Zipper after zipper, tear after tear, the repair movement is gaining momentum as dedicated workshops spring up and brands begin to address the issue by inspiring consumers to keep their products longer, or put them back on the market.

A new state of repair

Repair, along with reduce, reuse, recycle and recover, is now one of the accepted 5 Rs of sustainability. But, up until recently, it has not been the most promoted or visible. The right to repair movement is seeking to change that in reaction to the spread of electronics and electronic components in everyday items, from cell phones to tractors, that either cannot be repaired or can only be fixed by certified operators and are therefore tightly controlled by brands. Advocates of anti-obsolescence are also taking action, and have pushed legislation promoting repairability. At the beginning of January 2017, Sweden introduced a tax break on white goods repair services and reduced VAT from 25% to 12% on minor repairs of bicycles, clothes, shoes, leathergoods and household linens. Norway is considering similar measures to encourage fixing rather than throwing away damaged goods.

With the launch of The Renewal Workshop in the US in 2016 and Green Wolf in France in early 2017, both of which offer repair services dedicated to functional clothing, new solutions are becoming available to the outdoor industry. Outdoor brand Patagonia has widely promoted repairing and reusing through its Worn Again campaigns, and European brands are now also picking up the trend.

Founded by Nicole Bassett and Jeff Denby, The Renewal Workshop has been open for over a year now. The twelve-person team works with a handful of brands repairing used garments that are either returned to the company who



Prana is one of the first brands to partner with The Renewal Workshop, an organisation that restores garments at its own factory before selling them back to the brand partner or through its own e-commerce marketplace.

Prana

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Renewed clothing ready for a new lease of life thanks to repairs done by The Renewal Workshop.

The Renewal Workshop

sent them or sold on The Renewal Workshop's soon-to-be-upgraded e-commerce site. The latest company to sign up for its services is bikewear specialist Pearl Izumi, a positive addition says Nicole Bassett, as it shows the diversity of repairs the workshop, based in Cascade Locks, Oregon, can take care of.

Partnering with brands is one of its main goals. "We focus first on supporting brands and helping them to go circular," Ms Bassett says. This gives The Renewal Workshop access to larger quantities of goods, whether it be those collected by brands through take-back schemes or in the form of unwanted or unusable clothes that have been returned by consumers. The quality and condition of the garments sent to the company vary greatly; some have been barely worn, while others have broken zippers or defective snaps, delaminated cuffs or tears.

Beyond the task of laundering (without water), identifying appropriate solutions, repairing and returning renewed garments to their user or brand, The Renewal Workshop has two other broader aims. One is to take a brand's waste garments and make new yarns for the company to create a truly closed loop system. But, as Ms Bassett points out, "recycling has become fibre specific, and we deal with many different fibres." This, she admits, is a long-term project.

Valuable Data

Providing companies with feedback on repairs is another key service The Renewal Workshop offers. "A big part of what we do is help brands tweak their products to reduce the need for repairs," says Ms Bassett. Quarterly reports are sent to partner brands indicating the number of products repaired in the period, and mentioning, when possible, the item's reference or number. "This gives brands a new data set," she says, and though still at an early stage, the company is working on the best way to convey the information and to help brands decide what to do with it. Luz Rule, the workshop's director of repair and quality, is currently drawing up repair guidelines. "No such guidelines exist," she says. They would be a valuable addition to the industry's knowledge base.

Launched with the help of the Annecy-based industry organisation Outdoor Sports Valley, Green Wolf is based near Mont Blanc in the French Alps and has been in operation since 2015 in various forms. Now headed by Fabrice Pairot de Fontenay, it employs two full-time sewers and has partnered with a number of brands in the region, including Raidlight, Picture Organic Clothing, Degré 7, Duvillard, Arpin and Lacroix. The atelier is a certified Gore-Tex repair centre and offers its services to retailers as well.

Among his many projects, Fabrice Pairot de Fontenay has partnered with events such as the Mont Blanc ultra-trail (UTMB), setting up a repair station during the ultramarathon event and, after the race, upcycling tarpaulins and materials used for temporary structures into new products. "This helps events lower their environmental footprint," says Mr Pairot. He intends to expand the types of products that can be repaired to tents and backpacks. "We will progressively diversify our product expertise while focusing on the specific needs of the outdoor industry," he says.

In-house repairs

At the headquarters of outdoor company Vaude in Tettnang, Germany, a 15-member team with access to an extensive stock of spare parts manages repairs of all types. The company has also launched a series of initiatives to promote the long-term use of its products. Its

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Located in the French Alps, Green Wolf offers repair services to the many brands and retailers based in the region.

Green Wolf

latest advertising campaign, with its slogan 'Forever Yours! Give our products a long life', is dedicated to this theme.

In 2016, it partnered with iFixit, following in the footsteps of Patagonia, to offer online guidelines to consumers looking to restore their damaged clothing themselves. If the owner no longer wants an item of clothing, the company takes it back, repairs it and either donates it to FairWertung, an umbrella group of non-profit organisations, or resells it on its Second Use Shop on eBay. "The Vaude Second Use Shop on eBay is [an] important part of our holistic sustainability strategy," Vaude CEO Antje von Dewitz declared at its launch. "We are pleased to be able to show our commitment to the environment even beyond the eco-friendly production of our merchandise. Because the longer a product is used, the lower its ecological footprint."

Norwegian outdoor brand Bergans has provided in-house repairs to its customers for a number of years. It recently made the service more visible by installing a sewing workshop in its newly opened flagship store in Oslo. This has greatly boosted demand, the brand's head of CSR, Christoph Centmayer, tells *WSA*. The store also offers a take-back programme and sells the used products it receives. "Often these products are still in very good condition. Bergans is keen on high qualit and0 selling second-hand clothing is one way to show that our products last," says Mr Centmayer.

