

WWD

Fashion. Beauty. Business.

Getting Better

Capri Holdings is showing signs of stabilizing – and said Jimmy Choo is not for sale.

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Bigger Beauty

E.l.f. is expanding its global footprint through Sephora in the Middle East and navigating tariffs.

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Chopard has joined the toy craze, linking with Dimoo of Pop Mart on a Qixi exclusive.

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AI in Style

The fashion and retail worlds – like every other industry – are rushing to incorporate artificial intelligence into their operations, creating employment worries, new working methods – and the potential for explosive growth. *For more, see pages 6 and 7.*

BUSINESS

Capri Shows Signs of Stabilization



A spring campaign image from Michael Kors.



John Idol



A look from the Jimmy Choo x Mytheresa capsule collection.

● Sales still declined, but less so than in the fourth quarter and the pending sale of Versace will give it a \$1.4 billion cash infusion.

BY EVAN CLARK

The declines are slowing at Capri Holdings — but there's still plenty of work to do before the Michael Kors and Jimmy Choo parent gets its stride back.

At least the company is on a better trajectory and chief executive officer John Idol was able to say that "trends improved sequentially" in the first quarter.

Investors liked what they saw and sent shares of the company up 14.5 percent to \$20.84 on Wednesday, leaving the company with a market capitalization of \$2.5 billion.

Capri is still a long way off from the \$57 per share Tapestry Inc. once agreed to pay for the company, but at least the firm is out of the doldrums it was in before antitrust regulators blocked the deal.

Now the company has a \$1.4 billion agreement to sell Versace to Prada, which will let Capri take a big bite out of its \$1.7 billion debt load and help fuel a branded turnaround.

"While still early, we are beginning to see signs that our strategies are working," Idol told analysts on a conference call. "Although the global macroeconomic environment remains dynamic, we are on track to stabilize our business this year

while establishing a strong foundation for a return to growth in fiscal '27."

And Idol maintained that the company — which took its name from the island of Capri, its three rock formation symbolically tied to the group's three founder-led brands — would carry on with the two brands.

"Jimmy Choo is not for sale," Idol said. "We do not have an intent on selling Jimmy Choo."

But the firm does have plans to ramp Michael Kors sales up to \$4 billion in annual revenues, from \$3 billion last year, and Jimmy Choo up to \$800 million from \$605 million "over time."

First the company has to get back to growth.

Capri's first-quarter net income rose to \$56 million from \$5 million a year earlier, with adjusted profits up to \$60 million from \$18 million. Adjusted earnings per share tallied 50 cents — much better than the 12 cents analysts had penciled in, according to Yahoo Finance.

Revenues for the three months ended June 28 slipped 6 percent to \$797 million.

That included results from Michael Kors, where sales were down 5.9 percent, and Jimmy Choo, which was off 6.4 percent. The Versace business was not included as it is being categorized as a discontinued operation.

Although the company hyped its sequential improvement — and Idol got plenty of kudos for it from analysts on the conference call — it was a relatively low bar

channel working, that's an area where you can really kind of solidify the rest of the company.

"We moved very quickly last October, November around the full price," the CEO said. "It was making sure that we got different product to the floor more quickly. We took a very focused approach to our strategic pricing architecture and that is absolutely paying off."

The brand is also going to start selling some of its full-price looks in its outlet channel with a program called Icons, which mirrors what other brands have done.

Capri also plans to spend \$350 million on store renovations over the next three years and to start to see what Idol said would be "very nice returns on the \$100-plus million that we spent over the last couple of years on our data analytics and replatforming our e-commerce areas."

While sources have said that Capri tried to sell Jimmy Choo this year and that there have been interested parties, including the brand's cofounder Tamara Mellon, Idol was clear he planned to hold onto the brand.

"We're excited about the growth opportunity that Jimmy Choo represents for the company," he said. "When we bought Jimmy Choo many years ago, one of the reasons we bought it is because it has an incredible name and history and heritage with the fashion luxury consumer. It's highly recognized. And it is in the shoe business, and we thought we would actually learn a lot from them, which we have."

"Over the years, I'm not sure this has been clear, but we've actually bought two manufacturing facilities," Idol said. "So we produce over 50 percent of our own product in-house. We are truly vertical with Jimmy Choo's two beautiful factories that we have in Italy....Store fleet is in excellent shape. We spent a lot of money over the years renovating the stores...and so the investments we've made, now we can leverage."

as fourth-quarter adjusted losses totaled \$581 million with a 15.4 percent decline in sales.

But there was some progress there to celebrate.

"In our retail channel, we are starting to see encouraging signs of momentum," Idol said, pointing to both better traffic trends in the full-price stores, more full-price sell throughs on new styles and a positive turn in the average unit retail prices.

"We view these as early but meaningful indicators that our strategies are gaining traction," Idol said.

Michael Kors has exited 30 percent of its U.S. department stores over the past year and is on track to close 75 underproductive stores of its own this year.

Idol said the Michael Kors full-price channel would be the first part of the brand to turn around.

"We're getting close to that right now," he said. "That's a very good indicator, as you know. If you've got the full-price

BUSINESS

Zalando Adjusts Full-year Guidance



Zalando's recently revealed, new packaging features a bolder logo.

● Despite a good first half, the German e-commerce giant said it won't see the growth of more than 10 percent that it had been expecting in the second six-month period.

BY CATHRIN SCHAER

BERLIN – Earlier this month German online retailing giant Zalando finalized its takeover of About You, another online shopping platform based out of Hamburg.

Although smaller than Zalando, About You is still one of the country's largest online fashion retailers, catering to a more youthful audience of around 13 million customers and bringing in annual revenue of about 2 billion euros.

"The successful completion of the transaction represents another significant milestone in our journey to build a pan-European ecosystem," Zalando co-chief executive officer Robert Gentz said.

Although About You will continue to operate independently, Gentz explained that Zalando will eventually delist the company, founded in 2014 and worth an estimated 1.13 billion euros, from the stock market and make it part of the Zalando group.

As a result of the merger being approved and finalized in July, Zalando adjusted its guidance for the full year.

The company had a positive second quarter, with group revenues rising 7.3 percent to 2.83 billion euros over the three-month period. That brings Zalando's group revenues for the year so far to 5.25 billion euros, an increase of 7.6 percent compared to the same period last year.

The company's gross merchandise value, or GMV, also rose 5 percent to 4.06 billion euros between April and June. GMV measures how much inventory the

platform has moved and is usually higher than company revenue.

"This is a strong result given the current geopolitical and macroeconomic environment," Gentz said at a press conference in Germany on Wednesday morning. "Despite operating in a volatile market, we are confident on delivering a strong second half [of the year]. The first half shows that even in this environment, there are pockets of growth and we are able to find them."

Zalando now expects revenues for the newly combined group to grow between 14 percent and 17 percent over the full year, and GMV to grow between 12 percent and 15 percent. The double-digit growth comes because of the addition of About You.

This should amount to revenues of 12.1 billion to 12.4 billion euros for the full year, and GMV between 17.2 billion and 17.6 billion euros.

However, Gentz continued, if one assumed About You had been part of the Zalando group last year as well, then 2025 guidance for revenue growth drops back to between 4 percent and 7 percent over the full year.

About You had only predicted "moderate growth" for itself this year. Previously, Zalando expected between 4 percent and 9 percent growth for its own operations.

The reason for the lower top-of-the-range in the new guidance is due mainly to economic uncertainties, a spokesperson told WWD in an statement.

Zalando now expects mid-single-digit growth for the entire group in the second half of the year. The original higher-end guidance of 9 percent growth "implied a growth acceleration of more than 10 percent in the second half of 2025," the spokesperson said, "which we consider less likely given the current

market environment and current trading dynamics."

Although uncertainty around U.S. tariffs is impacting other German brands that export to America, Zalando is a mostly European retailer and hasn't seen any immediate impact yet, the company's executives reported.

"In terms of first order effects of tariffs, there are no implications," they explained. "But obviously, second order effects might come in the longer term – for instance, on consumer sentiment."

Over the second quarter, Zalando's active customers increased by 6.1 percent to 52.9 million, orders at Zalando also grew 2.5 percent to 65 million, and the average value of each basket rose 1.2 percent to just over 61 euros per purchase.

As a result of Zalando's push to provide more entertaining content, people are also spending longer on the platform, Gentz pointed out.

This week, Zalando replaced its traditional homepage with an "AI-powered discovery feed" for consumers, he noted. The platform will be using advanced algorithms to make shopping "more immersive and more entertaining." The busy, scroll-able homepage on the Zalando mobile app includes personalized product recommendations, inspirational campaigns, creator content and social media.

"The feed updates regularly with fresh content, keeping customers engaged and coming back," Gentz said. "It also introduces new high impact formats for partners to reach audiences."

And as consumers interact with the new personalized pages, Zalando will also be harvesting their data. "[This] will allow us to leverage AI to drive up personalization and relevancy for users," Gentz said.

Last year Zalando launched what it calls its "ecosystem strategy." This basically

splits the business into consumer sales via the existing homepage and app, and business-to-business, or B2B, activities.

B2B allows retailers to sell via Zalando and to utilize the group's marketing, data and logistics services, among other things. For example, Zalando co-chief executive officer David Schroeder noted, U.K.-based retailer Next has been using Zalando's fulfillment services in Germany since February and will soon expand that to other European markets.

At the moment, the B2B side of the company is growing faster than the consumer one. Over the second quarter, B2B revenues grew 12.2 percent to total 262.4 million euros. Although Zalando has previously predicted B2B will become a multibillion-euro business for the group, that figure is currently still dwarfed by consumer revenues, which grew 6.8 percent and totaled 2.41 billion euros in the quarter.

In another bright spot on the balance sheet, Zalando's adjusted EBIT – earnings before interest and taxes and considered an important indicator of day-to-day profitability – rose 8.1 percent to 185.5 million euros. In recent years, Zalando worried investors with its EBIT numbers because of the costs involved with this kind of retailing, but the company seems to have resolved this issue for now.

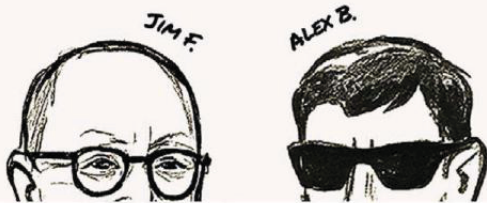
For the full year, Zalando expects adjusted EBIT to come in somewhere between 550 million and 600 million euros.

The second-quarter results were broadly in line with market expectations. Analysts from the likes of JP Morgan, Deutsche Bank and investment bank Jefferies expressed some concern about the second half of the year, though, noting more discounting, high inventories and lagging consumer sentiment. That kind of skepticism saw Zalando shares drop 10 percent in value in Wednesday trading in Germany.

VOICES

Michael Kors' 'Project Runway' Return, Luxury Sales' Decline and Marc Jacobs Up for Sale

A WWD PODCAST SAVAGE FASHION



● WWD's Jim Fallon and Alex Badia sit down with Michael Kors and discuss the news making waves across the industry.

BY KANIKA TALWAR

In the latest "Savage Fashion" podcast episode, WWD's chief content officer Jim Fallon and fashion director Alex Badia sat down with Michael Kors to discuss his fashion-obsessed childhood and ascent to the industry as well as his return to

"Project Runway," filmed at the renovated and recently reopened Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York.

"I always thought you had to be by the book," Kors told Fallon and Badia. "You go to FIT, you graduate, you become an assistant working for another designer and you learn the ropes. There was never a doubt that I was going to have the Michael Kors brand and it was going to be my own thing – but I didn't know it was going to happen so fast."

When Kors attended FIT in 1977, it was at the height of Studio 54. He walked into

the famous nightclub and immediately felt right at home. "I was seeing the designers I admired out and about and seeing the women they dressed: Halston, Calvin [Klein] or Steven Burrows. I knew this would be my world."

Kors shared that his brand's aesthetic is personal to who he is – "I'm a bit of a contradiction myself. I am super casual but I love luxury and I love indulgence. I'm either the life of the party or I'm a loner. I'm levelheaded but silly. I always responded to this idea that people have different sides to them."

While noting that fashion has not always been portrayed in the best light in film and on television, Kors was intrigued when he heard the premise of "Project Runway" – the show coincided with the launch of his more accessible Michael Kors line and pulled back the curtain on how Kors thinks and operates as a global brand. Kors will be returning this season as a guest judge.

"I might get in trouble for saying this but I think American designers need to show in New York," Kors said. "I think British designers need to show in London. I think Italian designers need to show in Italy. I think French designers need to show in Paris. There's strength in numbers; we are a community. I'd like to see everyone back together and showing in New York together – it makes it more powerful. America is a place of such great diversity and fashion week should be that."

Fallon and Badia also discussed the latest news, with the second-quarter earnings reporting from luxury groups largely in decline. Kering sales were down 25 percent in the first half, with consumers waiting for Demna's start at

Gucci in September with a see now, buy now strategy. LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton saw a 22 percent decline with Dior still in a transitional period with creative director Jonathan Anderson, but Louis Vuitton outperformed its other brands.

While LVMH firmly denied back in January that Marc Jacobs was on the selling block, WWD's deputy managing editor Evan Clark reported that various industry sources said that Authentic Brands Group, WHP Global and Bluestar Alliance are all in talks with LVMH and JP Morgan to potentially buy up the American brand – it's reportedly up for grabs for a cool \$1 billion.

"[The Marc Jacobs sale news] was a bit of a surprise," Fallon said. "We heard it early in the year but LVMH firmly denied it. Marc and others still own a stake in the brand. The most surprising thing is the people they're talking to – brand management firms. It's really then going to be more of a licensed business. What that means for Marc himself – given that he himself designs the most extravagant, imaginative and creative collections – remains to be seen."

And tariffs continue to be top of mind, as Wall Street continues to closely monitor the never-ending changes in rates and negotiations with the Trump administration.

"What will be interesting to see – which is yet to be determined – is what impact the tariffs are going to have. The wines and spirits division [at LVMH] is going to be hit pretty hard by the 15 percent tariffs. That's higher than what they're already paying. We're still figuring out what that means for the fashion division but it will also be higher for the beauty products," Fallon said.

BEAUTY

E.l.f. Beauty Expands Footprint With Sephora

● The beauty brand strengthens its retail presence with Sephora in the Middle East, Dollar General in the U.S. and rising international sales, while navigating tariffs.

BY KATHRYN HOPKINS

E.l.f. Beauty is working toward covering all the bases when it comes to retail.

After a successful launch in Sephora Mexico, the mass beauty brand will continue its expansion with Sephora in the Middle East, while it also finds success at Dollar General.

"We're the top three brand in Sephora Mexico, one of the best launches they've ever had. What they saw in Mexico was E.l.f. brought in a whole different consumer set – younger core enthusiasts – and I think they got excited about the data they saw. E.l.f. didn't cannibalize any other brands, but just brought incremental sales in," said Tarang Amin, chief executive officer of E.l.f. Beauty, in an interview as the company released first-quarter earnings.

The Middle East beauty scene is heating up as Ulta Beauty also prepares to launch there via a licensing agreement with Alshaya Group.

Amin also noted a wider deepening relationship with Sephora: Hailey Bieber's Rhode, which E.l.f. acquired earlier this year in a \$1 billion deal, will be rolling out at Sephora North America, while Naturium, another brand owned by E.l.f., is gearing up to enter Sephora Australia.

"It's a really great chapter for us to expand our partnership with Sephora," he said.

At the same time, the E.l.f. brand continues to roll out in all Dollar General stores across the U.S.

"We've seen incredible results. Our strategy with Dollar General was they serve the underserved consumer, with 80 percent of their stores in these rural areas. What we've seen so far is the people who are purchasing, 60 percent of them have never bought any cosmetics at Dollar General and then 53 percent are actually new to the E.l.f. brand. So it's a win-win, which is often the case for us with our retailers."

Net sales increased 9 percent to \$353.7 million in the first quarter ended June 30, primarily driven by strength in both the group's retailer and e-commerce channels, in the U.S. and internationally. Wall Street had pencilled in \$352 million.

Adjusted net income was \$51.3 million. Adjusted diluted earnings per share were 89 cents, above analyst expectations of 84 cents.

Due to the wide range of potential



E.l.f. Cosmetics Power Grip Primer

outcomes related to tariffs, E.l.f. said it is not providing a full year fiscal 2026 financial outlook. But it did reveal that for the first half, it expects net sales growth above the 9 percent level reported in the first quarter.

"We did provide a little bit of color, but we're really looking for resolution [with tariffs] before we're able to provide a full outlook," Amin said.

Around 75 percent of E.l.f. Beauty products are manufactured in China, down from 100 percent.

"We have a balanced plan. On Aug. 1, we did take our prices up \$1 across our portfolio. We communicated that to our community. The community response was overwhelmingly positive in terms of our transparency. We are continuing to optimize our supply chain, less to do with tariffs and more to do with a rapidly growing global business, and then we continue to diversify the business," he said. "Our international expansion helps us a lot where it's not subject to the level of tariffs."

EXCLUSIVE

Regenerative Fund Opens New Partnership Tiers to Fashion Brands

● The Kering- and Inditex-backed fund also crossed the 1 million hectare milestone as it expanded its projects to 13 countries, as revealed in its annual report issued Thursday.

BY RHONDA RICHFORD

PARIS — Conservation International's Regenerative Fund for Nature, the Kering- and Inditex-backed impact fund, has crossed the 1 million hectare milestone and is lowering the threshold for new participants to join the program, the group revealed in its latest report released Thursday.

The fund has now enrolled 1.1 million hectares of farmland into regenerative agriculture projects, including 845,000 hectares in direct projects and 267,000 hectares in indirect ones aimed at transforming the raw material supply chains for fashion.

"The Regenerative Fund for Nature has proven to be a successful example of an innovative financing mechanism and we hope other companies will join in order to help scale regenerative farming practices in luxury and fashion's supply chains," said Kering sustainability programs and innovation director Géraldine Vallejo.

Kering spearheaded the fund with Conservation International in 2021; Zara parent company Inditex joined in 2023.

Now active in eight countries with 13 projects spanning commodities like cotton, wool, leather and cashmere, the fund's outcomes range from healthier soils and restored ecosystems to improved livelihoods through premium pricing for producers.

Kering has already begun sourcing materials from these projects, with regenerative raw materials appearing in its collections across various brands.



To bring additional fashion brands on board, the fund introduced a new tiered partnership model, opening the door to a broader coalition of contributors.

The original partner level remains at a \$3 million commitment over three years, while the new principal tier requires a \$200,000 annual investment over the same period of time. Associate contributors will be reviewed on a case-by-case project basis to allow for more flexible engagement and financial commitments.

"We've seen excellent outcomes in farms and communities when investment and collaboration come together to support the transition to regenerative agriculture," Vallejo said. "These holistic practices not only benefit nature and create better long-term resiliency for companies but they are also feasible with the right support."

Jim Fitzpatrick, director of the Regenerative Fund for Nature, said: "Over 1 million hectares [are] being impacted

by investments from the fund. Each effort is centered around people and aims to instill regenerative agriculture practices designed to improve ecosystem health by delivering positive outcomes for people, nature and climate."

The fund has also established a new monitoring and evaluation framework, elevating water and climate as core performance principles, aligned with the Science-Based Targets Network, or SBTN, have benchmarks as the fund's projects grow in scope. The framework will establish clear baselines and success metrics to provide consistency and clarity on outcomes for participants and brands.

To that end, the fund introduced a first-of-its-kind impact allocation system, enabling brands to more accurately distinguish between direct and indirect benefits.

This development is particularly significant as the fashion industry continues to navigate increasingly rigorous

disclosure requirements, particularly in the European Union, alongside growing consumer pressure to back up sustainability claims with hard data.

Projects include a pilot in Argentina, where local herders have integrated new methods to protect their flocks from predators, allowing threatened species such as the Andean cat and guanaco to recover. Producers now earn a 15 percent price premium for their Wildlife Friendly-certified merino wool and mohair.

In the Mongolian steppe, nomadic communities used satellite data to better allocate the size of their herds ahead of winter.

In India, which now accounts for 22 percent of global cotton production, female smallholder cotton farmers were certified as organic producers with the support of training programs, local procurement hubs and secure pricing mechanisms, with a 10 percent price premium for their cotton.

Projects in Uganda focused on improving cotton yields, soil health and reducing human-wildlife conflict. Additional initiatives are underway in France, Pakistan, South Africa and Spain.

The fund also held its third annual Learning Exchange in Malargüe, Argentina, in October 2024, bringing together grantees, scientists and corporate leaders in the field to discuss challenges and propose new ideas, including establishing a working group examining cotton safeguards.

Looking ahead, the fund will refine its definitions and establish new criteria on ecosystem type, land classification and land transition phase. "This will enable more transparency, clarity and accuracy in our reporting, and how investments are driving impact," the group said.

"The goal is to reduce the environmental impact of the fashion sector while simultaneously giving back to nature and enhancing the livelihoods of the communities that supply these essential raw materials. The fund will continue to expand on and elevate our mission through scaled projects and partnerships within the fashion industry," it added.

BEAUTY

PR Agency Studio Beauty Acquires Wellness Firm Powers PR

● Powers PR founder Lana Powers joins as chief growth officer across categories.

BY EMILY BURNS

Studio Beauty, founded by Bex Meredith and Cindy Krupp, has acquired Powers PR for an undisclosed amount.

Through the acquisition, Powers PR will become the Powers Wellness Division, while founder Lana Powers will take on the role of chief growth officer working across categories. Studio Beauty and the Powers Wellness Division will operate as separate entities to ensure expertise in each category.

Powers PR has focused on the wellness category and currently oversees brands like Nutrafol, Chelsea Piers, Ro and Lindsay Arnold's The Movement Club. Previously, Powers also worked with Lauryn Bosstick's The Skinny Confidential, P.volve and Arrae. Studio Beauty has focused on beauty clients, working with brands like Dove, Hourglass Cosmetics, Naked Sundays and Jenna Lyons' Loveseen.

Meredith, Krupp and Powers were

connected by a mutual friend and consultant and immediately hit it off.

"Bex and I have often talked about, how do we continue to grow and expand Studio Beauty and keep our eyes open for not necessarily an acquisition, but opportunities," said Krupp, who maintains Studio Beauty's sister companies fashion and lifestyle agency Krupp Group and influencer agency 28 Row. "When Lana came into the picture, it was like all the pieces fell together. It felt like a no-brainer."

According to Meredith, since starting Studio Beauty, she and Krupp homed in on the idea of being specialists and focusing only on the beauty category. By bringing on Powers' expertise, Meredith said they are able to maintain that same specialist approach across wellness.

"You need to have that nuance of being experts in it, and this acquisition allows us to [do so]," said Krupp.

With Studio Beauty and its Powers Wellness Division, Krupp Group and 28 Row, the collective firm is able to provide expertise across categories including beauty, wellness, fashion, lifestyle and influencer.

This acquisition further reflects the

continued blurring of lines between beauty and wellness.

"Beauty and wellness are so beautifully intersected and as the wellness industry evolves, beauty is a part of it. As the beauty industry evolves, wellness has become such a big part of it," said Powers. "Now we have deep-rooted experts within beauty and wellness that we can seamlessly collaborate with to have stronger impact and stronger expertise across all of our clients."

Meredith added: "It's an interesting time for beauty because there is so much oversaturation and so, for Cindy and I, this wellness play is a strategic one. We know that it is beauty-adjacent. It remains in our powerhouse and our expertise, but it is indicative of where the beauty customer is going."

The trio emphasized that this acquisition is a response to the continued growth of the overall wellness market, which is estimated to reach \$9 trillion globally by 2028, according to the Global Wellness Institute.

"When I set out to start Powers and have this niche of wellness, it truly was a niche," said Powers. "As we've evolved over the

past handful of years, wellness is no longer a niche. Wellness is reshaping how people live, what they spend on and how they show up in the world."

Through the acquisition, the team said they are both poised to meet the needs of both clients and their consumers.

