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THE PREMIUM DENIM ISSUE

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FEATURE
WHAT IS PREMIUM?

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WHAT IS PREMIUM?

The term 'premium' is all around in the denim world. That does not mean that everyone agrees on its meaning-not even in the industry.

By Sabine Kühnl

➤ Already during this year's New York edition of Kingpins in January and again at its European premiere in Amsterdam in the first week of May organizer Andrew Olah initiated a seminar to discuss one of the key denim questions these days: What is premium? In New York he gathered four panelists on stage (TRC Candiani's Alberto Candiani and Damiano Dall'Anese, Cone Denim's Kara Nicholas and fashion editor/Jean Stories co-founder Jane Herman Bishop) to discuss the topic. The audience quickly got involved and pointed out its opinions. One thing became clear right away-the industry is still looking for a proper definition of what "premium denim" is and in what context the term shall be used. Here are some highlights of the discussion.

THE CHARACTER

Andrew Olah: So what is premium? I get confused myself... Speaking of its history it comes to my mind when Legler started with Replay and Diesel back in the days to do something that no-one else did, and this is how premium denim started.

Alberto Candiani: Premium denim was created in the early '90s. We built our success on stretch denim. Premium is more a female thing. Today it is about something else, because everybody does ring and stretch today. Therefore, today premium is about quality and sustainability.

Kara Nicholas: Fabric, fit and finish and all the little details like pockets, constructing—that all adds up to "premium denim."

Jane Herman Bishop: As a fashion editor I see rather the consumer side and their reception of premium denim. In their minds it is about brand names and price points over \$200 that make a pair of jeans "premium." And it is not about the fabric or finishings. This is what they connect with it. It has lost its initial meaning.

Damiano Dall'Anese: Premium denim is also about innovation. The jeans should stay tight for example. And clients need to feel these differences. Some brands are increasing the knowledge on the fibers and what they are made of.

THE PRICE

Andrew Olah: On the one hand everybody can make a pair of jeans for six dollars and sell them for \$200. On the other hand Uniqlo sells Japanese selvedge denim for \$49 right now. So how do we differentiate?

Alberto Candiani: High-end clients want customized, better product. They would go mad if I'd sell them the same stuff that I sell to fast fashion retailers.

Kara Nicholas: We are not in the \$49-selvedge-denim market. We produce on vintage looms and that feeling is woven into the fabrics. Of course Uniqlo does that for marketing reasons and because selvedge is so popular at men's.

Jane Herman Bishop: Maybe the mills together with the brands should create a counsel for premium denim to get some certification or approval just as France does it when you want to become a couturier.

THE SUSTAINABILITY

Alberto Candiani: It is tough to make organic cotton. Sustainability is about new technologies with lower impact. Still, it is a "left-wing" idea but the price points you reach make it a "right-wing" idea.

Kara Nicholas: The term of sustainability is used in many different ways. We think of sustainability also with regards to produce local: our material is from North Carolina, it is woven in North Carolina etc. With sustainability you can also tell a story to the consumer.

Jane Herman Bishop: Of course, everybody should take part in sustainability. Still, the female consumer wants to look good, that is the main thing for her.

Damiano Dall'Anese: There is still a difference between the European and the US market when it comes to sustainability. Europe is a bit further in that context. The American market does not really embrace it yet.

Alberto Candiani: Most of our innovative products are sustainable products. We try to explain our concept to the brands and hope they explain it to their customers, But the whole process is not fluent yet. For example, consumers don't consider recycled products as premium.

THE TERM

Andrew Olah: What if we change the word "premium" to "luxury"?

Damiano Dall'Anese: I think this doesn't work because luxury is about a different attitude. Premium denim was always mean to have a more relaxed attitude. You also don't need luxury, premium is the best you can get.

Alberto Candiani: I talk about the material, its quality and comfort. But it is a different story what the brands make out of it. I give to my client the good pasta and I hope they cook it well.

Kara Nicholas: More education of the consumer would help to get the "premium" story along. ↗