

special feature



Young Guns

What will outdoor gear look like in the future? Peek into the minds of four designers whose innovative ideas are changing the industry. By Doug Schnitzspahn

economic times. While many newcomers fizzle out, others make it and invigorate the industry with products that speak to consumer needs while pushing the industry's self-imposed design constraints.

Design in the industry is no longer just about building the most hardcore or lightweight gear. Many of the recent young, successful outdoor brands and designers have not entered the outdoor industry from the classic gear and technical function track. Instead, they are expanding the idea of what the industry represents (and what it sells at retail), as well as redefining the concept of design.

"It's not the outdoor industry of yesteryear," said David Schipper, a freelance production development pro who has created product for Easton, Black Diamond, The North Face and Salomon. At 47, he's been in the industry for 25 years and sold homemade gear in high school. "Now may be the best time for opportunity in the industry. When I began, you were an enthusiast. Now it's a viable job, similar to being a programmer or a long-haul trucker. That phenomenon may manifest in a negative way when a 4.0-GPA art school grad from New York City and a crusty mountaineer argue about real performance in the design room, but it also manifests positively when old norms don't anchor ideas in the past."

The industry is indeed branching out to new consumers and offering designers more outlets for expression, including new ways to address function while not neglecting hot design concepts and the morphing needs of today's consumer.

"Creativity rules the day in the outdoor industry," said John Winsor, executive director of strategy and innovation at Crispin Porter + Bogusky. "We are in a reshuffling period with a lot of consolidation and big buyouts, but we will see super entrepreneur brands that solve problems."

SNEWS has sought out a handful of notable young designers who are building better mousetraps and sharing how they utilize the perfect mix of function and fashion innovation to drive the industry.

Certain aisles of trade shows have all the buzz and desperation of a Third World marketplace. New brands hawk their wares, and a wild mix of products—some bizarre, some silly, a few beautiful or brilliant—line the walls. That's because the outdoor industry has become the proving ground for entrepreneurial-minded young designers who are living the dream by introducing products and ideas that are too risky or offbeat for big companies, especially in tough

Hanna Boone

graphic designer

Age: 26

Company: The Sandbox, K2 Sports; www.k2sports.com

» **The Product:** The Sandbox is a design firm within K2 Sports that serves all the group's brands, including Atlas, Tubbs, K2 Ski, K2 Snowboard, Karhu and Line.

» **The Story:** We were surprised at the dearth of young female designers in the outdoor industry, but Hanna Boone is here to buck that trend. With her feet in the snowboarding world, she graduated from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 2005, majoring in fine arts and web design. After a stint studying at a fashion school in London and interning in San Francisco, where she worked on the

Ice Air ski jump event with Jonny Moseley, she was hired to pep up the graphics on Atlas' snowshoes. Ever since, she has steadily worked to bring new energy to graphic design at the big sports group. Boone's first ski design came out this season—the Line Shadow—and she is the lead designer for Atlas' new men's and women's snowshoes, spicing up the normally staid hardgoods. She is also heavily involved in K2's women's ski line.

» **Design Philosophy:** "I simply ask, 'What would I want?' It's exciting to be able to do that, but at the same time, you have to understand specific demographics and customers for each product. I tend to try to push on color and idea. I get knocked down sometimes, but it's a never-ending battle that keeps you fresh and on your toes. I also work with the engineers a little, and if you have that understanding of how a product is put together, you can ensure it looks better and also functions well."

» **On the Outdoor Industry:** "There's room for growth and new design and creativity, especially in women's product. Women's product is moving in big, new leaps and bounds. Women's skis are starting to get far less conservative. And men's and women's snowshoes are changing. We gave Atlas a very progressive look and feel—not everyone loves it, but it had never been done before. There's room for those kind of risks."

Josh Guyot

co-owner with wife Sloan

Age: 33

Company: Guyot Designs; www.guyotdesigns.com

» **The Products:** Wide-mouth plastic bottle SplashGuards, Squishy Bowls, wide-mouth TapGuards with built-in water filters, Gription bottle tops and stainless steel bottles.

» **The Story:** Guyot found success by reacting to a perceived failure. In the winter of 2001, Guyot was driving back from a cross-country ski trip in Tahoe with his wife, Sloan, and water from his Nalgene bottle kept spilling all over him. Back home, Guyot, who holds a BFA in industrial design from Carnegie Mellon and worked in laboratory automation robotics, made a sketch for a bottle SplashGuard. He got EMS to pick up the product in the winter of 2002. It took off, and Guyot Designs has ramped up its offerings ever since. This spring, the company introduced a new Tap Guard, a SplashGuard with an activated carbon filter pouch—it's also a carbon negative product, meaning over its lifetime it saves more carbon than it takes to produce.

