

This July, at the OutDoor show in Friedrichshafen, Germany, crossover clothing, which attempts to fuse function and fashion, was the subject of many discussions. What styles and fabrics suit this transitional product category that aspires to reach a wider consumer audience of people who are looking for versatility and novelty?

The layering system in transition

Was it the mild spring and summer, or the sluggish outdoor apparel market? A bit of both would probably explain mounting interest in active sportswear made both for urban and outdoor uses. Research by the European Outdoor Group (EOG) found that sales in outdoor apparel were flat in 2014, growth in value inching up a mere 0.1%. This situation is distorted, the organisation notes, by the collapse of the Russian market and the mild weather in autumn and winter last year. EOG estimates the apparel category brought in €2.5 billion at wholesale, and €5.3 billion at retail in 2014 in Europe. "Market conditions remain challenging and the competition for consumer spend is very tough," declared EOG general secretary, Mark Held.

Inspiring consumers to buy a new item of functional clothing is precisely what brands would like to achieve by injecting additional versatility into the mid-layer category. It could be something like the lifestyle layer, a term coined by New Jersey-based textile resource and garment production specialist Concept III in 2013 (see WSA March-April 2013). "At the time," says company manager David Parkes, "we were referring to fleece and mid-weight knits. But over the past few years, consumers have finally figured out and adopted the layering system." He adds that "the mid-layer that pulls everything together, offering elasticity, light weather protection and warmth, has become more common, particularly in the United States." Aesthetics are also playing a greater role in this trend. "Fit, look and feel are now more important. If the cut, colour or

Performance Redefined, a new range at Peak Performance, focuses on minimalist urban vibes for products designed to transition from fitness, cycling and running to everyday life.

 Peak Performance



style are not right, the product won't sell." In 2013, Mr Parkes was already open to suggestions of a better name: "Crossover layer might be a better term, or athleisure, though that word makes some people cringe and should be used with care," he says.

Rise of urban tech

With growth in athleisure, commuter wear and even the "lumbersexual" trend, the crossover category is, at least in the US where these new catchwords originated, the talk of the outdoor industry. Efforts by brands to expand their offering to urban uses have been building up steadily. "Consumers spend a lot of money on their outerwear, it's understandable that they would want it to work in the city too," says Norrona CEO, Jorgen Jorgensen. The Norwegian brand introduced its urban casual range, Fjora, in 2009. It was initially designed for snowboarders looking for toned-down styles. Bithorn, its light trekking collection, is not urban per se, says Mr Jorgensen, but now features slimmer fits that have high crossover potential.

If consumers are buying less, they may want their clothes to do more. This is a situation that Swiss skiwear manufacturer Mountain Force has identified clearly. "In the past, we had clothing for each of the four seasons," says company owner, Roman Stepek. "Now that the layering system has become nearly mainstream, we have a single set of garments that adapts to all situations and climate conditions." What he calls the "ski tradition" is something he says he no longer believes in: "The product of the future is the perfect crossover jacket: a functional jacket that doesn't look like a ski jacket. Consumers have changed, they will ski one day and play golf the next, and they also need a jacket to go to work." He is working on this "perfect crossover jacket" and currently testing fabrics to find the one that will fit the multifaceted bill. It may be ready for the brand's F/W 2017 collection.

Arcteryx's urban tech range, called 24, was introduced in 2013. "As opposed to all of our other ranges that are sport specific, 24 is a very versatile category," says Edita Hadravská, head designer of the line. But, she points out, it always has "a functional anchor point" and then stretches to each end of the spectrum, from mountain life to city life. Now representing 20% of sales, the category has been successful for the Canadian brand. Looking for an example of a lifestyle layer, Ms Hadravská singles out a long jacket made in Gore-Tex, for men and for women, which comes in muted colours. She says these will "work in the city".

Swiss textile manufacturer Schoeller has a long history of infusing its performance fabrics with city aesthetics. "Urban lifestyles have evolved," says company spokesperson Dagmar Singer.