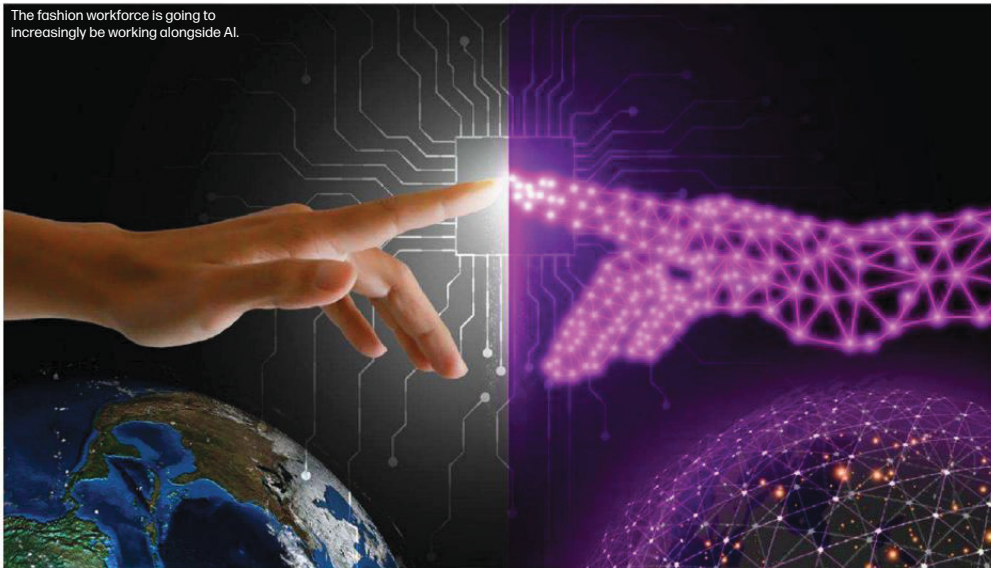
Meredith added: "We are now positioned in such a robust way, from a business perspective, of riding the industry waves...One key thing for us, personally and professionally, is being able to be there at every single touch point of the consumer through her day."



BUSINESS

An AI Workforce: Getting And Keeping a Job in Fashion

The fashion workforce is going to increasingly be working alongside AI.



● How the rise of artificial intelligence is changing work life in retail and fashion.

BY EVAN CLARK

Artificial intelligence isn't just the next big thing or a supercharged trend – it's everywhere all at once.

That includes in the apocalyptic dreams of those who see an evolutionary battle between man and machine, the utopian hopes of the glass-half-full crowd and, increasingly, the strategic plans of chief executive officers.

And how could it not? McKinsey & Co. recently estimated that generative AI will add \$150 billion to \$275 billion to fashion's operating profits by 2030.

Fashion has never been the most forward-leaning of industries when it comes to the latest tech trend, but that potential is hard to ignore.

For better or worse, AI has become almost unavoidable – and it seems set to pop up more often, in the design studio, the accounting department, the corner office and more.

CEOs are excited and so are some workers, even if there's plenty of anxiety to go around about what such a powerful new set of tools means for the future of their jobs and livelihoods.

And that's probably because, apocalyptic or not, the advent of AI is evolutionary in nature – the technology is changing fast. Brands, chief executive officers and workers are going to have to keep up and evolve as well, turning more toward what only people can do – for now at least.

"While AI is transforming how we produce, I think it hasn't yet proven that it can transform why we create something," said Martha Pease, former chief marketing officer and founder of Illustra. "In an industry built on emotion and identity and taste, that's still the most valuable kind of question in the room: Why is somebody going to be drawn to this particular aesthetic?"

"That whole aspect of applying creative judgment, whether it's strategic judgment or production and innovation judgment or general management judgment, there's

creativity involved in all of that," Pease said.

To understand how creativity is meeting the rising tide of technology, WWD interviewed CEOs, strategy consultants, a digital product creation expert, executive recruiters, an HR chief and the tech executives driving change through retail companies on AI.

What emerged was a kaleidoscopic picture of a future that is defined by, yes, disruptive change, but also opportunities to take a big step forward.

Many big names in fashion are in the glass-half-full crowd – and that might well be because the other side of the AI debate isn't about the glass being half empty but being poured out entirely and smashed on the floor.

Here's what the people who think there will be a future are thinking about AI – from how to get an AI fashion job to how the new technology is changing design, connecting with consumers and more.

The CEOs Jump In

Levi Strauss & Co. was early to start thinking about how AI would change its business and, in 2021, started to develop some internal talent with artificial intelligence and machine learning boot camps.

The idea was for employees who went through the program to take those skills back to other parts of the business, like retail.

And the AI wheels are still turning at Levi's.

"We're in the early stages here, but we're embracing it," said Michelle Gass, CEO of Levi's. "Whether it's using AI in design or using it in digital or using it in supply chain, in finance, there are different tools and capabilities that we're exploring, that we're experimenting with," she said.

That runs from taking on new challenges to trying to solve the age-old problem of sizing in fashion.

"We're a very size-intense business and having AI be helpful in ensuring that we have the right sizes for our fans is huge," Gass said.

Styling and store experience are also high on Gass' AI list.

"If you envision a day where you go into

a store and just in one device, any question that a consumer might have, kind of like ChatGPT or Claude or Perplexity or pick your favorite, we will have that version for Levi's," she said.

At Vans parent VF Corp., which is already in the midst of a major transformation and turnaround, CEO Bracken Darrell is leaning on his tech background as the former chief at Logitech and getting excited about AI.

"This can unlock more creativity, certainly more efficiency and more growth," Darrell said. "We're really trying to build a learning company where we're building academies along all of our functional excellence lines, like merchandising, design, etc. An academy company is a learning machine, and we want all these people in here learning all the time."

That learning is going to happen quickly.

"I fully expect that people's jobs are going to change a lot over the next year, much less five years," he said.

As optimistic as Darrell is, he's mindful of just how potent this new technology is.

"I have the same long-term questions that everybody else does," he said. "But I'm very excited for the next decade."

Darrell also said people have to, well, retain the ability to be mindful as the use of AI grows.

"It's important to keep exercising your brain," he said. "What we don't want to do is let a part of [your] brain go to sleep."

"Just because you have a calculator doesn't mean you shouldn't learn how to do math," he said. "We've got to keep doing that so that we stay facile and we can connect different ideas to each other."

Hooray for the Humanities

The rise of the internet, e-commerce, social media and the rest of it brought a very particular skill set to the fore. The people who could code and were willing to move fast and break things were the ones with all the heat, the big jobs and big inventions.

The tip of the AI talent pyramid is still in that mode, with the tech giants reportedly spending hundreds of millions of dollars as they staff up for the revolution.

But lower down the org chart, potential is growing for people who don't necessarily have the hard-core tech skills but are keen to engage with the new technology.

Roseann Lynch, chief people officer at Ralph Lauren Corp., said: "When we look for talent, we're continuing to look for storytellers, continuing to look for people who have intellectual curiosity and just a deep ability to probe and communicate as the purpose of the company is to inspire the dream of a better life through authenticity and timeless style."

"We're still looking for people who come as their authentic selves, have a story to tell about themselves, have a contribution to make in the organization that's inspired by creative thinking and how to create an experience for people, how to humanize an experience for people," she said.

Lynch said as she sees potential hires, she's looking for people with degrees in the humanities or liberal arts more so than a specialty in engineering.

"The days of these very specific skills as an area of primary focus are actually going to end," she said. "We're going to be thinking about people who are much more well-read."

Part of that is because interacting with generative AI programs is something like a never-ending game of "Jeopardy" where ChatGPT has all the answers, and you need to provide the questions.

"AI is only going to provide you the answers to the questions you know how to ask," Lynch said. "It's only going to be as good as the questions you ask it."

"In the old days, you would test a person's capabilities based on their absolute skills and qualifications to do a job, their ability, their capacity to take in information and utilize that information to do their job well," she said. "In today's landscape, it's more about knowing what questions to ask." ▶

AI is being used throughout fashion companies, from design to production to shipping.



The Right Prompt

"There definitely is a skill and a craft in prompting" an AI program, said J.J. Camara, Tapestry Inc.'s senior director of digital product creation, who's helping stitch together new processes behind the scenes at the Coach parent company.

"We've also identified training – training the model – as a role," Camara said. "My team are the trainers, and then all of our designers are the prompters."

And Camara's team brings a wide range of backgrounds to the effort.

"We have fashion designers, textile designers, game developers, product engineers," she said. "We have a multimedia expert and that is part of our secret sauce."

"No one has done this," Camara said. "We aren't learning this from anyone. We are learning it on our own. Often we'll have a challenge around a project that we're trying to execute, and the whole team will come together with their different expertise to crack the code and figure out how to develop it."

The technology just kind of finds its place in the work flow.

"So instead of sketching something on a cocktail napkin, [designers] are prompting it in AI and sending that quickly to me" to build out the idea digitally, she said.

In cases like that, the AI picture isn't perfect, but gives a sense of where the designer wants to go.

When Camara saw that, she thought, "Oh my god, I didn't even think about them using it as a communication tool to us."

It's a tool that the next generation is growing up with.

"Kids are doing AI every day," Camara said. "They already know. Some people who aren't early adopters of AI think that there is an issue with it, but it turns out a lot of these people early in their career, they're using it for 10 things a day."

How to Get an AI Job

There's more than enough angst to go around about what the rise of AI will do to the workforce – from the difficulties of training older workers to whether the new tech will lead to an imposition of the white collar world.

The truism that gets thrown around a lot is that it's not AI that's going to take your job, but a person using AI.

Given that the big tool everybody will use in five years probably hasn't been invented yet, how does one keep on working in fashion get an AI job?

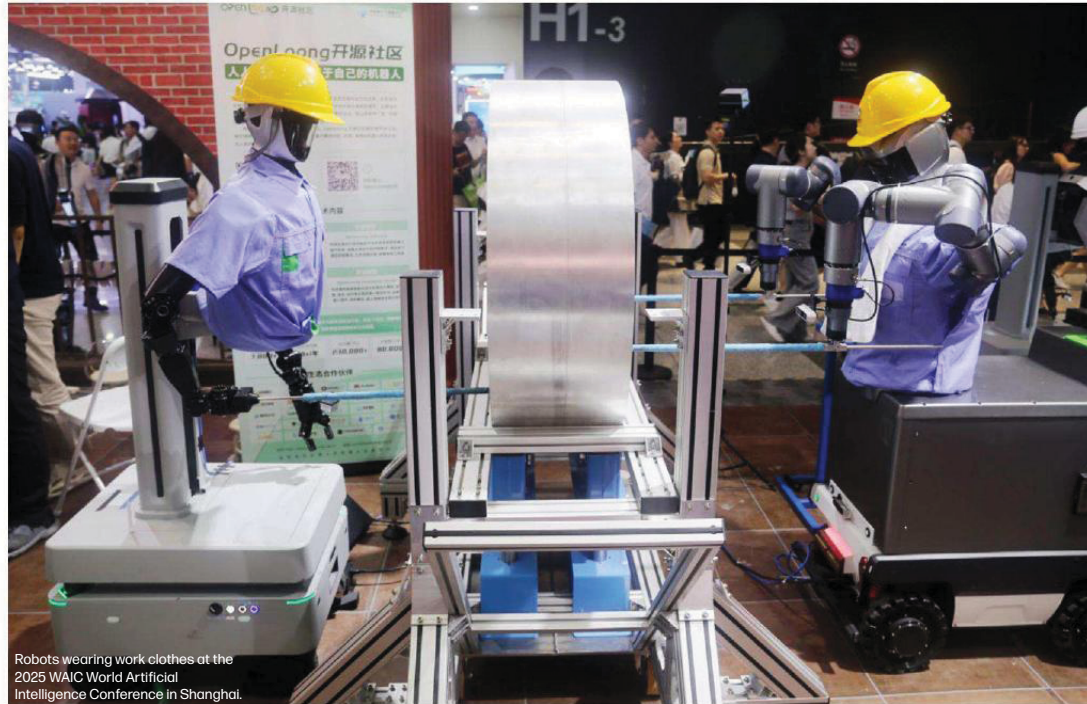
Tony Bacos, the Amazon fashion alum who is now chief product and technology officer at Stitch Fix Inc., advised that applicants need to "demonstrate curiosity."

"There is no shortage of free and really deep information [on AI] available, whether it's on YouTube or podcasts or blogs," Bacos said. "Are you curious and are you pursuing that and scratching that itch of curiosity by reading and watching things and experimenting and getting an OpenAI or a Gemini subscription and tinkering?"

"Do you understand what these things can do even if you're not necessarily understanding how they do it?" he said. "If we're looking for engineers to build and train these underlying foundational models, that's a very different skill set than looking for someone who's a marketing specialist or a product manager who doesn't necessarily need to know how the engine works."

Bacos said people need to go beyond just being able to type something into ChatGPT and understand and know how to use a "pipeline," automating certain elements while using AI.

"Oftentimes, you need to be able to build a pipeline that has various stages and steps that can take input beyond just a prompt that you type in. So really what it comes down to is people who have been



Robots wearing work clothes at the 2025 WAIC World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai.

"In the old days, you would test a person's capabilities based on their absolute skills and qualifications to do a job, their ability, their capacity to take in information and utilize that information to do their job well. In today's landscape, it's more about knowing what questions to ask."

ROSEANN LYNCH, RALPH LAUREN CORP.

curious enough and sort of self-starting enough to dive into that," he said.

While workers today with any tenure have grown used to a steady drum beat of technological change, the pace is only picking up and, unlike other much-hyped advances, it doesn't look like this one can be ignored.

"Remember NFTs and Web3, all those things that just weren't a thing? This is not that," said Lindsay Stevens, senior partner at executive search firm Kirk Palmer Associates. "This is such a thing that we can't ignore it. And those who do will fall behind and the executives who aren't embracing and encouraging it on the daily basis will be the businesses that fall short."

"I feel a lot of anxiety from my clients around it because they don't want to be left behind," Stevens said. "It is moving so quickly that it could be tomorrow that they lift their head up and are like, 'We didn't do it.' There has to be a strategy."

"Every single person at every single level of the company needs to be using it and working together on how they actually take whatever insight or output it gives you and how you decide to apply it across the business."

Zero Lines of Code

Even the biggest companies are pushing AI through all of their workforces.

Dave Glick, senior vice president of enterprise business services at Walmart, is responsible for "putting AI in the hands of every [corporate] associate every day."

That's a lot of hands as Walmart has a large corporate office and, overall, employs 1.6 million people in the U.S. alone.

Glick is also looking for new hires to be curious, adventurous and tenacious when it comes to using AI.

"What we see is the people who are really great at this go and say, 'AI, give me an answer to this.' And it gives them an answer and they say, 'oh, that's not

exactly what I wanted.' And they'll go back again and again. And the first time, it may take hours to get to where you need to be."

Everyone from associates to high-level tech types are being pushed to take that journey now.

"For the first two years of AI, the world is like, 'Oh no, we're scared.' And finally six months ago, we said, 'It's time,'" Glick said. "I asked my most senior engineers, the technical fellows, which are folks who have 20 years of experience, 'Go build something. I don't even care what it is. Go solve some problem using AI.' And they came back and said, 'This does more than I could ever have thought it would.'"

"This iterative process with pioneers and trailblazers, we're out there chopping through the jungle," he said. "They will come back and teach us lessons, but we want more. We don't want just the technical fellows. We want everybody chopping through that forest."

And the path is being made quickly.

For instance, sales development representatives at Walmart were spending a lot of time making powerpoint presentations. Glick sat an engineer down with one of them for a week and they built an AI tool that allows the salesperson to get a big head start by just putting in the name of a company and letting the machine work its magic.

"We'll build a PowerPoint deck to sell to them and build a narrative about the company, what they sell, how to contact them," he said. "All of these things that used to be a multi-hour process, we can now do in five minutes so we can have our people out talking to the customer."

It's a development process that looks very different than it would have not that long ago.

"Our best engineers have written zero lines of code in the last six months," Glick said.

The Economics of Using AI

That PowerPoint example from Walmart, which has been getting techier quickly, shows the potential to use the technology to save time. But it's the second part of that equation – freeing the salesperson to be out talking to customers – that Walmart is emphasizing.

Rebecca Homkes, a consultant and high-growth strategy specialist, said companies are going to be focusing more and more on that second part.

"If your key metrics are cost-saving and time-saving and personal productivity, you're behind. That's where the leading companies were three to four years ago," Homkes said. "Now we're looking for metrics like repurposed time. So, yes, you might've taken five hours out of a process, but it really doesn't matter unless you've repurposed that time to more value-creating activities."

And retailers are going to have to put that repurposed time to work because they aren't the only ones with AI.

"Your consumer is going to be asking, comparing and learning about you on their AI engine of choice," Homkes said. "Do you know how you show up there and what you need to optimize?"

Optimizing seems to be the word of the day – be it for consumers, companies or the workforce, which is in flux.

"The mainframe replaced a lot of roles, too, as did the internet, as did your mobile phone," Homkes said. "But companies now need [to consider] who's going to shape AI, who's going to govern AI? We need new roles and governance. There will be new roles created just as there's roles that are replaced. That goes back to repurposing."

So just what are employees going to do as AI steps in?

That might end up being the next most important question in a decade that's already seen a pandemic, a flare-up in racial tensions, political upheaval and war. ■

FASHION

Inside Shanghai Tang's Turnaround Story



A look from Shanghai Tang's fall 2025 collection.

Shanghai Tang's Ginger Flower fragrance range.



● Six years after acquiring Shanghai Tang – previously owned by Richemont – the firm's investors share plans for the niche luxury brand's future.

BY DENNIE HU

Shanghai Tang – the pioneering Hong Kong brand that first draped mandarin jackets on the shoulders of Kate Moss, Princess Diana and Gong Li – is finally entering its turnaround phase.

Founded by the late Sir David Tang, the flamboyant Hong Kong tastemaker, Shanghai Tang once fused Chinese tradition with Pop Art flair, becoming an in-the-know brand for globe-trotting elites in the '90s. But following Tang's death in 2017 and a rapid shuffle in ownership – from Richemont to a group of investors led by the Italian textile entrepreneur Alessandro Bastagli – the brand quickly lost its footing amid the evolving luxury landscape.

Six years ago, when Shanghai Tang was acquired by Lunar Capital – a Chinese consumer-focused buyout firm led by Derek Sulger and Jerry Mao – the new owners initiated what they called a “revolution.” Sulger and Mao dismantled the brand's fragmented supply chains in Hong Kong and Italy, relocated its headquarters to Shanghai, and set in motion a master plan to reinvent the niche legacy label as a modern lifestyle powerhouse.

“When we bought it, it was a very loved brand. There were so many things that could have been improved, but people loved it, and that's really what we bought. But what is now Shanghai

Tang, the brand, was just one small part of what we now consider Shanghai Tang, the group. It's a part of all things we are emphasizing, one of the most important parts being experiences,” Sulger said in an exclusive interview.

With a name closely associated with old-world glamour, Sulger is keen on building a lifestyle empire around the brand, just as he has with a host of other legacy names. Lunar Capital's portfolio includes UCCA Group, a fine art-powered retail, education and commercial content company, and Unmi Group, a constellation of fine dining restaurants that began with Da Vittorio Shanghai. Launched the same year the duo purchased Shanghai Tang, Unmi went on to become Louis Vuitton's main hospitality partner in China, running the luxury brand's Michelin-starred restaurant The Hall in Chengdu, as well as Le Café Louis Vuitton in Shanghai.

After enlisting Cui Dan, a former veteran editor at GQ China, and later Hu Chunhui, the doyenne of Wuhan's fashion retail scene, to help with branding and merchandising strategies, Sulger and Mao opted for a trend-driven product plan. Shanghai Tang products such as its Ginger Flower fragrance and the Five Element bracelets have become some of the brand's recent bestsellers.

“People are hanging these bracelets on their purses as to project good fengshui,” said Sulger, referring to the ancient Chinese wisdom of creating balance and harmony through spatial arrangements. “It's a functional product in that way. It's also experiential for us.”

Without a creative director at the helm,

the self-proclaimed “new founders” have taken a very hands-on approach to Shanghai Tang.

Every small detail matters. Sulger penned playful copy for the brand's Playmaker Polo, touting its soft mandarin collar as one that “brings good fengshui when closing deals, hitting the gym, dominating the court, or turning heads over coffee.” Meanwhile in Shanghai, Mao has been busy overseeing the newly established atelier, which counts around 20 skilled garment makers, driving collaborations, and outfitting a circle of friends that include Chinese artists, local entrepreneurs and art world patrons.

Despite an economic slowdown, the company saw its organic sales soar 60 percent last year. With 10 brick-and-mortar stores in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, Shanghai Tang recently expanded into hospitality with two cafés in Shanghai.

For Mao, Shanghai Tang's brand proposition is extremely exacting yet with an infinitely open-ended question: How can the brand define what Chinese lifestyle is today?

“It's a mood, an atmosphere,” Mao said. “It is not David Tang wearing a Tang suit and smoking a cigar anymore. We are keen on exploring ways to put Shanghai Tang in a larger context, perhaps it's under the context of the best museum in the

country, it's about finding the connection between Chinese style and Chinese art, we want to even open a Shanghai Tang hotel,” Mao said.

He was quick to point out Tang's deep influence in the contemporary Chinese world when he was alive, a storyline that often took a backseat to the bon vivant's colorful lifestyle and connections to British and Hong Kong elites.

Mao recounts how Tang was one of the earliest supporters of China's “85 New Wave” movement, which included the first crop of professional artists to graduate from the Central Academy of Fine Arts after the Cultural Revolution. “In fact, UCCA's founders didn't start collecting Chinese art until they met David Tang in Hong Kong,” Mao added.

“An art connoisseur and a tastemaker with real influence who could build a platform to celebrate his passions is a rarity in China today; that's what makes Shanghai Tang special,” Mao said. “Shanghai Tang is not a fashion business, it's a universe of Chinese lifestyles.”

For now, building the brand's universe means unexpected collaborations; its list of creative crossovers include the Chinese artist Xu Bing, the famed fashion photographer Chen Man, and Jacky Tsai, the Hong Kong artist.

Under its current company structure, Sulger and Mao own Shanghai Tang independently from Lunar's portfolio of companies. The new structure is meant to help define the future of the brand, which has plans to open a fashion and hospitality flagship in the Middle East and, further down the line, the Shanghai Tang hotel, which will be operated by its hospitality branch called Nocture.

“Just like the projects we are involved in with Louis Vuitton restaurants, where the products are directly integrated with some of the retail experiences, the revenue actually grows in parallel,” Sulger said.

A small luxury empire in the making, Sulger and Mao are confident that extending the brand's reach into hospitality – an aspirational category – will drive consumer interest.

“Whatever the challenges are, COVID-19, weak economy, bad stock market, the trends, the aspirations and the interests are very clear – people really want experiences, they do want a little bit of an escape, and they really want to sort of surround themselves with aesthetics and feel comfortable. So how you play the trends can become a little bit more interesting,” Sulger said.



Derek Sulger



Jerry Mao

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BUSINESS

Claire's Files for Bankruptcy in U.S. and Canada

● CEO Chris Cramer said in a statement that this decision was “difficult, but a necessary one.”

BY STEPHEN GARNER

Claire's is headed back to bankruptcy court.

On Wednesday, Claire's Holdings LLC and certain of its U.S. and Gibraltar-based subsidiaries (collectively Claire's U.S.), the operator of Claire's and Icing stores across the U.S., announced that it has commenced voluntary Chapter 11 proceedings in the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Delaware.

The accessories firm – which sells an assortment of jewelry, socks, slippers, beauty, hair accessories and home – said the move is to “to maximize the value of its business.”

What's more, the company's Canadian affiliate operating stores across Canada (Claire's Canada, and together with Claire's U.S.) also intends to commence proceedings in Canada under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice.

The company said that these proceedings will “enable Claire's to immediately commence the monetization process for its assets to maximize value for the business, while continuing an active and comprehensive review of strategic alternatives, including discussions with potential strategic partners that began prior to the filings.”

Chris Cramer, chief executive officer of Claire's, said in a statement that this decision was “difficult, but a necessary one.”

“Increased competition, consumer spending trends and the ongoing shift away from brick-and-mortar retail,

in combination with our current debt obligations and macroeconomic factors, necessitate this course of action for Claire's and its stakeholders,” Cramer said. “We remain in active discussions with potential strategic and financial partners and are committed to completing our review of strategic alternatives.”

