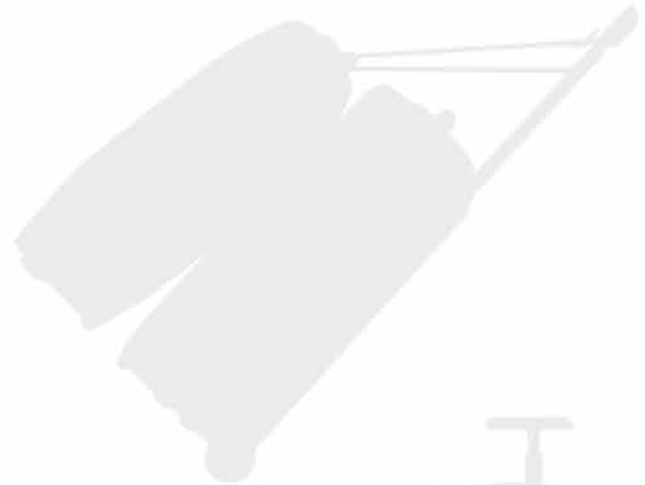
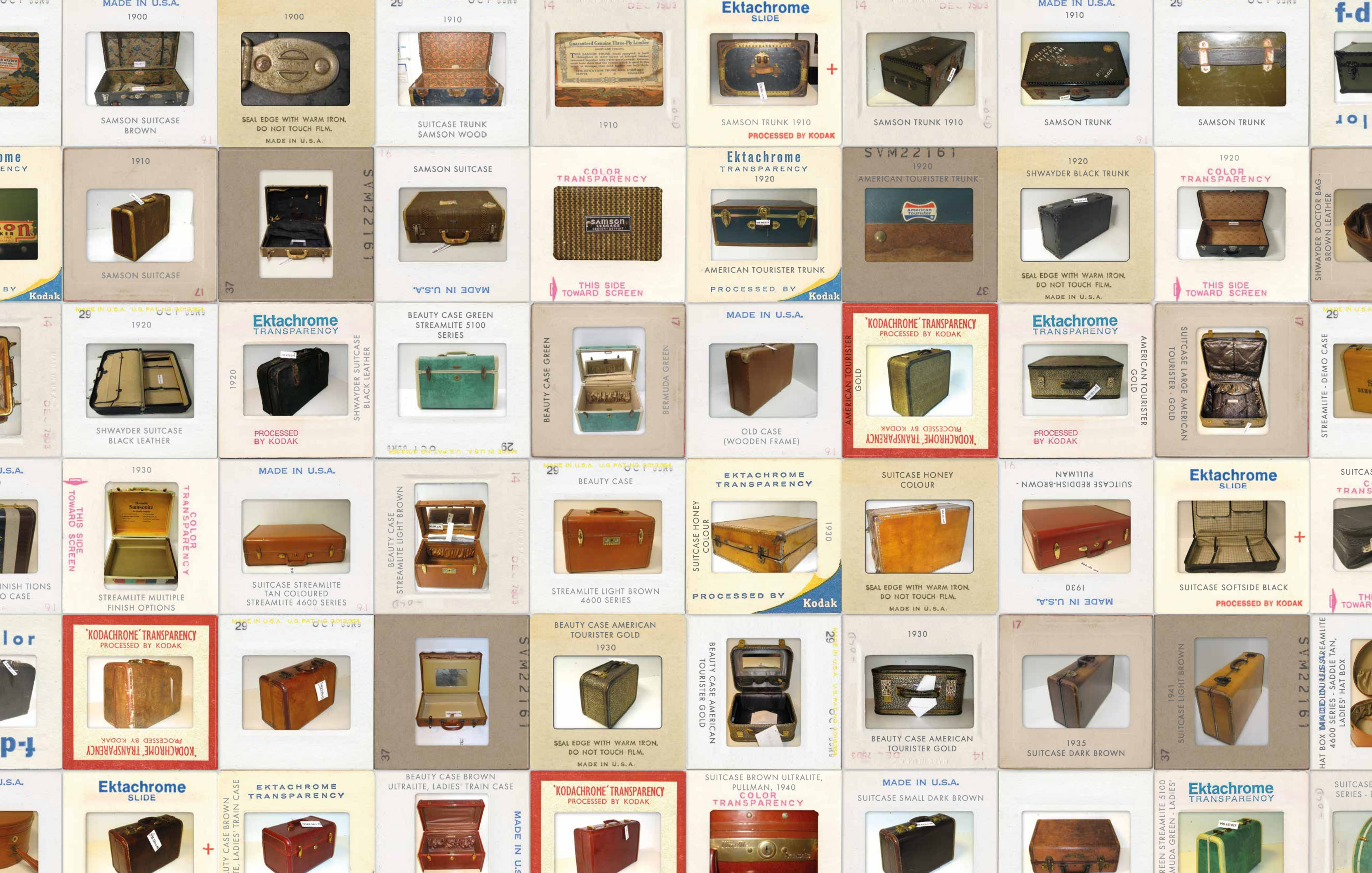


