

A Look at The Modern

Placket Shirt

by David Bebon

WHETHER IT'S A GOLF OUTING, the hospitality and service industry employee uniform piece or the customer appreciation gift, placket shirts offer a relatively inexpensive vehicle to promote an event or company. Although our industry has been seeing more woven shirt sales than knit shirts, the classic collar and placket knit shirt will always be a mainstay in the promotional channel.

The traditional polo shirt is presented in two major fabric types; pique and jersey knits. Jersey knit placket models were a natural progression in the promotional industry due to the dominance and importance of the T-shirt. These are defined as plain-stitch, knitted cloth usually made on a circular knit machine.

Pique knits, made ever popular by a small but distinct alligator emblem, are defined as medium-weight fabrics with a raised distinct design. Popular patterns for pique knits are variations of dobby weaves—baby pique, resulting in a small raised design; honeycomb pique, a hexagon-shaped stitch; and birdseye pique, a raised dobby design knitted with alternating colored yarns on the surface of the fabric.

On an extremely basic level, the placket category exists simplistically in one of these two distinct camps. But the mod-

ern placket has much more to offer on the planes of performance and sustainability.

Placketformance

As this segment evolves, there's an apparent technological boom in new fibers and fabrics that are delivering the performance story to the promotional channel. Let's take a look at a few of the major stories in today's collar and placket knit assortments.

On the top of the list are stain and soil finishes. There are two significant classifications of these—release and repel. Release treatments consist of chemicals and processes applied to yarns and fabric that allow stains that are introduced to the fabric to be easily removed through home laundering. Repellent treatments, on the other hand are chemicals and processes applied to fabrics which don't allow stains to reach the fabric. Most release and repellent finishes usually have a wash life attached to each process that indicates how many washes the garment can withstand before the release and/or repellent properties begin to degrade. Look for these designations from many major manufacturers in the industry

Wicking and moisture transfer is another hot topic in the realm of placket

shirts. These properties give fabric the ability to carry moisture from the inside of the fabric (next to the wearer's body) to the outside of the fabric where it will disperse and evaporate. This process can be achieved through two methods, mechanical or topical. In the case of mechanical methods, the yarn itself is of a special shaped polyester—CoolMax by Invista is one example—that transports the moisture away from the body to the outside of the fabric. The performance trait is an inherent quality of this type of moisture-management polo. The other method, topical treatment, involves the application of a chemical finish to the yarns and fabric that help facilitate the transfer of moisture. The major difference between the two is the longevity of the wicking property: Mechanical processes will usually last the entire life of the garment, where topical applications will eventually break down and degrade as they are washed and worn. There is a tremendous amount of new product offered to this industry in the moisture management category today.

Anti-microbial finishes are usually chemical applications to the fabric that allows the fabric and yarns to resist the effect of microbial secretions put off by the human body... otherwise known as odor. In addition to the chemical finishes that achieve this fresh result, there are a number of natural sustainable fibers, such as cocona (made from coconut shell charcoal ash) and bamboo, which naturally offer anti-microbial properties. The anti-microbial properties are found most often in the active and golf categories in today's plackets for obvious reasons.

Don't underestimate the importance of the performance phenomena in today's knit placket assortments. Although these great new technologies are being driven and brought to market by the big brands, it is very important to remember that these performance stories are now prevalent in the many wonderful "house" or industry brands available. In addition to providing an exciting twist on traditional plackets to share with clients, these performance features are easily understood as benefits by our customers.



David Bebon is the executive vice president of Capital Mercury Apparel and directs the Bill Blass Premium Brand and Arnold Palmer Golf lines of apparel. He is well known for sharing his extensive knowledge of apparel manufacturing, fabrications, sales, marketing and presentation techniques with promotional-products distributors at trade shows nationwide.

Earthly polos

Maybe it's because I was born in the 50s or because I have four children, but like most Americans, the sustainable movement has hit home with me. The carbon-footprint and renewable resource discussions in terms of products and garments are major topics in most industries today. And though I am of the opinion that the slow down in our economy may put this movement on the back burner, at least in the promotional-apparel realm, the eco-friendly message is very much alive, well and important today. Some of the more prevalent fabrics and yarns being utilized and featured for this movement include organic cotton, tencel, bamboo, transitional cotton, hemp, corn derivatives, PET (plastic soda bottles), pre- and post-consumer recycled and cocona.

Organic cotton is probably the most talked about fabric in this segment. Introduced and rampant in T-shirt assortments, the placket category is more and more available in organic fabrics. Organic cotton is grown in an ecologically-friendly manner, using less water and fertilizer without pesticides or chemical additives. An organic cotton crop must be grown in soil that has been chemical-free for at least three years, which helps to explain the higher price point.

Another bigger player in the field of sustainable apparel is Tencel. This is the brand name for Lyocell, a cellular-based fiber made from the wood pulp of the eucalyptus tree which grows quite prolifically and is easily replenished. The beauty of Tencel is its easy drape and the comfort factor. It is breathable, absorbent and takes dye stuffs quite well.

Another natural fiber that does well in the placket arena, bamboo comes from the tall woody grasses of bamboo plant grown in tropic and sub-tropic regions. It grows abundantly and offers wonderful anti-microbial and moisture management properties, plus it blends very well with cottons and rayons.

