

Outdoor Meets Fashion: A Retail Rollercoaster

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The line between fashion and functional outdoor wear is increasingly blurred—an evolution that benefits consumers but puts brands and retailers in an awkward bind. Regina Henkel’s commentary, “*Outdoor in the fashion world: A rollercoaster ride*,” explores how gorpcore and its iterations have challenged traditional market segments—sometimes to the detriment of both sides.

Segmentation vs. Consumer Freedom

Though consumers blend outdoor gear with fashion with ease—pairing trail shoes with skirts or mountaineering jackets with denim—the retail world still reacts slower. Henkel notes that real-world boundaries between the two remain rigid, largely due to structural reticence. The result? Brands can feel forced to choose identities—fashion or function—so as not to alienate traditional clientele

Fashion Hijacks—and Hurts—Outdoor Brands

Henkel reflects on how Helly Hansen, a Scandinavian sailing and outdoor specialist, was inadvertently pulled into the hip-hop trend in the 1990s. While unexpected popularity followed, the brand’s core audience felt betrayed, and once the trend passed, the fallout eroded Helly Hansen’s credibility.

A similar pattern played out with Adidas. When Run-DMC catapulted the three-stripes to streetwear fame, Adidas responded with structural shifts—launching Adidas Originals to separate its fashion-forward appeal from its core performance lines. Yet Adidas Terrex, aimed at outdoor enthusiasts, still wrestles with identity, seen as mass-market and not serious enough for hardcore outdoor users.

Outdoor Brands Retreat from Fashion

In response to such misfires, some outdoor brands are distancing themselves from these fashion overlaps. North Face and Salomon now run separate performance and style-led lines, often in dedicated retail spaces.

Mammut is even more outspoken. After experimenting with glitzy, fashion-driven collections—including pink climbing ropes and upscale down jackets—the brand’s current CEO has emphasized that Mammut “**is not a streetwear brand.**”

Arc’teryx, meanwhile, launched its minimalist sub-brand *Veilance* over 15 years ago. Unlike the hype-driven appeal of standard gorpcore looks, Veilance emphasizes discreet, high-tech everyday silhouettes. Interestingly, it’s the classic Arc’teryx or military lines—not Veilance—that fashion insiders gravitate toward, proving that authenticity still wins hearts.

Winners and Losers of the Hybrid Era

The fashion-centric hype undeniably drives short-term gains. Arc’teryx and Salomon, for example, have enjoyed impressive sales from crossover appeal. Boutique stores like Newseum (Nuremberg), Prm (Prague), and Ka-Yo

(Copenhagen) have emerged, capitalizing on the hybrid aesthetic that blends outdoor tradition with fresh, stylish innovation.

Yet classic outdoor retailers—especially smaller ones lacking retail flexibility—often lose out, as they can't adapt visually or logistically. Meanwhile, only elements like functional fabric comfort have staying power: even when the trend flames out, consumers still want breathable, durable clothing—but often without the endorsement of being 'fashion'.

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