Journey of Discovery

The History of Samsonite

Samsonite





MADE IN U.S.A.
1900
SAMSON SUITCASE
BROWN

1900
SEAL EDGE WITH WARM IRON.
DO NOT TOUCH FILM.
MADE IN U.S.A.

1910
SUITCASE TRUNK
SAMSON WOOD

1910
Guaranteed Genuine Three-Ply Lumber
THIS SAMSON TRUNK is guaranteed to last for years. It is made of the best material and is built to stand up to the most severe tests. It is stronger than solid lumber and will last for years. The SHWAYDER TRUNKS are guaranteed to last for years.

Ektachrome
SLIDE
+
SAMSON TRUNK 1910
PROCESSED BY KODAK

1910
SAMSON TRUNK 1910

MADE IN U.S.A.
1910
SAMSON TRUNK

29
SAMSON TRUNK

1910
SAMSON SUITCASE

37
SVM22161
SHWAYDER SUITCASE
BLACK LEATHER

16
SAMSON SUITCASE
MADE IN U.S.A.

COLOR
TRANSPARENCY
+
THIS SIDE
TOWARD SCREEN

Ektachrome
TRANSPARENCY
1920
AMERICAN TOURISTER TRUNK
PROCESSED BY KODAK

SVM22161
1920
AMERICAN TOURISTER TRUNK

1920
SHWAYDER BLACK TRUNK
SEAL EDGE WITH WARM IRON.
DO NOT TOUCH FILM.
MADE IN U.S.A.

1920
COLOR
TRANSPARENCY
+
THIS SIDE
TOWARD SCREEN

MADE IN U.S.A. U.S. PAT. NO. 3013354
29
1920
SHWAYDER SUITCASE
BLACK LEATHER

Ektachrome
TRANSPARENCY
1920
SHWAYDER SUITCASE
BLACK LEATHER
PROCESSED BY KODAK

BEAUTY CASE GREEN
STREAMLITE 5100
SERIES

17
BEAUTY CASE GREEN
BERMUDA GREEN

MADE IN U.S.A.
OLD CASE
(WOODEN FRAME)

'KODACHROME' TRANSPARENCY
PROCESSED BY KODAK
AMERICAN TOURISTER
GOLD
PROCESSED BY KODAK

Ektachrome
TRANSPARENCY
AMERICAN TOURISTER
GOLD
PROCESSED BY KODAK

17
SUITCASE LARGE AMERICAN
TOURISTER - GOLD

1930
STREAMLITE MULTIPLE
FINISH OPTIONS
THIS SIDE
TOWARD SCREEN
COLOR
TRANSPARENCY

MADE IN U.S.A.
SUITCASE STREAMLITE
TAN COLOURED
STREAMLITE 4600 SERIES

14
BEAUTY CASE
STREAMLITE LIGHT BROWN

29
MADE IN U.S.A. U.S. PAT. NO. 3013354
BEAUTY CASE
STREAMLITE LIGHT BROWN
4600 SERIES

EKTACHROME
TRANSPARENCY
1930
SUITCASE HONEY
COLOUR
PROCESSED BY KODAK

SUITCASE HONEY
COLOUR
SEAL EDGE WITH WARM IRON.
DO NOT TOUCH FILM.
MADE IN U.S.A.

16
SUITCASE REDDISH-BROWN -
PULLMAN
1930
MADE IN U.S.A.

Ektachrome
SLIDE
+
SUITCASE SOFTSIDE BLACK
PROCESSED BY KODAK

'KODACHROME' TRANSPARENCY
PROCESSED BY KODAK
PROCESSED BY KODAK

29
MADE IN U.S.A. U.S. PAT. NO. 3013354
SUITCASE BROWN
ULTRALITE, LADIES' TRAIN CASE

37
SVM22161
BEAUTY CASE BROWN
ULTRALITE, LADIES' TRAIN CASE

BEAUTY CASE AMERICAN
TOURISTER GOLD
1930
SEAL EDGE WITH WARM IRON.
DO NOT TOUCH FILM.
MADE IN U.S.A.

