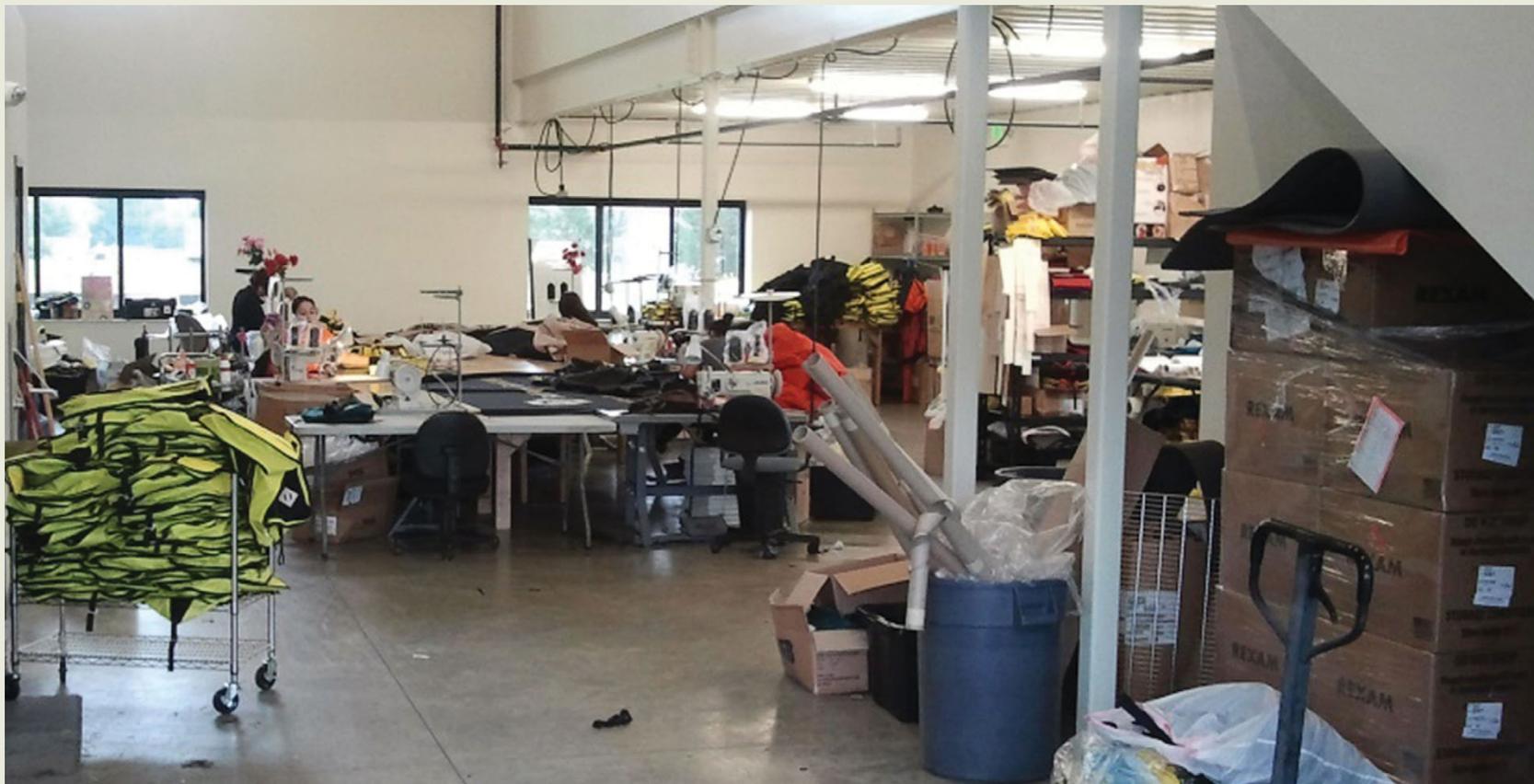


The Duality of Domestic Production



My day job is designing and developing apparel and gloves. Recently I've been involved in a small scale attempt to manufacture product in the USA, all of it made exclusively from American materials.

My first impressions when I started the project were regarding the wide spectrum of conduct and expectations of the people and businesses I encountered. From the sewing machine operators, to the jobbers and converters, and ultimately the mills, all seemed to be adapting to their role in modern industrial life. Although the domestic supply chain is chronically under-staffed, under-capitalized and overwhelmed, individuals and companies have each survived in their own unique way, often with a specialized skill set.

While developing a simple pack for the collection,

my colleagues and I were fortunate enough to run into a woman named Aldona. Working for a distributor and textile converter, Aldona answered my email query about American made canvas and at some point, after sending me the price of the stuff from India and mailing samples of other fabrics from Taiwan, we had a good old fashion conversation and she caught on; I was only interested in fabric that originated in the United States. What took place was inspiring. Aldona dug in and found the fabric we needed, big rolls for production, little rolls for color, tiny rolls for development. We may never know how many emails she wrote asking people to go back and check yardage and color, consolidate the goods and get it forwarded using her carrier and her company's discount. What was obvious to us was she had saved our pack program.

I've run into this again and again: As soon as the American customer service reps understand that you are making product from exclusively domestic materials and labor, they will move heaven and earth to help you. Happily, they will send warehousemen out to count buckles, and quietly they'll lean into the phone and tell you which of their competitors you might want to call. We've been sold the last two thousand cordlocks that were dug up from the back of the closet and had our webbing added to a much bigger order in order to avoid forcing us into a dye lot situation of our own. Our team has felt much more powerful than the few of us working directly on the product. We had Aldona pushing as well.

The summary is the yin and yang of dealing with American manufacturing; you are collaborating with the locals and they are a wildly diverse bunch.

Yes, they don't answer the phone, and many suppliers consider email a nuisance. However, they are a resourceful and hardworking group, and when given the chance, i.e. when not getting beat-up over their higher prices, the American apparel industry comes through and supports the all-important small scale production space inhabited by the entrepreneurs.

I spent decades designing outdoor product that was made in Asia, and in the end, I know very few of the people actually responsible for the day to day work involved in making tens of thousands of garments. Don't get me wrong, I made many friends across the Pacific, however, in the last few months I have formed more bridges and found more broad shoulders to lean on than I ever before. Working with Americans has been awesome. ●