walked through the door, you could almost feel the spirits, and you spontaneously lowered your voice. The mood was almost melancholy, like Sarah Winchester was there looking on.

"And I loved the clothes. They were so delicate with all that lace. They really made you feel feminine and added to the authenticity. When I was driving home after the shooting, a fog was rolling in and I felt very strange all night. It took me a while to get back to the 1980s."

Like Ms. Spencer-Devlin, Ms. Reynolds was posing in the fashions for the first time.

"I'd seen *Fairway* over the years, of course, and thought the girls always looked terrific," she says. "I thought I'd love to do it some day and was thrilled to get the chance."

So thrilled, in fact, that she flew into San Jose from her home in Missouri, despite an infected foot that kept her from playing golf.

"To be honest, I almost backed out," she said. "But I'm glad I didn't. I was very down at the end of the year. I had played badly, had some personal problems, and was finishing out the season with an infected foot. But the photo session in San Jose really picked me up."

"And the exposure can't hurt, not just for me, but for the LPGA in general. Some people, including some of our players, are critical of this sort of thing, but I think it's healthy. There is nothing wrong with . . . showing that athletes have another side."

It wasn't until after the photo session that the models and crew involved learned something about a mirror in Mrs. Winchester's last bedroom. It was used in a shot of Ms. Coles. Legend has it this is the only mirror in the house in which anyone has claimed to have seen the ghost of Sarah Winchester — and that sightings there have been frequent.

"I wish I'd known at the time," says Ms. Coles. "I would have enjoyed meeting her."