There are opportunities in any market for the placket shirt. Between the hospitality, service and uniform businesses waiting to buy their next shirt program, business is there for the taking. **PR**

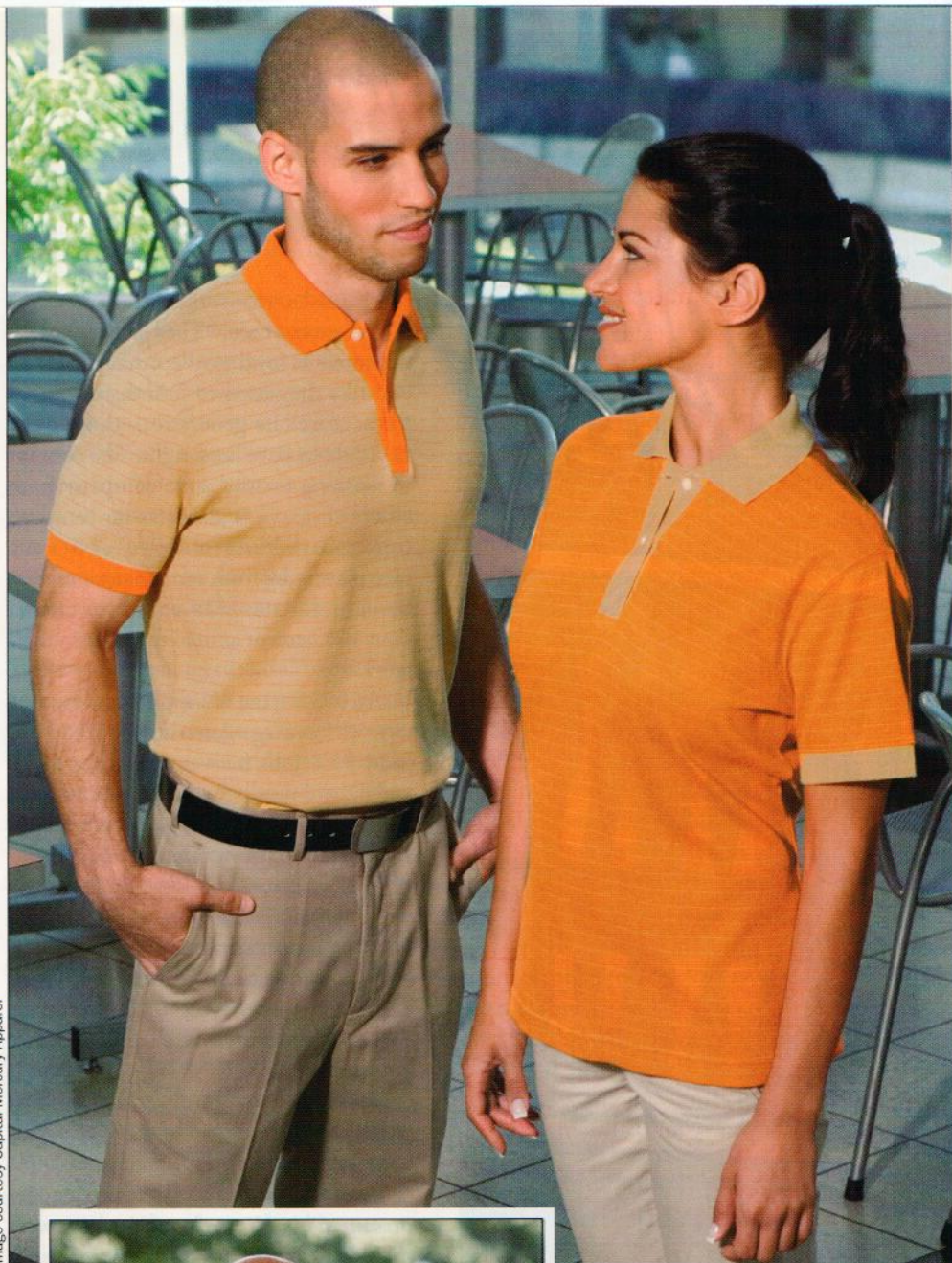


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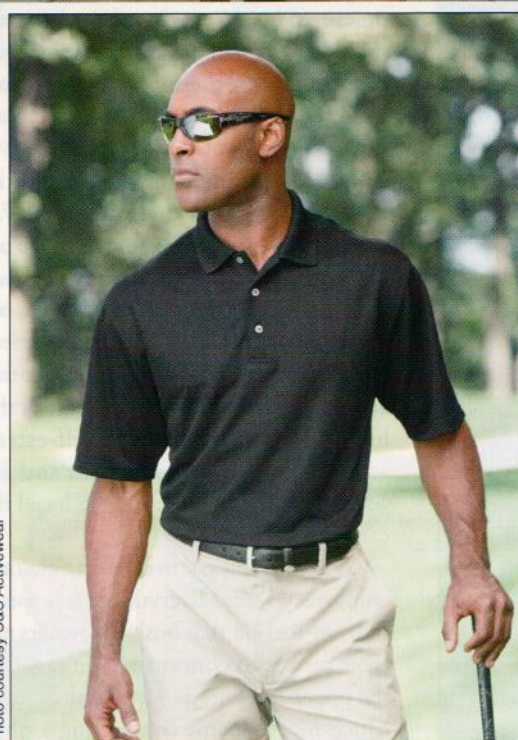


Photo courtesy S&S Activewear

The placket isn't the only thing reversed in these complementing men's and women's polos. These trendy styles lend themselves to programs that are going for some uniformity, but don't want that too matchy look.



Classic embroidery plays up the crisp look of this fashion-forward zip placket.

(Left) Performance factors are key in supplying plackets for golf and other athletics.

Image courtesy Signatures Custom Embroidery & Apparel