29
MADE IN U.S.A. U.S. PAT. NO. 3013354
SUITCASE BROWN ULTRALITE,
PULLMAN, 1940
COLOR
TRANSPARENCY

1930
BEAUTY CASE AMERICAN
TOURISTER GOLD

17
1935
SUITCASE DARK BROWN

37
SVM22161
SUITCASE LIGHT BROWN

Ektachrome
SLIDE
+
SUITCASE BROWN
ULTRALITE, LADIES' TRAIN CASE

EKTACHROME
TRANSPARENCY
MADE IN U.S.A.

BEAUTY CASE AMERICAN
TOURISTER GOLD
PROCESSED BY KODAK

SUITCASE BROWN ULTRALITE,
PULLMAN, 1940
COLOR
TRANSPARENCY

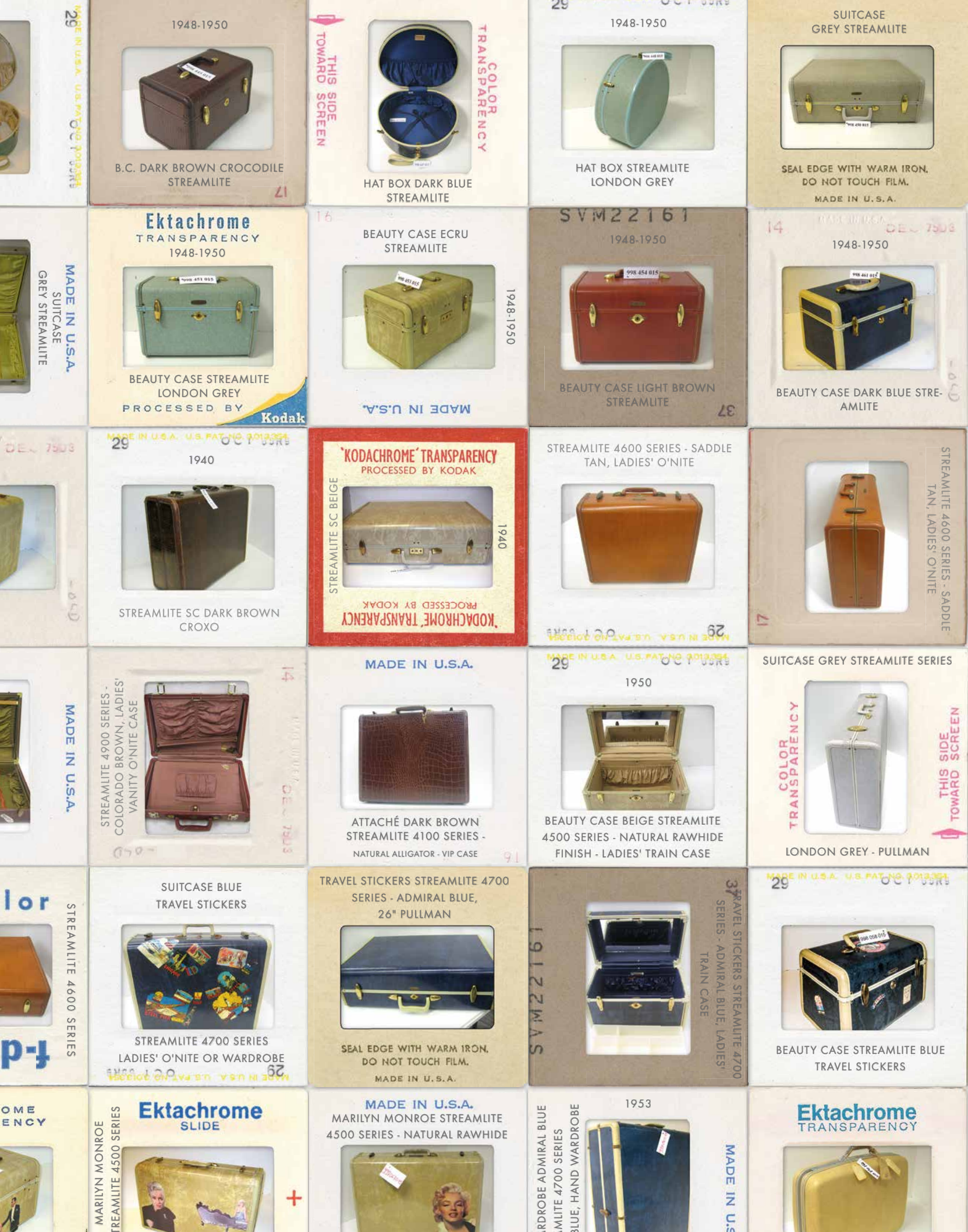
MADE IN U.S.A.
SUITCASE SMALL DARK BROWN

