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Gear trends: 2015/16 Baselayer

Today's 'long underwear' not only performs better, it has style to show off. Check out the new baselayers slated for retail in 2015/2016

By David Clucas - April 2, 2015

Throughout the next month, SNEWS will recap its coverage of Outdoor Retailer Winter Market 2015 with select stories from the [O.R. Daily](#) we published at the show Jan. 20 – 24. It's an opportunity for you to catch up on stories you might have missed in O.R.D., and for us to update and upload the articles to our searchable archives.

Baselayers have come out to play — shedding their sole status as “long underwear” — becoming dynamic pieces that can be worn on top, too. And it's not all about fashion. These flashy pieces are big performers with less itch, more wicking power, greater durability and higher insulation at lower weights.

Merino wool continues to dominate on the performance side of baselayers, and practically every brand — it's not just Icebreaker, SmartWool and Ibex anymore — has entered the field.

“We counted 140 brands in the U.S. now with some kind of merino wool product,” said Icebreaker vice president of product Mark Koppes. “Natural fabrics, in general, continue to have a lot of leg with consumers.”

That being said, the definition of wool is getting muddied with a flood of wool/synthetic mixes. Purists say that's damaging wool's natural thermal-regulating and body-odor-fighting properties. Newcomers say synthetics help boost wicking, reduce itch and increase the strength of the pieces.

On those mixes, be sure to talk with brands about the construction methods and their strategies for placing what material, where. They're all different. **Ibex**, which focuses on 100-percent wool pieces, for example, is experimenting with some mixes, wrapping the wool around a nylon core for strength, but keeping all the merino on the outside and next to skin.

On the flip side, the Akeleie (MSRP \$75) from **Bergans of Norway** — another brand with 100-percent wool options — presents an 80/20-percent merino/synthetic mix, but with all the synthetic material next to skin for wicking more moisture and reducing itch. There's a similar story with a bit more synthetic in **Terramar's** Thermawool pieces (MSRPs \$50-\$70), which employ a plaited construction of microfiber polyester against the skin with a durable merino/poly mix on the outside. In the middle, there are pieces like **Montane's** Primino Merino Baselayer (MSRP \$149), blending merino and synthetic PrimaLoft fibers to let both fabrics do their jobs of thermal regulation and wicking.



Retailers shopping the show floor should cover all sides of the merino/synthetic debate. There will be customers who swear by, and only want 100 percent wool; there will be others that appreciate a little wool/synthetic mix; and yet still others who want 100 percent synthetic.

For the all-wool side, stop by Ibex to feel the Nobu — a 100-percent merino piece woven in Japan with a super, heavyweight brush knit. “We joke, that if you put it on, you won’t be able to stop touching yourself,” said James Fisher, vice president of product at Ibex. For the kiddos, check out **Minus33’s** 100-percent merino Triceratops Boy’s Midweight Crew (MSRP \$46).

American-made wool is gaining ground among brands and consumers.

Polarmax debuts a new line of Wool 1.0 baselayers (MSRP \$88) that are made in the USA with wool from Montana sheep.

“We need and can become wool independent just as we’re striving to be oil independent,” said Robert “Bernie” Bernthal, founder at **Duckworth**, which mills its wool from Rambouillet sheep in Montana. The brand is working with domestic wool labs at Montana State and Texas universities to improve the natural fiber stateside. “Made in the USA has to stand for quality and innovation, not just that it’s made here,” Bernthal said. “That’s not good enough. It has to be the best.” One key area to advance domestic wool production is creating a chemical-free, anti-shrink treatment for wool, he said. Duckworth thinks it has found the solution through heat, pressure and water and will debut the end-result in a 150-weight, wool-jersey knit called the Maverick.

There’s also plenty to see on the all-synthetic baselayer scene — many focusing on better breathability and wicking, such as the **Brooks Running** Streaker LS (MSRP \$85), made from a hollow fiber with a chafe-free seamless construction; the **Falke** First Layer Air (MSRP \$115), made with polyamide, polypropylene and a seamless elastane for a snug fit; and the Polarmax Nice baselayer (MSRP \$40), the brand’s first collection for women with 94 percent polyester and 6 percent Lycra; and **ColdPruf** revamps its baselayers with 88 percent polyester and 12 percent Spandex in its women’s Honeycomb Fleece collection, including a yoga-style waistband in the bottoms and an extended tail in the top (MSRPs \$31). **Patagonia** updates its signature Capilene collection (MSRP \$69 for the mid-weight zip-neck) with a better fit, Fair Trade Certified sewing and 100-percent recycled fabric in the lightweight styles

The fit and body mapping of a baselayer also are increasingly becoming important, especially as the layer might be the only one the user is wearing on a warmer day or at the studio. The **Super.natural** Women's Strata Pant (MSRP \$100) uses a balanced fusion of wool, polyester and stretchy elastane for an ergonomic fit and support, plus, it sports breathable mesh in key areas and a small front pocket. **Icebreaker's** BodyfitZone baselayers (MSRP \$110) are more merino wool-concentrated than the above, but add 4 percent Lycra for stretch, and take on the tough task of eyeleting the natural fabric to create merino mesh venting zones in high-sweat areas.

On the fashion front, more brands are flocking to patterns, brighter colors and designs, because "consumers can buy a black baselayer from anyone these days," said Sara Yoder, product manager for women's apparel and accessories at **SmartWool**. "We've seen our pattern business pick up [with it being] a little stronger on the women's side. We're pushing to see how far we can take it.

The trend also comes thanks to better technologies for coloring and creating designs with fine merino wool. For 2015-16, **Helly Hansen** brings all-merino, graphic-intense tops and bottoms in its Wool Graphic lineup of baselayers (MSRPs \$100-\$110), which have patterns ranging from flowers to the Northern Lights.