

6. Nalgene Colored Lexan Water Bottles

While Nalgene introduced the wide-mouth polycarbonate bottle to the market in the early 1980s, it was not until the company began making the 32-ounce bottles in a wide range of bright colors in 2000 that their popularity really took off. The colored bottles came from the company's prioritization around innovation and newness coupled with the evolving capability of its suppliers. While one can argue the nuances of innovation, the simple act of coloring the plastic in a bottle turned Nalgene into a household name—something not even the company's engineers could have predicted as they grumbled about the merits of pink resin bottles during R&D testing. Eventually, the bottles became more than just about hydration and, one might argue, turned into something of a fashion statement.

7. Patagonia Capilene Base Layers

In 1984, Yvon Chouinard, the founder of Patagonia, was walking around a sporting goods show in Chicago when he stopped to view a demonstration of polyester football jerseys being cleaned of grass stains. Patagonia had offered wicking polypropylene underwear since the mid-70s; however, it had become quite frustrating that the smooth, plastic fibers were difficult to clean, efficiently repelling both water and soap. The polypropylene also had a low melting temperature and would wear off in 20 washings or so. The football jerseys were different, though, as they had a permanently etched fiber that was completely hydrophilic—that is, water-loving. Chouinard surmised it would be the perfect fiber for underwear: With a much higher melting point, the etched fibers wicked like crazy, yet didn't absorb water inside the fiber and were quick-drying. Due to the capillary effect of the wicking process, Patagonia named its new product Capilene.

8. Jetboil PCS Stove

Cousins Dwight Aspinwall and Perry Dowst grew up camping, backpacking and canoeing together. As adults, they remained avid outdoorsmen, but were frustrated with heavy fuel bottles and clunky stoves on long trips. They eventually became engineers and worked to build a better stove, testing their theories in the lab and on the trail. Their technological breakthrough came around 2002 when they discovered a way to improve the transfer of heat in a stove, which doubled its efficiency. Using a piece called the Flex Ring, their new

compact, self-contained unit could boil a cup of water in a minute, allowing outdoor adventurers to carry less fuel and cookware. To improve the product, Aspinwall and Dowst sought feedback from hikers on the Appalachian Trail and in the White Mountains. With this input, they built a prototype that had all the technical characteristics and elements of the current Jetboil. Realizing the promise in their invention, they quit their jobs to devote 100 percent of their energy to launch a marketable product.


9. CamelBak ThermoBak Hydration System

As the originator of the hands-free hydration system, the inspiration for the original CamelBak came from Mike Edison, an EMT and road bike racer in Midland-Odessa, Texas. Edison was a competitor in the famed Hotter'N Hell Hundred Race—an annual 100-mile ride in 100-degree weather in Wichita Falls, Texas, in late August. For this race, Edison designed a product to carry his water with him that was easier to access and held more water than a standard water bottle. Using an IV bag sewn into his bike jersey, the inspiration for CamelBak was born. From this idea, the first CamelBak, known as the ThermoBak, was brought to market in 1989. Although extremely innovative at the time, the ThermoBak is relatively primitive compared to current

CamelBak hydration

system technology. The ThermoBak was a streamlined hydration system with a simple pop-top reservoir and a sipping device (a forerunner to the bite valve that worked on a spring and ball system). The reservoir was encased in polyurethane laminated foam. The spring and ball sip system was soon to be replaced with the first CamelBak bite valve introduced in 1991. The next major milestone for CamelBak was the introduction in 1996 of the M.U.L.E. pack, which has also gone through numerous upgrades over time.

10. Crazy Creek Camp Chair

It was Rob Hart's first invention that would publicly define the man and launch a company: the Crazy Creek Chair. In 1987, along with his first wife, Louise "Weezy" Chandler, Hart began tinkering with a folding, wooden chair used by paddlers. Hart said he was trying "to create something that would provide a warm, dry and comfortable place to put my butt in and then lean back on." Crazy Creek Products was launched in 1988, and one could argue that Crazy Creek and Hart are responsible for introducing comfort into the backpacking and mountaineering equation. A pad of closed cell foam was no longer good enough. Though there have been many imitators, it is significant that the original Crazy Creek Chair is still produced today. The company's product lines have expanded to include several styles of chairs designed for a multitude of uses, reflecting Hart's desire to create comfort in the wilderness or at home. 

Material Innovations

You can't build a great product without innovative materials. We asked the industry to vote for the material advancements that represented the most significant and game-changing introductions in the market in the last 25 years. Here are the top picks, ranked in order:

1. Gore Windstopper
2. Arc'Teryx waterproof zippers
3. PrimaLoft One
4. Patagonia organic cotton
5. Featherlite tent poles
6. Five Ten Stealth Rubber
7. eVent
8. Polartec PowerDry and Powershield
9. Seam Grip
10. Schoeller Dryskin

Among the write-in votes, the ITW Nexus side-release buckle, Polarguard HV and Cordura Ballistic garnered the most nods.

