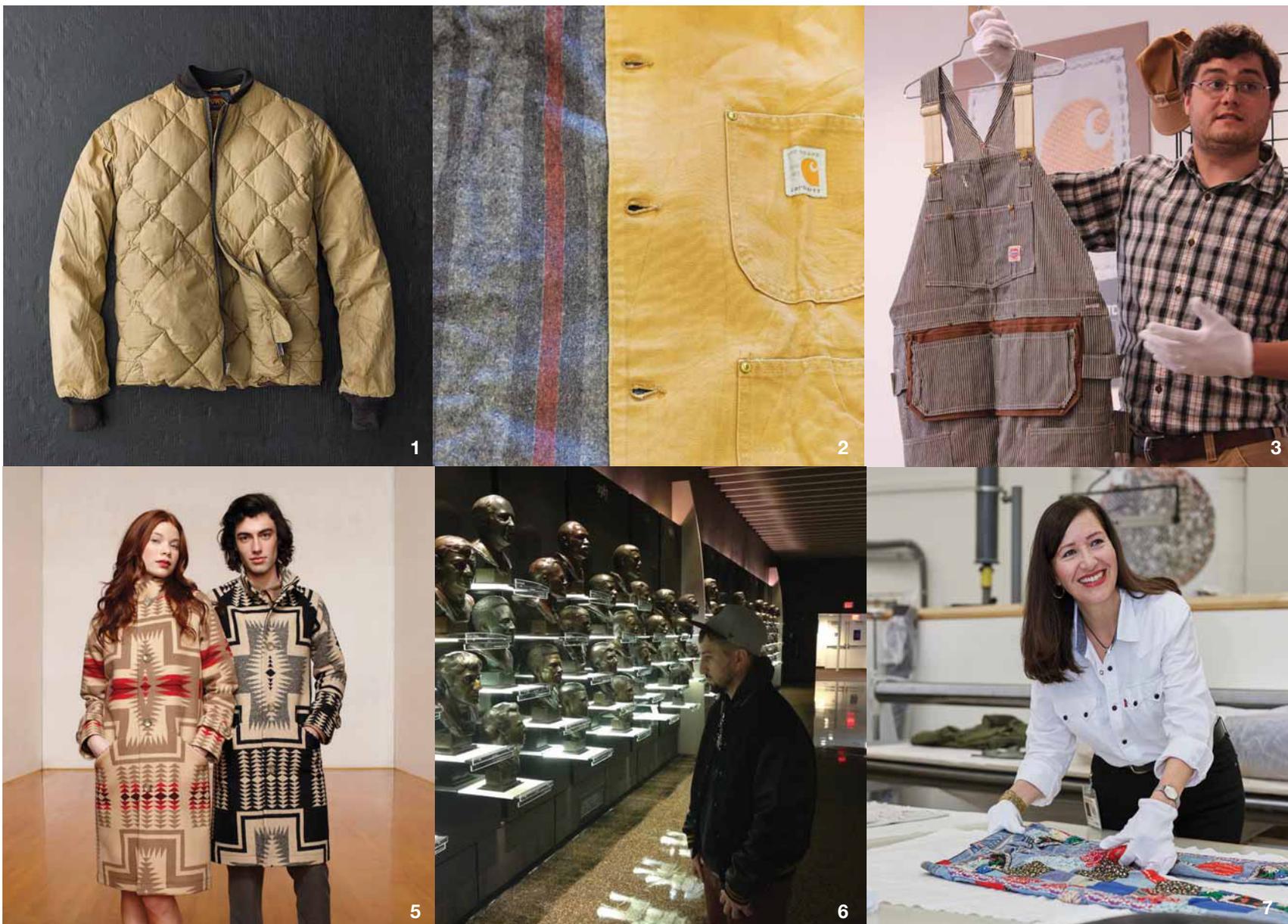


The History Channel



“
Storytelling is one of the oldest and most powerful forms of connecting and communicating.”

COLIN BERG, BRAND HISTORIAN, EDDIE BAUER

Back in April, public relations firm Backbone Media held a press event to promote client offerings for Fall/Winter 2016. One stand promoted the Eddie Bauer Originals Collection, which celebrated the brand’s “Evolution of Innovation,” starting with a spin on a Skyliner Down Jacket from 1936. It was the first down jacket patented in America and considered “Eddie’s first breakthrough product,” according to Colin Berg, brand historian for Eddie Bauer. Berg was at the event briefing the press on the history of Eddie Bauer in a marketing move that is not so unusual in today’s storytelling climate. Brands

are increasingly tapping into their rich histories as a differentiator in the market, with historians as its promoters.

“Storytelling is one of the oldest and most powerful forms of connecting and communicating,” said Berg, adding, “For a brand, this can be invaluable because it helps to build a community of customers who identify with the story.” While Berg performs traditional archival tasks and gives tours to employees, vendors and the public; he also is formally part of Eddie Bauer’s editorial staff spending a significant amount of time writing copy.