Claire's noted that its retail stores in North America will remain open and continue to serve customers while the company “continues to explore all strategic alternatives.” Through the filing of customary “first day” motions with the U.S. Court and the Canadian Court, Claire's added that it “intends to uphold its commitments to customers, employees and partners, including continued payment of employee wages and benefits,” the company said.

“I'd like to express my gratitude for our employees, who have continued to work diligently in a constantly evolving consumer landscape to deliver amazing products and experiences for our customers,” Cramer added. “We remain committed to serving our customers and partnering with our vendors and landlords in other regions during this time.”

This isn't Claire's first time filing for bankruptcy. The company is owned by Elliott Management Corp. and Monarch Alternative Capital, who were part of the creditor group that took control of



A look at a Claire's store in a California shopping mall in the middle of the holiday shopping season on Dec. 11, 2024.

the retailer after it filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy court protection in March 2018. The bankruptcy helped Claire's eliminate \$1.9 billion of debt. The retailer exited bankruptcy proceedings seven months later. The tween retailer said in October 2018 that it gained \$575 million in new capital in its reorganization.

The retailer was once owned by the Schaefer family. It became a publicly traded firm in 2005 and was taken private in a \$3.1 billion leveraged buyout by Apollo Global Management in 2007.

In 2021 Claire's said it was planning an initial public offering again, but that plan was abandoned in 2023. In recent years, the girls' accessories chain has expanded its consumer reach through concessions, or shops-in-shop, in retailers that include Walmart Inc. and Macy's Inc.

But Claire's has been struggling for years. It faces challenges from other retailers that also cater to its customer base. Those include e-tailers such as Shein and Temu, who both offer a wider range of better quality merchandise at the same low price points.



EXCLUSIVE

Amelia Gray Features in Campaign for Stella McCartney Elyse Shoe Capsule

Here and left: Amelia Gray in the new Stella McCartney campaign for the Elyse.



● The limited-edition capsule includes mycelium-based alternatives to snakeskin and cruelty-free croc made with repurposed apple waste.

BY SAMANTHA CONTI

Stella McCartney has tapped Amelia Gray for a new campaign featuring the latest iteration of the Elyse, a vegan platform shoe with wavy treads that debuted at the brand's fall 2014 runway show.

The limited-edition capsule, which includes mycelium-based alternatives to snakeskin and cruelty-free croc made with repurposed apple waste, will be available at Stella McCartney boutiques worldwide and via stellamccartney.com from Thursday.

A new personalization service will also be available in-store and online. For a limited time, customers will be able to add brass initial charms, available at select Stella McCartney boutiques worldwide, to their shoes.

In the ads, Gray is wearing Stella McCartney tailored clothing, lingerie and Stellaware swimwear. The shoot is meant to highlight “the limitless versatility and day-to-night appeal,” of the Elyse.

The limited-edition shoes have been done in tonal gray and navy, with two standalone styles made from

mycelium-based python and apple-based crocodile vegan leather alternatives.

Over the years the distinctive style has become a celebrity favorite, and has been worn by Kendall Jenner, Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, Rihanna, Gigi Hadid, Oprah and Viola Davis, among others.

The Elyse rests on a sustainably sourced, FSC-certified wooden wedge and a saw-edged micro-sole. Each pair is handcrafted in Italy using 100 percent cruelty-free materials and is vegan down to the glue, according to the brand.

The brand touts the shoe as “comfortable, giving height, lengthening the legs and making a bold statement,” and says it's a blend of “masculine and feminine, classic and sporty.”

Gray has been on a footwear streak this summer, promoting Puma's spiky Mostro style in an “after dark” campaign in which she showcases a new yellow and black colorway. In that campaign, which broke in June, she wears the “Pelé Yellow” Mostro with red Puma socks, blue jeans and a Puma T-shirt.

Earlier this year, Gray appeared in the spring womenswear campaign for Givenchy. Echoing the spring's bright white runway, Gray wore designs from the penultimate Givenchy collection designed by former creative director Matthew M. Williams, who exited the brand on Jan. 1.

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ACCESSORIES

Chopard Teams Up With Dimoo for Qixi Exclusive

● The 288-piece collaboration available Friday spans three China-only versions of the Dimoo figurine sporting the jeweler's Ice Cube collection.

BY LILY TEMPLETON AND TIANWEI ZHANG

The latest celebrity Chopard is dressing for Qixi, considered China's Valentine's Day, is only 13 centimeters tall.

Dimoo, a starry-eyed character imagined by Chinese artist Ayan Deng and turned into figurines by China's Pop Mart, will be sporting the Swiss jeweler and watchmaker's Ice Cube designs in limited-edition versions released exclusively in China.

With this crossover collaboration, Chopard hopes to "offer a truly unique and fascinating experience — one that sparks imagination, inspiration and delightful surprise — while also resonating deeply with China's Gen Z and our clients," said Tasso von Berlepsch, managing director of Chopard China.

Two of the figurines come as a set paired with Ice Cube gold necklaces, featuring a line of Ice cube-inspired motifs half-set with diamonds.

Matching the gold hue of the jewels, the accompanying Dimoo comes draped in three rows of shining cubes nodding to the jeweler's design and has Chopard's curling C initial adorning his hair.

Available for preorder via the Swiss brand's official Tmall store, the 209 sets will go on sale from Friday for 25,199

renminbi, or around \$3,500 at current exchange rates.

A third figurine, a larger 29-centimeter model with a translucent head containing an icy cityscape, comes in a limited run of 79 pieces for clients who purchase items from Chopard's Ice Cube jewelry line at specific Chopard boutiques.

This is the latest hookup with luxury and fashion for Pop Mart, which is behind the viral Labubu doll seen on the likes of Blackpink's Lalisa Manobal, Rihanna, Dua Lipa and recently Marc Jacobs, as well as other intellectual properties such as Skullpanda, Molly and Crybaby.

It collaborated with Sacai x Seventeen for highly limited Labubu plush toys that fetched as much as \$31,250 each on Pharrell Williams' auction platform Joopier; Balmain for a large-scale Molly figurine in 2024, and teamed with Hong Kong-based jeweler Chow Sang Sang for solid gold jewelry. A Uniqlo hookup is dropping in the late summer.

The Chinese toy and collectible company has also expanded its categories with the launch of its Popop jewelry line, which opened its first store in Shanghai in June.

Founded in 2010 by Wang Ning, Pop Mart kickstarted its global expansion following a blockbuster \$676 million listing in Hong Kong in 2020. It has since opened stores in the U.S., the U.K., Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, New Zealand, Australia, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines, and has rolled out blind box



The "Chaleur de lumière" and "Lumière du silence" figurines from the Chopard and Dimoo World collaborations.

vending machines in these regions.

On Thursday, it is opening its largest store yet, an expansive two-floor unit clocking in at 8,200 square feet that includes a café, in Bangkok's Iconsiam luxury mall.

Riding the dopamine effect, which crystallized around affordable but hard-to-get small treats and dovetails with the end of the decade-long global luxury boom, has turbocharged Pop Mart's 2024 performance.

Its full-year revenue hit 13.04 billion renminbi, a 106.9 percent jump. Net profit in the period soared 185.9 percent to 3.4 billion renminbi. Overseas revenue surged 375.2 percent to 5.07 billion renminbi, accounting for 38.9 percent of total revenue. Revenue from Labubu and the Monsters series climbed 726.6 percent year-over-year, becoming the company's top-performing intellectual property.

And it is continuing to soar. According

to data from Charm.io, the fluffy monster toy has helped Pop Mart's sales on TikTok Shop U.S. grow from \$429,259 in May 2024 to \$4.8 million in May 2025.

Partial sales numbers from June indicate that the Chinese toy company has reached a new high on the platform, selling more than \$5.5 million last month — a 1,828 percent increase from June 2024 to June 2025.

The data also reveals that Pop Mart's revenue from the TikTok Shop U.S. in 2025 has already surpassed its total for the entire 2024 year by more than four times, with sales of \$21.3 million on the platform so far in 2025.

On the stock market, the Hong Kong-listed Pop Mart has also soared. Its share price has more than quadrupled in the past year, with a current market capitalization of more than 366 billion Hong Kong dollars, or \$46.63 billion, more than double that of Kering.

FASHION

Designer's Death in the Hamptons Under Investigation



Montauk Yacht Club and Resort in Montauk, N.Y.

● Martha Nolan O'Slatarra, 33, was found unresponsive on a boat docked at the Montauk Yacht Club.

BY ROSEMARY FEITELBERG

An investigation into the cause of death of an Irish-born, New York-based designer is underway in the Hamptons.

Martha Nolan O'Slatarra, the founder of the little-known lifestyle brand East x East was found around midnight on Monday on a boat docked at the Montauk Yacht Club. The East Hampton Town Police was called to the scene following a 911 call from a man, who reported a woman unconscious, according to the Suffolk County Police Department. Good Samaritans attempted to perform CPR on O'Slatarra, according to officials.

The 33-year-old Manhattan resident was pronounced dead on the boat by first responders. A preliminary investigation and exam were "inconclusive," regarding

the case of death. Investigators are asking that anyone with information about the incident contact Suffolk County Police Department's homicide squad detectives at 631-852-6392.

An autopsy is being conducted by the Suffolk County Medical Examiner's office. A media request to that office was unreturned Wednesday.

In addition to heading up her fashion line, O'Slatarra acted as director of operations at K4 Capital Management, according to her LinkedIn page. A media request to K4 Capital Management did not acknowledge a request for comment. She was also identified as chief executive officer of Brand Growth Consultants.

O'Slatarra attended the Institute of Education in Dublin and the University College Dublin. The Institute of Education's commercial director David Ball said he was unable to assist with a media request, and he declined to confirm whether she attended or graduated from the school. Representatives at the UCD, where the designer earned a master's degree in digital marketing and a bachelor of commerce, had not responded to a media request Wednesday afternoon.

Originally from a farming family in Monacurragh on the edge of Carlow town in Ireland, O'Slatarra first emigrated to the U.S. in 2015, according to the Irish Times. The blond-haired, blue-eyed designer depicted a high-flying New York City lifestyle with photos of her smiling on private planes, driving in a convertible, standing on a tarmac and out at night with friends. Dylan Grace posted 12 photos of O'Slatarra socializing with him and others

Wednesday morning with "We dreamed big together, laughed harder than anyone could understand, and built so much from nothing. I'm truly blessed and grateful to have had you in my life. Love you so much Mar. Fly high girl."

Grace did not respond to media requests Wednesday.

In her home country of Ireland, Taoiseach Micheál Martin reportedly said her death was "an absolutely devastating blow" for the family and the community of Carlow, describing O'Slatarra as "a young, beautiful, very talented, creative woman."

O'Slatarra started her company in September 2021 with a focus on sunglasses, bikinis, beachwear and hoodies with slogans like "I Only Love You in Montauk." A media request to her company had not been acknowledged Wednesday afternoon. She had also worked as chief marketing officer of Out East Eyewear for 17 months starting in the fall of 2020.

The designer had recently wrapped up a pop-up at Gurney's Resort in Montauk. A company spokesperson Miller Diaz-Cobo said, "We are deeply saddened by the tragic news regarding Martha Nolan and extend our sincere condolences to her family and loved ones. While Martha was not an employee of Gurney's, we were proud to host her East x East pop-up and admired her entrepreneurial spirit and creative vision."

The spokesperson noted that the safety and well-being of Gurney's guests, staff and community remain its top priority. The spokesperson added, "Gurney's remains a safe and welcoming environment, and our team is available to support guests with any questions or concerns."

All of the Montauk Yacht Club's operations, which include a hotel and restaurant, were running Wednesday and a staffer there said a statement would be released at a later time.

The boat that O'Slatarra was reportedly found on was named "Ripple" and was registered in Long Beach, N.Y. A media request to the Montauk harbor master was deferred to the Suffolk County Police Department.

Nicola Harrison, the author of the St. Martin's Press-published "Montauk," has spent years exploring what makes Montauk so unique. She said, "Part of the reason Martha Nolan's death has struck a global chord is because Montauk itself has become more than just a seaside escape. It's a symbol."

She added, "Over the past decade, Montauk has transformed into a destination where glamour and ease coexist. It's where artists, designers, tech founders and surfers all somehow share the same space. That mix of serenity and style gives Montauk its magic, when tragedy strikes here, it feels especially jarring because the setting promises peace, beauty and escape."

The author suggested that Nolan "embodied much of what draws people to Montauk today — creativity, quiet success and a laid-back confidence." She said, "Her death has likely resonated globally because it disrupts the fantasy of what Montauk is — an idyllic beach town and escape from the hustle and bustle of the city."

Plans for a memorial service were not immediately known, nor were the names of O'Slatarra's survivors.

BUSINESS

Beyoncé vs. Sydney Sweeney: Are Jeans Getting Political?

Beyoncé in the new Levi's campaign.



Sydney Sweeney for American Eagle.



- Two new campaigns for American Eagle Outfitters and Levi's have stoked a cultural debate.

BY ROSEMARY FEITELBERG

This week's launch of Beyoncé's ad campaign for Levi Strauss & Co. seems to have only ratcheted up the cultural debate around jeans — of all things.

While some Republicans, including U.S. President Donald Trump and commentator Megyn Kelly, have weighed in about the new American Eagle Outfitters advertising that features actress Sydney Sweeney, Beyoncé's fan base chimed in on social media about her new ads for Levi's. Like "The White Lotus" actress, the multi-Grammy-winning Knowles models a denim-on-denim look with blonde hair. Knowles' "Live in Levi's" ads feature her wriggling out of a pair of Levi's at a laundromat, wearing in Daisy Duke cutoffs and then playing pool in a dive bar before speeding away on a motorcycle.

A Levi's spokesperson declined to comment Wednesday about the cultural debate that has developed from its new ads with Beyoncé, and American Eagle's new campaign with Sweeney. Media requests to AEO and its outside public relations firm Shadow were not acknowledged.

Whatever the impetus or undertones of either campaign — whether intended, nuanced or not — Wall Street seemed to approve. American Eagle's stock was up 6.7 percent Wednesday, closing at \$12.82 per share, and Levi Strauss' stock finished up nearly 2 percent on Wednesday, closing at \$20.38 per share.

After being told that Sweeney was a registered Republican in Florida, Trump posted on Truth Social, "#SydneySweeney, a registered Republican, has the HOTTEST ad out there. It's for American Eagle, and the jeans are 'flying off the shelves.' Go get 'em Sydney." The company's stock jumped up by 23.5 percent Monday, after closing slightly down on Aug. 1.

On Tuesday, Kelly stoked the fires by suggesting that Beyoncé's campaign "is the opposite" of Sweeney's ad and saying, "Quite clearly there is nothing natural about Beyoncé."

The "Cowboy Carter" creator's next collaboration with Levi's is being introduced Thursday, but some of Levi's 9.6 million Instagram followers have shown signs of approval. A photo of the musician in an embellished Canadian tuxedo had 72,600 likes Wednesday afternoon. The singer's song "Levi's Jeans" with rapper Post Malone has fashion cues, too, with lyrics like "denim on denim on denim on denim." Beyoncé already has a base of 310 million followers on her Instagram.

Last year in an earnings call, Levi's chief executive officer Michelle Gass said, "Denim is having a moment, and the Levi's brand is having a powerful moment around the world. I don't think there's any better evidence or proof point than having someone like Beyoncé, who is a culture shaper, to actually name a song after us."

Politics and jeans have collided before. In 1995, a Calvin Klein jeans commercial featuring models being asked to undress by an anonymous man behind a camera caused outrage. U.S. President Bill Clinton publicly chastised the "half-dressed adolescents" in Klein's ads and C.J. Doyle

of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights called the images "cynical, exploitative and immoral." The American Family Association, a conservative Christian group, said it would boycott all retailers who carried the jeans.

Klein was eventually investigated by the Justice Department's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, though charges against the designer were dropped after the company proved that its models were of age. The commercials, however, were ultimately pulled from the air.

The Brooklyn Museum's senior curator of fashion and material culture Matthew Yokobosky said the uproar around both campaigns reveals how deeply denim is tied to the American identity, and how it still stands as a symbol of rebellion and freedom, especially globally. "What's striking now is that language is the controversy, not the jeans themselves. No one is saying those jeans don't fit, or they are cut badly. It's about how 'genes' and 'jeans' get tangled up, and what's being implied about bodies and beauty in that wordplay."

Kent State University's professor Catherine Amoroso Leslie said denim has been a political symbol historically. She said, "During the Civil Rights Movement, there was an adoption of denim as a common fabric of the working people. In the case of American Eagle and Levi's today, there may be a gravitation toward one brand or the other based on politics. This would be largely due to endorsements or criticisms of advertisements from politicians and media figures."

In 2022, research led by Oded Netzer, Columbia Business School's vice dean for research, found that 54 percent of American

Eagle's followers in "X" were Democrats and 46 percent of its "X" followers were Republicans. That was part of a survey that measured the political affiliation of hundreds of brands. AEO's results were "slightly left-leaning, but less so than other fashion brands like Abercrombie & Fitch, Urban Outfitters or the Gap," Netzer said.

In 2022, Abercrombie & Fitch's "X" followers were 63 percent Democratic and 37 percent Republican, whereas Urban Outfitters was 73 percent Democratic and 27 percent Republican, and Gap was 69 percent Democratic and 31 percent Republican.

Jeans are major business for brands like American Eagle, Levi's, Hudson, H&M, Uniqlo and more. The global denim jeans market size was estimated at \$86.66 billion last year and it is projected to reach \$121.5 billion by 2030, growing at a CAGR of 5.9 percent from 2025 to 2030, according to Grand View Research. The North American denim market accounted for a revenue share of 31.2 percent last year. Ever-changing consumer trends and product innovations with designs, styles, and colors are fueling the demand for jeans.

Toni Holt Kramer, founder and president Trumppettes USA, Inc., said she loves the American Eagle campaign so much that she will be sending all of her friends for their birthdays and Christmas a pair of American Eagle jeans with a photo of Sydney Sweeney "to hang on their closet doors, as an inspiration."

Emma McClendon, assistant professor of fashion studies at St. John's University, said the reaction to the Sweeney ads highlight the unique role jeans play in American culture. She said, "Denim is deeply tied to national identity, and we're in a moment where that identity feels unstable. People are actively debating who gets to be American and what the country stands for."

In that context, she said, American Eagle's use of genetics "feels, at best, tone-deaf and clearly meant to provoke." While brands have used sex and controversy to sell jeans before, as was the case with Calvin Klein's 1980 Brooke Shields campaign and Abercrombie & Fitch's "hyper-sexualized" catalogues [that were photographed by Bruce Weber from 1997 to 2007], McClendon said "bringing genetics into the mix is new." She said, "It reflects a broader shift in how we think about bodies right now: not just as idealized, but as things that can be optimized or engineered, especially in the age of GLP-1s and Oura rings. What really stands out to me is that this came from American Eagle — a brand that, less than a decade ago, was known for championing body positivity with its Aerie line."

Drexel University's Joseph Hancock speculated that the American Eagle ads could be a play on liberal ideology. He said, "After all, Sweeney was in 'The White Lotus' — very gay — and she has appeared to be quite open-minded." He said the campaign could have intended to demonstrate diversity, since Sweeney herself corrects the spelling of "Genes" in one spot to writes "Jeans."

Her quote, "Genes are passed down from parents to offspring, often determining traits like hair color, personality and even eye color. My jeans are blue," could be more a play on diversity than conservative ideologies, according to Hancock. "Think red is Republican and blue is Democrat."

And Hancock noted that jeans do not stand for a conservative agenda, but for a revolution. He noted how in the film "Rebel Without a Cause," James Dean fought against the conservative nature of his parents wearing jeans, and the movie caused jean sales to soar. Hancock said, "So much that Levi's built factories in London. And let's always remember that jeans were invented by Jacob Davis and Levi Strauss, a Jewish tailor."

Fashion Scoops

The second image that Zara pulled down following a single complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority.



Image Removal

Zara has removed two images from its website following a single complaint to Britain's Advertising Standards Authority, the independent regulator for advertising. The ASA, which published its ruling on Wednesday, said the images made the models appear "unhealthily thin."

The first image showed a model wearing a long and loose silky white blouse with a deep V-neck. The ASA noted that the low-cut design of the shirt "drew attention to the model's upper chest area, creating a focal point around her collarbone, which was protruding."

It added that the model's pose, "created the impression" that her arms, shoulders and chest were very slim. "Overall, we considered that the pose of the model and the choice of clothing in the ad created the impression that the model was unhealthily thin,"

the ASA said.

Another image showed a separate Zara model wearing a white spaghetti strap minidress with a flouncy skirt. The ASA said the shadows over the model's legs "drew attention to them, whilst making them appear noticeably thin."

The watchdog added that the model's hair was styled in a "slicked-back bun, which drew emphasis to her head whilst making it appear slightly gaunt." It also took issue with the model's stance, "which made her body appear slightly out of proportion," and added that her collarbone was "visibly protruding."

The ASA looked at two other Zara images flagged by the person complaining, but said they were not in breach of any rules and could not be considered "irresponsible."

Zara said it took note of the ASA's decision "following an individual complaint regarding two images on our website," and

immediately removed the images when the ASA made it aware of the complaint.

"We are committed to responsible content and follow stringent guidelines and controls in the selection and photographing of models, as well as in the selection of images," Zara said.

The clothing retailer also told the ASA that it "operated in line with the recommendations of Fashioning a Healthy Future, a report published by the U.K. Model Health Inquiry."

It also confirmed that both models had medical certification which proved they were in good health, and that none of the images had been modified "beyond very minor lighting and coloring edits."

Despite its frequent finger-wagging, the ASA is a non-statutory, self-regulatory organization that cannot interpret or enforce legislation in the U.K. It often rules on cases that have drawn a handful of complaints from members of the public.

Takashi Murakami with colorful flip-flops from his new footwear venture, Ohana Hatake.



As reported last year, it backtracked on a decision it had made two months prior regarding a Calvin Klein underwear ad from 2023 featuring the singer FKA Twigs.

The ASA had originally said the ad, which had appeared as part of a wider poster campaign that also featured Kendall Jenner, objectified the singer and "must not appear again in the form complained of."

It later published an updated ruling, saying that while viewers' attention might be drawn to the singer's body, the images were "not sexually explicit, and presented a woman who appeared to be confident and in control."

—SAMANTHA CONTI

Flowers Bloom

Famed artist Takashi Murakami this week introduced his footwear brand, Ohana Hatake, meaning field of flowers in Japanese, to the U.K. with a corner shop takeover at Selfridges' Oxford Street flagship in London.

Running until Aug. 24, the pop-up space has been reimaged as an immersive, joy-filled environment with candy-colored flip-flops bearing the artist's signature flower motif placed on top of leafy installations called Field of Flowers, evoking the joy of the great outdoors amid a blissful, sun-drenched British summer.

The brand has issued exclusive colorways of the Ohana Full-Bloom and the more everyday Surippa Ohana silhouettes for the Selfridges pop-up.

Following an official reveal at ComplexCon Las Vegas in November, Ohana Hatake launched a high-profile collaboration with K-pop sensation Blackpink with the Ohana Full-Bloom model, fitted with a molded pink upper and a solid black midsole.

Prior to coming to Selfridges, the brand has taken its Field of Flowers installations to Shanghai's

Plaza 66 and Pacific Place in Hong Kong.

This summer, flip-flops are having a moment, with the \$690 The Row iteration, seen on Jonathan Bailey during his "Jurassic World Rebirth" press tour, named the hottest item for the second quarter of 2025.

In late June, Pharrell Williams introduced the LV Flip during Louis Vuitton's spring 2026 menswear show in Paris: a voluminous thong sandal rendered in pastel suede and crocodile. Styled with wide trousers and soft tailoring, the silhouette nodded to a larger shift already underway.

The revival isn't limited to designer shows or even to men's footwear. H&M's latest drop includes under-\$40 thong sandals that echo luxury styles. Dolce & Gabbana's Havaianas collaboration, complete with animal prints and furry straps for men and women, sold out in 24 hours. Khloe Kardashian embraced the trend in Chanel ahead of Jeff Bezos and Lauren Sánchez's Venice wedding last month.

According to a 2025 report from Polaris Market Research, the global flip-flop market is valued at roughly \$24 billion.

