RISE TO THE CHALLENGE: MOUNTAIN KHAKIS

Jackson Hole Wyoming-based outdoor brand Mountain Khakis (MK) has included 23 new men's styles and 21 women's in its spring-summer 2012 collection. Traditionally focused on 'hips down', the brand has said it is "particularly excited" that a majority of these new styles are tops, and that nearly half are for women.



Classic, cool and core

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"MK has been present in the women's category since June, 2006 when we launched our women's Alpine pant," said national sales manager, Martin Wilkinson, on announcing the new collection. "As part of our growth strategy, we have invested in our women's programme like never before, and are 100% committed to this channel. Our biggest statement for spring-summer 2012 is that MK is now in the women's business."

The MK product team worked on the new collection with branding expert John Moore and his team at The Pencil on Paper (POP) Studio in Los Angeles, best known for his work as creative director of the Hollister apparel brand. Hollister, an Abercrombie & Fitch brand, has achieved immense success among high-school consumers, mostly by keeping clothes at prices around 20% lower than Abercrombie & Fitch's own prices and, especially, through the concept of self-marketing. John Moore helped make the brand so desireable among teenagers that they were only too happy to have Hollister branding all over their clothes.

When POP Studio turned its attention to MK, it identified as key "brand words": adventurous, rugged, reliable, authentic, energetic, quality, consistent, classic, cool and core. All of these went down well in Wyoming.

MK co-founder and director of

Subtle changes resulting from work Mountain Khakis has done with fashion branding expert John Moore will help the outdoor clothing company embrace overall lifestyle.

Mountain Khakis



A Carabiner T-shirt in 100% organic cotton, with water-based ink for decoration.

Elongated cuffs on the Americana jacket are among the feminine design details in the new Mountain Khakis collection.

Mountain Khakis

product development, Noah Robertson, said: "Colours and silhouettes are truly MK, met with some 'John Moore infusion'. It's great for us to establish our design direction that is true to MK, then test it against John's fashion insight. MK does not chase fashion and trend, but we are careful to stay germane to these patterns. Our style is mountain lifestyle, but relevant to all aspects of coastal, urban and western [trends]. MK relates to all sectors of Americana."

Fabric focus

On the technical side, Mountain Khakis is introducing two new fabrics. The Approach Collection features a jersey fabric made from Singtex's S.Café product, polyester fabric based on post-consumer waste coffee grounds. The Fairway Collection also features a performance jersey knit fabric made from PET recycled plastic bottles, called Bionic.

Mountain Khakis said it had picked S.Café because it exhibits inherent, permanent properties including odour control, UV resistance and quick-dry. The S.Café lifecycle and patented process starts with the green coffee bean: the peabody. Spent coffee grounds from coffee shops are salvaged. Redirecting the waste away from the land-fill is an added eco benefit of the fibre.

Bionic uses an innovative, patented process to blend cotton and recycled PET. The Bionic lifecycle and patented process starts with discarded plastic bottles. Again, redirecting bottles away from the landfill is one of the eco-benefits to the process. As plastic bottles are recycled into PET the chips are transformed and melted into fibre strips. Spun together with cotton through a proprietary spinning process to create a dual layer Bionic Dpx yarn, the effect is a soft fabric surface of cotton and a core of recycled PET. Each MK Fairway shirt contains as many as 14 recycled PET bottles.

In addition, there are women's shirts in 100% organic cotton (the Ski Bunny, the Piñon Tree, the Carabiner, the Bucky and the Mountain Miss Organic) that use water-based inks for the graphics that decorate them. Other touches specifically aimed at making the collection appeal to women include elongated cuffs on the Americana jacket.

Lifestyle choices

MK's director of creative development, Jen Taylor, believes all of these developments will make a positive impression on buyers of the brand's clothes. She says: "Our mission is to be a mountain-inspired lifestyle brand. People work to pay the bills to enable them to do what they like to do. I used to race pro mountain bikes; I was a core customer of MK. Other people are working in offices and don't have quite so much time, but are still core customers. We love what we do in our free time. Now we're also hoping to appeal to office dwellers who are more aspiration MK people. The brand is now embracing overall lifestyle. We're in the outdoor spectrum, but that doesn't mean we don't take care over how we dress."

She describes the changes that have taken place to bring about the new spring-summer collection as a "subtle transformation". MK had a great core, she insists, but John Moore was able to look at it through a different lens. He refined labels and hangtags to make even these appeal more to those people who dream of walking or cycling in the Rockies but have to spend more time than they would like in the office at the moment, helping them take the hustle and bustle of business life in their stride and rise above it all.

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