

AND THE WINNER IS...

OSU Student Designer is First Place in Project OR



Melaney Stevens

The clean lines and feminine style of Melaney Stevens' versatile climbing pants won over the panel of industry design gurus judging Project OR. The Oklahoma State University student designed a stretchable, water resistant ice climbing pant that combined a modern look with targeted incorporation of color to take the top spot at the competition held during the Outdoor Retailer Winter Market.

Stevens' climbing pant featured water resistant, stretch fabric from Schoeller, reflective piping from JRC Reflex, padding for knees and shins from Poron, YKK zippers, and buckles and zipper pulls from ITW Nexus.

"The padding by Poron was probably the coolest product I've ever got to work with," said Stevens. "The padding is very light weight and slightly squishy if you were to press it with your finger. However, if you were to hit it quickly with a hammer, the padding hardens like a rock!"

Stevens found working with Schoeller materials a real plus. "The Schoeller fabric had an interesting dark grey teal color while the opposite side of that same fabric had a jersey grey/silver and black texture to it. This material had water resistance and stretch properties that I thought I would be the most beneficial to an ice climber. So the outside of my pant looks like I used two different materials, but really they are just flipped," Stevens explained. "Doing that gives the whole pant the same amount of stretch. I really liked how the material was very easy to work with while sewing and draping."

"My perception for outdoor apparel is growing from interested to getting an obsession for it."

Stevens was one of six students, including runner-up Silvia Guttman, selected to participate in the sixth cycle of Project OR, an intense 48-hour concept-to-prototype design competition meant to inspire innovative outdoor fashion.

Hyperbola, manufacturer of Bola-Tex soft shell, and Malakye.com, an online networking and career-building resource for the action sports and outdoor industry, were presenting sponsors for Project OR at Winter Market 2011.

"My focus is in custom bridal wear so coming to Project OR was a new challenge," said Stevens whose background includes an internship in Oklahoma with Johnathan Kayne from Project Runway who specializes in formal wear, and an internship with Karen Sabag Couture in New York.

"I've grown up designing every homecoming formal gown and prom dress since I was 15. Once I got to college I started custom designing for people whether it was cocktail dresses, wedding corsets, wedding dresses, or even just simple alterations," Stevens explained.

Stevens described Project OR as "probably one of the best experiences I've had in the industry. I really want to learn and know more about the products, fabrics, companies, technical design and everything! I now have a thirst for working with the small details in the designs and the performances that are needed for outdoor apparel." ●

Out of Context: Kurt Gray

Salt Lake City Best in Show for Fall 2011

salt lake city -- by the end of the OR show I had a clear view of how what was once generically thought of as 'top technical apparel' is now being reflected by the mass merchants at the bottom, while the new age outdoor players in the center have slipped sideways into clothing with a distinct point of view, and it isn't necessarily mountain climbing. the emergence of outdoor lifestyle design is palatable and its product sensibility is much more, 'sportswear meets clothing-as-equipment'. common, smooth, slick, monochromatic and color blocked outdoor apparel looks really old, no matter how fancy the zippers are.

fresh product with a new synergy was shown by; merrell, patagonia, horny toad/nau, and stormy kromer, with drive-by examples at ex officio, kuhl, carhartt, plumflower and mojo. off the grid and old looking were hi-tec, woolrich and columbia. adidas was competent.

as usual, patagonia knocks it out of the park, as does nau/horny toad. the best garments from a designer's point of view were from nau. this company is establishing high couture outdoor apparel with an active-urban DNA. both sophisticated and purposeful, they deliver product that is as relevant and compelling as anything from the city. the best apparel line from a merchants point of view was patagonia, it would be easy to see it's bright, modern garments lit-up in retailer's windows next christmas. the big p defines outdoor style, and their emphasis on fabric and function continuously makes for heirloom garments. best single style was the patagonia hooded flannel shirt with insulation (this, my friends, is the garment of our tribal future). coolest fabrics were; slubby yarn-dyed outerwear, over printed little quilted jackets and emerging' flannel-tech'. most heartfelt garment was the stormy kromer mackinaw, god bless their vision.

major fabric trend is the proliferation of new technologies, everyone now thinks they're a fabric scientist and they all have cute names for their inventions. the biggest market trend is the huge push towards alternative distribution, with all kinds of experimentation and new strategies by brands, retailers, and increasingly, factories. while everyone frets over increased internet distribution, m-commerce is going to fundamentally change the landscape. (it won't be easy to compete against every color, in every size, all on sale, all shipped free, and all at your phone's fingertips.) absolutely the dialog of the show was 'how are we going to keep making all this in a changing geo-political world?' can you say, 'price increase..?'

it was the biggest winter OR show ever. many commented on the increasing presence of chinese and japanese buyers at the show. american-made products coming from grassroots operations were everywhere. tons and tons of little new players on the floor, all with a vision. rejuvenation begins.

