

W.L. Gore & Associates

Beyond waterproof/breathable is a whole new world.

Now more than 50 years old, outdoor-recreation and hunting-industry icon Gore has been producing ground-breaking “waterproof/breathable” outerwear and footwear specifically aimed at hunters for some 25 years. Many of us can remember quite fondly the first time we scrimped and saved enough to purchase a premium Gore-Tex lined garment, and the weighty anticipation that came with using it during that first “extreme” wet-weather hunt. When the result was warm, dry comfort, we knew a new era in outerwear had arrived.

Is another on the way? This past summer came news that Gore had developed not a new miracle fabric, but an entirely new camouflage—Optifade—based on the current high-tech military digital camo, but one made exclusively to fool the eyes of game animals: specifically, deer and other ungulates. Gore’s primary partner in this exciting endeavor was another cutting-edge company, Sitka gear—a young camo clothing/gear company whose meteoric rise we profiled in our March/April 2008 issue.

So briefed, we had many questions. And we got them all answered—with surprising candor and insight. We talked to Brad Yeomans, a key Gore team member who focuses on hunting and fishing outerwear and footwear sales, to clue us in on Gore’s exciting new hunting-industry developments for 2009 and beyond.



We spoke with Gore’s Brad Yeomans, shown here with some Fall 2008 proof that the new Gore Optifade camo holds some serious promise for cutting-edge big-game hunters.

Manufacturer Info:

MANUFACTURER: W.L. Gore & Associates, Inc. **YEAR EST.:** 1958

LOCATION: Corporate offices in Newark, Delaware; 45 locations worldwide

PRODUCTS: Hunting industry: Gore-Tex and Windstopper fabrics;

Gore Optifade Concealment.

CONTACT: (888) 914-4673; www.gore.com; www.optifade.com



□ SITKA GEAR Storm Front Jacket w/ Gore Optifade Camo

Few companies—if any—can match the scientific resources that have been used by W. L. Gore and Associates to develop cutting-edge, ultra-high-performance waterproof/breathable apparel. In a somewhat surprising move, Gore has used these same types of resources to develop a unique camouflage based on how ungulates—hooved animals—actually view their surroundings. After hearing from Brad Yeomans you'll see why the company has aptly labeled this new and exciting development, "The Science Of Nothing."

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After spending untold millions of dollars to date designing fabrics made to keep outdoorsmen more comfortable in any conditions, Gore's research showed it was time to take the next step. Giving consumers a new camouflage that would differentiate Gore's premium garments from the current sea of popular camo patterns simply makes good sense, company officials believe.

Archery Business: *One of the most-exciting industry stories for 2009 is Gore's development of an all-new camo pattern—Optifade—a digital pattern based on extensive scientific research. How and why did this pattern come about?*

Brad Yeomans: "David Dillon, the category business leader for Gore's hunting and fishing category, and I were really looking for a way to bring new value to Gore's garments. One thing we struggled with was how customers can look for 'visible value' from the Gore-Tex brand. We have access to all sorts of technology and resources that are being used for developing military products. That could be a lot of things, it could be looking at the impact of infrared signature, maybe special dyes or textiles we can use to minimize reflectance. We decided to orchestrate looking at camo that's truly designed for hunting. Nobody has looked at concealment from the

perspective of how deer and other ungulates actually see. We were trying to understand what we could do visually, to have additional value at retail, and let the consumer identify Gore-Tex garments more easily at retail. Right now 'waterproof' garments start at about \$39, while ours start at \$129—so how does the consumer determine the difference? In a sea of camo, we wanted something that would truly make a difference in performance and stand out."

A.B.: *Why would Gore, a company widely respected for its ground-breaking developments in waterproof and other fabrics, and a hunting industry icon for some 25 years, suddenly decide to develop a camouflage pattern?*

B.Y.: "I think it's clear everybody buys their ammo, or their guns and bows, with the idea they will produce better success. People buy a 'bonded

bullet' for specific reasons. They buy a long-range rifle for a very specific application. They want more success. In clothing, we're trying to take that concept past the 'comfort vector,' and see what else we could add. We knew that a lot of companies in the hunting industry would not have the dollars to support all the necessary research for this kind of concept the way that Gore can, and as a result we'll be able to differentiate ourselves going forward for the long term.