At Adidas, history communication manager Dr. Martin Gebhardt works to bridge the company’s five-member archival team with its marketing department. “I take on the role of a consultant or collaborator,” said Gebhardt, as he works “trying

“Companies are recognizing that using heritage to differentiate is a worthwhile investment.

TRACEY PANEK, BRAND HISTORIAN, LEVI STRAUSS & CO.



1. An Eddie Bauer 1940 Skyliner Jacket [2] Carhartt Blanket Lining [3] Carhartt Resident Archivist Dave J. Moore [4] Patched 505 Jeans Circa 1967 on Display at the “So You Say You Want A Revolution, Rebels & Records 1966-1970” Exhibit at London’s Victoria & Albert Museum [5] Pendleton’s Portland Collection [6] Historian Jared Wheeler at the Pro Football Hall of Fame Garnering Inspiration for ‘47’s Golden Age of Gridiron Collection [7] Levi’s Historian Tracey Panek with a Pair of Patched 505 Jeans Circa 1967 [8] The Adidas Archives (courtesy of Adidas History Management /Adidas Archive)

Making Archives Relevant

To keep employees interested in Levi Strauss & Co. brand history, historian Tracey Panek recently set up a new inspiration room at the firm’s San Francisco archives. There is a giant television to view advertisements. Garments are regularly put on display. “We’re always exploring new ways to make the archives look relevant,” commented the exec.

Employees can access a digital app to view the collection, or visit the archives in person to see over 5,000 garments including the oldest pair of 501 jeans in the world (from 1879), a denim tuxedo jacket designed for Bing Crosby in 1951 and a classic work shirt from 1910. While many items were lost during the 1906 earthquake in Northern California, a rich history still remains. One new introduction inspired by the 505 jeans launched 50 years ago come 2017, is a re-mastered 505.

Back in 2014, Levi’s celebrated 80 years of creating jeans for women with a new collection, so Panek traveled around the world for promotional purposes with the first pair of women’s blue jeans the brand created (she kept them in a carry-on and never baggage checked them for flights). Like consumers appreciating the idea of authenticity and the origins of garments, “companies are recognizing that using heritage to differentiate is a worthwhile investment,” Panek said.

“We try to capture a specific era as authentic as possible while being trend forward,” noted Jared Wheeler, historian at ‘47. During a recent trip to the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY, Wheeler found a 1976 pillbox hat that paid homage to the 100th anniversary of the National League. In an updated version, preserved elements include the inside mesh lining that maintains the hat’s shape and the soutache on the crown of the cap. As historian, Wheeler is tasked with identifying silhouettes that relate to upcoming

collections and works with the design team on a daily basis to make looks appropriate, while still upholding history.

Archives as Inspiration

Carhartt’s resident archivist Dave J. Moore also works with his brand’s design team regularly, using the archives as a source of inspiration. For example, one classic pattern for blanket coat lining from the archives was re-used in the development of a new plaid. Moore also contributed facts and materials for Carhartt’s 2016 campaign, “Our Future is in Our Heritage” including information on pants created for soldiers in WWI. “We constantly draw on the inspiration of our founder Hamilton Carhartt even in the development of new products, as we seek the feedback of our consumer just as he did when he founded the company in 1889,” commented the exec.

While Carhartt’s archives are relatively new—established in 2014—they carry a vast history. Comparatively, the Pendleton Woolen Mills name has been around since 1863 (with the first mill opened in 1909), and the corporate archives have been in existence for more than two decades. Richard S. Hobbs started as contract archivist and historian at Pendleton eight years ago. He is employed by The Winthrop Group, which provides history, editorial and archival services.

At Pendleton, the most prominent visible uses of its archives are the National Parks Initiative, Thomas Kay Collection and Portland Collection. “Heritage information is recognized increasingly in positive ways by consumers for its ability to deliver the messages of longevity, integrity and stability,” the exec noted.

Companies are increasingly recognizing brand heritage as an “information asset,” Hobbs explained, and are leveraging history for reasons also beyond marketing. Execs at Pendleton, Levi’s and Adidas all noted being regularly tapped in regards to trademark issues and litigation matters, with the archives being one of their mightiest protectors. The archives at Pendleton are also used for succession planning and leadership transitions, as well as to support business performance analytics and help understand historical trends and implement strategic plans. Rich history “unites, inspires and educates personnel in the company’s heritage, affirms continuity, motivates people to embrace change and inspires pride,” Hobbs concluded. ●



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to think about which stories resonate most with consumers.” Employees often tap into adidas-archive.org, which allows users to comb through thousands of shoes, garments, catalogs, videos and exhibitions.

One example of blending past and present is the NMD franchise, which blends the iconic Micro Pacer, Rising Star, and Boston Super into one modern shoe. Gebhardt’s team gets about 30 requests per week (of which 35 percent are to external sources) for historical information drawn from the archives in Herzogenaurach, Germany.

Pharrell Williams visited the Adidas archives for inspiration for his Adidas Originals collection. “The more we talk about history, the bigger the demand,” said Gebhard