—TIANWEI ZHANG

Vitamin Boost

The Vitamin Shoppe has appointed Mike Forbes as executive vice president and chief strategy officer, a new position at the specialty retailer.

A 20-year veteran of retail and consumer goods sector, Forbes has been given an assignment with several areas of responsibility, including long-term growth planning, digital acceleration, innovation, organizational transformation, performance marketing, customer loyalty, new business development and strategic partnerships, such as mergers and acquisitions. Forbes reports to chief executive officer Sharon Leite.

The Vitamin Shoppe sells vitamins, minerals, sports nutrition, specialty supplements, herbs, homeopathic remedies and eco-friendly green living products.

Most recently, Forbes served as co-CEO of MaryRuth Organics, where he is credited with putting the vitamin and supplements company on a fast growth track. Before that, he was CEO of Alter Eco Foods, where he is ▶



Mike Forbes



New York City Councilwoman Vicki Paladino at the Style Across the Aisle runway show in 2024.

credited with revitalizing the organic chocolate company's operations and brand. Earlier, he served as CEO of Safely, the eco-conscious cleaning brand founded by Kris Jenner and Emma Grede, where he scaled digital marketing and achieved key sustainability certifications. Forbes was instrumental in growing California Olive Ranch, the olive oil brand. He began his professional career at McKinsey, advising consumer and retail companies, and held brand leadership roles at Jim Beam, Procter & Gamble and General Mills.

"The creation of the chief strategy officer role reflects our commitment to maximizing innovation and unlocking new avenues of growth across digital, retail and strategic partnerships," Leite said in a statement. "Mike's deep experience with consumer brands and retail will be invaluable as we chart the next chapter for The Vitamin Shoppe and our customers."

"I'm excited to bring my passion for digital innovation and customer-centric strategy to help drive the next chapter of expansion" at The Vitamin Shoppe, Forbes said. "Having personally experienced the transformative power of nutrition and a wellness-focused lifestyle, I'm deeply motivated to help deliver that same impact to even more customers and communities."

In May 2025, The Vitamin Shoppe was acquired by Kingswood Capital Management and Performance Investment Partners. As part of the transaction, Leite rejoined the company as CEO, having previously led the business from 2018 to 2023. Forbes is Leite's first major appointment since she rejoined the company. "The new ownership group has committed significant resources to advancing The Vitamin Shoppe's digital capabilities, expanding the reach of its private brand portfolio and accelerating

performance marketing efforts to support its e-commerce platform and nationwide network of more than 640 retail locations," the company indicated in a statement. — DAVID MOIN

Style Returns

Style Across the Aisle, New York's only bipartisan community fashion show, is set to return this fall, bringing together local government leaders and emerging designers for a runway event that blends politics and style. The initiative kicks off on Tuesday with a launch party at the Renaissance New York Hotel Chelsea.

The kickoff party will bring together elected officials from across the political spectrum, fashion industry professionals and community members. The goal is to build momentum ahead of the main runway show, scheduled for Sept. 10 at Manhattan's Surrogate's Court, where each participating official will model looks created by designers from their own districts.

Founded by political media entrepreneur Skye Ostreicher, Style Across the Aisle aims to connect public service and personal expression. The project provides local designers with a platform to showcase their work, while fostering dialogue and connection between leaders and citizens.

"When public service meets personal expression, something transformative happens," Ostreicher said in a statement. "We create a space where leadership feels human, connection feels possible, and style becomes a statement of unity. When our leaders show up not just in suits, but in support of local designers, we're not just making a fashion statement — we're stitching community, culture and courage into the fabric of public life."

Last year's event featured

30 local officials and 30 designers, raising more than \$70,000 for charity. Organizers expect the 2025 edition to surpass those numbers, with a larger venue, expanded programming and increased charitable impact.

Confirmed participants for 2025 include City Council members from all five New York City boroughs, such as Keith Powers (Manhattan), Julie Won (Queens), Althea Stevens (Bronx) and David Carr (Staten Island), as well as New York State Sen. Zellnor Myrie and New York City Commissioner Louis Molina. Designers representing neighborhoods across the city include Bond & Bari Bespoke's Gina Marie Newman (Manhattan), Heed's Starling Sanders (Queens), Okaigo's Sherlon Stephenson (Brooklyn), Signed by McFly's Mugzy McFly (Bronx) and others.

Tickets for the Sept. 10 show at Surrogate's Court will be available this week at styleacrosstheaisle.com. — RENAN BOTELHO

Special Event

Polo Ralph Lauren isn't the only fashion brand that is tying into the Oak Bluffs community on Martha's Vineyard this summer. Awet New York, RAISEfashion and the DJ Henry Dream Fund will be rolling out the second annual Black-Owned Brands Summer Bazaar on Sunday at the Dragonfly House on the Massachusetts island.

While Polo Ralph Lauren debuted an Oak Bluffs collection with Morehouse and Spelman Colleges last month, the upcoming bazaar will be held in Oak Bluffs. For the first time, the event is being co-presented with RAISEfashion, the New York-based nonprofit that champions equity in the fashion industry, and it will benefit the DJ Henry Dream Fund, an organization that provides financial support for underserved children to participate in community-



Designers have been selected for their creations and their missions.

based programs in sports, the performing arts and summer programs, as well as scholarships.

The DJ Dream Fund was created in memory of Danroy "DJ" Henry Jr. whose life was cut short in New York just shy of his 21st birthday in 2010. His parents, Angella and Danroy Henry, are members of Oak Bluffs' seasonal community and they own the Dragonfly House, which is of great significance to members of the Black community on Martha's Vineyard.

Built in 1874, the waterfront property was once owned by John Ritchie, an abolitionist and the diarist for the Massachusetts 54th Regiment in the Civil War. Located at the corner of Canonicut and Seaview avenues in Oak Bluffs, the house later operated as Eastman's by the Sea, and it was a safe haven for Black travelers during segregation. It was listed in the historic Green Book, the guide that was used by African American travelers to find friendly hotels, restaurants and service stations in New England from the 1930s to the 1960s.

In 2025, the Dragonfly House was officially recognized as the 41st site

on the African American Heritage Trail of Martha's Vineyard. On Sunday, it will be a hub for Black-owned fashion brands.

Last year's debut event was a grassroots celebration of culture, commerce and community. Like the Polo Ralph Lauren initiative, the Black-Owned Brands Summer Bazaar is part of a growing contingency that is playing up Black-owned luxury brands in spaces that have been traditionally associated with exclusivity.

To strengthen its infrastructure and impact, Awet New York and RAISEfashion have created a shopping experience that doubles as a platform for connection, mentorship and generational opportunity. The aim is to create "a thriving ecosystem for Black creators," according to Awet New York's founder Awet Woldegebriel.

RAISEfashion's founder Felita Harris said, "Our partnership with Awet New York reflects RAISEfashion's belief in investing in BIPOC founders, supporting one another's causes, and creating meaningful ways for the community to give back. This collaboration presents a powerful opportunity to

uplift the work of incredible designers, while also driving commerce and supporting the long-term scalability of their businesses. It's about forging deeper connections with the people behind the brands and building a future grounded in intention, access, and shared progress."

Shoppers will find designs from Aisling Camps, Awet New York, DLSH Creations, Gwen Beloti, Harbison Studio, House of Aama, Yeseaet and bySharisse with brands having been selected not just for their creations but their backstories and missions too.

— ROSEMARY FEITELBERG

Football Season

Count Johnnie-O as the latest brand to sign a deal with the National Football League.

Under the terms of the agreement, the West Coast preppy-inspired brand will create a collection of officially licensed products for all 32 teams. The line will feature 29 styles for men and women including polos, quarter-zips and other lifestyle apparel pieces for fans.

"To be part of something as iconic and unifying as the NFL is a milestone for our brand and a true pinch-me moment," said John O'Donnell, founder of Johnnie-O. "I grew up a diehard Chicago Bears fan, so this collaboration hits close to home. We're proud to join the NFL family and look forward to being part of fans' game day traditions — and bringing a touch of Johnnie-O style to NFL fans everywhere."

Heath Hooper, vice president of licensed for Johnnie-O, said, "Licensed sports apparel continues to be a tremendous driver of success for Johnnie-O because fans never stop rooting for their teams. With the NFL now part of the licensed portfolio, Johnnie-O stands as ▶



Shirts from the Johnnie-O collection for the NFL.

the definitive year-round destination for premium licensed apparel."

In addition to this deal, the company offers licensed collections for MLB, NHL, major golfing events including the upcoming Ryder Cup, more than 200 colleges and universities and other sports leagues.

The Johnnie-O NFL collection will debut before the start of the 2025 season on Sept. 4. It will be available on the Johnnie-O site as well as at NFL team shops and online stores, Dick's House of Sports stores, Rally House and other retailers around the U.S.

In 2025, Johnnie-O, which has become known for its logo of a guy holding a surfboard and its patented "Tweener" button, is celebrating its 20th anniversary. The Tweener is tucked between the second and third buttons on its shirts. — JEAN E. PALMIERI

Hall of Fame

Michael DePaulo, the fashion designer who designed the gown that Carrie Underwood wore on her 2020 holiday album, "My Gift," recently donated the gown to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville.

The red ballgown will now be shown through curated exhibitions at the museum.

Underwood chose to wear the red ballgown from DePaulo's fall 2016 collection that he showcased during New York Fashion Week.

"I feel amazing. I'm thrilled to go see an exhibition and stand next to it. It's one of my favorite pieces," said DePaulo, who has sold reproductions of that dress.

He recalled that Underwood's Christmas album came out in September 2020 and he ran to Target to buy several of the CDs (which he hadn't bought in a long time), and bought the full album for his own archive.

DePaulo, who is based in New York, is known for his sculptural bridal and eveningwear designs featuring intricate embroideries and beading. In addition to Underwood, he has dressed celebrities such as Gwen Stefani, Kate Beckinsale, Camila Cabello and Lea Michele, among others. He also does custom work.

His silhouettes run the gamut from grand ballgowns to sexy sheaths and formfitting jumpsuits. He sells at retailers such as Stanley Korshak in Texas and Bridal Reflections in New York City. He's also sold to Saks through trunk shows and Mark Ingram.

DePaulo graduated



Michael DePaulo's red ballgown on the fall 2016 runway.

with an architecture degree from Northeastern University in 2004 and pivoted to fashion design in 2006, when he set up his company. The designer is getting ready to show his spring 2026 collection in a presentation at Radio Park in Rockefeller Center on Sept. 12 at noon.

— LISA LOCKWOOD

Globe Trotting

The Harlem Globetrotters will be celebrating their 100th anniversary next year and the famed basketball franchise is teaming with Jeff Hamilton to design a special uniform for the historic season.

This is not the first time Hamilton has worked with a sports league. The Los Angeles-based designer has longstanding partnerships with the NBA, NFL and, more recently, FIFA for the World Cup 2026. Best known for his leather jackets, his designs have been worn by everyone from Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant to LeBron James over the years.

At the 1997 NBA All-Star Game, when a panel

selected the 50 greatest players in NBA history, each honoree received an NBA-commissioned Hamilton leather jacket to wear to the ceremony. Hamilton also designed the commemorative jackets 25 years later when the NBA announced a 75th anniversary team to honor the 75 greatest players in NBA history.

Hamilton's designs have influenced other brands including Converse, which released a collection of shoes in 2021 inspired by his NBA championship jackets.

"Our 100-year anniversary has provided the perfect opportunity to refresh our uniform," said Keith Dawkins, president of Harlem Globetrotters & Herschend Entertainment Studios. "Our goal is to create a look that better reflects our iconic history, leverages the equity that we've built up over the years, while also doing something that is fresh and appealing to our global audience. Partnering with Jeff Hamilton, one of the sporting world's most legendary designers, is an opportunity to build something truly special for our centennial and beyond."

In addition to the uniform, Hamilton will design a series of collections for other fashion brands next year and the Globetrotters will also be working with other companies on consumer retail partnerships for their 2026 season.

"While we have worked to design fashion pieces with some of the biggest and most storied franchises in sports, especially in the NBA, this collaborative partnership with the Globetrotters is both special and will be one of our most unique," Hamilton said. "There is no organization with such positive global appeal than the Globetrotters, and our pieces will be both reflective of their history in sports, pop culture and diplomacy, as well as their appeal to an audience that will learn about their story for the first time. It will be one of the must-haves for the world of fashion and sport as their 100th season unfolds."

In the 2025 season, the Globetrotters played in 46 North American cities as well as 50 markets globally. Their tours have showcased the sport of basketball to tens of millions of people in more than 124 countries and territories on six continents. — JEP.

Lili's Move

Lili Reinhart's Personal Day is venturing into retail.

Starting Sunday, the acne-safe skin care brand, best known for its TikTok-viral Unplug Blackhead-Melting Nose Strips, will be sold in about 700 Ulta Beauty doors, plus an additional 104 front-of-store towers under the retailer's Sparked program. This milestone comes just 10 months after the brand initially launched in October 2024, operating direct-to-consumer with just five skus under \$40.

"We want people to be in stores, to go in and be able to touch and feel our products," Reinhart, 28, told WWD over a video call. "Ulta Beauty is very accessible to a lot of people, and it feels also very approachable. It kind of

feels like, 'Come one, come all,' in those stores. And so, we felt like Ulta Beauty was the right move for us."

Founded on the mission of providing consumers dermatologist-tested products to help manage and soothe breakouts on acne-prone skin, Personal Day infuses ingredients such as mevalonic acid, azelaic acid, zinc hyaluronate, rice powder, niacinamide and chlorophyll into its specialized products, including Trust Me on This Hypochlorous Acid Spray, Emotional Support Lip Balm and Full Clarity Cleansing Powder.

Reinhart's foray into beauty was inspired by her robust acne journey, which led her to go on Accutane twice.

"I've had acne since I was 12, but I'm also such a huge product lover, and I love makeup. I think a lot of times, people with sensitive or acne-prone skin feel very left out, or we think we can use these products, and then it makes us break out. So, to me, there's been a gap in the industry there," Reinhart said. "I wanted to create a brand that was completely acne safe and provide acne safe alternatives for really popular products that everyone wants or needs to use in their skin care routine, but also to provide innovative, cool and exciting formulas that can help keep your skin clear."

These formulas and the story behind Personal Day are what Shelagh Wong, CEO and cofounder of Personal Day, believes set the brand apart from not only other celebrity beauty businesses, but also other skin care products available on the market.

"We're coming into a world where everyone's sick of celebrity brands, right? Our goal is to make it so that she is, yes, a celebrity, but that's not why this brand exists. Reinhart happens to be famous, but her story is real," Wong said.

Customers have seemingly resonated with Reinhart's experience and the products she and Wong have put out. In May, the brand saw a monthly net

sales growth of 73 percent from April and a 779 percent jump from January. Four skus — Emotional Support Lip Balm, Trust Me on This Hypochlorous Acid Spray, Unplug Blackhead Melting Nose Strips and Everybody Stay Calm Recovery Mask — sold out in May and June, while 9,000 units, which was the entire inventory, of just the Unplug Blackhead Melting Nose Strips were sold in 26 days.

Like the consumers, Ulta Beauty has been impressed with Personal Day's accelerated growth and product development in the last 10 months.

"At Ulta Beauty, we're committed to discovering and elevating the best in emerging beauty. Personal Day is a standout — bringing together dermatologist-developed formulas, breakthrough innovation, and a refreshingly real approach to acne care. With proven momentum and viral buzz, we're excited to help even more guests discover the brand and feel confident in their skin, only at Ulta Beauty," Lisa Tamburello, vice president of skincare merchandising at Ulta Beauty, told WWD.

For Personal Day, Ulta Beauty felt like the obvious choice for its inaugural move into retail, considering its stores were central to the locations where the majority of its consumer sales were coming from. In analyzing the company's consumer data, Wong and Reinhart both recognized that the majority of its consumers were from rural areas. "That's where Ulta Beauty really came in. When we looked at the store locations and we mapped it to where our consumers are, we were like, 'This is where we can meet them where they're at,'" Reinhart said.

"To have something in a store is just special," she continued. "When we're used to ordering everything online, being able to go touch something in person and have a shopping in-store experience is exciting. I'm just super happy that we get to have that experience." — KALEIGH WERNER ■



The Harlem Globetrotters' centennial logo.



Lili Reinhart and Shelagh Wong

SJ DENIM



SOURCING JOURNAL

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RED, WHITE AND BLUE



WHEN PRESIDENT TRUMP unveiled his board of tariffs on “Liberation Day” in April, one basic item landed in the media spotlight: blue jeans. Despite being manufactured primarily overseas for decades—the very reason they were swept up in the tariff wave—jeans became a lightning rod in the debate. The moment raised a pointed irony: why should Americans pay more for a garment so deeply woven into their cultural identity, even if it’s now made almost entirely overseas?

While the tariffs threatened to affect hundreds, if not thousands, of imported goods and dare I say more vital goods, it was jeans—a staple so quintessentially American it seemed almost sacred—that sparked concern. “Trump’s Mexico tariffs could hit American men right in the blue jeans,” Quartz stated. “Bourbon, bikes and blue jeans: Hitting back against Trump’s tariffs,” Financial Review declared. AP made sure to include the whole humble American uniform in its headline: “Tariffs will make sneakers, jeans and almost everything Americans wear cost more, trade groups warn.” SJ Denim certainly contributed to the headline melodrama meltdown, but denim is what we do.

The coverage served as a reminder of how the legacy of American-made denim stands in contrast to today’s global manufacturing reality.

In conversations I’ve had over the past six months with industry insiders about tariffs, U.S. manufacturing, and President Trump’s “America First” policy, the prevailing sentiment is clear: a thriving domestic denim industry is unlikely to make a comeback. The necessary investment, expertise, machinery, and skilled workforce simply aren’t in place. The swift decline of Vidalia Mills in Louisiana—if it can even be said to have truly taken off—is a telling example.

What the U.S. denim market does have in abundance is demand—but it comes from two very different camps with opposing American dreams: passionate small business owners committed to American-made products, and companies seeking convenient domestic production at the same low costs offered by overseas manufacturers.

All hopes appear to rest on Mount Vernon in Trion, Ga. to keep the denim dream alive (and to acquire Vidalia’s American Draper X3 looms). However, the mill has kept mum during the hoopla despite numerous attempts by Sourcing Journal to include them in this issue.

Perhaps it’s time to rethink what qualifies as a “Made in USA” jean. The FTC—which designated July as “Made in USA” month as culturally diverse observances vanish from the calendar—might not be on board. But maybe the most authentically American jean isn’t one defined by geography, but by spirit: a blend of origins, styles, and influences that mirrors the American consumer.

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ACROSS THE U.S.

The latest industry news affecting U.S. textile and garment manufacturing.



VIDALIA MILLS SALE DATE AND INVENTORY CONFIRMED

A date for the sheriff's sale for Vidalia Mills is set. The sale will take place on Aug. 6 at 10 a.m. CT at the Concordia Parish Courthouse in Vidalia, La. All property will be sold together. No bids will be accepted on individual lots or items.

SJ Denim obtained the final inventory of equipment. In addition to the 81.87 acres of land the mill sits on, the list includes 12 Draper X3 shuttle looms, an unspecified number of Draper X3 looms in the front office and 79 half stripped Draper and Picanol shuttle looms.

In 2019, Vidalia Mills acquired 40 American Draper X3 selvage looms from the shuttered

White Oak facility in Greensboro, N.C. The mill went on to produce U.S.-made selvage for brands like Imogene & Willie, Devil-Dog Dungarees and Ginew before quality issues and financial troubles arose.

The auction of the historic looms has stirred considerable attention across the U.S. denim industry, particularly among brands and manufacturers that value domestic production and authenticity. Several brands have expressed interest in keeping the looms on U.S. soil by making significant upfront investments to mitigate some of the financial risk associated with acquiring the equipment.

Mount Vernon in Trion, Ga. is widely viewed as the only obvious U.S. plug-and-play choice for the looms.

Other items on the inventory list include a partially installed warp dyeing slasher system, sewing equipment, testing equipment and

▲ **Left Field NYC was one of the heritage-focused brands using fabric from Vidalia Mills.**

several Zinser ring spinning frames.

The sale of the now-shuttered denim mill was originally planned for April but was postponed due to inventory and other logistical issues.

According to 7th Judicial District Court documents, the mill owes approximately \$32.5 million in principal, interest, and late charges as of Nov. 14, 2024 to the Jefferson Financial Federal Credit Union and Greater Nevada Credit Union.

In 2018, Vidalia Mills (also known as Vidalia Industrial Facilities, LLC) received a \$25 million loan from Jefferson Financial Federal Credit Union and a \$5 million loan from Greater Nevada Credit Union for equipment and working capital, the Concordia Sentinel reported. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Agriculture provided loan support through its Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program. —ANGELA VELASQUEZ



QORE OPENS \$300 MILLION QIRA FACILITY

Qore, a joint venture of Minnesota-based Cargill and Germany-based HELM, is officially starting production of Qira, the world's first large-scale 1,4-butanediol (BDO) made from locally grown dent corn. Qira is derived from annually renewable crops and serves as an impactful alternative to a fossil-derived equivalent used in the manufacture of consumer goods including stretch jeans.

Qore celebrated the grand opening of the \$300 million facility located in Eddyville, Iowa-based facility on July 22 with state officials, customers, farmer partners and industry leaders. The factory will produce 66,000 metric tons annually.

Qira is a key ingredient in The Lycra Company's bio-derived Lycra EcoMade. Lycra and Qore teamed up in 2022 to enable the commercial production of the bio-derived spandex. Through this partnership, 70 percent of The Lycra Company's spandex fiber content will be sourced from annually renewable feedstock, which is anticipated to yield a 44 percent carbon footprint drop, per LCA data.

Agolde introduced the first jeans made with bio-derived Lycra EcoMade in May. In addition to apparel, Qira can be applied to footwear, beauty and personal care products, automotive and electronics and packaging.

"Qore is able to leverage the deep agricultural network and world-class fermentation technology expertise from Cargill and HELM's global market reach to bring Qira to life," said Jon Veldhouse, CEO of Qore. "By providing a reliable, renewable, and transparent feedstock, Qira helps global manufacturers and brands implement identical materials that reduce reliance on overseas supply chains, bringing more transparency to their product portfolios."

The bio-derived feedstock is made from field corn grown in a 100-mile radius of Qore's

facility in south central Iowa sourced chiefly from individual farmers. The farmers apply regenerative agriculture practices for growing dent corn. These practices are a holistic and inclusive approach to land management, meant to restore soil and ecosystem health.

Additionally, the proximity of the feedstock enables greater traceability and transparency throughout the supply chain.

"By offering a bio-based alternative to fossil-based feedstock, we are empowering brands to reduce their environmental impact and respond to consumer demands for transparency, more sustainable, high-performing products," said Steve Kuiper, a fourth-generation Iowa farmer. "Our community is proud to play a vital role in making everyday products more sustainable." — AV

U.S. MANUFACTURING JOBS CONTINUE TO DECLINE DESPITE AT-LARGE JOB GROWTH

The U.S. added 147,000 jobs for June, marking higher-than-expected growth amidst question marks over tariffs and the economy. Economists had projected that number would grow by about 110,000 for June.

Still, the U.S. manufacturing sector lost 7,000 jobs last month, which follows a similar contraction in May, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

Scott Paul, president of the Alliance for American Manufacturing, said he hopes the trade deals Trump has heralded ultimately shepherd in positive growth for domestic manufacturing jobs.

"Manufacturing jobs have been treading water for more than two years now, losing 7,000 in June. Factories have shed 150,000 employees since February 2023. While it's evident there's still a lot of factory construction activity that could bear fruit in the future, we're not there yet," Paul said in a statement.

BLS data shows that in June, 544,000 people in the manufacturing sector remained

unemployed. That brings the sector's unemployment rate of 3.6 percent half a point lower than the industry agnostic average of 4.1 percent. Nonetheless, unemployment in manufacturing has still come up half a point from June 2024, when it stood at 3.1 percent. June unemployment in the non-durable goods sector, which typically is inclusive of apparel, stood at 4 percent, up from 3.6 percent in June 2024. In June 2024, the sector shed 10,000 jobs.