Snowboard brand Maloja, founded in 2004, is extending its action sports roots to the city and uses Primaloft's lightweight Active Insulation Silver in its Spring-Summer 2016 collection.

 Maloja

"People don't want to look like they are going hiking when they are in the city. And they need smart clothing for travelling too." In the crossover market, the company's equestrian fabrics, a category labelled Prestige, has been attracting more interest. They are said to offer a good combination of durability, stretch and recovery. "These slightly thicker fabrics are also good options for slim pants, that will be very comfortable to wear," she adds, citing Outlier, Proof NY and Mission Workshop as having sourced fabrics from this range.

The evolution of layering

Designing a functional garment that can be worn in many different conditions requires materials that are able to adapt to changing climate conditions. This is what Primaloft is working on, by shifting away from a "company specialising in insulation" towards a supplier of "thermoregulating solutions". Primaloft CEO, Mike Joyce, translates this as a garment "that will work in many different conditions" to become a "must-have" piece. "We want to be in that must-have piece. The item of clothing that will be in everybody's suitcase."

Though designed for high-aerobic activities, the new Primaloft Silver Insulation Active has features that make it a good option for brands looking for lifestyle materials. "We've reengineered the insulation to reduce fibre migration," says Mr Joyce, which means that it is no longer necessary to use super downproof outer fabrics. It also works well for the trend



Designed by Stephan Moretti and Henri Rodriguez, Rip Curl's Quest Anti-Polar Shirt won a Polartec Apex award in 2015. The technical casual shirt is made in a textured Polartec Thermal Pro fleece.

 Rip Curl

away from quilted baffles in favour of cleaner looks for insulated jacket styles. Mr Joyce cites Montane's reversible mid-layer jacket, which has quilting on one side and none on the other, as an example of this evolution.

Primaloft's yarn, made for fleece, flannel, knits and wovens, merges performance and softness in such a way that it would be quite suitable for crossover mid-layers. The company's strategy is to build an entire garment system around thermoregulation, including fabrics and fleece made with its yarn. The project is headed by Chris Sentementes, development manager for performance fabric and fleece. Primaloft's yarn is a hydrophobic polyester that is said to be treated with a process that contains no CFCs and dries fast. It can be blended with merino wool, silk or cotton, in knitted and woven fabrics, including flannel shirting with a surprisingly smooth hand feel. The company is testing different structures and alternating hydrophobic and hydrophilic properties to create products that "bridge high-performance to city, high-tech to fashion," says Mr Joyce. The crossover segment also has a sustainability story behind it, adds Mr Sentementes, as people want to buy a jacket they can wear in the city that doesn't "scream sport-specific".

The natural fibre aesthetic

When asked what is the best lifestyle material, many industry insiders cite natural fibres in general and merino wool in particular. Merino specialists, from Designer Textiles to Global Merino, are not ones to deny the trend. "Merino is ideal for lifestyle layers because it has both the performance characteristics and the city aesthetics," says Global Merino manager Jose Fernandez. The San Anselmo, California-based company combines merino wool with other fibres, including CoolVisions dyeable polypropylene, and works with Ramtect, Primaloft and DryDye. Its knit using merino wool for the face and DryDye polyester for the back (also with a C6 DWR finish) was awarded the Performance Days Eco Innovation prize in this April. The company intends to develop canvas and ripstop woven fabrics. A corespun yarn, with wool covering a nylon core, is also in the works to produce lighter-weight yet durable merino fabrics.

At Designer Textiles, innovation manager Brett McIlvride also believes merino wool is the best option for crossover lifestyle layering. "Wool has many great properties, it has natural stretch and recovery, it is anti-odour and warm. It's an easy choice, but the market also needs differentiation, which can be achieved with blends or prints," he says. For blends, the New-Zealand based company offers Merino wool and Tencel lyocell knits that have a cooler hand. It has also developed a way to carry out digital printing on wool fabrics. "Merino has a very classic look; printed motifs can be a way to infuse it with a fashion edge," says Mr McIlvride.

