



Pack and Play

Kigo launches conscientious portable product.

For commuters, hikers, cyclists, skiers—anyone looking for an easily transportable and easy-to-slip-on footwear alternative—Kigo of Carbondale, CO, launches shoes that can be conveniently stowed in a pocket or purse. A few years ago, now Kigo president and CEO Jan Kuramoto, an avid skier, found herself frustrated in the warming house with no option but the ski boots she'd worn in. After sharing this tale with her daughter-in-law Rachele Kuramoto (now the company's director of marketing), the pair devised an answer—collapsible shoes that can be rolled up and hooked closed for portability. Partnering with Kristin Parker, who had experience in business development, the trio began conceiving the line.

Rachele notes they took care with their business approach, doing thorough market research to determine what consumers want. With no experience in footwear making, the Kigo team tapped the Two Ten Foundation, which referred them to a designer who helped them engineer their products. The company officially launched in January at The Atlanta Shoe Market, and its first shoes will ship in June.

The company debuts with two year-round styles: the Shel, a unisex slip-on, and the Star, a Mary Jane. “We developed the Mary Jane style after listening to women commuting in heels and hating it, or who would put on flip-flops and wind up with dirty feet,” Rachele says. The shoes are lightweight (a size 7 pair weighs approximately 0.7 pounds), she adds, and the company has a patent pending for its closures, which keep a folded shoe compact. The initial designs come in sophisticated gray with subtle contrast

stitching—conservative enough for the business set—as well as versions with pops of bright green or orange. Rachele hints that an ankle boot—still fully foldable—is currently in development.

From the onset, Kigo approached business with an eco-friendly mindset. “We decided to take our time and find some cool sustainable materials that would be very lightweight, breathable and water-resistant,” she explains. Kigo uses Cyclepet, a material made from recycled milk jugs, for its uppers and linings, and a wash-in treatment for water and stain resistance that is the first of its kind to be approved by the EPA.

Everyday business practices are also as green as possible. “From the start, we’ve been trying very hard to reduce our carbon footprint,” Rachele says. The shoes are made in China, “so admittedly we’ve got shoes on a boat,” she notes. “But we’re trying to counterbalance that with working virtually and not creating extra waste.” In addition to running the business as paper-free as possible, Kigo is shipping reduced-size, fully recyclable shoeboxes, and each pair of shoes comes in a cornstarch bag.

Initially, Kigo is targeting independents to help spread the word about its brand, but Rachele says larger outdoor and action-sports retailers are a fit as well. The company has also signed a women's boutique that caters to commuters. Rachele notes that Kigo—with its \$50 retail price—is hoping to make eco-friendly footwear accessible to a larger audience. “We’re committed to bringing a product to market that anybody can afford, and we’re really proud of that.” —Leslie Shiers