According to the Institute for Supply Management's Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) June report, textile mills reported negative employment growth for June. The mills simultaneously reported paying higher prices for raw materials, alongside all their industry counterparts. The mills also reported lower backlogs, decreased production and a contraction in new export orders in June. The PMI often counts textile mills separately from apparel, leather and allied products.

While industry agnostic work weeks declined by 0.1 hour to an average of 34.2 hours per week, manufacturing's weekly average held strong at 40.1 hours. That may be indicative that the industry is working to preserve the longevity of the jobs it can maintain.

That all comes against the backdrop of Trump's erratic trade strategy, which the administration has said will create domestic jobs and create a resurgence in domestic manufacturing.



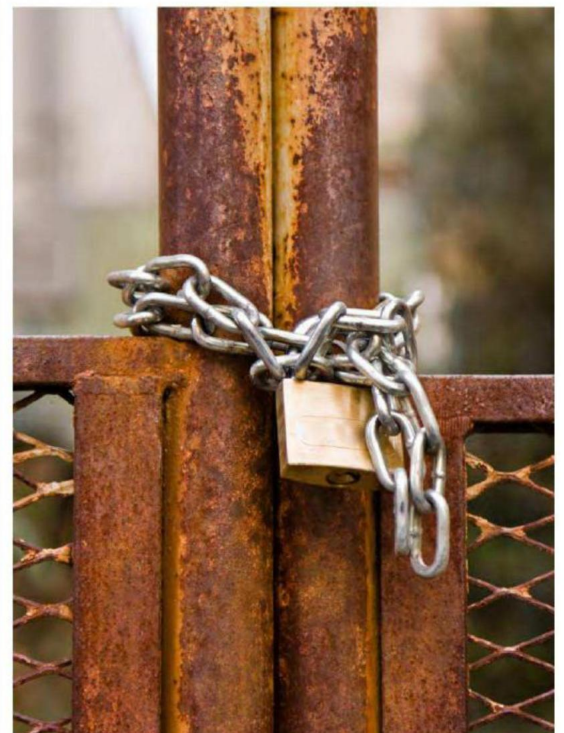
**OUR COMMUNITY IS PROUD TO
PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN MAKING EVERYDAY
PRODUCTS MORE SUSTAINABLE."**

— Steve Kuiper, farmer

▲ **Qira's feedstock is grown with regenerative agriculture practices.**

▼ **Manufacturing jobs are declining in the U.S.**

Paul said the trade group hopes Trump's actions catalyzes growth for the industry, rather than causing further job retraction. "My hope is that the successful resolution of bilateral trade deals and tariff rates after months of shifts will help boost the fortunes of factories," he said in a statement. — MEGHAN HALL





CAUTION AHEAD

Brands take a more measured approach to seasonal sourcing. **by Angela Velasquez**

ONGOING TARIFF NEGOTIATIONS, combined with weakening global economies and broader political disruptions, have added complexity to the traditional process of developing a new product season. As a result, mills say clients are approaching their orders with caution, prioritizing pricing clarity, supply chain stability, and value-driven sourcing.

“Brands and stores across the board are looking for value from their supply chain so there is a refocused energy in that direction,” said Henry Wong, AGI Denim’s VP, product development and marketing.

Umair Masood Tata, Naveena Denim Limited’s director of marketing, said recent tariff revisions and rising logistics costs have impacted overall order volumes and timelines. “As a denim mill, we’re doing everything we can to stay competitive by controlling costs, staying consistent in quality, and supporting our clients through close collaboration,” he said.

Mills are seeing clients approach the season with a sense of cautious optimism.

“While orders are moving forward steadily, the global market is currently shaped by a high level of uncertainty. Factors such as tariffs and geopolitical tensions are prompting buyers to be more deliberate and strategic in their purchasing decisions. Everyone is waiting for greater clarity before making bolder commitments,” said Anatt Finkler, Global Denim’s creative director.

This “cautious stance” is especially true with U.S. brands, according to Aydan Tuzun, Naveena Denim Mills’ senior vice president, sales and marketing.

“The introduction and ongoing uncertainty of new tariffs have caused hesitation in placing orders, with many clients choosing to delay decisions rather than take risks,” she said. “Additionally, ongoing disruptions in shipping routes, especially due to the Red Sea blockage, have led to extended lead times. These logistical and geopolitical challenges are prompting clients to plan further ahead and remain flexible in their sourcing strategies.”

China-based Prosperity has seen shifts in how clients are preparing for the season. “Political influence plays a crucial role in shaping clients’ decisions, particularly in times of uncertainty, before they finalize their orders,” said Stafford Lau, Prosperity director. “Tariffs and other geopolitical issues appear to be significant contributing factors to this trend, affecting client confidence and the volume of orders placed.”

By having production hubs in China and Mexico, Cone Denim has been able to offer clients some flexibility. Pierrette Scavuzzo, Cone’s design director, said clients are exploring all order options this season due to uncertainty around tariffs.

“Brands are investing extra time and effort into preparing various sourcing strategies so they can quickly adapt if needed, ensuring



their deliverables and distribution remain unaffected. Having two production platforms in two different hemispheres has helped our customers seamlessly explore counter options with quick speed,” she said.

Though Turkey’s trade with the U.S. is relatively balanced and small compared to Canada, China, the EU and Mexico, Gizem Yaşar, Maritaş marketing chief, said it’s crucial to understand the impacts of imposed tariffs on U.S. economy. The U.S. has consistently been Turkey’s second-largest individual export market.

“Tariffs and trade policies play a crucial role in shaping costs and competition in the global textile and fashion industry. Trump’s politicized approach to trade and tariffs has accelerated protectionism and fragmentation in the global trading system,” she said.

Although the pace of fabric purchasing for collections has slowed down due to fluctuations in the global economy, Yaşar said brands are doing this with the aim of managing the process more deliberately.

Still, consumers’ wallets will be the hit hard. “Companies big and small will face higher costs on the goods they buy from other countries—and could have little recourse but to hike prices themselves. For consumers, that will likely mean more expensive prices [for] everything. As experts say, stagflation risk is on the table,” she said.

Maritaş’ plan is to remain agile and adapt strategies to upcoming changes. Yaşar added

that the company is already in a better position, having distanced itself from mass-market competition by focusing on advanced and sustainable product lines.

Being based in Turkey means Orta can provide a speed advantage in sourcing compared to other countries from a geopolitical standpoint. However, Sinem Kahveci, Orta’s marketing specialist, said uncertainties surrounding tariffs remain a concern. “Like the brands, we closely monitor all developments and continue our operations with cautious and measured steps,” she said.

However, Turkish companies are running into issues closer to home. In the last two years, Ibrahim Ethem Buyukpepe, Calik’s acting general manager, said there has been a 20 to 30 percent contraction in consumption in Europe due to inflation and uncertainty expectations. Contraction continues, evident in the demand for fabrics this season.

“In terms of tariff, American brands that carry out price-oriented production have started to add Turkey and North Africa options to their logistics strategies and are carrying out feasibility studies. However, [because] no clear steps have been taken for customs tax processes, the effect of the process has not been clearly observed,” he said.

As brands seek to navigate and mitigate supply chain disruptions, new opportunities are emerging for sourcing hubs that have



EVERYONE IS WAITING FOR GREATER CLARITY BEFORE MAKING BOLDER COMMITMENTS. —Anatt Finkler, Global Denim

▲ **Cone’s customers are looking for versatile fabrics.**

▼ **Global Denim is seeing interest in 3x1 comfort stretch fabrics.**



previously remained under the radar.

Sharbati has seen interest grow for its Egyptian production over the last couple of years. “For sure tariffs have created a higher need for alternative solutions, and Egypt is seen as the best actual option being in the Mediterranean area, hence with faster and sustainable transit time,” said Stefano Dotto, Sharbati’s product design manager.

“In general, clients are approaching their orders with caution due to ongoing uncertainty in the retail sector. The impact of geopolitical tensions and tariffs, particularly between the EU, U.S. and Asia has led several clients to diversify their production and sourcing bases,” said Maria Mas, Evlox’s digital marketing director.

As a result, she said Morocco is gaining traction as a reliable nearshore alternative for European brands, thanks to its logistical advantages and trade agreements. Clients are also more aware of the origin of their components. Mas said Evlox is seeing a shift toward more sustainable and traceable denim, with clients requesting recycled and organic cotton, and placing more emphasis on environmental certifications. 🌱

SJ DENIM

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THE YEAR AHEAD

From inseams to finishes, mills to marketing, each edition of SJ Denim shines a spotlight on the industry's most relevant issues, trends and personalities. Be a part of our Fall or Winter issues!

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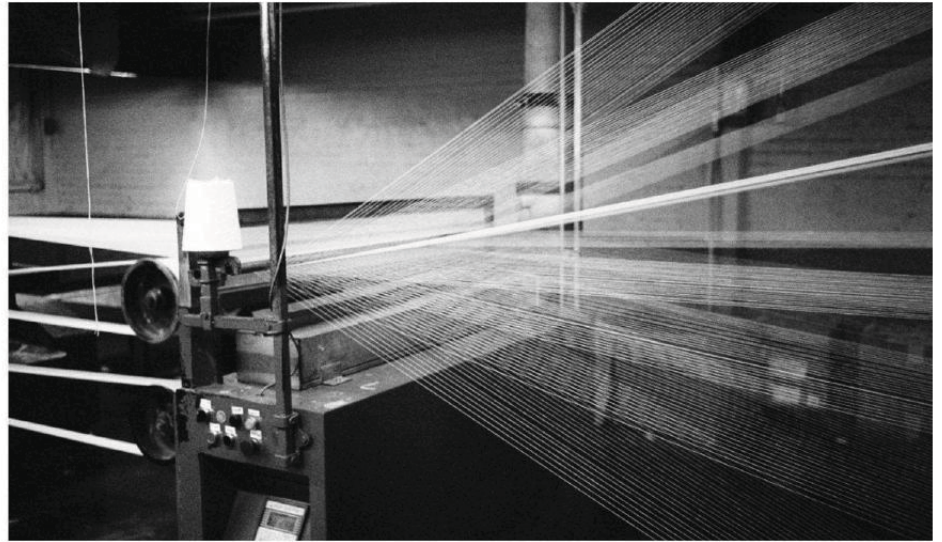


FARM TO

From cotton to indigo, Imogene + Willie's fosters a U.S. supply chain for jeans. **by Angela Velasquez**



FASHION



WITH THEIR LATEST JEANS, Imogene + Willie put the U.S. denim supply chain to the ultimate test. ✨ The jeans are the second phase from the “Made in USA” brand’s Cotton Project, an initiative dedicated to growing, processing and manufacturing cotton onshore in the Southeast U.S. ✨ The jeans are made with single-origin sources within a 400-mile radius of the brand’s Nashville headquarters. The regeneratively-farmed cotton comes from Martin Farms in Courtland, Ala.; the natural indigo is from Stony Creek Colors, a regenerative farm that grows plant-based dyes including natural indigo in Springfield, Tenn.

Mount Vernon Mills in Trion, Ga., the largest denim manufacturer and the only remaining rope dye range in the U.S., produced the fabric.

“We always wanted to be able to do this in the denim space because, at our core, we are a denim company. Being able to work with locally grown natural indigo and the teams at Stony Creek Colors and Mount Vernon has been a dream for years,” said K.P. McNeill, Imogene + Willie CEO.

The collection marks the first time Mount Vernon has utilized natural indigo at their facility. The mill stopped production at their dye range, cleaned and sanitized the dye vats, and filled them with natural indigo from Stony Creek Colors. Since natural indigo costs more than synthetic indigo, the brand said experimenting with these production methods at this scale is unique, particularly in the United States.

Imogene + Willie’s relationship with Dale McCollum, who recently retired after 50 years of employment at Mount Vernon Mills, helped secure the mill’s involvement in the project. The brand said the mill was “willing to take a risk on uncharted territory with the small denim brand.”

“Mount Vernon is a hero of this story, as they are really the last remaining mill of their size making denim in the USA. They deserve

a lot of credit for still being there, innovating and changing with the times—to adapt and survive in an ever-changing supply chain landscape,” McNeill said.

For the collection, Imogene + Willie made a creative decision to select two utilitarian patterns as a nod to the workwear history of Mount Vernon. The Cotton Project collection includes the Hencye, a men’s double-knee work pant, and the Augusta, a women’s carpenter pant, both washed down to a soft and well-worn finish. The jeans retail for \$265. This places the natural indigo jeans in the mid-range of Imogene + Willie’s denim offerings, which range from \$235 to \$325.

Imogene + Willie established The Cotton Project in 2021 by purchasing a 22-acre cotton crop at Martin Farm. The brand offered a



BEING ABLE TO WORK WITH LOCALLY GROWN NATURAL INDIGO AND THE TEAMS AT STONY CREEK COLORS AND MOUNT VERNON HAS BEEN A DREAM FOR YEARS.”

—K.P. McNeill, Imogene + Willie

▲ **Mount Vernon Mills adjusted its production to make the specialty fabric.**

◀ **Imogene + Willie chose workwear-inspired fits for the collection.**

premium price 25 percent above market standards to ensure fair compensation for farmers while investing in regenerative agriculture before planting even began. A year later, Imogene + Willie doubled their investment in cotton crops.

The brand launched its first product from the project, a cotton unisex T-shirt, in May. However, the second launch of the project sends a clear message: this wasn’t just a one-off for the brand.

“This is real life proof that we’re taking what we learned and advancing it. We want more and more of our business to be done this way,” McNeill said. “We’re making an attempt to do things differently, and if enough people in the industry attempt to do things differently, that will make a big impact.” 🌱



MarkWest Denim enters the western market with saddle-tested jeans. **by Angela Velasquez**

WILD WEST

WHEN WHITNEY LLOYD, an AQHA amateur rider, got back into the saddle after a 14-year hiatus, it wasn't the competition or the dynamics of the circuit that changed. It was the jeans. ✨ "Jeans are the most essential garment for cowgirls. It's what they wear every day, ride in, compete in—it's a very important garment but you still want to look on trend," she said. ✨ However, Lloyd found that the new jean styles from major western brands weren't cutting it. "Quite frankly, I just found that all of them had major issues. None of them really fit and functioned and flattered in the saddle, which is the most important place for a horse girl. We want to look good there. We want to feel confident and feel supported by what we're wearing. And all the jeans that were out there just really missed the mark," she said.

In 2022, Lloyd turned her frustration into a business plan to develop her own brand of saddle-tested jeans for fellow cowgirls. The Columbus, Ohio-based denim novice turned to Christine Rucci, denim expert and founder of Godmother NYC, Inc., initially for pointers and then for full-package support from fit and fabrics to setting up a U.S. supply chain. Lloyd said she felt confident that Rucci "would be the person who would get this done for me and kind of make these jeans a reality."

Now, almost three years later, MarkWest Denim is preparing to enter the Western denim market with a single style that attests to Lloyd's confidence what she and Rucci produced: a women's stretch denim jean made from Cone Denim's Parris, Mexico mill, manufactured in Los Angeles and washed by SFI in Commerce, Calif.

The jean features a hidden cellphone pocket that won't interfere with the saddle, a gap-free waistband, pant legs that stack nicely above boots and won't ride up or twist around boots, and a construction that eliminates the traditional front center seam—an uncomfortable detail that Lloyd said female

riders have learned to accept. "I thought there's has to be a better way," she said.

With her saddle in her living room, Lloyd and Rucci would meet over Zoom to review prototypes. Six were made in one fabric until they realized they needed one with more stretch because the post-ride recovery wasn't up to their standard.

"We're the only people doing a sport in blue jeans. We need fabrics that have enough stretch and can maintain its shape throughout the day," Lloyd said. We spent a lot of time on little things like rivets; [namely] smooth-domed rivets that don't scratch your saddle when you're carrying it on your hip. "They won't snag your delicate show clothes that people compete in. All those little details we spent a lot of time on to make sure that they're really functional for our cowgirl customer."

Making the jeans in the U.S. was a priority as well. "For a Western audience, and the horse industry in particular, there's a lot of value on the tradition of the American West, the American cowboy and high-quality products that are made here in America," she said. Though the fabric is made in Mexico, Lloyd said she's proud to partner with a mill like Cone which has a long legacy in the U.S.

MarkWest will launch this month. The jeans will be available in sizes 00-18 and retail for \$209.



THERE'S A LOT OF VALUE ON THE TRADITION OF THE AMERICAN WEST, THE AMERICAN COWBOY AND HIGH-QUALITY PRODUCTS THAT ARE MADE HERE IN AMERICA... —Whitney Lloyd, MarkWest

◀ **MarkWest founder Whitney Lloyd addresses common issues women have with Western jeans.**

Lloyd has rolled out an aggressive social media strategy to share what MarkWest Denim is all about. She's also relying on the connections she's made over the years as an active member of the Quarter Horse circuit.

"It's been very organic. The horse community is a very old-school community in that it relies on word of mouth. People pay attention to what people they know and trust in the industry are using," she said. "I think consumers recognize that there's a real need for jeans for cowgirls that are actually made by a fellow cowgirl who gets it and understands what we experience in the saddle." 🍷



Meet the vintage shop owners preserving American fashion. **by Angela Velasquez**

TIME



◀ Stock Vintage focuses on fashion from the 1900s-1970s.

THE CURATOR

Stock Vintage

143 E 13th St., New York, N.Y.

STOCK VINTAGE FOUNDER Melissa Howard wants you to hang on to your clothing.

Located in New York City's East Village, the vintage emporium is approaching its 20th anniversary of offering carefully curated men's wear and accessories from the 1900s to the 1970s to a discerning clientele of both locals and international visitors. Here, they can find everything from a collection of 1920s University of Pennsylvania gear by Spalding to a WW1 M911 sweater to a 1970s African American motorcycle vest.

When Howard opened the store in 2006, she already had a customer base from selling at the Chelsea Flea Market in the late '90s. Many individuals and business owners she met through the flea helped spread word that Stock would become a premier destination for early American men's wear.

"It was word of mouth that brought clients to my store. At the time that I opened Stock, the store was one of the few vintage men's clothing storefronts in New York City," she said, adding that most social media platforms were not prevalent at the time.

Howard sources garments largely from connections she has made over the years and through vintage clothing shows and flea markets. People also bring her pieces to the store. While she doesn't focus on brands, some are exceptional for quality and are worthy of being collectibles like Levi's, Big Yank, Double Wear, Hercules and Bucu.

Some of Howard's best scores were unearthed in the early '90s like the time she found hundreds of never-worn Shorthorn Levi's shirts, gaberdine shirts and Catalina shirts with painted swordfish in a warehouse for \$4 a piece.

"My vision for the store has remained the same since day one," Howard said. "I look for pieces with wonderful fabrics and details that stand out. I've always tried my best to maintain the integrity of what I bring into the store. The benefit to having my store is that I have clients that are of like minds and appreciate the history of the pieces."

While Howard's vision has remained steadfast, the strictly brick-and-mortar store has embraced social media to a degree. Stock Vintage has 24.9K followers on Instagram. However, the same platform has dimmed the excitement of finding a special piece. "It was a bit more enjoyable when you organically found a great piece and there wasn't any documentation online," she said.

Pieces from Stock are often plucked by stylists for celebrity editorials for Vanity Fair, Esquire and GQ. From musicians and photographers to designers and artists, the store is a source of inspiration for New York City creatives—not for replicating designs but for creating new ideas.

CAPSULES



“MY VISION FOR THE STORE HAS REMAINED THE SAME SINCE DAY ONE. I LOOK FOR PIECES WITH WONDERFUL FABRICS AND DETAILS THAT STAND OUT.”

—Melissa Howard, Stock Vintage

“Designers like to look at the stitching, details and how a garment has worn over time,” Howard said. “I think that designers have an affection for older designs because once upon a time, these garments were new ideas and new fabrics, and they were developed all over the world in small factories and small spaces, not mass produced.”

For Howard, being a vintage clothing dealer is a lifestyle, informing how she searches for quality pieces for her closet and home. “My home reflects my store in many ways,” she said. “I love early folk-art objects and furniture. What I sell in my store is also how I live. When I include objects in my store displays, I always try to keep in mind how it relate to the garments that I display to tell a story.”

Collecting is in Howard’s DNA. “My mom has been an antique collector and dealer for as long as I can remember,” she said.

When Howard was 12 years old, her mother opened a store in Michigan selling new women’s high-end clothing and accessories alongside early Americana furniture. She helped at the shop but eventually stepped away to partner with an existing vintage clothing store.

Howard gravitated to men’s wear. “Being a bit of a tomboy myself, I have always had an affection for older men’s wear from the early 1900s to the 1970s,” she said.

Part of the appeal of men’s vintage clothing is its scarcity. Growing up in Michigan, Howard said she would go to estate sales in the early ’90s and the men’s closet was always smaller than the women’s closet. “Women were always bigger consumers of clothing. Men would have a handful of suits that they would rotate week after week and some casual wear for the daytime and weekend,” she said.

Customers who come into Stock Vintage are often amazed that the garments have stayed in good condition. Howard said it’s a testament to how clothing manufacturers of the past focused on building garments to last. What amazes her is how someone chose to save these items and hang on to them for future generations.

Consumers are especially less precious when it comes to men’s clothing. Whereas someone might see the monetary or sentimental value of a woman’s dress or handbag, dungarees and leather belts are often treated with less regard.

“I often ask some of my male customers if they plan to save what they are currently wearing, whether that be Ralph Lauren, J Crew, sneakers, etc., for their kids in the future, and they usually say no,” Howard said. “This is why it’s amazing that any of us vintage clothing dealers can find the vintage items that we have.”

THE GRANDMILLENNIALS

Low Timers
3207 Burgundy St. New Orleans

NESTLED IN NEW ORLEANS’ laid-back, artsy Bywater neighborhood, Low Timers is a compact time machine filled with stylized Americana fashion predating the 1970s, vintage signage, old school trophies and pendants and few taxidermy animals.

Co-founders Ham Smith and Kelsey Christian launched Low Timers online in 2017. The business went analog in 2019 when they opened the brick-and-mortar store. Appealing to consumers searching for a piece of history, the store has gained a following of visitors hunting for unique souvenirs, designers on inspiration trips and local eccentrics.

“We’ve also been described as eclectic grandpa, which I love. It captures what we specialize in,” Christian said.

Smith and Christian’s respective grandfathers were their catalysts into vintage fashion. Christian said it’s what they initially bonded on and eventually realized they could turn it into a business. “Both of us are obsessed with our grandfathers. They were kind of working class and wore the type of clothes that we now collect and sell. They both passed away when we were relatively young, so I think clothing kept our obsession going. We were both seeking out these things to feel closer to our grandparents,” she said.

“My hobby is now my job,” Smith said. As a teenager, Smith said he would scour thrift stores for the types of button-up shirts, jeans and hats his grandfather wore. “I didn’t exactly know what I was looking for—I just thought looked cool at the time. And it kind of evolved into making and upcycling clothes. Then I would go to vintage stores, thrift stores and antique stores and just look for stuff that I thought was interesting. It didn’t even have to be my size. It could just be something I thought was cool to look at,” he said. “And then it just kind of snowballed.”

Smith estimates that 95 percent of the apparel they sell is “Made in USA.” Recent denim pieces have included 1950s Big Smith overalls with original repairs, a pair of 1960s selvedge jeans from Foremost, a two-tone 1950s Lee 101-J jacket and 1960s carpenter jeans from Carter’s and Sears, the latter lined with fleece.

Worn-in tees, chainstitched button-up shirts, faded sweatshirts and knitwear—many with collegiate and varsity motifs—make up the bulk of Low Timers’ assortment. Graphic tees from pizza shops, hardware

▲ Stock Vintage’s clientele spans stylists, celebrities and fans of slow fashion and heritage design.

▼ Low Timers merchandises vintage fashion with Americana memorabilia.

stores and other small-town businesses tap into the growing trend for localized merch. Low Timers sells their own “shop shirts,” a.k.a. vintage pieces that Smith and Christian customize and upcycle with custom graphics and chainstitching.

While brands are mostly irrelevant at Low Timers, there are a few heritage names in workwear that get collectors excited. “Levi’s is an obvious one, but I love Sears,” Smith said. “Sears is a highly underrated brand. All those big department stores back in the day had smaller brands like Hercules and JCPenney had Big Mac. Those are my favorites.”

