

The Fly Fishing, Surfing, Rock Climber: Yvon Chouinard

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On the river, you might have seen somebody or know someone who has a pair of waders or a fishing pack made by Patagonia. Ever wondered who had the idea to create such an incredible company? Yvon Chouinard did.

Born in 1938, Yvon Chouinard grew up in a French community in northern Maine. In 1947, his family moved to southern California. There, he became a falconer, and a rock climber when one of his instructors taught him how to climb down cliffs to get to falcon nests. After that, he loved climbing. He even hopped trains to get to the best climbing spots.

When Chouinard started hanging around places such as Stoney Point and Tahquitz Rock, he met Sierra Club members Royal Robbins, TM Herbert, and Tom Frost. Together, they taught themselves to climb in Yosemite.

When they were climbing in Yosemite, the pitons (steel spikes used to dig into the rock to support the climber) they used weren't reusable, and since some of the climbs they did required a lot of pitons, Chouinard decided to forge his own reusable ones.

Pretty soon all of his climbing friends had their own, and many other climbers wanted their own, so Chouinard started to sell them for \$1.50. He built his own shop in his Backyard, and travelled up and down the California coast surfing and forging at dusk. During the winter he would make the pitons, and in the summer he would climb

Wyoming and Canada. One summer, he famously lived off of canned cat food since the amount of money he got from the pitons was a tiny amount.

Then, in 1965, he founded Chouinard Equipment with Tom Frost. Though they made quite a bit of money, their pitons were damaging the rock, because so many of them were being forced into the rock and it created holes. When they learned about it, they stopped making pitons, though they were a very popular product. Instead, they created metal blocks that you used to hoist yourself up with. Even though their business was successful, it went bankrupt when users of their equipment sued them when they got injured from their products that broke.

When Chouinard was climbing in Scotland, he discovered that rugby shirts worked really well for climbing. Thick and durable enough for rugby, they were definitely durable enough for climbing. When his friends saw him wearing them, they wanted some so he ordered some from England. Pretty soon, more and more people wanted one, so he ordered them from countries like Argentina and New Zealand. Some companies even started to sell them and pretty soon it looked like Chouinard had started a new fad!

When Chouinard started to make more clothing, he thought they needed a name for the company. He thought of a few names, but settled on Patagonia. He chose Patagonia because it is a beautiful area of wilderness full of Glaciers and mountains.

Soon, Patagonia was experimenting with new materials in their clothing. Their first experiment was with synthetic materials in making long underwear. It did have one downside, though. The synthetic materials they used didn't absorb water, making it

extremely hard to remove any stains and or smells. Another small change was the color of their clothing. Most climbing clothes at the time were either tan or blue. Patagonia changed that by making their clothes red, green, and brown. Also, in 1994, Patagonia switched to 100% organic cotton for all their cotton products.

Patagonia's community is also different from many other companies. At lunch, the workers play volleyball or surf, and the company even sponsors climbing trips. Patagonia also has a cafeteria that serves environment friendly, healthy, food. Malinda Chouinard, Yvon's wife, also started a daycare for children whose parents work for Patagonia.

The reason why Chouinard runs his company like this, is because he is very concerned about the state of our planet, and is very knowledgeable about materials that his company is using. One of Patagonia's ads tells you "Don't buy this jacket"! The message that Chouinard tried to get across is that you should only buy their products if you absolutely need to, for making a jacket consumes a lot of energy, which is bad for the environment.

As an accomplished climber, surfer, and eco-conscious businessman, Chouinard is truly a pioneer in creating clothing for the outdoors, in a sustainable, worker friendly environment. Still going strong, Patagonia is still trying to make more products with as little impact on the earth.

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