"Developing Optifade Concealment has been a sizable investment that only a few companies in our industry could even think of making. Yes, it is a risk, but we believe in it and if consumers accept it, there could be substantial growth opportunities. The great thing about Gore is we really encourage an entrepreneurial spirit, to look for opportunities that can help the end user be more successful. We are constantly challenged to do these things. All of our research told us that consumers are interested in this type of innovation. And we took this very seriously, investing a lot of time and effort. It was a three-month process just to come up with the Optifade name."

A.B.: *We already know that Sitka will be the exclusive supplier of Optifade camo outerwear to the hunting industry. Why Sitka, and why not offer Optifade licenses to many more camo clothing companies, much like various other major camo companies?*

B.Y.: "The short answer is, we don't want to be in the camo-licensing business. We want to help consumers find Gore-Tex garments to buy. We are not looking to promote the Optifade Concealment on beer coolers, golf bags, or ATVs. If the product is not seen or used during the hunt, it doesn't need to be camouflaged. Optifade is not a 'lifestyle' product. This is gear made to improve your chances of success, and we don't want to water that down.

"With Sitka, we wanted to partner up with the company making some of the absolute best products in the industry for the hunter. Together with Sitka, we're making gear for consumers that can help them stay out longer, and hunt harder. Without a doubt, Sitka has done a lot in the last two years to help hunters be more successful. They have brought differentiated fabrics, constructions, and a system, or layers of gear, to enhance consumer performance. Sitka has brought needed innovation to design such as a tighter fit that's bet-



Especially exciting about Gore's new Optifade Concealment is the company's solid reputation for leaving no stone unturned during any type of product development.

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□ BROWNING Maxus Gore-Tex Jacket



ter for bowhunting—or the stretch they put in their Ascent pants. It's all the little things they do. It's really taken clothing to a new level. Their motto of 'Changing Clothing to Gear' is realized in all products they create."

A.B.: *We've seen demonstrations of the "in-the-field" effectiveness of Optifade camo and they're certainly impressive. However, is there any concern by Gore that this camouflage will not have the necessary "shelf appeal" to attract a large dedicated following?*

B.Y.: "That will be a challenge. We know the typical hunter, or the hunter's spouse, is buying most camo at arm's length. Optifade wasn't designed to have shelf appeal under fluorescent lights in a retail environment. It was engineered to be effective in the outdoors at effective bow range. We realize that, and Gore is planning to focus on consumer and retail education, partnering with Sitka, and to communicate the differentiation. With Optifade, they've got to learn that we're not trying to hide from our friends, but the animals. We're going to make efforts to let people know that you don't hunt in a retail store. You're hunting an ungulate, which has a dichromatic [two-color] visual acuity system. Their visual acuity is much different than ours, and we need a whole new concept in concealment technology to fool them."

A.B.: *We know Optifade will be available for 2009 as an option on some BowTech bows. Are there any other Optifade partners finalized or in the works?*

B.Y.: "For 2009, Optifade is going to be available exclusively in Sitka gear and BowTech products. We are working on other [camo] patterns and concepts, and there will be opportunities for other partners in the future."

A.B.: *Does the grand plan for Optifade include licensees covering virtually all hunting accessories?*

B.Y.: "For the most part, we're looking to make it a natural progression, but, yes, we're anticipating working with companies offering everything from treestands and ground blinds to other important gear that is outwardly facing during the hunt. For 2009 BowTech, in addition to their bows, will have their quivers and stabilizers and similar bow accessories available in Optifade, and Sitka will have all their gear available in Optifade including their backpacks. As we dive toward more of the whitetail hunting market, I can definitely envision seeing anything visible during the hunt being involved. But will that include mud flaps on trucks, or cell phone covers? No. We

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□ **ROCKY**
MountainStalker
w/ Gore-Tex

won't be going there. If the consumer wants better concealment on a crossbow or a rifle, we could be going there in the future. It's really a matter of finding the right partners.