Being part of the vintage community has impacted all aspects of their lives. Christian said they have a greater appreciation for the value and history of vintage fashion, and the process it took the seller to put it back in circulation. Smith added that they tend to pick up clothes for themselves during their sourcing trips instead of buying new ones.

Estate sales, yard sales, and connections with rag houses form the backbone of Low Timers’ vintage ecosystem. However, it’s often the sourcing trips to Smith’s home state of Virginia that yield the most obscure brands and rare pieces—items that never made their way down South. According to Smith, vintage Americana fashion serves as a reminder of just how regional the apparel industry once was.

“Where I’m from in Virginia, there weren’t any big department stores, and traveling to a big city was an event,” he said. “It wasn’t something that people did regularly. So, the way that they got clothing was through small general stores that sold groceries and farm supplies. That’s where everyone got their



STOCK VINTAGE IMAGES: GEORGE CHINSEE/FARCHILD MEDIA GROUP

clothes. Manufacturers that were in Virginia or North Carolina basically sold only in Virginia and North Carolina. It wasn't very common for them to be a national brand."

Online marketplaces, coupled with the popularity of estate sales for social media content, is changing the vintage market. In the past, estate sales would draw a few early birds for clothing. Now, Smith said there are hundreds of high school and college-age people lining up hours before doors open. Additionally, Christian said sellers are becoming savvier, checking comps on eBay to turn a profit. "Not long ago you could buy a pile of clothing for \$10. Now they're pricing items out piece by piece," she said.

"I couldn't tell you how many times in the past year I've gone to an estate sale and picked up something like a jacket, and there's a \$150 price tag on it, and it's something that we would sell in our store for \$50," Smith said. "The pricing is very out of touch, but everyone knows that the vintage business is booming, so they're going to throw a crazy price out there and hope that someone who doesn't know any better will pay it. And that keeps driving the prices up."

However, what newcomers don't realize is the Golden Rule stating, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" applies to vintage retail.

"We're always try to be as straightforward and fair and honest as possible, and that has been our biggest success," Smith said. "We don't want someone to take advantage of us, so we're not going to take advantage of them, and in turn, we're given more opportunities to buy."



BOTH OF US ARE OBSESSED WITH OUR GRANDFATHERS. THEY WERE KIND OF WORKING CLASS AND WORE THE TYPE OF CLOTHES THAT WE NOW COLLECT AND SELL..."

—Kelsey Christian, Low Timers



THE FILSON EXPERT

The Barn Owl Vintage Goods
6012 12th Ave. S, Seattle

JOSH DAND, owner of The Barn Owl in Seattle, is preserving a piece of American history—one "Made in USA" T-shirt and pair of jeans at a time. Opened in 2021, The Barn Owl Vintage Goods has become a destination for the finest in vintage workwear, denim and tees from the 1920s to the 1990s.

Dand's passion for vintage began early. "My father was a collector. He collected records and books, and that lifestyle kind of led me into collecting the same things as well as vintage clothing. Vintage clothing was kind of how you developed your own style when you were young. I work vintage pieces in with modern stuff and created my own style," he said.

That approach to styling has struck a chord with his customers. A shared appreciation for timeless fashion brings together The Barn Owl's wide-ranging clientele—from high schoolers on the hunt for standout vintage tees to shoppers seeking rare, one-of-a-kind finds. "I think my average shopper is someone who has an appreciation for the well-made goods of the past but also is looking for a modern way to work them into their style," he said.

Classic American fashion and workwear is the "meat and potatoes" of The Barn Owl, where consumers can find Levi's sherpa Type III jackets, Lee chambray shirts, Wrangler gas station jackets, Pendleton and Woolrich flannels, heaps of Filson gear and graphic T-shirts—all "Made in USA."

"Unfortunately, long gone are the days when there were mills throughout the country. If you look through the history of this country and garment production, it has been people chasing lower labor costs and mills moving from New York to Pennsylvania to North Carolina and South Carolina and then overseas," Dand said. "The goods that were made in the United States were built to last. So much of what is produced nowadays is meant to be disposable. I would rather repair something and keep it in

▲ **Classic American fashion is the "meat and potatoes" of The Barn Owl.**

circulation for decades than to go ahead and buy something new."

Dand has a special affinity for Seattle-based Filson. In addition to The Barn Owl being the leading source for vintage Filson in the U.S., he has written a guide on dating and verifying vintage Filson. "I'm kind of the preeminent Filson expert," Dand said. "People reach out to me for verification on pieces."

Whereas many vintage retailers stay offline, The Barn Owl embraces e-commerce. A dedicated online team powers The Barn Owl's online business, which Dand said does a "healthy amount" of sales. While investing in e-commerce has paid off many times over, he said there's "no substitute for being able to develop a relationship with a piece of clothing by coming in, touching it, feeling it, trying it on, seeing how it fits exactly."

Selling vintage jeans online is especially challenging. When it comes to denim online, Dand tends to focus on tops and jackets because are a "little more universally sized" compared to the various iterations of Levi's 501s over the years. "I have people come in and spend an hour or two, trying on jeans, going in and bringing stack after stack," he said. "That's the only way you can do it."

Spending time with customers also gives Dand a front-row seat to emerging trends. "The thing that I always find interesting is I have several shoppers from Japan who come through. And in a lot of ways, I follow what the Japanese are buying—that's the next big thing," he said.

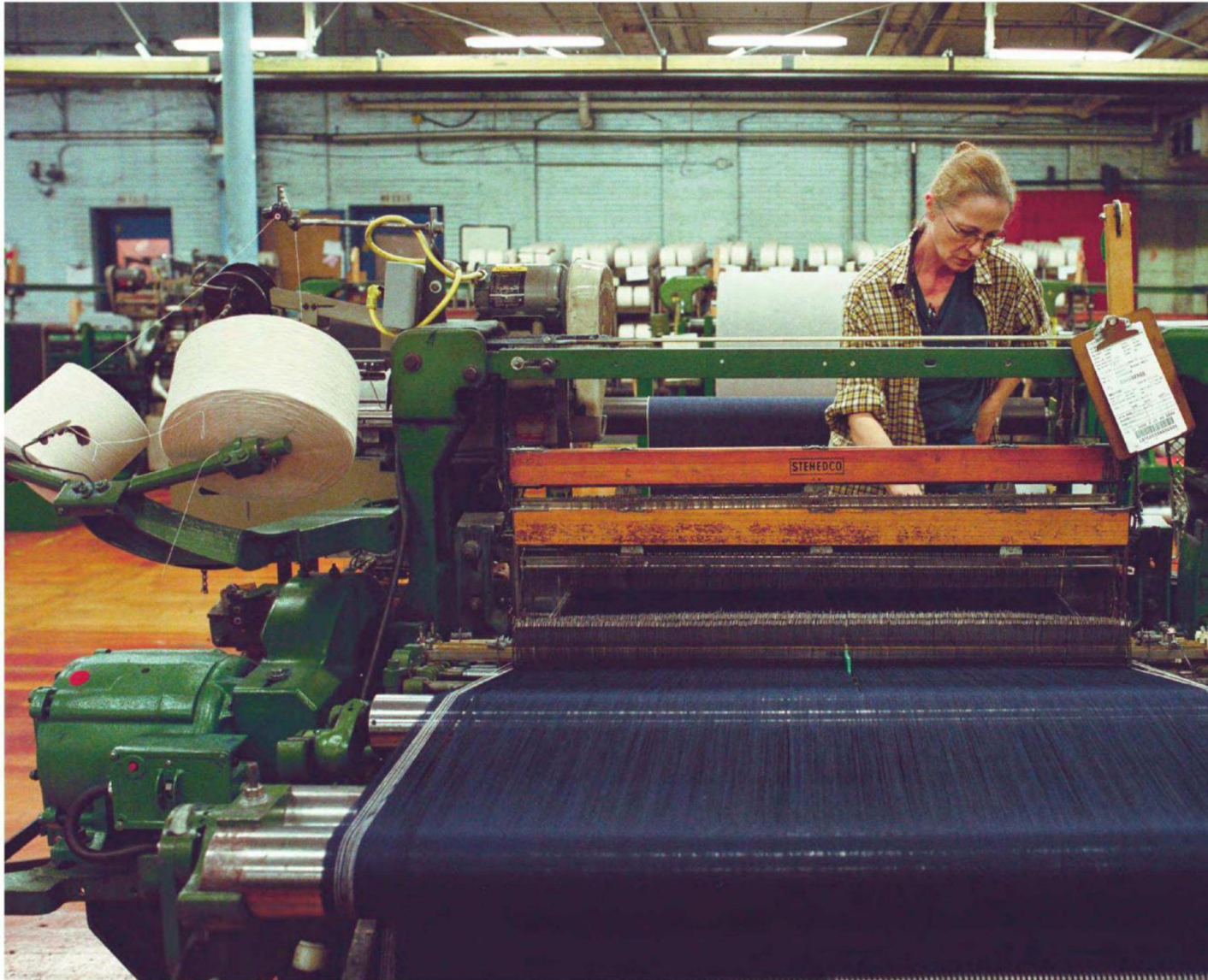
While vintage fashion often stands in contrast to fleeting trends, Dand says there's still an ongoing evolution in how it's curated. "It used to be that I couldn't sell an Aloha shirt to save my life, and over the past couple of summers, I've seen a ton of interest in the shirts. Same with leather jackets. I just had someone in here looking for a vintage 1950s or '60s leather jacket," he said.

Jeans, however, are always in the forecast. "I always feel like American-made denim is one of those iconic bits of workwear that people are always going clamor to, and we've got the biggest selection in Seattle," he said. 🇺🇸



LOOM LORE

Photographer Matt Sharkey documents the final days of White Oak in a new book. **by Angela Velasquez**



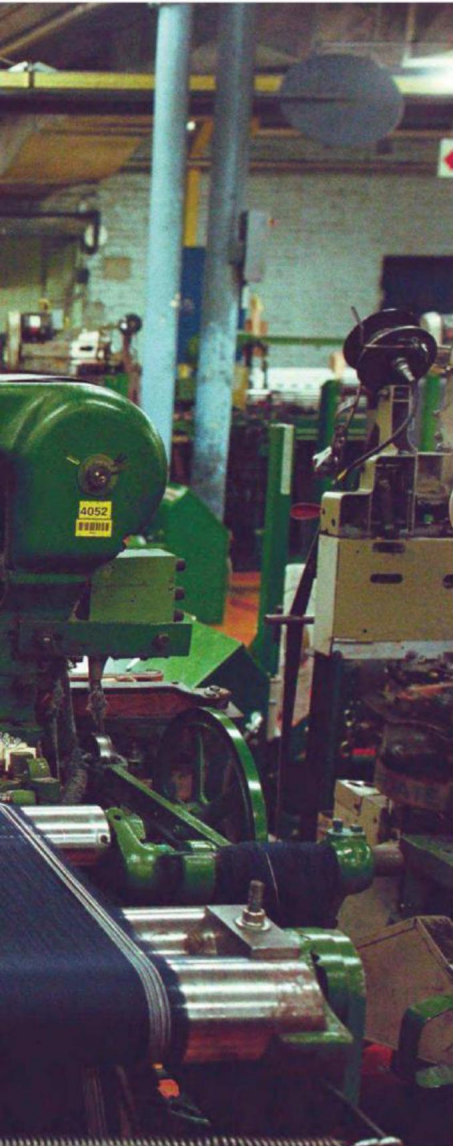
“AMERICAN DENIM” aims to preserve the legacy of Greensboro, N.C. White Oak, its employees, and a unique time in the history of American textiles. Photographed by Matt Sharkey, the 224-page hardback from Schiffer Publishing tells the final chapter of the plant’s story through 200 color photos curated into three parts: White Oak’s final days of operation, its closure, and its revival making selvedge denim again under the care of the White Oak Legacy Foundation and Proximity Manufacturing Company. ✨ A part of Cone Denim, the White Oak plant ended its 112-year run of continuous production in Greensboro in December 2017. International Textile Group, Inc. (ITG), the then-parent company of Cone, said that despite efforts to manage changes in the market, the demand for White Oak selvedge had significantly decreased as customers had transitioned more of their fabric sourcing outside the U.S. ITG said the plant’s large size provided more capacity than was needed resulting in a significantly higher manufacturing cost that could not be supported.

▲ Sharkey shot over 900 images on film during his visits to White Oak.

Opened in 1905 by brothers Moses and Ceasar Cone, White Oak in Greensboro, N.C. became the largest denim mill in the world occupying more than a million square feet. By 1910, it was supplying a third of the world’s denim demand. Between 1915 and 1970, the lion’s share of denim produced for Levi Strauss & Co. was made there. It’s selvedge denim made on Draper X-3 looms became blue gold.

Part of White Oak’s legacy is the deal Cone struck with Levi’s in 1915 which gave the brand exclusive rights to its XX 501 selvedge fabric produced at White Oak. “There are many brands that have significance—Wrangler, Lee, Blue Bell—in the denim space. But I think there’s been a huge hat tip to Levi’s for over 100 years for being the original, at least in the commercial eyes of the world for denim globally,” Sharkey said.

▶ **"American Denim"**
captures the final
days of White Oak.



For denim brands emerging in the '90s and 2000s, using White Oak denim became a way to tap into the legacy of the U.S. textile industry and align themselves with Levi's storied origins. Incorporating White Oak selvage signaled a dedication to craftsmanship, authenticity, and heritage. For consumers, wearing it wasn't just about quality—it was a subtle badge of clout. While Levi's remained the No. 1 customer of White Oak selvage until its closure, the plant produced large volumes for small brands like Tellason and Raleigh Denim.

Whereas other manufacturers of the same size and in the same categories have focused more on production and less on marketing and media, Sharkey said White Oak was keenly aware of its significance.

"To White Oak's credit, they did a good job of telling their story and connecting their



cloth to cultural moments in music and art," Sharkey said. "They allowed the spotlight and told this great American textile town story where every house around that factory was owned by Cone, and everybody who lived there worked there. It is an incredible story that ran for a very long time and is the legacy of multigenerational families that work there as well. I think a big part of their storytelling, and their ability to capture that story is to let others tell it and share it."

Sharkey revisited the empty and vacated facility in February 2018 and again in 2022 to document how Evan Morrison continues White Oak's tradition of producing selvage denim on old Draper X-3 looms. The co-owner of Hudson's Hill, a Greensboro-based American general store, helped formalize the establishment of White Oak Legacy Foundation in 2020. The following year, he built the production arm of the non-profit organization, which has since spun off, and begun weaving narrow shuttle denim on Draper X-3 looms at the White Oak plant under the name Proximity Manufacturing Company. The name is a nod to Proximity Cotton Mills, the first denim mill founded by the Cone brothers in 1895.

Sharkey's first visit to White Oak was in 2016 when he directed a commercial for Portland, Ore.-based Chrome Industries. The performance apparel and accessory brand was using the mill's Dyneema fabrics. That fall, he opened Bleacher Critic, a retail store in Petaluma, Calif. with a strong focus on "Made in USA" brands like Tellason Denim, the selvage denim brand that produces jeans in San Francisco. "We knew that we weren't going to be 100 percent 'Made in USA' because the price threshold for that would not reach our customer. But we wanted to be a store in our community and help people on price per wear and all those things," he said.

Through his "Made in USA" network, Sharkey caught wind in the summer of 2017 that there was a strong possibility that then-owner Platinum Equity was planning to close White Oak. Sharkey got in touch with the people he had worked with on that shoot back in early 2016 and told them, "I've heard through the grapevine that you guys are going to close White Oak. This place is such an important part of both global and American textile history, and I'd like to come and photograph the factory while it's still operating."



I THINK A BIG PART OF THEIR STORY-TELLING AND THEIR ABILITY TO CAPTURE THAT STORY, IS TO LET OTHERS TELL IT AND SHARE IT.—Matt Sharkey



ITG followed up in the fall, requiring photographers to send in proposals for submission. The company planned to choose one local photographer and one non-local photographer to photograph the plant's final days. Sharkey was selected as the non-local. During the second week of December 2017, he was escorted around the White Oak property to photograph the facility and some employees.

Sharkey recalls being struck by the unexpectedly uplifting atmosphere at White Oak during that time—something he found difficult to fully comprehend. "I would have expected the employees to be so much more crushed knowing that a week after I was taking photos, the looms would be silent and the electricity would be turned off," he said. "Everybody I talked to was still very jovial about their experiences there, and happy to share their story."

Sharkey recalls meeting with Frank, a weaver at White Oak for 61 years and his ambivalence about the day. "He had on his jumpsuit just like any other day at work... Punching in, punching out," Sharkey said. "Maybe the workers were just trying to go about their work week and process the closure later. Everyone was kind, thoughtful and respectful, but there was a part of me also wanting to soak it up because I knew the gravity of the moment."

Sharkey edited 900-plus images to 200 images for the book. He chose to use a film camera, embracing an analog process that mirrors the traditional craftsmanship of Draper X-3 looms. Sharkey said the book serves not only as a photo essay on White Oak's role in building the U.S. denim industry but also as a reminder of the urgency to maintain the country's denim expertise and know-how.

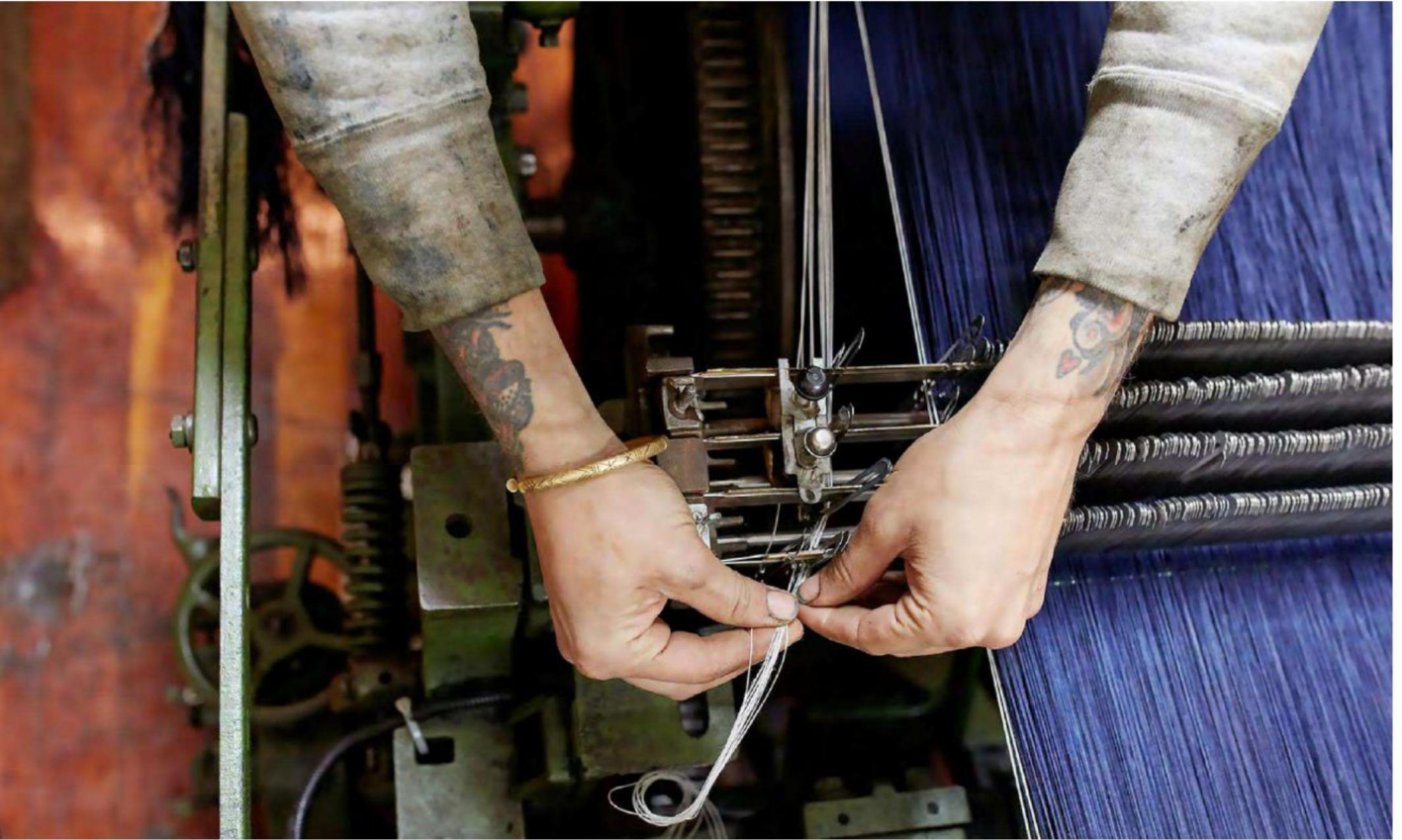
"Right now, we still have a population that can respond, and there are enough people that are still relatively young enough to teach younger generations," he said. "If companies get behind this 'Made in USA' movement, there's still like some easy resources to tap, whereas if, if they wait another 30 or 40 years, a lot of this institutional knowledge is gone, and it would have to be entirely rethought, if not entirely robotic by then." 📌



WORKING HISTORY

Proximity Manufacturing Company upholds Greensboro, N.C.'s longstanding denim tradition. **by Angela Velasquez**





TWO DRAPER X-3 LOOMS ARE STILL chattering in Greensboro, N.C.

Since 2021, Proximity Manufacturing Company has produced limited runs of selvedge denim made on a pair of White Oak's historic looms inside what was once the plant's archive room.

Proximity is the for-profit textile manufacturing subsidiary of the White Oak Legacy Foundation (WOLF), a non-profit organization with the mission to preserve the city's history and heritage of denim and jean manufacturing. Established in 2020, two years after White Oak shut down, the foundation serves as a steward of history and an educational resource for denim professionals.

White Oak and textile manufacturing will always be the heartbeat of Greensboro, said Evan Morrison, the operations manager of Proximity Mfg. and co-founder of Hudson's Hill, a Greensboro-based general store

that specializes in carrying "Made in USA" products. "I started my entire retail business on the idea that we would be selling other 'Made in USA' brands and products, but also making our own using fabric that we could drive over and pick up just on the other side of town. It threw a kink in the pipes when they closed the mill," he said.

Morrison connected with the new owner of the White Oak property, who agreed to set aside two of the plant's 46 looms. The rest were acquired by Vidalia Mills in 2019. Morrison, with the support of a neighbor who was the former head of product development at Cone, got the looms up and running in 2021.

Using warp yarn from Mount Vernon Mills in Trion, Ga., Proximity has produced thousands of yards of fabric. Fabrics span 12 oz. to 12.75 oz. left hand twills, right hand twills, broken twills and herringbones. Special projects have included the first bio-



WE'RE SHIPPING IT TO BRANDS THAT ARE TURNING IT INTO THOUSANDS OF GARMENTS AND THAT'S A COOL FEELING."

—Evan Morrison, Proximity Mfg.

▲ **Fabrics use warp yarn from Mount Vernon.**

◀ **A small team maintains the heritage looms.**

▼ **Proximity partners with brands to develop specialty fabrics.**

based indigo denim on a selvedge loom in the U.S. as well as the first denim woven with U.S.-grown degummed hemp.

"We've shipped pallets of denim, which is kind of surreal because there's only two of us," Morrison said. "We're shipping it to brands that are turning it into thousands of garments and that's a cool feeling."

First Standard NYC, Opie Way Footwear and Runabout Goods have used Proximity's fabric for special products. At \$30 a yard, the fabric is not for mass consumption. However, Proximity doesn't follow a traditional capitalist business model. Instead, Morrison said the true value of what Proximity does lies less in the weaving itself and far more in the educational impact the company can make.

The business plays an important role in WOLF's Denim 101 courses held twice yearly. Over 200 students have attended the two-day deep dives into denim manufacturing, including senior employees at major U.S. denim brands who have never visited a denim mill. "There's so much to unpack," Morrison said.

He should know. In his role at Proximity, Morrison serves as the weaver, loom repairman, payroll manager, shipping person and quality control inspector. "It might be insane to wear all the hats, but it is extremely valuable for our city's sake, because it keeps our tradition of making denim going for a third consecutive century," he said. "We're kind of the caretakers of this knowledge. You can't take it with you, but you can hold onto it for a little longer." 🧵





AMERICA

Origin USA founder Pete Roberts gives a candid look at what it takes to build a Made in USA movement. **by Angela Velasquez**



N DREAM



◀
Pete Roberts,
Origin USA founder.

