

# TEJ SOPAL

## CREATIVE DIRECTOR | PRODUCT DESIGN AND GENERATIVE AI

Menswear | Womenswear | Accessories | Heritage, Sportswear and Lifestyle Apparel  
Xiamen, China | Halesowen, United Kingdom | Open to global relocation  
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## PROFILE

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Creative director with 25 years designing apparel at adidas, Mexx, Timberland and Xtep, now working daily in generative AI as a product design tool. I build node-based AI workflows in FLORA that carry a concept from first generation through to finished campaign imagery, and I use 25 years of range architecture, materials and construction knowledge to judge what that output can actually become. At Xtep I led a 30-person design team as the Lifestyle division grew from RMB 2.1 billion to a peak of RMB 4.39 billion. Following the group's acquisition of K-Swiss and Palladium in 2019 I designed apparel concepts for both brands, including the full K-Swiss expression across menswear, womenswear and accessories. Open to Head of Product Design, Creative Director and Design Director roles, full-time, contract or retained.

## AI AND CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY

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- Node-based generative workflows built in FLORA using Nano Banana 2, covering concept development, product visualisation and commercial campaign photography.
- Two-stage compositing pipeline: the location plate is generated first, then the product is composited at low strength, so garment and footwear form hold rather than being reinterpreted by the model.
- Brand marks preserved by wiring asset nodes directly into the composite instead of suppressing and regenerating logos, keeping trademarked marks accurate.
- Cross-renderer lighting mismatch resolved through a targeted relight pass, holding one consistent light signature across images generated by different models.
- Product judgement applied as the control layer at every generation round. Silhouette, seam logic, fabric weight and construction are assessed as the work develops, so concepts resolve into product that can be made.
- Complete AI-developed project case studies published at sopaldesigns.com, covering mood, fabric, colour, key item development and final look.

## CORE EXPERTISE

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Generative AI workflow design | AI-assisted concept development and product visualisation | Creative direction | Range architecture | Menswear and womenswear | Accessories systems | Print and graphic language | Colour, fabric and silhouette | Outerwear, wovens, knitwear and denim | Design-to-cost | Team leadership | Merchandising and sourcing collaboration

## TOOLS

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FLORA (node-based generative AI) | Anthropic | Openai | Gemini | Adobe Creative Suite | Microsoft Office

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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### Sopal Designs Founder and Creative Director

Xiamen, China | 2025 to present

Independent design practice working across range architecture, product direction and AI-assisted concept development for sportswear, lifestyle and heritage apparel.

- Built the studio generative AI production workflow, published as complete project case studies that form the practice portfolio.
- Self-initiated sportswear brand: brand identity, product direction and graphic design.
- Weekly published series on how heritage and sportswear ranges are built, drawing on work at Timberland, Xtep and Mexx.

## **Xtep International** Creative Director, Lifestyle

*Xiamen, China | 2016 to 2025*

Led a 30-person design team across multiple categories, with one Design Director as a direct report, setting direction on colour, fabric, silhouette and brand codes and connecting seasonal creative direction with range planning, product development and sourcing.

- Led Lifestyle apparel design as the division grew from RMB 2.1 billion in 2016 to RMB 3.2 billion in 2025, peaking at RMB 4.39 billion in 2024, more than double the 2016 base.
- Designed apparel concepts for K-Swiss and Palladium after Xtep acquired both brands in 2019, holding three distinct brand handwritings within one multi-brand portfolio.
- On K-Swiss, designed the complete expression across menswear, womenswear and accessories, including an archive-led silk scarf print that became the range's signature language and carried through to all-over prints, stripe placements and ribbon trims on bags, headwear and socks.
- On Palladium, translated the brand's footwear and military heritage into an apparel icon system, built on a utilitarian trim and fabric language designed to age with wear.
- Rebuilt how market information reached design and focused each range on fewer, stronger ideas that cross-merchandised across categories, supporting division growth of 34% in 2018 and 33% in 2022.
- Lifestyle consistently contributed approximately 30 to 40% of total group revenue.

## **Timberland, VF Corporation** Design Manager

*London, UK | 2013 to 2016 | Collections designed primarily for the US market*

Set concept, colour, fabric and trim direction for the TFO category, then led the design team through execution to final product and global sales presentations.

- Led design as TFO category revenue grew from approximately USD 85 million in 2013 to USD 120 million in 2016, a 12 to 13% CAGR.
- Supported 18% global revenue growth in SS16. Led design on the FW17 collection before leaving, which went on to record 48% revenue growth.
- Delivered margin gains of 46 to 150 basis points across SS16 and FW17 through assortment, sourcing and design-to-cost programmes.
- Developed the Young Consumer Strategy, a focused 60-style, 240-SKU seasonal collection that drove consistent double-digit growth in the entry-price segment.
- Built the waxed cotton and cotton twill fabric programmes that anchored TFO. Their performance led the European markets to request the premium Outdoor Heritage collection.

## **Creative Design Consultant** Various clients

*United Kingdom | 2010 to 2011 and 2012 to 2013*

- Supported apparel design strategy for fashion and sportswear brands during restructuring and repositioning, simplifying ranges around consumer needs, pricing and segmentation.
- Developed brand creation and product vision for a luxury men's and womenswear brand with accessories and footwear, covering market research, consumer analysis, pricing and retail environment.

## **Store Twenty One** Head of Menswear and Boyswear

*Solihull, UK | 2011 to 2012*

- Led the AW12 range, which delivered GBP 5 million in sales and 14% growth.
- Increased product profit margin to 38% through a pricing and assortment reset that improved perceived value by 20%.
- Launched the More Than Expected repositioning range, generating over GBP 70,000 in incremental revenue.
- Negotiated denim supplier efficiencies of up to 30%.

**Mexx International** Divisional Design Manager, Menswear

*Amsterdam, Netherlands | 2004 to 2010 | Progressed through Concept, Category and Divisional Design Manager roles*

- Contributed to menswear turnover growth from EUR 155 million in 2006 to EUR 280 million in 2010, across Europe, Canada and the Middle East.
- Led casualwear design through EUR 41 million of growth from 2006 to 2009 with a team of seven, as casual reached 70% of menswear revenue.
- Restructured fabric weights, patterns and colour cards so four price tiers read as one coherent brand at retail.
- Designed for a network of 200 retail stores and 1,700 wholesale accounts, and presented seasonal collections to the VP Product and Global Creative Director.

**adidas AG** Project Designer and Apparel Designer

*Herzogenaurach, Germany | 1999 to 2004*

- Worked with the adidas Innovation Team to take ClimaCool and Formation to market, across premium segments and multiple sports, each application engineered for the demands of its category.
- Briefed and trained designers across categories on applying new technology, so the innovation story reached every global market as one message.
- Built seasonal concepts from trend research, competitor range analysis and international market visits, and presented them to buyers across sports and fashion retail.

**EDUCATION**

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BA (Hons) Fashion and Design, Surrey Institute of Art and Design

National Diploma in Fashion and Design, Birmingham Institute of Art and Design