Taiwanese company Evertex has been focusing on merino blends for the past few seasons, blending the natural fibre with synthetics and even bonding two merino knits to a very fine layer of foam, creating a spacer knit-like material. "The fabric has a real urban feel," says company manager Tony Yeh, "but it also has good thermal properties." He also believes wool is a natural choice for fashion or urban apparel: "When you blend wool with a synthetic yarn, you can achieve both high-performance levels and keep the natural merino hand. Blends also make merino easier to care for as it can be machine washed and tumble dried."

A look at tomorrow's lifestyles

As the crossover category remains slightly blurry at the edges—where does one draw the line between sport and city?—larger performance textile suppliers are creating capsule

Made with Primaloft's Active Insulation Silver, Helly Hansen offers a versatile mid-layer with a slimmer and cleaner look that will easily crossover to urban and casual uses.

 Helly Hansen





Invista called upon Bob Bland, a designer of fashion tech start-up Manufacture NY, to explore next generation commuter wear using fabrics made with Lycra T400, a bicomponent polyester, and Lycra Sport fibre.

 Invista

collections to help designers and brands get a better grasp of some of the many possibilities of this new market. Last year, Invista's Cordura team asked designer Alex Valdman to create a silhouette using the company's newly launched Combat Wool fabrics. This year, Cordura has worked with Michelle Rose, founder of Portland-based Struktur Studio, to create a silhouette using some softer knits that Cordura has in development. "This collection not only highlights our latest-generation soft comfort Cordura fabrics but also allowed us to work with leading companies to support growing demand for stylish, yet performance-inspired apparel for women," says global Cordura brand director, Cindy McNaull. She believes "adaptive clothing" is a growing trend that touches on the "casualisation" of our wardrobes and the rise of athleisure. "We're looking to develop lighter-weight Cordura fabrics for the crossover category. Our extensive market research shows that consumers want comfort but durability also," she says.

Taping specialist Bemis worked with Michelle Rose and Invista on the Cordura concept range that includes an anorak jacket, a top and pants. The company's Exoflex film, a high-stretch overlay film, and its High Recovery and Seam Reinforcement Tape (HSRT) were used to add a

modern aesthetic to the products. "Exoflex is ideal for the athleisure market because it offers true performance, including water resistance, wash resistance, up to 60°C, and abrasion resistance, yet it feels very soft to the touch," says Bemis Associates marketing manager for sportswear, Bill Fabiszewski. The newly developed cotton ground HSRT was specifically made for urban sportswear uses. "We're good at synthetics, developing tapes for wool or cotton was a bit of a challenge," he adds.

Burlington Labs has re-organised its offering based on end-user types to help designers and fabric buyers navigate the increasingly rich and complex sportswear arena. "As the performance sports market edges in on the lifestyle arena, fashion becomes crucial and the technologies move to the background," says Belinda Burt, the Greensboro, North Carolina fabric manufacturer's product development manager for activewear. This new programme, known as Pathfinder, pairs user types with a fabric, a fashion and a function.

The marketing team at Invista Lycra has also created a capsule collection of eight finished garments illustrating possible examples of commuter wear, another branch in crossover or transitional sportswear. The elastane fibre producer worked with fashion tech startup, Manufacture New York (MNY), to create the showcase collection that uses its T400 Lycra and Lycra Sport. "This collection addresses higher consumer expectations for their clothing. They want stretch, they want fabrics that dry fast and they want cooling functions too; clothes that do more," says Simon Whitmarsh-Knight, Invista marketing manager for active and outdoor apparel.

As opposed to brands that need to stay as close to real market demands as possible, these inspirational collections are designed to preview what could be next in line. Crossover garments ideally tap the sweet-spot between function and fashion, but it is not an easy task. Mr Yeh, at Evertex, places these crossover products in the citywear rather than the sportswear category: "We're talking about a garment that will work in the outdoors, but only in moderate conditions. It's main purpose it to look good." Norrona CEO Jorgen Jorgensen neatly sums up the challenge: "Everybody wants something new, but it's not easy to be new and commercial." 

In its lifestyle range Svalbard, Norwegian brand Norrona is reintroducing a limited edition anorak made in denim.

 Norrona