1935
SUITCASE DARK BROWN

GREEN STREAMLITE 5100
BERMUDA GREEN - LADIES'

Ektachrome
TRANSPARENCY
HAT BOX - STREAMLITE
4600 SERIES - SADDLE TAN,
LADIES' HAT BOX

SUITCASE
SERIES -



Journey of Discovery

The History of Samsonite

Samsonite

For over a century, Samsonite has been a byword for exceptional luggage. From the simple wooden trunk designed by company founder Jesse Shwayder in 1910, to modern cases like Cosmolite and NeoPulse, which combine bold design with cutting-edge technology, Samsonite has been by the traveller's side, meeting their needs, exceeding their expectations, and anticipating their demands. The global travel industry never stands still, but, through its 107-year lifespan, Samsonite has maintained its focus on quality, functionality and durability to meet the changing lifestyle needs of people on the move. Along the way, there have been a number of notable "firsts" – first plastic case, first suitcase on wheels, first upright case, first four-wheeled "spinner" case – that have not only helped take the strain out of travelling, but have also been in the vanguard of transforming the industry as a whole.

This history books celebrates the breadth of Samsonite's achievements, from its humble beginnings in downtown Denver, Colorado, to its current status as a global brand. It details Samsonite's breakthroughs and innovations, and charts its rise – and some of the bumps it's encountered on the road – to become the world's best-known luggage company. But it also shows that the core values which informed its founding have remained constant over the decades. Jesse Shwayder exhorted his workers to "make it better, make it different." Today, Samsonite's workforce around the world remains committed to producing products of high quality, fine craftsmanship, exceptional reliability, contemporary design, technical innovation, and enduring style. "We have evolved from a wholesale company to a multi-brand, multicategory and multichannel company," says Samsonite's CEO Ramesh Tainwala, "without sacrificing any of the principles that have made us one of the world's most trusted brands. We're still making history."

Let the journey begin.



Introduction

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1910 – 1930

A company is born

It's a small object, but it carries a distinct heft; a purple marble with a gold band around its circumference, bearing the Biblical injunction *"Do Unto Others As You Would Have Them Do Unto You."* This is the Samsonite Golden Rule, the ethos that has guided the company from its humble origins as a small trunk manufacturing company in the American West in 1910 to its current position as a global brand and household name with a market capitalization of \$6 billion in June 2017. The marble, which is traditionally given to all new Samsonite employees, is a reminder that, through 100-plus years of innovation, style, durability and craftsmanship, certain values – treating customers, employees, suppliers and investors fairly, being straightforward and transparent in all its dealings, always striving to improve – have been an essential part of its remit from the very beginning. *"The Golden Rule is the finest programme we could adopt,"* said Samsonite's founder Jesse Shwayder. *"With its help, men can still work wonders."* It's also a precept that unites the entire company, from the factory floor to the executive boardroom. *"It's a company whose products have always had integrity,"* says Tim Parker, Chairman of the Board of Directors. *"It's also a company that's always sought to be innovative and pioneering. It's also one of the few American companies that, at least since the 1960s, has had a truly*



The Golden Rule marble is a touchstone for all Samsonite employees; it serves as an embodiment of the brand's ethos and values.

international outlook. All this, and it still feels like a family company.”