"Our intention for this pattern is to be sold only through independent and specialty hunting shops where the technology can be communicated."

A.B.: *Is the development of a camo pattern the beginning of a totally new direction for Gore?*

B.Y.: "In some ways I think it is. It's giving us a

chance to do many more projects—a whole new 'sandbox' to play in. At the same time, the core of the Gore line continues to be the Windstopper and Gore-Tex brands. While our mission at Gore is still comfortable protection, this does allow us to do a number of different things as long as it can be incorporated into that mission. We have always been about identifying and meeting consumer needs. That will continue."

A.B.: *What is the total number of Gore licensees in the hunting industry for 2009, and how/why has that number changed over the last five years?*

B.Y.: "For 2009, globally, we have about a dozen footwear licensees and additionally, about a dozen outerwear licensees—and that number has come down slightly over the last three to five years, due mostly to companies succumbing to price pressure, and being 'followers' rather than leaders. Once you start playing the 'price game,' Gore doesn't play well in that arena because of our insistence on high testing standards and quality."

A.B.: *Who are some of your key hunting-industry licensees?*

B.Y.: "Of course Sitka is strong, as is Team Realtree, Beretta, and Browning. One that hasn't come to the U.S. is Harkila. They're out of Sweden, and they are focused on the European hunting market. They do camo and solid-color huntingwear. At this time, Harkila has not decided to come into the U.S. They've got some beautiful apparel, but I don't know what the U.S. hunter would think of the fashion, the detail that's in this great gear. The trim packages are absolutely amazing. It makes you think of upscale country wear in the hunting environment, just absolutely meticulous constructions and presentations of the highest quality."

A.B.: *What's the best thing about being Gore in today's hunting industry?*

B.Y.: "Knowing that we have a very solid financial backing and that if we can dream it, and prove we can make it successful, we're given 'green lights.' Our leadership team encourages us to make business decisions, and is very willing to take chances. We're over two billion dollars per year in sales as a corporation. Gore is diversified and we have four divisions of focused effort: elec-



□ **BROWNING**
Gore-Tex Xtrafit
Gloves

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□ **BROWNING**
Pac-Lite Half-Zip
Pullover w/ Gore-Tex



□ **BROWNING**
Gore-Tex Decoy
Gloves

exist because consumers have unique and varied needs.”

A.B.: *Coming from such a progressive, cutting-edge company as Gore, I've got to say your last statement is kind of surprising.*

B.Y.: “You've got to remember we have some of the same ‘daily’ types of activities as most other companies. And though we have some great, talented associates and world-leading resources, it really comes down to having great product concepts. Once we identify good product concepts that will be valued by consumers, our engineers and teams start working and creating ways to solve problems or bring solutions to the user. Gore is a fascinating and rewarding place to work, but pulling required resources together to focus on a smaller industry, or a smaller activity like hunting—compared to Outdoor recreation including hiking, skiing, cycling and running—can be a challenge.”

A.B.: *What are some of Gore's short- and long-term goals in the hunting industry?*

B.Y.: “For sure the short-term is making certain our current licensees are having success, ensuring the success of our customers at retail with sell-in and sell-through. And that success involves the retailers making appropriate margins. It's more important to have product sell-out than a closeout—we want the consumer to buy it because they demand it. And we can have some influence on that through our point-of-purchase displays, our educational materials and retail online and floor staff training.

“Educating the consumer is so important. There's a big difference in the performance of a Gore-Tex jacket and a ‘waterproof’ jacket. Yet so many people have not experienced that, because no one's told them to. Either the retailer hasn't understood it, or consumers haven't understood the price value.

“How are we going to educate? For Optifade concealment, we have our new website—www.optifade.com. That site will be the ‘first touch.’ Additional ‘touches’ will be point-of-purchase displays and materials used in conjunction with Sitka gear. With them being an exclusive launch partner, it makes sense for our message to be on their fixtures. We will work collaboratively with Sitka to make sure that consumers are being touched through different publications, television, and some other very creative ways we're not quite ready to reveal yet.”

