## BRAND PROFILE: ARC'TERYX

Arc'teryx is in the middle of important changes at the top of its organisation. But it is determined to stay faithful to its West Coast Canadian roots.

# Culture and quality remain unchanged



*Arc'teryx tries out all its own gear in the British Columbia landscapes close to its North Vancouver base.*

Arc'teryx

Canadian outdoor brand Arc'teryx is undergoing a change in its leadership. Vincent Wauters, who has led supply chain and IT divisions of parent group Amer Sports since 2008, became the brand's new general manager in mid-June, with former brand president, Tyler Jordan, a major figure in Arc'Teryx's 23-year history, moving on to pursue new opportunities. A few months earlier, its vice-president for sales, George Curleigh, also left, joining Red Wing Shoe as vice-president for its outdoor footwear brand, Vasque.

Nevertheless, the company's focus on innovation and, above all, on making high-quality outdoor clothes and equipment, continues. For spring 2013, in the lifestyle clothing category, the inspirations are mountain life, climbing and travel. Breathable softshell jacket range, the Gamma, has undergone a redesign. It uses a new version of the company's proprietary Fortius laminated fabric to provide what marketing manager Tom Duguid describes as "a mild barrier with breathability, but with some warmth behind it". He says the jackets work well for climbing.

### Backpack redesign

Meanwhile, it's also redeveloping its pack line. "We were big in packs, although slightly less so in Europe," says Tom Duguid, "but we let it lapse a little." Highlights he picks out from the new



*A version of the blade bag. The bag has no wheels to make it lighter.*

Arc'teryx

range of packs include the Cierzo, which he says is so lightweight and packable it can fold up to almost nothing. Earlier versions of this model even proved popular among urban users, but the new one will hold everything outdoor enthusiasts need for a day at the crags, Mr Duguid insists. A product that is aimed more at urban Arc'teryx fans is the latest version of the Blade bag. The company spent plenty of time thinking about this product and has opted not to have wheels to keep it as light as possible. To make it easy to carry, it has handles on all four sides and has special pockets and sections for passports, tickets, laptops and everything else the modern traveller needs. The view at Arc'teryx is that there has been a wide compromise across the industry on material quality in backpacks with the aim of keeping costs down and that it's hard to compete if you insist on using high-quality material such as rip-stop nylon.

## In the beginning

Still, there is plenty that's new and plenty to be optimistic about for the brand that began life in founder Dave Lane's house in North Vancouver in 1989. It took a few years to establish itself, but an emphasis on product quality and on meeting the needs of real outdoor enthusiasts led to an average of 54% in annual growth between 1995 and 2000. At the start of 2001, on the strength of this, Salomon Group bought Arc'teryx and the brand passed to the ownership of Amer Sports when the Finnish group bought Salomon from adidas in 2005. For Tom Duguid, none of these changes of ownership, and not even the restructuring imposed by the loss of two senior figures this year, have changed the fundamentals of Arc'teryx's culture.

"Two key people have left this year," he says, "but our culture isn't changing. We still have the same mantra, to keep building good stuff." This is not to play down how important the two departed executives were to the company. Tyler Jordan, in particular, offered a direct link to the origins of the brand. "Tyler was employee number four at Arc'teryx," says Mr Duguid, "packing up boxes and answering the phone." He was at the company for more than 20 years and became a very prominent figure in the Vancouver business community. He will be missed. "But there are still 220 people at our headquarters in North Vancouver and I would say 150 of them are fun hawks," the marketing manager continues. "I can tell you that everyone in our design team is able to sew and make and test our own stuff."



*Mountain life, climbing and travel are the areas of inspiration for Arc'teryx clothing.*

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*A focus on quality materials and quality products has always been part of the brand's philosophy.*

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## Take the test

Every Tuesday in winter an Arc'teryx group starts its working day at Mount Seymour, 15 kilometres from the office, to put this into practice. The idea, Mr Duguid explains, is to build products, try them and tweak them. The company carries out its own pattern-making and product development in house, and has its own manufacturing facility in Vancouver. It feels this is one of the main reasons why it can develop "unorthodox design concepts": it has complete control over the development of its products. "As more North American brands move their design and production overseas, Arc'teryx remains a member of an ever-shrinking group of manufacturers that employs a full complement of vertically-capable in-house designers and product developers," it claims.

And when product development is complete and the company's range of shirts, pants, shorts, jackets, gloves, baselayers and sweaters is in place, a high-powered customer service organisation picks up the baton. Tom Duguid is proud of a "massive sales-per-door figure", referring to the performance of Arc'teryx products once they make it onto retailers' shelves. Not only that, he points to on-time delivery rates of 92% or 93% from the company to its retail partners. "The rest of the industry is lucky if it does 60%," he claims. "Our retailers know that our stuff will come in. We have a huge customer service department and our dealers get great training. But when you look at Arc'teryx, we're not a big company and we know that there are a lot of places where we are not well known yet. We have to try to get in there, or at least into the right places.




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