

JEANS IN ROTATION: VICTOR & SARAH LYTVINENKO

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Raleigh Denim was founded by Sarah and Victor Lytvinenko in Raleigh, North Carolina, just over 100 miles from our front door. Together, the two look close to home for the sourcing of their US-made denim brand. With Cone Denim Mills right in their backyard, Victor and Sarah have access to denim from one of America's premier mills, allowing them to create jeans themselves, by hand. Made from White Oak Cone Denim, each pair is hand signed and individually numbered.



Jeans in Rotation aims to take a closer look at what our friends in the industry are wearing on a daily basis. Although we might have 10 pairs of pants, it's really about the two or three pair that actually get put on each morning. Victor and Sarah took a moment to share with us what they're each wearing and even share some pictures of how those jeans have come to be their own.

What was the first pair of jeans you remember purchasing?

Victor: I remember my mom taking me to Kmart to get a pair of Levis when I was in elementary school, the next week I slid down a hill and tore a hole in them. My mom was so mad! We ended up getting another pair, but it was a big deal. Jeans were an investment that were meant to last.



Sarah: I got a pair of denim flares from a thrift store with a really dense rainbow stitching all over the back pockets. I spent at least three weeks taking out all the stitching; the fit was so great that it was worth the effort. When the stitching was finally gone the denim underneath was significantly darker than the rest of the jeans. I think that was when I began to appreciate the character of denim and the way it changes with time and exposure.

Tell us about the first pair of jeans you made.

Victor: The first pair of pants that I ever made was when I was living in Ukraine. They weren't jeans but they were what got me into making jeans. I was living with my Aunt and Uncle way out in the country. They didn't have running water or much power. It was a little village of about 80 houses on one street. Everyone had five acres of land and one or two cows, completely sustainable and organic...but not necessarily by choice.

After college I went to live with them for three months. Two months in I was so bored I thought 'I'm going to sew some pants!' I took the thirty or so mile trip to town on the bus and bought whatever fabric I could and started making patterns. I used an 1880's treadle sewing machine to sew these pants together. I didn't have anything for the waist band and Sarah had sent me some homemade cookies tied with a baby blue ribbon which I ended up using as the inside of the waist band. I keep that first pair up on my shelf in my office as a reminder of where we started. Soon after I had arrived back to North Carolina we really got obsessed with making jeans.

How did you fall in love with denim, and what does it mean to you?



We stumbled into it and fell in love with the simultaneous toughness and beauty of denim. We wanted to make jeans because it was what we wore everyday. We just started making them and became obsessed with the process. We spent a lot of time in “informal apprenticeships” going up to the mountains and talking to people that worked at the last Levis factory in the country and two ladies at Cone Mills with years and years of experience. We learned a lot about denim from their love of their craft. We like that the jeans are a lot about the process and they have a connection to the wearer. You imprint them with the way that you live and they become a representation of what you do. Indigo is a living thing and has so much variance in character. It is always different, and has an elegance in its aging. We fell in love with these romantic aspects but were equally inspired by the

history and heritage of denim production in North Carolina. It means a lot to be a part of the revitalization of the industry in our state in a very small way.

Where did the name Raleigh Denim come from?

Sarah: We both grew up in Raleigh. The community here and the textile resources of our state have enabled us to do what we love, so we thought the straight forward name of our home town was fitting.



Give us a breakdown of the jeans you currently have in rotation.

Victor:

Jones Thin Organic – These jeans are made from the first crop of certified organic cotton grown in North Carolina. They’ve been worn for four months with no washes. We collaborated with Cotton of the Carolinas to convince some organic farmers to grow the first crop of certified organic cotton ever grown in North Carolina. We worked with the cotton gin, the spinning mill and Cone Mills to create a jean that has one of the smallest carbon footprints of any jeans made in the world...and using NC grown Certified Organic cotton.

Jones Indigo Dyed Canvas – This was the sample of the pants we made exclusively for Need Supply a few seasons back (The Jones Thin Trouser). They’ve been worn for one year with two washes. It’s a really beautiful lighter weight fabric and it’s nice because the warp and the weft are indigo dyed. So it starts out really dark but over time it fades into this pixelated look because it’s a 1X1 weave.

Jones Original – My Jones Thin Original was worn for 18 months three washes. The original fabric is first fabric that we designed with Cone Mills that they still make exclusively for us. It’s a 12.75 ounce tinted weft yarn which gives it a little bit of a darker color. It’s raw but then it breaks down to a brighter indigo blue. It wears to show those great deeper tones contrasted with the pops of brighter blues and white.

Sarah:

Surry Raw – about 4 months wear with only one wash; *Union Raw* – more than a year of wear with 4 or 5 washes. Soft and comfy; *ORGANIC by John Patrick/RALEIGH collaboration slouch* – raw denim made with recycled TV trays. I just started wearing these – they were a sample from our first presentation. I love how relaxed they are.



Raleigh Denim is available online and in the store, and is proudly made right here in the USA.