IN A TIME WHEN GLOBALIZATION and fast fashion dominate the apparel industry, one New England manufacturer is rewriting the script. Since launching Origin USA in 2011, Pete Roberts has made it his mission to bring denim manufacturing back to American soil—not as a niche craft, but at scale, and with purpose. Rooted in the belief that manufacturing can provide both economic vitality and personal fulfillment, Roberts and his business partner Jocko Willink are building an apparel and footwear brand that prioritizes local supply chains, environmental impact and quality craftsmanship. ✨ Origin employs more than 300 people across three factories in Maine and North Carolina. The brand produces T-shirts, outerwear, technical bottoms, performance apparel, jiu-jitsu gear, footwear, accessories and more. In 2019, Origin launched its first jean. Denim now accounts for a quarter of the company’s business. On Black Friday 2024, Origin generated \$6 million in sales and shipped 30,000 pairs of jeans—more than the brand’s total annual sales in 2019. ✨ “It’s been a real process, because we’ve done everything from scratch with no funding,” Roberts said. “But it’s been a fun journey.” ✨ In this interview, Roberts discusses the challenges and rewards of producing domestically, the knowledge gaps his team has worked to close, and the long-term vision for creating an enduring, “build by freedom” legacy.



From a business perspective, what advantages have you seen from keeping manufacturing domestic?

Pete Roberts: I think there are multiple advantage to keeping it domestic. Number one is purpose. Jobs are important, especially in my community. In New England there are towns that were built around factories and now a lot are empty. It's giving people purpose if they decide that they don't want to go to college to become accountants and programmers. I look at manufacturing as a trade and there are a lot of people that want to do it. We have an obligation to support our communities. Additionally, keeping everything on a local supply chain is [sustainable]. There's also so much economic prosperity throughout the supply chain that can be had. For me, localization is a very big thing. It's important to know you're having a positive impact on the environment and people. And you can better control manufacturing when you know where things are coming from. I know the people I'm working with; we're friends. I can control the product and the quality product well and I can be anywhere in a few hours if I need to be. That's also important.

Has manufacturing denim in the U.S. become easier or more difficult since you've started in 2011?

PR: It's become easier because there's more knowledge. When I started, especially in my part of New England, there was no knowledge left. There were a couple of old timers who had a little bit of knowledge and helped me. But as we've grown, we've rediscovered the knowledge and have pass it on to our team. There's redundancy in our knowledge base. When you have one person with all the

knowledge, you have a single point of failure. When you have 300 people with a shared consciousness, a shared knowledge, you can be craftier, and things don't take as long as they used to. It used to take forever to do something, because we were figuring it out. Now we can develop things and do new things, and we have the skills to make them happen.

Is training a workforce difficult?

PR: You'd think it would be hard to train people, but we have a lot of young people. I look at it as a trade and a skill set. I'm not just training somebody on one thing. They're not just pressing a button and pulling a levee. They're crafting, they're moving between machines, and they got to know how to do this and that and the other thing... as they learn and get better, it becomes more fulfilling for them. People intrinsically want to do a good job.

What have been the biggest challenges in producing denim domestically? How have you overcome this challenge?

PR: The hardest part was making the garment again. I wanted to bring [denim manufacturing] back but not in a bespoke way. I didn't want to cut one pair of jeans. I wanted to bring it back in a scalable way. But trying to jump into scale immediately was difficult. We had to learn about leg twist and shrinkage on different batches and quality. There was just so much that we couldn't see at face value until we got to the garment. It's not just being able to create the garment one time—it's being able to create it a million times and make making sure it's consistent every time. That was hard. There was a huge knowledge gap in being able to make that happen.



THE MARKET IS THERE; NOW IT'S CONVINCING CONSUMERS TO SPEND MONEY ON THE RIGHT THINGS."



▲ **Origin recently launched 100 percent American-made Chelsea boots.**

▲ ▲ **Roberts relied on former Wrangler pattern makers to fine-tune Origin's first denim designs.**

How did you overcome that challenge?

PR: We made a lot of tuition payments. We couldn't sell the first 500 pairs of jeans. We donated a lot of them. Then I met a couple of pattern makers from Wrangler, and they went through the whole process. They learned from old timers that used to work for Wrangler and filled in the knowledge gaps we were missing. They re-engineered our patterns, created processes around what happens when the fabric comes in like inspection points and tolerances. I needed skilled people to help us on that part of the business.

Do you find U.S. denim production to be limited in terms of capabilities or variety?

PR: It's all very challenging. We make a super stretch denim. We're making a 100 percent cotton heavyweight denim this fall and then next year we're going to start selvedge denim. Making selvedge denim at scale in American is obviously hard. Each one is a challenge, but we've built a process around being able to do it. We don't skip steps. If you skip steps, it's disastrous... But once you got it and you have talented people, and the knowledge is shared, you can make any style, whether it's a relaxed or tapered or boot cut.

Does the U.S. government play a meaningful role in supporting domestic production for apparel? Is there enough incentivization for small businesses to produce Made in U.S. jeans?

PR: No, not even close. The U.S. government, historically, is concerned about national security and manufacturing. When you're talking about footwear and apparel manufacturing, the original purpose was to outfit America's military and that is the reason we still have the remaining fabric mills and factories. For the most part, they are supporting the federal government. They are maintaining the knowledge needed to make garments and footwear that fit the U.S. military's needs. That's the focus of the U.S. government. The focus has not been because manufacturing in America is the right thing to do. It's the right thing to do from a fossil fuel perspective. It's the right thing to do from an economic perspective.

How do you anticipate current or future trade policies impacting your business operations and supply chain?

PR: It's a good question, because it's not what you would think, right? I would say, for the most part, no. But the one caveat to that is, if there's more demand for U.S. apparel manufacturing prices will go up because more people want to make it here. We saw during covid with lumber—when demand increased, lumber prices soared. It won't affect us tremendously, because we weave some of our own fabric. We cut and sew in our own factories. Raw materials might go up in price if there's more demand, but I don't think too much.

Do you work with any garment factories outside of your own?

PR: We make everything. We have overflow shops that help us on hoodies and T shirts, but when it comes to things like blue jeans, jiu-jitsu gis and footwear, we don't subcontract

that stuff. We have a footwear factory in Maine where we make shoes from scratch with U.S.-sourced components. Those hard to make goods, we do it all in house.

What are your long-term goals for growing or evolving your domestic production?

PR: To build America's next big brand, but 100 percent on American supply chain. That's the 100-year plan. People think I'm crazy because I call it 100-year plan, but it will transcend me. I'll be gone by the time it's realized. We're going to go slow to speed up. We don't need to go eat tons of market share tomorrow, because we're never going to go public and we're never going to sell the private equity or venture capital. We'll maintain the business structure the way it is.

Origin produces a lot more than jeans. What categories do you see the most growth potential?

PR: I think it's less about growth potential and more about market size. The market will always grow, especially in blue jeans. People are always buying apparel. When I look at what has happened in footwear and apparel with Shein and Temu—all these cheap and cheerful goods coming across the ocean—it's really disheartening, because the American consumer continues to be convinced that this is the way to buy more. And what we're trying to say is, you need to buy less. You just need to buy quality, whether it's from us or somebody else. The American consumer is consuming more than they ever have. The market is there; now it's convincing consumers to spend money on the right things. If they're looking for dopamine from a \$12 flannel from Temu, that's one thing. But if they're looking for long term fulfillment that's where we can pull on their heartstrings a little bit. That's the goal.

Do consumers actively seek out 'Made in USA' products? Is that what draws them to the brand?



WE DON'T NEED TO GO EAT TONS OF MARKET SHARE TOMORROW, BECAUSE WE'RE NEVER GOING TO GO PUBLIC AND WE'RE NEVER GOING TO SELL THE PRIVATE EQUITY OR VENTURE CAPITAL."



▲ Denim accounts for a quarter of Origin's business.

▼ Jeans are made in a company-owned factory in North Carolina.

PR: Those early adopters just wanted to support Made in USA. But then they saw we offer variety of product and we're transparent about where things are made. We've showed them soup to nuts everything we're doing, and customers want to become part of the revival of U.S. manufacturing. But in the beginning, we didn't have best in class product, right? So, to appeal to customers who want best in class product, good fits and fabrics and function, we had to get better. We had to get better at building product. Now customers see it's a great product, made in USA, dollars are going back to the community, and they love it. We're diversifying product categories—that's the phase we're in now. We have our heritage goods, training goods, casual goods, and the next step is professional.

What do you have planned for the rest of the year?

PR: We're releasing our 100 percent cotton jeans in the fall and our first women's jean, which we're really excited about. Fiber, labor, rivets, zippers, buttons—100 percent American made. We've trademarked the term 'built by freedom.' That's our way of saying 'American made' because American made can mean a part of it was made in South America and then it was assembled in the U.S. 'Built by freedom' means that every component came from a U.S. supply chain. We're also expanding our footwear offering. We're making a really cool bison boat shoe and some sneakers, and more casual goods professional goods. So really excited about this year.

In the current climate, is it challenging to not politicize 'Made in USA'?

PR: Yes, it's very difficult, because we've been standing on the rooftop for almost a decade and a half now, trying to tell the world what happened to my community and how we're going to try to fix it. It was very people centric, and purpose driven. It's like, we need to do this, because if we don't save this, it will be gone forever. We've always been politically agnostic, but now suddenly there is this big Made in USA, push, which I would say a little bit a little bit weaponized, depending on what side of the aisle you stand. But for me, it's just the right thing to do.

It has been politicized, and maybe that's okay because it's getting everybody talking about it. I'd rather everybody be talking about it than not. During covid, everyone wanted to make stuff here and the moment that ended, boom, everything back to foreign countries. Well, now people must talk about it so that's a good thing. We've received less than a handful of comments like, oh, you know, I love Origin, but you guys are getting all political. And I'm like, whoa, what do you mean? We literally haven't changed our message, but the noise from the outside has convinced you of this. Being 100 percent Made in America isn't a political statement. That's who we are. That's our soul. 🇺🇸





Domestic denim brands face rising costs, labor shortages, and supply chain chaos—

FADED GLORY

yet some refuse to abandon the Made in USA mission. by **Angela Velasquez**



PETE SEARSON, co-founder of Tellason, vividly remembers the day his business partner, Tony Patella, received the call from a sales rep. ✨ “He said, ‘Hey, Tony, are you sitting down?’ He literally said that. And Tony goes, ‘You’re going to tell me [White Oak] is closing, aren’t you?’ The rep says, ‘How did you know?’ And Tony was like, how could they not be closing? ✨ Searson and Patella visited the storied Greensboro, N.C.-based mill for its 110th anniversary in 2015. There, they learned that Tellason, the niche “Made in USA” brand they had founded six years prior, was the famous mill’s fourth-largest customer in the entire operation. “And they were proud of it,” Searson said. “We thought we’d be their 40th customer.” ✨ Revered globally for its historic ties to Levi Strauss & Co. and its American Draper X3 selvage looms, White Oak’s closure after 112 years continues to weigh on the minds of denim heads and entrepreneurs alike.



WHILE OTHER COUNTRIES HAVE SUBSIDIZED THEIR MANUFACTURING SECTORS FOR DECADES, THIS SECTOR IN THE U.S. HAS FALLEN BEHIND IN CAPACITY, QUALITY AND SKILL.” —Dr. Erik Brodt, Ginew

shipment to leave Greensboro. As the Tellason team unloaded the massive order in Oakland, Calif. Patella traveled to Japan to meet with mills about re-creating the unique fabric. Kaihara Denim delivered.

“The first run of samples they came up with based on what we were doing with White Oak was on point. We couldn’t even really tell the difference between White Oak and Kaihara,” Searson said.

WHITE SPACE

While high-quality fabrics are available globally, White Oak’s demise left a significant gap in premium U.S.-made denim and disrupted both the production and purpose of many “Made in USA” brands.

Since launching in 2010, Ginew has produced most of its small-batch collections in L.A., Seattle and Portland, Ore. Up until December 2017, the Native American-owned denim brand sourced all its denim from White Oak.

Following the mill’s closure, Ginew transitioned to sourcing premium fabrics from Nihon Menpu Mills in Japan and Vidalia Mills in Louisiana. The latter ceased operations last fall and is now set to be auctioned off in August to resolve outstanding debts.

Dr. Erik Brodt (Ojibwe), co-founder of Ginew, said the focus has always been to source the highest quality, most interesting fabrics. The task has never been easy in the U.S. While sustainable fibers and technologies has become more accessible, finding high-quality U.S.-made fabric grows more challenging with each passing year.

“Manufacturing denim apparel that is made with USA-made denim fabric has become more difficult,” he said. “There are several small mills that make premium denim in the U.S.; however, the cost, quality challenges and limited supply have made it tremendously difficult to source new, premium USA-made denim fabrics.”

While Vidalia, with its promise of value-added fabrics and selvedge denim made on Draper X3 selvedge looms acquired from White Oak, seemed too good to be true for many insiders in the industry, brands like Ginew and Devil-Dog Dungarees were eager to place orders. Brodt said the mill produced “stunning denims” with intricacies and artisanal elements.

Devil-Dog Dungarees incorporated Vidalia Mills denim into its 75th-anniversary jeans, a limited release that Jeff Rosenstock, Devil-Dog Dungarees president, said paid tribute to both the brand’s history and the legacy of American-made denim. “As the only mill producing premium selvedge denim on American soil, Vidalia’s craftsmanship and innovation helped preserve an important part of our industry’s heritage. Vidalia represented a rare commitment to domestic textile production, and its closure is a significant loss for the U.S. denim industry,” he said.

Others were more skeptical of the mill housed in a former Fruit of the Loom facility. To be a fully vertical denim mill with in-house spinning requires a right-sized facility and a knowledgeable workforce at each stage of production, not to mention cash. Pete Roberts, the founder and CEO of Origin USA, said Vidalia lacked it all.

Despite being a small client, even at No. 4, Searson said the brand did everything it could on a “cultural and business level” to support White Oak. While larger companies “chased the rainbow to profits by going overseas,” he said Tellason was never tempted by cheaper fabrics from Italy, China or Turkey.

“We committed to our raw materials,” he said. “We certainly could have saved money and been maybe more profitable by buying fabrics from somewhere else, but that would have taken away from the ethos of our brand, which is made in USA, cut and sell in San Francisco, all the way. So, my take is, we did our part. We decided to stay with it, stay the course, because it meant something to us on a cultural level. And denim, in our opinion, is a really special product.”

Tellason purchased a year-and-a-half’s worth of proprietary fabric from White Oak ahead of its closure. The order was the last

▲ **Tellason is committed to producing jeans in San Francisco.**

► **Selvedge denim, chinos, and fatigue pants are part of Tellason’s collection.**







FEWER MILLS ARE PRODUCING IN THE U.S., LIMITING OPTIONS AND ELONGATING THE TIME IT TAKES TO RECEIVE YARDAGE.”

—Susie Shaughnessy, Crawford Denim

“There’s a lot that goes into each one of those components, into carding and roving, into spinning, into dyeing, into weaving. And trying to bring back everything all at once with limited cash, using other people’s money in this massive space... it was kind of a pipe dream,” Roberts said.

“It’s unfortunate for brand owners like me and the apparel industry at large in the United States, but hopefully there’s some lessons learned, and hopefully other people can pick up and push the ball a little further,” said Patrick Mate, founder and owner of Patriot Jean Co.

Godmother NYC Inc. founder and CEO Christine Rucci helps brands like Patriot Jean Co. build specialized supply chains around their design concept, price and finishing. She had “high hopes” that Vidalia would become a fully vertical supply chain factory for large- and small-scale full package production. “It seems companies would rather shut down than invest in factories here. I have worked with so many of them for over 40 years and there are none left in the Southeast. Or they’ve shifted from jeans to government contracts to keep the lights on and people employed,” she said.

COST CONSIDERATIONS

Producing jeans domestically offers key advantages—such as speed-to-market, quality control, and the flexibility to adapt designs to shifting demand—but these benefits come at a growing cost, driven by limited manufacturing capacity and tariffs introduced during the Trump administration.

“The single greatest challenge to producing denim apparel domestically is cost,” Brodt said.

Not only has it become more difficult for Ginew to obtain premium fabrics, but the cost of cut-and-sew has increased exponentially since 2017. And the market, while proud of “Made in USA” items, is not willing to pay the necessary end prices for clothing made domestically, he said.

Despite being a small customer, Crawford Denim has provided consistent business to its U.S. factory partners for 12 years, even during the ups and downs of covid. Founder Susie Shaughnessy chooses to buy deadstock denim and overstock fabrics from L.A. rag houses for her small batch brand. The strategy prevents fabrics from ending up in landfills and helps fill the material void left by the great exodus of U.S. mills.

“The biggest challenge is sourcing denim domestically,” Shaughnessy said. “Fewer mills are producing in the U.S., limiting options and elongating the time it takes to receive yardage. Ordering from North America and overseas suppliers is harder by the day.”

She added that the instability with current tariffs is driving brands and suppliers to increase their pricing because no one knows what costs will be levied against them when suppliers deliver.

Rucci’s greatest hurdle now is tariffs on imported fabrics. A \$5 per yard fabric from China becomes \$18 per yard with duty, tariffs and shipping, she said. On average, a jean requires 1.5 yards, which means it costs \$27 for fabric alone. With a general CMT (cut, make, trim) of \$35 for a minimum order of 1,000 units, plus \$5 for trims and \$20 for washes, the jean costs \$78 right out of the factory, and that’s not factoring shipping and other logistical fees.

Rucci said only direct-to-consumer brands can work with this costing, and those companies are often challenged by MOQ (minimum order quantity) and price, especially niche startups pursuing domestic manufacturing. Rucci’s solution is to group together small brands and to encourage them to share raw materials when possible. “I can set up a line with one color thread and sew three brands in one place,” she said.

Rucci has embarked on a sourcing journey in the Americas, currently sourcing denim from mills like Cone Denim in Mexico and cutting and sewing in the U.S. Her clients are mostly smaller brands like Raimundo Langlois, MarkWest Denim, Ginger + Dandelion and Corby Holbrook, all of which are making jeans in L.A. for their direct-to-consumer businesses.

Patriot Jeans Co. is her only client using 100 percent “Made in USA” components—from buttons to tissue paper—and manufacturing in El Paso, Tex. The men’s brand sources fabric from Mount Vernon in Trion, Ga., the only denim manufacturer in the U.S., and supplier to brands like Imogene + Willie and Origin USA.

Fabrics are not the only issue either. Rucci said most American trim manufacturers want 10,000 to 20,000 for custom trims and they’re not always willing to do smaller quantities even with an upcharge. She must source certain trims outside the U.S. for that reason.

“There are also many suppliers who stock imported fabrics and trims which are U.S.-based, which I consider U.S.-sourced,” she said.

Rucci’s core U.S. suppliers are YKK, A&E Thread, Carr Textiles, Copen United and American Made Knitters. She uses Caroda, a New York City-based factory, for raw denim programs. For bigger volumes with lower retail costs, she works a factory in El Paso for sewing and laundry. For larger volumes, she turns to factories in Mexico. Her network in L.A. includes American Made, Star Pades and Cotton Cloob.

Since the Maquiladora Program in the 1960s, which allowed U.S. companies to set up manufacturing plants in Mexico, and later NAFTA in 1994, Rucci said “Made in Mexico” is widely accepted in the U.S. jeans sphere—though Rucci prefers to use the term “Made in North America.”

“I worked for two years for a large Mexican jeans manufacturer, and they make for all the top American brands, which all had their own staff and offices within the factory,” she said

BLURRING BORDERS

According to the FTC, for a product to be called “Made in USA” it must be “all or virtually all” made in the U.S., meaning the final assembly or processing of the product occurs in the U.S., all significant processing that goes into the product occurs in the U.S., and all or virtually all ingredients or components of the product are made and sourced in the U.S.

If brands can’t produce a garment that meets the strict criteria for a 100 percent “Made in USA” label, should they abandon domestic production altogether? It’s a

◀
Ginew is the first Native American-owned denim brand.



IT SEEMS COMPANIES WOULD RATHER SHUT DOWN THAN INVEST IN FACTORIES HERE.”

—Christine Rucci, Godmother NYC Inc.

pressing question for companies and organizations striving to scale and support U.S. manufacturing.

Stephen Lamar, president and CEO of AAFA, said the strict standards for using the unqualified “Made in USA” label—requiring nearly the entire supply chain to be domestic—can discourage U.S. production. Many manufacturers are unwilling to invest in partial domestic operations if they can’t fully meet the criteria, especially since they can’t charge premium prices for products labeled with qualifiers like “Made in USA of imported materials.”

As a result, he said the all-or-nothing nature of the labeling system can undermine its intended purpose of encouraging domestic manufacturing.

In the denim sector, many brands that manufacture in Los Angeles embrace “Made in L.A.” as their signature identity.

Hiroshi Kato opened its fully vertical factory in L.A. in 1991 and debuted its brand in 2013. Cut, sew, wash, and finishing all take place in L.A., where the company recently launched a new water recycling plant and a solar power system. “We aim to recycle 75-85 percent of the water used in processing jeans and return them to the factory. Additionally, more than 90 percent of the electricity used will be self-generated,” said Muneyuki Ishii, founder of Hiroshi Kato.

The brand’s signature 4-way stretch selvedge fabric—used in popular styles like the Pen Slim and Hammer Straight—is sourced from Japan, but Hiroshi Kato remains committed to preserving its strong American roots.

“Jeans were born in the U.S. Throughout the history and evolution of jeans, the value of jeans

▼
Hiroshi Kato’s key fabric is a 4-way selvedge from Japan.



made in the U.S. has consistently remained significant and will continue to do so in the future,” Ishii said. “Every aspect of our process, from design and manufacturing to marketing, is based in the U.S., incorporating cultural evolutions into our American-made jeans.”

However, without the factory Ishii said producing jeans in the U.S. would be nearly impossible. “Many factories in L.A. have ceased operations, making business challenging for us. We adapted by redesigning our supply chain and incorporating in-house operations to become fully vertical,” he said.

Despite the growing challenges of U.S. jeans production, commitment can help overcome these obstacles. “Adopting advanced technologies and innovative business models is essential rather than repeating old methods,” he added.

Searson isn’t looking to shake things up anytime soon. By sourcing premium Japanese fabrics at fair prices and crafting garments in San Francisco’s last remaining factory, Tellason maintains a steady approach, honoring tradition while embracing necessary change.

“Now, if the factory we use closes, we’ll have to go somewhere else. That’s life. We’re big boys,” he said. “We can handle it, and we will pivot when needed, just as we did from White Oak to Kaihara. But if the green light is on at our factory in San Francisco, we will continue to make there. If the prices need to go up, we understand that, and we won’t bark about it.”

DEMAND VS. SUPPLY

Though Rucci applauds brands that want to make “Made in USA” jeans, the industry vet warns of setbacks, adding that the “sad truth” is the industry is lacking in every aspect imaginable, from machinery and garment wet processing to skilled sewers.

A persistent lack of skilled labor, especially in sewing, is one of the industry’s biggest issues, Lamar said. As companies consolidated factories due to labor shortages, they eventually closed facilities. Workers left for better-paying or more appealing jobs in other industries, like automotive or tech. Rebuilding the U.S. workforce would require textile and apparel companies to offer stronger incentives and rethink the image of factory work, especially the perception of spending eight hours a day at a sewing machine.

“As a country, we should not be reliant on other nations for our goods. Apparel can be made quickly, ethically and reasonably priced in the U.S.,” Shaughnessy said.

In her experience working for U.S. denim brands both domestically and overseas, Shaughnessy said there’s a need for both, but that it must be recalibrated. Though she’s encouraged by a resurgence of small batch sewers using vintage machines, business has tipped too far to imported consumer goods, impacting a knowledgeable workforce in the U.S. and artisans who view apparel manufacturing as an art form.

“Having designed for larger brands while they still had domestic production, I know they can return to it,” she said. “We need to give consumers high-quality and abundant options to choose from.”