Samsonite was indeed built on strong familial foundations. Founder Jesse Shwayder, born in 1882, was one of eleven children of Polish immigrants to the American West who settled in Central City, Colorado, a desolate, clay-cliffed, boulder-strewn, sun-baked hardscrabble mining town high in the Rocky Mountains. Stocky, strapping, and resourceful, like his ancestors, Jesse had a vivid imagination and a keen sense of adventure, all of which came to the fore after the family moved to Denver at the end of the 1880s. The city, a cluster of tents a mere thirty years earlier, had a population of over 100,000 and was the banking and trading centre for Central City and Leadville, another mining town. Its wealth attracted many budding entrepreneurs, including Jesse’s father Isaac, a young rabbinical student who had married Rachel Lea Kobey. In Denver, Isaac ran a grocery store before buying a used furniture store. Jesse and his ever-growing band of brothers all worked in the latter store after school, learning about all aspects of business. It was here, too, that the family first learned how to make trunks, under the auspices of a man named Gershon Simon, Isaac’s assistant, who produced trunks to sell alongside the secondhand bedsteads and dining tables.

Thus inspired, Jesse struck out as the nineteenth century came to a close, deciding to go into the retail luggage business on his own. He opened a store at 15th Street & Curtis selling several lines of luggage alongside trunks that he made himself



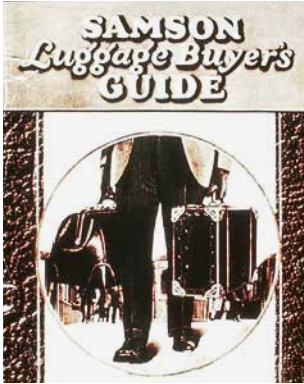
A typical travel trunk from the turn of the century; Jesse Shwayder’s version would be stronger and more stylish.



In 1923, the Shwayder Trunk Manufacturing Co. moved to its new, 80,000-square-foot plant in Denver.

with equipment that he moved over from his father’s store. He soon opened a further two stores, handing one over to his father and the other to his brother Mark. Nevertheless, it was tough going; Jesse paid himself the princely sum of \$10 a week for personal expenses. He sensed bigger opportunities elsewhere. Like his brothers, he was a good salesman, but there simply weren’t enough potential customers in Denver. He needed a bigger canvas, and found it in the Seward Trunk Co. of Virginia, the largest luggage manufacturer in the country, who had no sales representative in the West.

Jesse’s initial overtures were rebuffed; indeed, Seward officials were so sceptical that they refused to send him a set of sample cases. Jesse finally paid \$150 for his own samples and hit the road for the first time in his life, leaving his father and brother in charge of the stores and travelling for a month through Colorado



Jesse Shwayder had a keen eye for marketing; the Samson Luggage Buyer's Guide was an innovative sales tool for Shwayder Bros.' dealers.

Springs, Texas, Los Angeles and the West Coast, east to Butte, and finally back to Denver. He returned with orders for \$20,000-worth of luggage, and had cleared \$1400 after expenses – a considerable advance on the \$10 a week he’d been used to. His father and brother soon joined him on the road, and before long they were selling \$100,000-worth of merchandise a year. Seward executives, suitably impressed, offered Jesse a job as sales manager for the company in New York in 1908. He spent a year with Seward, inaugurating the company’s east coast office and helping to modernize the company’s product range, but longed to pursue his dream of starting his own business back in Denver. At the age of 28, he moved his young family back to the place he regarded as his hometown (he and his wife Nellie Weitz, whom he had courted for more than six years, would eventually have a comparatively modest tally of four children), to start his own manufacturing and wholesale concern. On March 10, 1910, with his life savings of \$3500 and a workforce of ten men, he founded the Shwayder Trunk Manufacturing Company.

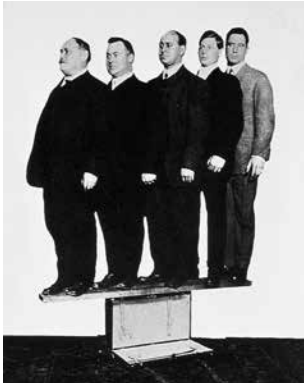
The initial going was tough – Jesse burnt through his savings in the first year of business, borrowing money to stay afloat while producing his line of what were becoming known as “*dress-suit cases*” from a 50-by-125-foot room he’d rented in downtown Denver – but he persevered: “*Like most successful businessmen, I’m really a very ordinary person,*” he said. “*But this has its advantages. I was too stubborn to admit that I couldn’t succeed, and so, little by little, I succeeded.*” Indeed, by 1917 he had ten employees making trunks and inexpensive hand luggage,

