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Ghurka: For the Love of Leather

by Daniel Scheffler

Contributor

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"A Ghurka bag is as international as it is American, as cosmopolitan as it is local, as rooted in history as it is constantly changing."

Far above the Himalayan clouds of Nepal is where some hill tribes, called the Ghurkas, were originally stationed during the Nepal and British Indian wars of 1814. The name, handed from Hindu warrior-saint Guru Gorakhnath, dates back to the 8th century - the Nepalese Gorkhas, eventually becoming Ghurkas. Known for their prowess and fierceness these warriors were said to be the finest mercenaries around: Field Marshall Sam Manekshaw once famously stated, "If a man is not afraid of dying, he is either lying or is a Ghurka." And this is where the now New York City-based leather brand birthed its very own story.

Fast forward to the 20th century where American Marley Hodgson, at a 70s London auction, became fascinated with the leather antiquities up for bidding. The goods, mostly campaign gear, were made for Ghurka regimental officers stationed in India at the start of the 1900s and the adventure-fueled entrepreneur was immediately hooked.

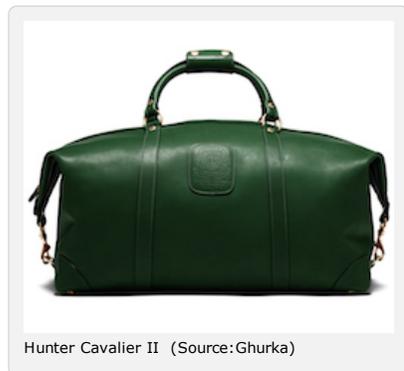
The auction did not go as well as Hodgson intended and he did not manage to acquire everything he had set his heart on - but it led him to a new, and long, friendship with an English tanner who taught him all about the art of tanning - a useful skill if you're about to start the finest luxury leather brand in the U.S.

Upon returning home, Hodgson originated the Ghurka brand with the name imprinting every single product the brand creates today, beginning with the birth of a knapsack for his son. Nowadays, this quality-driven product in all its beauty is in the hands of his granddaughter.

As a business that is largely unaffected by fads and trends, Ghurka has some sterling items as part of its current collection. "This fall we are seeing backpacks, backpacks, backpacks and then there is a real feel for petrol blue and beautiful raw Vachetta leather," says Pam Bristow, Executive Vice President of Marketing and Brand Strategy. Expect rich hues like hunter green and navy blue constructed with the finest leather.



Explorer No. 239 Vintage Chestnut Leather Backpack. (Source:Ghurka)



Hunter Cavalier II (Source:Ghurka)

rifle holders and even their wallets.

Ghurka currently manufactures in Norwalk, Connecticut, and operates two retail stores in Manhattan: Prince Street and the flagship on Fifth Avenue, with some movement across the pond in the works. The spirit of handmade, high quality goods - items to last a lifetime - are very much reminiscent of the values of the 18th century when craftsmen forged and shaped the regimental gear. In today's world of throwaways, a well-crafted product commands a certain respect - particularly when it comes to leather goods.

Ghurka goods come with a deep imprinted number, a nod to the craftsman and to the quality, which indicates the sequential style number. A Cavalier Duffel No. 1 96 bag is the 96th style that the brand created and this quality runs through their backpacks,

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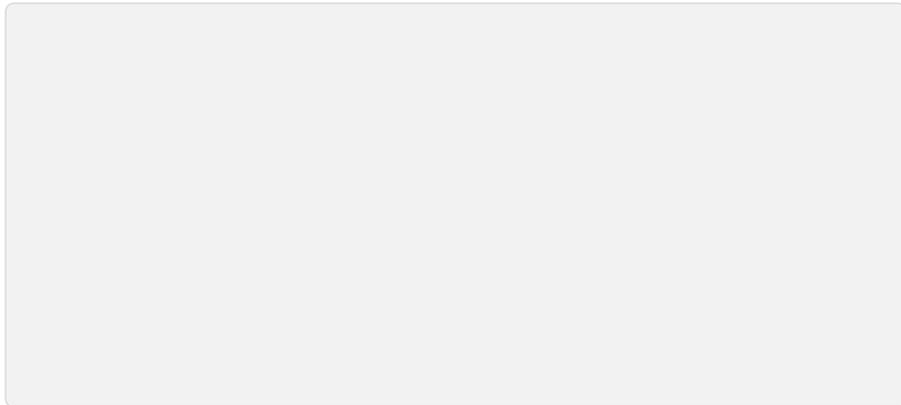
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The brand, which has extended its aesthetic to furniture, also takes on various special projects. The acclaimed restaurant Eleven Madison Park is kitted out with Ghurka leather menu covers; the Formula 1 brand McLaren Automotive has a number of select leather accessories for drivers and fans; and this October, the luxury resort brand Aman will host 18 guests to 18 of their resorts across Asia on a private jet outfitted with Ghurka luggage.

Leather never goes out of fashion, it just ebbs and flows in terms of its position in the line-up of what's great to own. Ghurka is like that - a family invitation to belong to something built on quality. It's unpretentious, doesn't care about celebrities and fluff but rather bestows an escapade sense of wonder to a piece of luggage that's going to travel with you for the rest of your life.

For more on Ghurka visit www.ghurka.com or the stores in New York.



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