Even as major brands continue to offshore production to reduce costs, smaller companies still face a David-versus-Goliath struggle when trying to access U.S. manufacturers. Rucci said big brands are starting to approach L.A. factories, laundries and dyehouses with 10,000-20,000 units and she fears smaller brands will be dropped due to cost and



margins. To make matters worse, she noted that many large companies are turning to U.S. or L.A. manufacturing merely as a temporary marketing tactic, rather than as part of a long-term sourcing strategy.

“I have seen it happen repeatedly,” Rucci said. “It’s also hard on smaller brand owners because they’re often self-financed and don’t have steady monthly jeans production. Most of the factories bring in workers based on volume.”

On top of that, she said ICE raids in L.A. are making it more difficult to secure a workforce. “As many garment workers are immigrants, some workers are fearful to come to work. Just as we are promoting ‘Made in USA,’ the U.S. government is cracking down on the very skilled labor force we need to make here,” she said.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

As if convincing U.S. consumers to spend more on domestically made products weren’t already difficult—especially in a time of tightened budgets—brands now face an added challenge: the nation’s deteriorating global reputation.



Shaughnessy said overseas customers are turning away from U.S. products, both in protest of the current administration and the costs.

Outside of the U.S., Brodt said the recent trade disputes have resulted in a geopolitical shift away from “Made in USA” with some blocs boycotting American items. “This has definitely been difficult for our business as international order cancellations are far outpacing new domestic orders,” he said.

Compared to other countries, Brodt said federal and state governments can do more to support U.S. textile and garment manufacturing.

“While other countries have subsidized their manufacturing sectors for decades, this sector in the U.S. has fallen behind in capacity, quality and skill. I think it is a critical time to evaluate the role of both federal and state governments in supporting USA manufacturing, to be able to compete at the cost, scale and quality of offshore and nearshore factories,” he said.

The government at all levels can help in a variety of ways. At the state and city level, offering tax incentives in specifically zoned

manufacturing areas could be a highly effective strategy. Shaughnessy noted that organizations like SF Made in the Bay Area play a crucial role by helping brands access more affordable manufacturing facilities. She pointed out that investing in local businesses not only supports entrepreneurs but benefits the broader community by keeping spending and economic activity circulating locally.

At the federal level, Shaughnessy emphasized the urgent need to eliminate inconsistent tariffs. “They have been proven historically to be ineffectual and have driven up the everyday consumer’s cost of goods,” she said. “Incentives to larger American brands to offer U.S.-made product will also work, if the companies work at a different profit margin. There are large-scale manufacturers that work with the U.S. military that can accommodate larger orders for these big brands.”

However, without decisive policy changes, Shaughnessy fears the outlook will continue to worsen. She suspects more brands, businesses, and suppliers will fold if government officials fail to acknowledge the impact of President

▲ **Hiroshi Kato recently updated its L.A. factory with a new water recycling plant.**

Trump’s tariff policies and their frequent, unpredictable revisions. “It is economically challenging not to know what your duties and tariffs will be day to day,” she said.

Brodt echoed these concerns, warning that small apparel businesses may become the unintended casualties of the current global trade environment. “We anticipate that supply chain disruptions will continue,” he added.

Pearson was even more direct, challenging the assumption that domestic denim manufacturing can be revived through tariffs alone. “You’re not just going to whip up a factory, are you? The idea of bringing denim manufacturing back to America by imposing tariffs—it’s not true. No one will open a factory to make denim again. It’s way too technical,” he said.

Instead, he argued, the policies are actively undermining companies committed to U.S. production. “Why punish us for buying from Japan? I can understand if there was a solid mill, but we would have never gone to Japan because we like the USA story. It doesn’t exist. This broad stroke of tariffing everything—that’s a mistake,” he said. 🇺🇸



GROWING PAINS

Will Trump-sanctioned ICE raids stunt regenerative agriculture's growth? **by Andre Claudio**



PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP'S increased U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (aka ICE) raids are poised to have a broader impact than initially anticipated. ✨ In just six months back in office, Trump has drastically reshaped the political landscape. Among the most controversial moves from the 79-year-old leader is the ramp-up of deportation policies and the intensified presence of ICE, a shift already sowing fear across industries dependent on immigrant labor and threatening the stability of key supply chains. ✨ “We’re seeing policy whiplash that’s creating operational chaos,” Loren Locke, a business immigration attorney and former U.S. Department of State consular officer, told Sourcing Journal. “This instability makes it impossible for businesses to plan long-term investments or really changes of any kind.” ✨ While Trump insists his crackdown is focused on “criminals,” the numbers tell a different story. According to a CNN analysis of ICE records from October through the end of May, more than 75 percent of those booked into ICE custody during fiscal year 2025 had no criminal convictions beyond immigration or traffic-related offenses. Fewer than 10 percent were convicted of serious crimes such as murder, assault, robbery or rape, undermining Trump’s repeated claim that ICE’s efforts are about public safety.



Adding insult to injury, ICE—operating under Trump’s direction—has started heavily targeting undocumented immigrants working in essential sectors like agriculture, hospitality and food service. Although Trump had briefly ordered ICE to halt arrests, enforcement operations resumed shortly afterward.

“The President has been incredibly clear. There will be no safe spaces for industries who harbor violent criminals or purposely try to undermine ICE’s efforts,” Tricia McLaughlin, a spokeswoman for the Department of Homeland Security, told CBS News. “Worksite enforcement remains a cornerstone of our efforts to safeguard public safety, national security and economic stability. These operations target illegal employment networks that undermine American workers, destabilize labor markets and expose critical infrastructure to exploitation.”

With ICE raids back in full swing, the fashion industry—along with many others—is likely to feel the ripple effects, particularly when it comes to the growth of regenerative agriculture.

In recent years, fashion brands like Patagonia, Kering, Citizens of Humanity and Eileen Fisher have integrated regenerative practices into their supply chains to boost sustainability. These efforts involve reducing chemical inputs, minimizing tillage and improving soil health, cornerstones of the industry’s push toward a more sustainable future.

However, as ICE continues to target farmworkers—and with an estimated 283,000 undocumented immigrants employed in agriculture, according to the Center for Migration Studies of New York—the future growth of regenerative agriculture remains uncertain.

“Unlike conventional farming operations that rely more on mechanization than manpower, the sustainable methods used in regenerative cotton operations benefit from the farmworkers’ special expertise,” Locke said. “Immigration enforcement actions could drive away experienced farmworkers and could do so at points in the cotton season that are particularly devastating to the outcome. It is just unrealistic to think that farmers could replace their current farmworkers on the fly with willing U.S. workers with adequate skill.”

Better Cotton—the world’s largest cotton sustainability program, which operates in 22 countries including the U.S. and accounts for 22 percent of global cotton production—echoed Locke’s sentiment, but noted that the



IT IS JUST UNREALISTIC TO THINK THAT FARMERS COULD REPLACE THEIR CURRENT FARMWORKERS ON THE FLY WITH WILLING U.S. WORKERS WITH ADEQUATE SKILL.”

—Loren Locke, a business immigration attorney

▲ **Protests against ICE continue to break out across the U.S.**

◀ **Most U.S. cotton farms rely on foreign nationals for labor.**

fallout will likely have a “relatively low impact on the U.S. cotton sector [which is ranked as the fourth-largest producer worldwide, according to Mordor Intelligence] when compared to other commodities like fruit, vegetables and dairy.”

A representative from Better Cotton added that most U.S. cotton farms now rely on foreign nationals who come to the U.S. temporarily to perform seasonal agricultural labor, aka H-2A workers. Through this program, farms are able to meet labor demands while maintaining protections for U.S. workers’ wages and working conditions.

Still, it’s far from a permanent solution. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, H-2A workers are not allowed to stay for longer than one year, and the approval process can take up to three months, posing additional logistical challenges.

“Whether they have current U.S. work authorization or not, individuals employed in agriculture—including those on H-2A visas—retain significant legal protections under federal law,” Locke said. “But ICE raids can create a climate of fear that effectively nullifies these protections, as many become too afraid to report violations or assert their rights.”

Javier Palomarez, founder and CEO of the United States Hispanic Business Council (USHBC), warned that a decline in domestically produced cotton could also force the U.S. to look to international suppliers like India, Brazil, Mexico and Australia, all of which are facing tariffs under Trump’s revived trade policy and “further complicate brands’ ability to secure sustainable fiber.”

“If ICE crackdowns intensify and deter or remove large numbers of farm workers, fashion brands that have committed to sustainable sourcing may struggle to obtain a sufficient amount of U.S.-grown regenerative cotton, potentially pushing them back toward conventional cotton or international sources with less transparent labor standards,” Palomarez told Sourcing Journal. “Prices may also rise, and businesses would likely struggle to find workers to fill the void. The associated uncertainty and resource shifts would not benefit consumers or businesses whatsoever.”



THE AM

The latest industry news from Latin America by **Angela Velasquez**



AMERICAS



JEANOLOGIA BRIDGES DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING IN MIAMI

The denim industry is global with most brands having supply chains that span across multiple continents. Despite various avenues of communication and the increasingly digital process of creating denim, a gap persists between designers and the people executing their designs.

Spanish technology firm Jeanologia is closing that gap.

The company opened its Miami Innovation Hub in 2023 as a regional center for education, research and development, enabling brands across the Americas to create and refine sustainable wash recipes and laser designs—processes that can then be replicated in manufacturing facilities globally.

Comparable to a denim WeWork, the facility has become a neutral space for creative collaborations, connecting designers to the wider manufacturing world and the people and technologies that bring their ideas to life in scalable and sustainable ways. Global mills from Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, Vietnam and Mexico and Colombia leverage the hub as a place for establish strategic relationships with clients. Some come to test new fabrics on Jeanologia's machinery. Others including Evlox, Interloop, Kaltex and Twin Dragon invite their brand partners to work on future products.

To celebrate its 30th anniversary, Jeanologia is hosting a series of monthly workshops. Each one focuses on a different topic from sustainability to digitization.

"Many designers never travel to their manufacturing companies, because they are not the product developers," said Pepa Silla Casanova, strategy business manager for Jeanologia's Miami Innovation Hub. "Designers usually stay at their companies' New York or Los Angeles headquarters and don't have the chance to interact with the technologies and with the way the product is really manufactured."

The Miami Innovation Hub provides designers hands-on access to the technologies, which Silla Casanova said can better inform their designs. While the extent to which sustainable finishing technologies are integrated into their operations varies, all share a common interest in exploring the latest innovations available. Since launching, the Miami hub has welcomed large brands like American Eagle, Guess and Target along with a range of emerging labels. Brands from Latin America are also using the hub. Jeanologia has a center in Brazil, but Silla said it is primarily for the domestic market.

While Jeanologia continues to prioritize innovation—Silla Casanova said they're

working on improving digital washes and exploring ways to re-finish existing products—the company is increasingly becoming a support system for brand partners trying to navigate the complex denim market.

Despite the denim industry's global nature, factors like shrinking travel budgets and growing travel safety concerns are constraining how teams operate. Additionally, tariffs are putting a strain on companies, driving many sourcing teams to rethink their sourcing strategies. Jeanologia has formed several partnerships with factories in Mexico, Guatemala and Colombia in the last couple of years as more brands focus their efforts on onshoring and nearshoring their production.

Brands need to be agile and confident, Silla Casanova said. By developing their washing techniques in Miami, brands regain control of their designs and can take their recipes to any vendor in any country with technological capabilities.

"The Miami hub is not just a place for creation and design...Jeanologia is helping brands that may not be traveling or have never traveled to countries that are more favorable in terms of tariffs or other reasons. We have local teams everywhere and because we have customers around the world, we can help them implement new sourcing strategies in a better way from our Miami hub," she said.

◀ **The Miami Innovation Hub provides designers access to technologies like ozone and laser.**

▼ **Jeanologia has local teams around the world in key sourcing regions.**



JEANOLOGIA IS HELPING BRANDS THAT MAY NOT BE TRAVELING OR HAVE NEVER TRAVELED TO COUNTRIES THAT ARE MORE FAVORABLE... —Pepa Silla Casanova, Jeanologia





Omer Ahmed, Artistic Milliners managing director, said AM Mexico will shave up to 13 weeks off delivery timelines, unlocking “the benefits of reduced risk and supply chain resilience.”

Murtaza Ahmed, Artistic Milliners CEO, said AM Mexico marks a significant milestone in Artistic Milliners’ expansion. “The opening of AM Mexico is the culmination of years of investments and commitments to Artistic Milliners’ customers, who from day one supported our vision to offer them multi-country, multi-category products,” he said. “They now have a denim factory in this hemisphere that meets and exceeds their expectation for product creation and automation.”

Artistic Milliners has been heavily investing in production in North and Central Americas since 2020. The company’s network in the Americas includes SFI and Star Fades Studio, a design development hub in California, and the SFI factory in Guatemala.

The company also has a strategic partnership Cone Denim, which has a factory in Parras. Clients are encouraged to source fabrics from regional mill partners so that fabric can stay local.

AM Mexico features cutting-edge automation across cutting, sewing, finishing and laundry operations. The facility integrates machinery and technology from leaders such as Lectra, Jeanologia, Tonello, C Tex, IMA, Morgan, Tajima, Hashima, Sip-Italy, Smart MRT and Triveneta.

This focus on innovation is carried into products. In April, AM Mexico and Los Angeles-based sister company Star Fades International (SFI) announced a partnership with The Lycra Company to offer Lycra FitSense denim technology for the first time in North America. The yarn and garment processing technology allows brands to customize jeans with targeted compression.



GLOBAL DENIM ENCOURAGES STUDENTS TO EXPLORE CIRCULAR DESIGN PROCESSES

Universidad Anáhuac México design students unveiled the results of a circular design project sponsored by Global Denim.

The project, called “Circular Denim Moda Anáhuac México,” provided 21 sixth-semester students with the opportunity to develop a fashion collection in denim aligned with circular economy principles, incorporating design research, textile experimentation, and innovative design strategies.

The theme aligns with Global Denim’s efforts to increase the use of circular fibers in denim manufacturing. It also highlights the mill’s ongoing focus on education. Previously, Global Denim partnered with students from Anahuac Mexico Norte University in Mexico City to develop problem-solving collections.

Guided by Anatt Finkler, Global Denim’s creative director, the project’s academic focus encouraged critical reflection on the denim industry by allowing students to take an active role in addressing contemporary fashion challenges.

ARTISTIC MILLINERS BEGINS PRODUCTION IN MEXICO

AM Mexico, the newest division of Artistic Milliners, has begun production.

The state-of-the-art denim production facility in Parras, Mexico, featuring a 150,000-square-foot production floor, specializes in producing and washing jeans. Artistic Milliners acquired the former Dickies de Parras S. de RL de CV facility last August and began the process of upgrading the 10-acre complex consisting of two buildings.

Key Artistic Milliner leadership and partners celebrated the opening of AM Mexico on May 26.

AM Mexico enables Karachi, Pakistan-based vertical denim manufacturer to meet the needs of existing and new customers looking for production in the Western Hemisphere. The facility’s strategic location near the U.S. border enables reduced shipping times and costs compared to overseas sourcing. Its proximity to major transportation hubs in Torreon and Saltillo ensures smooth logistics and accessibility.

Upon opening, AM Mexico is producing 30,000 garments a month. Capacity will grow to 450,000 within the year.

▲ A design from the “Circular Denim Moda Anáhuac México” project by student Antastacia Callejaz.

► AM Mexico is one of several initiatives by Artistic Milliners to promote nearshoring.

GREEN STORY'S NEW PILOT SUPPORTS EMERGING LATIN AMERICAN BRANDS

A new pilot program provides small and medium-sized fashion producers in Latin America with access to the essential traceability tools that increasingly vital requirement to participate in the global textile and apparel industry.

Sustainability intelligence provider Green Story is partnering with Fundamentally, a Mexico City-based community platform dedicated to strengthening Latin American fashion and the industry's commitment to sustainability, to launch Fundamentally Green Metrics – LATAM.

The data-powered program is designed to accelerate sustainability in the region's fashion sector by making Green Story's expertise in Life Cycle Assessments (LCAs), Digital Product Passports (DPPs), and comprehensive environmental data accessible to 30 selected brands and manufacturers that produce in Latin America.

The company's technology has already been embraced by leading denim manufacturers in Pakistan—such as Sapphire Mills, Soorty, and AGI Denim—as well as brands like Earthletica in Australia and Bayo in the Philippines.

“LATAM is becoming a sourcing hotspot, especially with the rise of nearshoring. But with that opportunity comes an urgent need for credible, science-backed sustainability data. We see LATAM as a region with immense potential. It has strong manufacturing capacity, increasing awareness of ESG issues, and a real desire to lead rather than follow,” said Akhil Sivanandan, CEO of Green Story.

The region is still catching up when it comes to access and implementation, according to Diana Hernandez, CEO and Founder of Fundamentally. “Most transparency

technologies, like digital passports or blockchain traceability, are either too costly or too complex for the average SME in Latin America. Add to that the lack of public funding, institutional support, and clear regulation, and you get a system where only a handful of larger companies can participate. Meanwhile, smaller producers, even the most committed ones, are left out of the conversation. That's exactly the gap we're trying to bridge,” she said.

The need for the partnership highlights several underlying issues when it comes to scaling sustainability. “We can't build a truly sustainable fashion system without including everyone, and Latin America has long been left out of the data-driven transformation,” Hernandez added.

LATAM's local fashion economies are under intense pressure from ultra-cheap fast fashion imports, especially from Asia, she explained, she said. In countries like Mexico, Chile, and Argentina, small producers are being displaced and in the absence of strong EPR laws, local governments are struggling to respond and are getting excluded from regulated international markets.

That's where Fundamentally and Green Story's mission matters most. “By equipping underserved producers with accessible, verifiable data, we're supporting compliance and opening the door to global markets. We're giving visibility, credibility and competitiveness to those who have long been excluded,” Hernandez said. “Real sustainability isn't possible without systemic change. All stakeholders are equally important.”

The program aims to strengthen the readiness of Latin American companies to meet evolving compliance standards, align with EU sustainability expectations, boost visibility among responsible buyers, enhance access to premium export markets, and build consumer trust by transparently communicating verified environmental impacts.



“WE’RE GIVING VISIBILITY, CREDIBILITY AND COMPETITIVENESS TO THOSE WHO HAVE LONG BEEN EXCLUDED.”

—Diana Hernandez, Fundamentally

▲ **Participating companies will have access to Green Story's expertise in Life Cycle Assessments and Digital Product Passports.**

“Digital product passports are fast becoming the default language of trust in fashion. They tell a verified story about how a product was made and its environmental footprint. Our initiative is about helping LATAM suppliers meet that pressure head-on, by giving them the tools and support they need to not only comply, but thrive,” Sivanandan said.

Supported by a regional subsidy managed by Fundamentally, companies will receive “preferential rates tailored to the Latin American context.”

“By doing so, we aim to help reduce the financial and technical barriers that have historically limited small producers in the region. This initiative strongly aligns with our mission to enable better data for better decisions, across all stakeholders worldwide,” Sivanandan said.

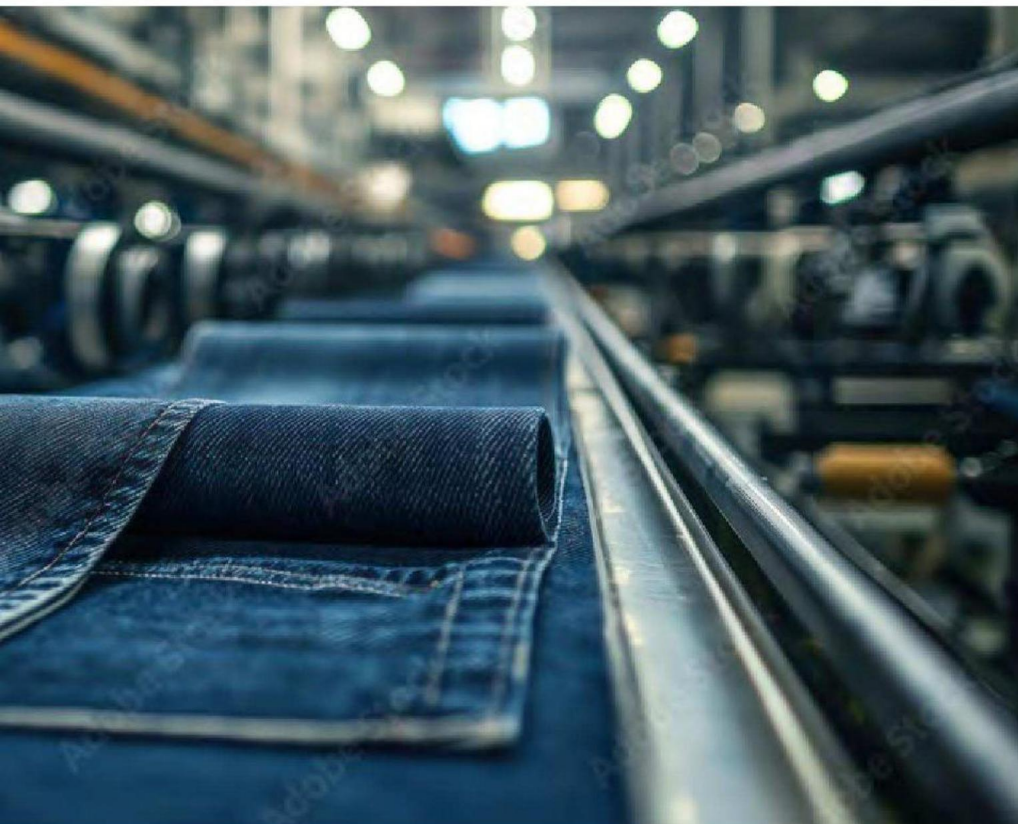
Participants will be selected jointly by Fundamentally and Green Story. Selected participants should demonstrate a strong interest in improving their sustainability practices and traceability systems, and a commitment to preparing for international markets.

Benefits include unlimited DPPs, the opportunity to use Green Story data in support of Higg Index submissions, optional carbon offsetting through verified projects, training resources and API connectivity for integrating impact metrics into e-commerce platforms.

The pilot is designed to be inclusive of all types of producers in the apparel space, but Hernandez said the focus is on small and medium-sized slow fashion producers who are often excluded from these tools, despite being the ones making big efforts toward sustainability.

“These are brands with strong relationships with their customers, rooted in their communities, but lacking the verified data to back up what they're already doing,” she said. “By making this technology accessible to them, supporting compliance and opening the door for international markets also we're strengthening a culture of transparency from the bottom up. Including a diverse range of producers also creates a stronger collective push toward data-backed sustainability.”

The pilot will run for three months, and participating brands will retain access to Green Story's platform and tools for one year following their onboarding date. Based on the outcomes of the pilot, Green Story and Fundamentally aim to expand the reach of the program to support many more brands and manufacturers committed to sustainability throughout Latin America. 🌱





BY THE NUMBERS

Denim may be synonymous with American fashion, but the world's love for jeans is a truly global affair. Recent consumer research from Cotton Incorporated highlights the key qualities people around the world look for in their denim—and how much they're willing to invest in the perfect pair. —ANGELA VELASQUEZ

47

↗ the average dollar amount U.S. consumers spend on a pair of jeans. **



10



↖ percentage of consumers who recycle jeans through programs like Blue Jeans Go Green. **



60

↗ percentage of consumers who donate unwanted jeans to charities or thrift stores. **

4

↗ pennies per wear of one pair of jeans. **



48

↗ percentage of consumers that say they wear jeans more regularly than ever. *



↖ percentage of consumers that prefer their jeans made with cotton. *

87

↗ percentage of consumers that say fit is the main driver behind purchases of jeans. **

62



SOURCE: * COTTON INCORPORATED'S 2024 GLOBAL DENIM SURVEY OF MORE THAN 10,000 GLOBAL CONSUMERS IN CHINA, FRANCE, GERMANY, INDIA, ITALY, JAPAN, MEXICO, NETHERLANDS, SOUTH KOREA, SPAIN, THAILAND, U.K., AND U.S. ** 2025 COTTON INCORPORATED LIFESTYLE MONITOR SURVEY IS AN ONGOING RESEARCH PROGRAM THAT MEASURES CONSUMER ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS RELATING TO APPAREL, SHOPPING, FASHION, SUSTAINABILITY, AND MORE.



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