- k gray

Emerging Markets & the Evolving Retail Structure

Way back in the mid-1990's Larry Pluimer worked with Target, helping move the big retailer's business onto the landscape of the Internet. He then spent years spearheading Amazon's initiative to bring specialty outdoor product to its customers. His new venture, the aptly named Indigitous, uses the latest QR technology in concert with brands and brick-and-mortar retailers to provide customers with a richer, more inclusive, and more informative shopping experience. It's a competitive advantage they sorely need.

You use the term disruption and describe an impact on existing conditions that is directly related to the speed of the change. I presume the idea is that there isn't time to evolve in a fast-changing climate.

Often times we hear things like "nobody saw that coming," when, in fact it's entirely possible to see things coming if we pay close enough attention. Adoption rates of new technologies have been important key indicators in the past and continue to be worthy of our attention. For example, 6.5 trillion text messages were sent via mobile phones in 2010. That suggests to me that we are experiencing a rapid upheaval in communication patterns, which should in turn force us to examine how we communicate with our customers and/or business partners.

Explain what you mean by channel blending? And how does this relate to suppliers, brands and retailers?

"Channel Blending" is a term that I have used to describe an evolving mash-up of sales channels where the consumer is complicit in the process. For example, a consumer can now enter a retail environment (i.e. channel A) and in the midst of the

"We thought it would be in the best interest of the brand (and the retailer) to offer that consumer some relevant content such as reviews, videos and specs."



shopping experience she can access the Internet via a mobile device (channel B). This has the potential to be both positive and disruptive for the retailer. By accessing customer reviews and product information online, the consumer might be persuaded to complete the purchase from the retailer. On the other hand, if the consumer found more favorable pricing or a more attractive selection online, she may abandon the retail shop for a competitor. She may even make a purchase using her smartphone while standing right there in the store.

The latter scenario is occurring with greater frequency every day, and retailers are feeling (rightfully) threatened. So far, supply chains and producers are somewhat insulated from this type of disruption. It's possible that only the consumer-facing elements of the chain will be disrupted. Then again, if there are wholesale



shifts in retailing as a result of this disruption, and suppliers are strategically aligned with distribution networks that are altered, there could be fallout as a result of those ties.

ExtraTags is your effort to level the playing field between retailers and internet players regarding the emerging Quick Response (QR) tags. How does it work and how would a textile company use it to promote product and build a relationship with the consumer?

ExtraTags enables consumers in a retail store (as well as retail sales associates) to access detailed product information online by scanning a QR code that the manufacturer affixes to hang tags, packaging or POP materials. Since the consumer is accessing the Internet via their smartphone anyway, we thought it would be in the best interest of the brand (and the retailer)

to offer that consumer some relevant content such as reviews, videos and specs. ExtraTags offers the opportunity to deliver instant incentives to consumers on their mobile devices, provides social sharing functionality and even recognizes the retail partner through geo-location technology. The idea is to give the customer an option that may help the retailer close the sale inside the four walls of their store.

As for textile companies, I see an opportunity there as well because fabric suppliers don't often get to bring their case directly to the consumer. Their message often plays second behind the manufacturer's branding. Through a mobile marketing program like ExtraTags, textile suppliers could educate the consumer on the value propositions of their products with content that would otherwise not be readily available in a retail environment. Direct customer relationships are also possible once a dialogue is initiated.

Is there a danger that we will quickly become over-tagged and awash in a sea of QR tags wanting our attention? Will there be some sort of QR tag hierarchy?

Personally, I think every item should have a QR code or some other way to connect the physical product directly with online content. Just because the code is there doesn't mean you have to scan it, but it's nice to know that if you want to learn more about something, a convenient path exists to access that information.

The other day I had to schedule a service call for my dishwasher. While on the phone with the service company, I was asked for the model and serial number for the machine. On my knees, with a flashlight, trying to read all of the tiny numbers etched into the little metal plate - upside down - I was cursing and wondering why my dishwasher didn't have a QR code installed inside it. With one quick scan I could have instantly sent the serial number and complete service history to my dealer electronically. ●

Larry Pluimer can be found at: <http://extratags.com>