A.B.: *Anything else you'd like readers to know about Gore they may not already know?*

B.Y.: “I think the most-important thing is that Gore has been working in the hunting industry for over 25 years, and we have plans to stay in it long-term. Optifade Concealment is not a ‘shot in the dark’; we have a proven history of developing the very best products available, and we will always be looking at ways to make the hunter more successful.”

tronics, industrial, medical, and fabrics. With this diversification, we are able to effectively fund projects across divisions when solid opportunities arise.”

A.B.: *What is Gore's biggest challenge moving forward in the hunting industry?*

B.Y.: “Breaking our own internal paradigms is without a doubt the biggest challenge. I've been a Gore associate almost 12 years, and I still have a hard time telling myself to break out of the box; it's just hard to step back away from the daily challenges and see that opportunities

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Sitka co-founders Jason Hairston, left, and Jonathan Hart first met with Gore some time ago to talk about developing some new “hunter-friendly” fabrics. As the relationship developed Gore officials later approached the duo with a unique concept in camo—resulting in Sitka being the exclusive outerwear licensee of Gore’s Optifade camo.

W.L. Gore & Sitka:

Exclusive partnership set to unveil new Optifade digital camo at ATA & SHOT Shows.

Archery Business talked with Sitka President Jonathan Hart about his company’s exciting new partnership with W.L. Gore & Associates, and the very bright future of cutting-edge camo apparel.

A.B.: *On the surface Gore and Sitka working together seems a logical choice. How did this come about; who approached who?*

Jonathan Hart: “The relationship actually began before any ‘concealment’ talks. We began conversations with Gore over two years ago, exploring new fabrics technologies with the goal to continue resetting people’s expectations from that perspective. Gore is the most well recognized and respected textile developer worldwide, with over 8,000 scientists working on technologies spanning aerospace to human implants. Our relationship developed and conversations centered on what we could do together as partners to help make the hunter more successful. Initial conversations focused on the development of new fabrics, but as talks matured and the topic of concealment came up, Gore shared with us some details on a project they had been working on.

“We know our current patterns work well in the field, and at retail. This has helped, to a degree, with the current success of the Sitka

brand, but has not driven it. It’s still about the clothing first. When Gore proposed looking at concealment from a different perspective—that of the animal—our interest was perked...to say the least.”

A.B.: *With Sitka’s success to date, why look for another camouflage pattern?*

J.H.: “Sitka is driven by three things: technology, credibility, and game-changing solutions. If you stick to those core elements, you have the tools to analyze product development decisions. Every element of a product might not scream of all three, but they all have to be existent in some capacity. This includes the patterns we use. To date, we’ve been more focused on what we can do from a fabric and design standpoint. Our patterns have been less critical and consequently not so unique. This lack of uniqueness fundamentally goes against building products that are remarkable and noticed by consumers. The opportunity to work with a science-based concealment system is a direction more in line with Sitka’s mission.”

A.B.: *It sounds like Sitka has considered going completely to the new Gore Optifade technology.*

J.H.: “We’ve considered it and haven’t made a

decision yet. In the grand scheme of this marketplace, there is such a strong affinity to the biggest-branded patterns in the market. The emotional connection that millions of users have made to these patterns is understandable. Millions of dollars have been spent to make that connection, and the status quo is hard to change. We aren’t looking to sell the emotional story, we want to offer the best-performing product. Some sales will be driven by market demand for that emotional connection. We understand that. But for the retailer that embraces the philosophy of offering product that is based on quantifiable performance, it’s hard to not offer your customers the option. If I can prove this new technology is more effective and helps hunters be more successful, why wouldn’t they use it? Marketing—that’s why.

“With Optifade there will certainly be a hurdle at the store level initially. Education is a big part of it, both for the consumer and the retailer. We understand there has been a lackluster embrace of ‘digitized’ patterns to date. We have to make sure people understand that it’s not about blending in with your background, but actually disappearing within the range of vision of an ungulate. It’s not about what you and I see. It’s about what and ‘how’ an animal sees. These are two very different things. Optifade is effectively changing the

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□ **SITKA**
Jet Stream Vest
 w/ Gore
 Optifade Camo



□ **SITKA**
Jet Stream Pant
 w/ Gore Optifade Camo



'art of camo' to 'concealment technology.' It's like switching from a 'Bachelor of Art' degree to a 'Bachelor of Science' degree. The dedicated hunter is absolutely going to do everything he can to sway the odds in his favor, even if it's just a little bit."