The company has formed partnerships with events and trekking associations and its latest information campaign focuses on extending use. "We have called it 'Long live the product' as it is important to use a product for as long as possible, this being the most effective way to be sustainable," he adds. To further promote repairing, every Bergans down jacket is sold with a patch of fabric in the same colour that can be cut to size and glued to a torn section.

Like Vaude, Bergans also offers rental services as another way to reduce consumption. "Consumers can rent a backpack or tent, as often these will only be used for a week or two. Consumers are not always sure what size they really need, renting a product enables them to try several different options," he says.

Rethinking design

As part of its take-back scheme, Bergans asks its consumers to fill out a questionnaire. This provides useful information to the brand on what people buy and why, what works and what doesn't. "We want to learn why people stop using a product, what breaks, and transmit this information to our design teams," says Mr Centmayer. The results may take time to come to market, he concedes, as products being sold and worn now were often developed three to five years ago.

"The design stage is very important, as all the decisions we make have an impact on the product's use and lifespan," says independent design consultant Anne Prahl, who has a PhD in wearable tech and sustainability. "There are different solutions; customisation can be an option or classic styling. There are many tricks to make a product last longer, but it is difficult to know what has the most impact."

One direction would be to design clothing that is easy to repair. But, she points out, "designers are not trained for this and they would need to know where a garment wears down. This is useful information that a repair centre could provide." Ms Prahl also says that brands should be more transparent about their standards and should inform consumers about

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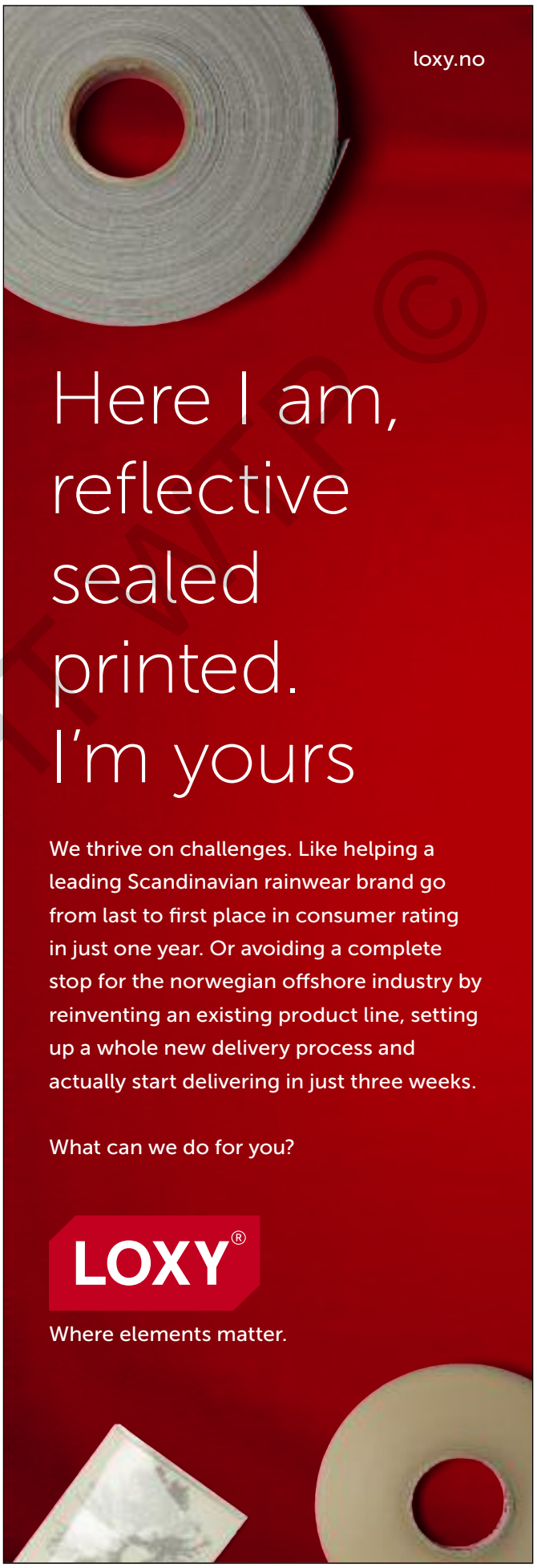
Outdoor brand Bergans of Norway has installed a repair station in its new flagship store in Oslo.

Bergans of Norway

how long they can expect to use the garment or when they should reproof it.

A few brands are addressing this issue, as seen with Tom Cridland's 30-year sweatshirt, which comes with a 30-year guarantee, in the UK or Flint & Tinder's 10-year hoody in the US. "This shows that they paid attention to where a sweatshirt wears the most and reinforced those places," says Ms Prahl. British designer Christopher Raeburn is known for reworking second-hand products into new ones, beginning with used parachute fabrics in 2006. His Remade in England collection, launched in 2009, is made with existing fabrics instead of new ones. With the leftover fabrics and off-cuts, he makes stuffed animals. Because at the end of day, he says, it is also important to have fun.

In the past, garments would have been endlessly repaired. The throw-away culture has wiped out this relatively simple task from everyday chores. But the development of taped seams on performance clothing has changed the nature of these not-always-so-simple tasks. Employees at repair workshops are trained to repair delaminated seams. But, in some cases, Fabrice Pairot de Fontenay says that a defective seam is not accessible without further damaging the garment. Designing out such features would be a welcome improvement to outdoor clothing.



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