1910 The “Samson” Trunk



Where it all began – the basic wooden trunk, redesigned by Jesse Shwayder with metal plates and corner-pieces and christened “Samson,” after the Biblical character who was given immense strength to aid him against his enemies. Its premium quality was emphasized by the \$4.98 asking price, while its robustness was highlighted by a poster featuring five portly members of the Shwayder family perched on a plank on top of the trunk, with the caption: “Strong enough to stand on.”

the company’s net worth had climbed to \$35,000 – ten times its value when it was founded – and the business had moved into its first factory, a three-storey building which Jesse and his brother Maurice converted themselves. He and his brothers were now selling \$76,000-worth of luggage annually, thanks in no small part to Jesse’s canny eye for marketing; mail-order advertising expanded the company’s reach across the US, and, rather than compete with deep-pocketed rivals on price, he would differentiate his products by quality and emphasize their strength and durability. Up until this time, the basic luggage item was a \$2.50 hand case that looked just the same as every competitor’s case, and sold for the same price. Jesse redesigned it by applying shiny metal studs to make it more eye-catching and christening it “*Samson*,” after the Biblical character who was given immense strength to aid him against his enemies. Its premium nature would be further emphasized by the \$4.98 asking price, which Jesse’s brothers and most of the Denver store buyers argued was too high, but Jesse’s first stroke of genius occurred when he not only persuaded the luggage buyer at the Denver branch of the department store May Co. to take two dozen cases as a test, but also devised a striking display of the case’s robustness in the store’s window, where it was shown supporting a thousand pounds-worth of flour sacks. Jesse then sent 25 of his employees to crowd round the window, which attracted other passers-by; Shwayder’s advertising manager then took a photograph of the throng apparently straining to get a look at the “*wonder case*,” which was then used in a direct-mail circular to other stores, bringing in a wealth of new business.



Balancing act; the Shwayder family demonstrate the remarkable strength of the “Samson” case.

PUT TO THE TEST
When it comes to quality control, Samsonite’s testing lab takes each case to the limit.

In a series of small rooms at the heart of Samsonite’s factory in Oudenaarde, Belgium, various bags and cases are being severely mistreated. They’re being flung around in what looks like a giant tumble dryer; they’re being dropped from a great height by their handles and left dangling in space; they’re fixed to a rough conveyor belt, like a giant treadmill, with their wheels endlessly spinning and grinding. The rooms are a bedlam of crashing, banging, squeaking and rasping. “*I always tell our visitors, ‘Welcome to the torture chamber,’*” says a grinning Lieve Beelen.

Beelen is Samsonite’s Quality Manager Europe, and she runs the company’s testing lab, which is surely the world’s most stringent facility for measuring the strengths and probing the potential weaknesses of suitcases and bags. “*Luggage never has an easy life, and that’s particularly true today, when people are making so many journeys,*” she says. “*We have to make sure that our products can withstand the conditions they’re going to meet out there in the real world – which can often include a lot of rough treatment.*”

Product testing has always been integral to Samsonite’s operations, from the earliest days, when the Shwayder brothers demonstrated their trunks’ fortitude by standing on top of them. “*They started with a small lab,*

but as we’ve grown and added new styles and materials, the operation has expanded,” says Beelen. “*Now we give support to our design, research and development teams by putting new products through the strictest of challenges.*”

The battery of tests that Beelen oversees are a mix of standardized tests for the materials concerned – whether textiles, metals or plastics – and a series of unique testing regimens devised by Samsonite specifically for cases and bags. Some of the most taxing examples are as follows:

THE TUMBLE TEST – A full case is placed inside a machine that spins it around. The interior is lined with a number of obstacles that the case is hurled against as the drum rotates. “*The product will go into the freezer at minus 12 degrees first, the temperature in a plane’s hold at high altitude, so it’s in the worst kind of brittle condition,*” says Beelen, “*then we tumble it for 50 full cycles; it’s usually dropped randomly 3–5 times per cycle. The guarantee is that it must be 100 per cent functional when it comes out – no broken handles, no cracked or heavily dented shells.*” A few scratches are acceptable, though, as Beelen says, “*you still have to be able to read any printing on the shell, any logos or foils. And the filaments have to remain intact – we don’t want the surface of the case feeling scratchy or rough.*”

