

## Innovation from Sport

We tend to think of textile innovation as a top-down affair, i.e. mega textile mills handing out technological advancements while R&D continues to work on the big problems facing

functional apparel across a wide spectrum of uses and disciplines. All very serious stuff

Sometimes innovation comes from sport itself. Users/designers see textiles

as being in concert with an athlete, and in the case of outdoor and alpine sports, in sync with the environment as well.

Millet, a French real-deal mountaineering company, has advanced climbing and skiing apparel by picking up a technical weaving trick and applying it to down jackets. The Millet Synergy Jacket uses a woven fabric that is channeled in the weaving process, making for a single fabric that is both shell and lining. Where the channel intersects the two layers are integrally woven together, there is no heavy tape or glue, no zillion little holes made by a sewing machine needle that leak both air and insulation. This garment functions as both insulator and windshirt, and in doing so it is far lighter and warmer than its cut and sewn predecessors. That's meaningful when a climber carries the clothing they wear, and if anything goes wrong, they spend the night in it.

This wasn't plug and play. The French development team worked with the mill

to get the right denier and density for the performance they needed and filled the garment with hydrophobic down, thus extending the comfort zone considerably. The design nailed the light and fast alpine ethos.

This new construction methodology will never dominate at Kmart, however, it is very meaningful to a limited group of enthusiasts and it will dominate a tiny, although highly visible, subset of a growing market. Most importantly, it shows how a real need can be solved through the interaction of textile and designer, and how that solution then becomes a point of difference for the brands that follow.

Disclaimer: Mr. Gray doesn't fully understand the difference between a coat, a jacket and a parka and wishes someone would just combine them all into one garment already. Not coincidentally, the publisher does not necessarily agree with all of Mr. Gray's "opinions." ●



The Millet Synergy Jacket keeps its loft without stitches or glue. (Millet is pronounced Mee-Yaa)

### POSTCARD FROM SALT LAKE CITY

## Where Have All the Buyers Gone?

The Outdoor Retailer Winter Market's biggest story was the change in dates resulting in phantom buyers. Getting organized to attend a huge industry trade show a few days after the year-end retail slugfest and holiday binge is definitely not easy, nor perhaps necessary if your pre-season orders have already been written. The final verdict for ORWM will lie with those who did not attend. How did the whole experience end up for them?

It's clear that Big Brands need a venue to show their unfiltered brand

presence, meaning all the product, in all its glory. These Major Players need a big national stage to pull this off and Salt Lake is perfect. However, the mid-sized folks and those with stable regional and demographic markets, might look to shift most of their OR booth buying dollars other places, such as specialized buying group shows, road trips and regional sales rep shows. The idea is to go to the places where sales orders actually get written.

I know, supporting regional independent sales reps is counter

to the in-house trend, but I sense that sales managers are beginning to see these kind of events as low cost mercenaries in the war of pre-selection, and they can be supported tactically at the grassroots level a lot cheaper than a 20' x 40' in Salt Lake twice a year.

In the future, watch for a movement towards smaller, brand taster or "social booths" popping up in the pavilions and ballrooms while more colossal, walled-city like showrooms emerge on the floor. ●