

MADE IN THE USA

HERITAGE BRANDS ARE EXPERIENCING A REVIVAL THANKS TO LINES THAT TARGET NEW DEMOGRAPHICS AND EMBRACE TRENDS.

BY ASHLEY BURNETT

When it comes to American fashion, we've always favored certain looks and fabrics: rugged denim, supple leather and pure cotton. Designers in the United States still favor these fresh looks and uncomplicated silhouettes, with classic national brands still calling to mind that image: Levi's, L.L.Bean, Patagonia, Ralph Lauren, Brooks Brothers, Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfger among them.

Though as time has passed, these well-known labels have had to reinvent themselves, reaching out to younger or sometimes entirely new demographics in order to stay current and relevant. With the use of slimmer silhouettes, new textiles and a broadening of sartorial inspiration, these brands have continued to remain on the forefront of trends being worn by fashion influencers and celebrities around the world.

CLASSIC PRODUCTS, NEW TWIST

When you think about American fashion, a staple probably comes to mind: blue jeans, perhaps with a Levi's tag sewed onto the back. The denim brand has been around since 1853, when founder Levi Strauss started the business in San Francisco. He later partnered with tailor Jacob Davis, the mastermind behind the idea to use copper rivets to reinforce their denim and increase the longevity of the fabric. Strauss ended up selling pants and coveralls to gold miners in California and eventually created the famous Levis 501 Jeans in 1890.

The 501 Jeans are still in production and to this day clothe fashionistas across the country. However, alongside these classic jeans are new iterations such as the 501s with an extra stretch fit, which tie into the current athleisure trend. The brand has also added both a curvy and relaxed line, partnered up with the NFL and MLB, and introduced collaborations with "it" girls like actress Zoë Kravitz. Long gone are the gold miners.



Left: Gigi Hadid and designer Tommy Hilfiger walk the runway during New York Fashion Week. Above: Menswear is featured at a Brooks Brothers clothing store.

In the same vein, California-based outdoor retailer Patagonia has also embraced change. The company, which was founded by Yvon Chouinard in 1973, started out providing workmanlike clothing for climbers, hikers and other outdoors enthusiasts. It quickly gained a reputation for quality and for its unorthodox business practices. To this day, Patagonia is still heavily involved in environmental activism, supporting various nonprofits and even encouraging employees to take a leave of absence to volunteer with the organization of their choice. And while it still provides the same quality of pieces for those looking to try their hand at Everest or trekking in the most remote parts of the world, it has also expanded into providing gear for yoga, sundresses and even clothes for children. You can now wear Patagonia gear all day long, not just when hiking or trail running.

When it comes to high fashion, however, three classic American designers stand out: Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren.

Tommy Hilfiger founded his own company in 1985, after being offered a position at Calvin Klein. His looks were, and remain, rooted in an East Coast, Ivy League style, with preppy staples featuring a modern twist. Originally focused on men's clothing, Hilfiger now designs for both men and women.

Hilfiger's looks quickly gained traction in the music world when several hip-hop and rap stars began wearing his sweatshirts and carpenter jeans. Hilfiger courted this new demographic with a mix of casual, laid-back pieces, as well as haute fashion. His clothing continues to be a staple in the music industry.

Today, the brand remains in the public eye by collaborating with fashion icons like model Gigi Hadid and creating lines dedicated to the Rolling Stones, as well as with unique fashion shows like the recent #Tommynow, in which models walked down the Tommy Pier runway. At the end of the show, pieces were immediately available for purchase via a touch screen. The company has also created a new line, Hilfiger Edition, which boasts unique elements on the usual menswear pieces, like patchwork details and floral motifs.

Fellow American icon Ralph Lauren has also remained culturally relevant with a plethora of clothing lines. The company was originally founded to sell men's ties, but has since grown to encompass a wide range of apparel and accessories for several demographics. Lines include Denim & Supply, which features hip maxi dresses, military-inspired jackets and off-the-shoulder blouses, as well as Polo Ralph Lauren, the first that Lauren ever created, which was inspired by the designer's love of sports. Lauren even designed the 2016 Olympic Opening Ceremony outfits for the United States athletes.