» **Design Philosophy:** "I'm very function first. Form should follow function. A product needs to meet a need. It can have beauty to

it, but a lot of times that beauty comes from its simplicity or intended use. From another aspect, I also always try to make products that have a slight amount of whimsy, that gives a user a smile. Our silicone Squishy Bowls give you a sense of comfort, of home. We have SplashGuards with smiley faces."

» **On the Outdoor Industry:** "There's tremendous opportunity in the outdoor industry for looking at things in different ways, making products more elegant or simple or functional. The outdoor industry has been phenomenal on the business side in terms of a safe place to start a business relationship too. A small company can grow and have a good sense of community. And there's a lot of room for a young company to make mistakes."

Ian Ivarson

owner

Age: 28

Company: Ivar Backpacks; www.ivarpack.com

» **The Product:** The Ivar Pack is a smart student or commuter backpack. It's built with organizing sections that make it easy to order stuff in the depths of a day-to-day pack, as well as creating better weight distribution so the pack is easier on the back. Ivar added three new models in the spring.

» **The Story:** Unlike the other designers profiled, Ian Ivarson did not go to school for design; instead, he studied finance and marketing at the University of Denver. But he had been germinating the idea for an easy-to-organize pack since he had been a junior in high school and received the support and encouragement of his parents who are both designers by trade. When he graduated from college, Ivarson decided to pursue the pack instead of heading on a career track in the finance industry—a decision that looks very sage now. With just enough guidance from some family friends to get him started, he traveled to Asia and started to source and build manufacturing relationships for the first Ivar packs, which launched in July 2006. Industry vets cautioned him not to be overly optimistic at his first Outdoor Retailer show in January 2009, but he was overwhelmed with traffic and has recently expanded his sales force to 17 reps and hired a PR consultant.

Building on Ivarson's marketing know-how, the company has created a fun, viral video of the pack in action: [ivarpack.com/what-is-ivar/ivar-video](http://www.ivarpack.com/what-is-ivar/ivar-video).

» **Design Philosophy:** "I like simple designs. Organic shapes. Symmetry. The

pack is very lifestyle oriented, less outdoorsy, although we maintain a very high quality design so that it can hold up to heavy use."

» **On the Outdoor Industry:** "It's a hard industry to fit into to be honest. There are so many brands, so many manufacturers. All those players make it difficult to break into the industry. Right now, it's over-saturated."

» **The Product:** capCAP lids for wide-mouth bottles and GoToob squeezable travel tubes.

» **The Story:** Chris Mikovsky may be a bit older than our other up-and-comers, but he moved into design later in life too. First, he earned an undergrad degree in political science, but spent most of his salad years exploring the world. He worked with radio-controlled models, traveled, worked on cattle ranches and fishing boats, and picked grapes. In 1998, he decided he wanted to pursue a career in design and spent two years at the University of Colorado before heading to a masters program in product design at Stanford. He then worked at the renowned IDEO design firm for three years before deciding to branch off on his own. After getting "frustrated at trying to convince boring companies my ideas are worthwhile," he founded HumanGear in July 2007, launching successfully the capCAP, a user-friendly squeeze-bottle-type lid for wide-mouth bottles (he stresses it makes room for a human nose when drinking). In winter 2008, he introduced the squeezable GoToob, and he plans on growing the business.

» **Design Philosophy:** "I picked the name HumanGear for a reason: I was indoctrinated in human-centered design. It's essential to think about how people use

products, how they really use them, not how you think they might use them."

» **On the Outdoor Industry:** "My personal experience has been that the outdoor industry seems very receptive to smart, new products that address compelling

human needs in elegant and functional ways. I've heard of other industries where it is basically impossible to get any shelf space in a big retailer without having a whole line of some sort, or having to pay through the nose for a peg. Of course, fostering small companies with good ideas is great for everyone: the small company, the distributor and the retailer who get to profit from their efforts, and the end-user who ultimately gets a better outdoor experience." [S]

VISONS OF THE FUTURE: Pay attention, these four designers have more to say and can tell you what the outdoor industry will look like in the future. To check it out, go to www.snewsnet.com/magextras where you'll also find a profile of another young gun designer, Tai Kim of Allie Designs.