A.B.: *Why is Gore such a good fit with Sitka?*

J.H.: "As companies, Sitka and Gore are very aligned in our interests. Both of our goals are to make our customers more successful in the field. I think what would absolutely amaze people is the amount of research Gore does on any and every garment-specific product that exists in the hunting industry. As a partner, this gives us an incredible amount of insight into what has and hasn't worked. The sheer amount of data Gore has amassed is unrivaled and leveraged to develop better products through a consistent science-

based approach. Working together, we are creating solutions."

A.B.: *Will any other companies be licensed to use the new Gore Optifade Concealment Products?*

J.H.: "Not for garments. Sitka is committed [to this pattern with an exclusive deal for] the long term. Other accessory gear partners will be brought in as time goes by, to continue the messaging and round out the offerings. Where will the pattern go? As different conditions through the country dictate, the pattern can and will be more specifically 'optimized' for different regions and hunting styles."

"Technically, this original Optifade pattern we're introducing for 2009 is optimized for the big game hunting in the mountain environments, for use in more open terrain, where shots are going to average 30 to 40 yards. Statistically the average

bow shot out West is something like 36 yards. So that puts you in the spot-and-stalk realm. The future can include going to patterns designed for closer range—the world of treestanding is another animal and is going to include different parameters. Ideally, we're going to have a [whole series of separate] optimized patterns."

"Right now, BowTech is the only other company that Gore has approached, and will be offering its bows in the Optifade camo as an option for 2009."

A.B.: *Will Sitka have a say in future licenses of the patterns?*

J.H.: "Gore has committed to us that every potential partner approached will be an open discussion with us, to make sure that our visions are aligned, that we have like brands with the same goals, as was the case with BowTech. That's very important."

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In addition to the “first-generation” Gore Optifade camo pattern you see here, to be introduced at the 2009 ATA and SHOT Shows, Gore has plans to introduce a whole series of digital-based camo patterns. Each will be “optimized” for various hunting styles and/or areas of the country. Stay tuned.



A.B.: *What are other changes in the Sitka lineup for 2009?*

J.H.: “Sitka’s 2008 line will act as the foundation and core of the 2009 Sitka line, with some exciting additions. We have expanded the line for 2009 to include eight new pieces, a few outerwear and more insulation pieces.

“On the outerwear side, we’re excited about three different Gore-tex and Windstopper designs. On the insulation side, we’re excited to be working with well-known Primaloft and, new to the scene, Ardica Technologies to create garments for extreme cold. Two more packs will be coming out in the 2,000- to 3,500-cubic-inch range, and a few more ‘necessities’ to round out the line.

“I would like to specifically note our new partnership with Ardica Technologies, and their ‘fuel cell’ technology. Ardica was started by a group of scientists from Stanford University who, for years, focused on creating more efficient and lighter fuel cells (batteries) for the military purposes. These fuel cells will allow us to empower our users with not only heat, powered by the power pack, but also enable you via a small USB cord in your pocket to charge and use all your electronic devices, like cell phones, GPS, laser rangefinders, etc. Right now we’re looking at the potential to provide 8-plus hours of heat on a ‘low’ heat setting. You have controls to turn it on and off, which allow you the most efficient use of your juice. After running the unit dry, it only takes a few hours to fully recharge the power pack.

“Sitka is currently Ardica’s exclusive partner in the hunting industry. The current system runs off Lithium Ion, and the future technology is hydrogen fuel cells. Treestanders will love it. The goal for us is to be able to put somebody on stand for hours without bulk. We are committed to fixing that problem. And backcountry guys, out there for days on end, you’ll be able to really cut down on weight and what you need to carry. Imagine being able to take a sleeping bag and cut that weight in half. Or power your headlamp to run as bright as a Surefire [flashlight]. These are just a few things that are coming down the pipeline.”

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