Calvin Klein, another classic American brand, has also remained in the public's eye by targeting younger demographics with models like Kendall Jenner featured prominently in ad campaigns, as well as new lines constantly being added. One notable line is the company's Reissue Logo collection, which takes the iconic Calvin Klein logo and emblazons both vintage-style accessories (think miniature backpacks) as well as trendy staples like crop tops. The brand has even crossed over to the home decor sphere, with bedding, tableware and rugs as modern as

Left: Ovidiu Huidan/Shutterstock; right: James R. Martin/Shutterstock



Clockwise from far left: Calvin Klein; the L.L.Bean flagship store in Freeport, Maine, with the brand's famous Bean Boot style displayed out front; the iconic Polo Ralph Lauren logo on a Las Vegas storefront

the company's clothing styles.

Overall, while these designers have shifted their focus over the years, one thing has remained a constant: They've all focused on providing timeless, sleek American looks.

REACHING OUT

One of the biggest ways American heritage brands are maintaining their momentum is through targeting new audiences. Lands' End, L.L.Bean and Brooks Brothers have all added new lines focused on younger customers.

"Our customers run the gamut, but we've recently seen an increase in popularity amongst high school and college students, as well as young urbanites and within the fashion community, driven primarily by the surge in interest in our iconic Bean boots," says Mac McKeever, a spokesperson for L.L.Bean. This increased popularity led to the company's Signature line, which features classic L.L.Bean styles in streamlined silhouettes. It's not uncommon to see skinny jeans paired with the brand's flannels, or a trendy maxi dress with one of its parkas.

"Signature has been very well-received," McKeever says. "We have developed a loyal following. In addition, there has been continued high-demand for some of our more heritage-based products like flannel shirts and, of course, Bean boots."

Iconic American retailer Brooks Brothers has also expanded its offerings with a new line featuring casual clothing with an upscale twist. Pieces include items perfect for the office, as well as sportswear. The clothing features soft tailoring—a recent trend in menswear—made

in fabrics like wool and cotton. Pants boast stretch capabilities, and 3-D knitting has been incorporated into some of the pieces. The technology allows garments to be created in one continuous piece rather than being formed together out of separate panels and parts.

Lands' End released a similar line called Canvas, targeting young men and women. It incorporates luxurious fabrics—think velvet, silk and satin—in modern styles and silhouettes. Overall, the look of the line is more like trendy office wear than classic Americana, but it still sports the same quality of Lands' End's staple clothing pieces.

While the brands boast modern looks, they also come with a promise other trendy companies can't back up: durability, a quality embedded into the brands' reputations. Lands' End started in 1963 as a sailboat equipment company that expanded into clothing, while L.L.Bean has been around for more than a century. They have years of experience that have transformed them into the major labels they are today.

"As a heritage brand, we have over 104 years of our rich history to build upon," McKeever explains. "This gives our product designers the ability to study key pieces from our history and archives and put a new, modern spin on them. Because of this rich history, there is an authenticity and credibility to the brand that newer companies do not have."

In life, experience is the best teacher—the same is true in fashion. And judging by the way these brands continue to remain fresh and relevant, it's clear they've learned a few lessons throughout the years. •

HONORING HERITAGE

DON THESE UPDATED CLASSICS FROM SOME OF AMERICA'S MOST STORIED BRANDS.

The **811 CURVY SKINNY JEANS** from Levi's are contoured for curves and feature a waistband that prevents gapping, \$59.50, at Levi.com.

The **SIGNATURE SLUB HENLEY** from L.L.Bean is perfect for layering underneath a flannel or hoodie, \$64, at LLBean.com.



Model Gigi Hadid helped design the **JUMPSUIT GIGI HADID**, which makes getting ready easy thanks to the all-in-one design, \$295, at TommyHilfiger.com.

The **SEABROOK DRESS** from Patagonia has 50-plus UPF (ultraviolet protection factor) sun protection and is made of quick-dry fabric, \$89, at Patagonia.com.



Calvin Klein's **DORA LOGO SNEAKER** boasts a wraparound stripe and the brand's iconic logo emblazoned on the side, \$59, at CalvinKlein.us.

The acid wash **MEN'S MILITARY COTTON RIB SWEATER** from Canvas by Lands' End is made of ringspun combed cotton, \$90, at LandsEnd.com.



The **PLAID WOOL SHAWL COAT** from Ralph Lauren's Denim & Supply line is made of a jacquard-knit wool blend and features a double-breasted silhouette, \$398, at RalphLauren.com.