THE MILEAGE CYCLE TEST – One of the tests developed with the advent of wheeled cases; the latter are fixed to a conveyor belt running at 4km an hour and fitted with small obstacles mimicking paving slabs or ruts, and tested for 32km, or eight hours. More recent innovations including a Spinning Machine, which rolls and spins the wheels for 16km each under conditions that mimic carpet, sand, and rainstorms, among others, and an Automated Kerb Drop & Lift Tester, which drags a case through 750 steps non-stop, with 25 cycles of pulling (as if up steps) and 25 of dropping (as if off kerbs). “*Before these machines, we had to rely on the Outside Rolling Test, where one of our operators would walk a track with a case,*” says Beelen. “*The machines are more efficient, and they don’t get so tired.*”

THE JERK & LIFT TESTS – Both designed to test handle strength. In the Jerk Test, the case is hung on a spring mechanism by its handle, and jerked 3000 times at a drop of 15cm. “*When you carry a case, you are always jerking the handle a little bit with the action of your body or arm,*” says Beelen. “*This is a severe version of that.*” With the Lift Test, the handle is borne upwards and then dropped 15cm another 3000 times. “*This is because people will sometimes take the case by the retractable handle and lift it up stairs or into vehicles,*” says

Beelen. “We also do the same test on the carry handles and even the wheel handles. We have to try and simulate all the ways in which a consumer might misuse a product.”

THE IMPACT TEST – This was developed especially to test Samsonite’s extra-strong, extra-light Curv material; samples are cut from Curv shells, and a dart is dropped on them to measure the force needed to break the material and the energy the material can absorb. “We started with similar thicknesses to our polypropylene cases, but we couldn’t even break the Curv,” says Beelen. The lab also deploys a Drop Table, where Curv cases are dropped on their wheels, corners and glides. “We’ve dropped from a height of 1 metre 50 thousands of times, and we’ve experienced dented corners but no cracks, and no real breakage of the material,” says Beelen. “And even if there was a dent, we could easily pop it out again.”

THE HUMIDITY TEST – Cases are placed in a cabinet set at 38 degrees centigrade and 98 per cent humidity for 240 hours, or ten days. “This simulates conditions you might find in Asia or India, and measures corrosion resistance,” says Beelen. “We can

also check for discolouration or deformation of the shell under such conditions.” The lab also runs a UV Test to monitor the effects of excessive exposure to sunlight. “We expose the case for 144 hours under a UV lamp,” says Beelen. “Again, we’re checking that we don’t get discolouration, even on the stickers or hang-tags on the case, and we don’t want the lighter-coloured shells to turn yellow.”

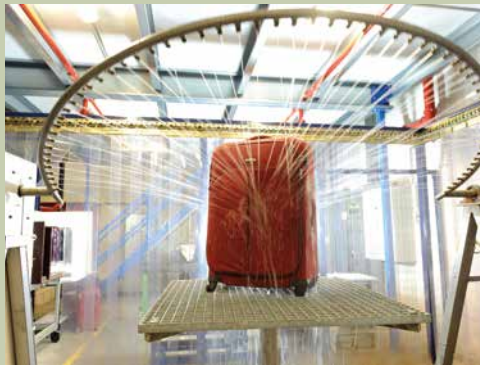
THE OVERLOAD TEST – Any casual observer at an international airport will confirm that people sometimes overload their cases; Samsonite test how much their hardside luggage will withstand by fixing a case to an “overload table” with screws, putting a plate inside, and pushing from the inside with a hydraulic press, measuring the force needed to spring it open. Modern cases, says Beelen, must withstand a minimum of 290 kg – the weight of an average pony. For softside luggage, tyres are placed in the product and blown, to see how much the zippers can withstand (a separate zipper “Reciprocation Test” sees a machine pulling the zipper in both directions for 5000 cycles).

Should the unthinkable happen despite such a rigorous regime, and your case breaks – perhaps

you tried to take it up 751 steps, or jerked the handle 3001 times – Samsonite also have a thorough after-care system in place. “If there’s a broken part, we’ll pick it up from a dealer,” says Wim Baert, Samsonite’s Director of Administration and Logistics Europe. “We’ll repair if we can, replace if not, and ship it back. For the future we’ll be doing more online, offering people advice on self-repair, like replacing a wheel.”

Problems with wheels, it turns out, are the reason for close to 50 per cent of Samsonite returns. “It’s inevitable, as wheels got more complex, with the Spinners,” says Baert. “And you can’t simulate absolutely every situation our bags will find themselves in.”

Back in her “torture chamber,” Beelen is having a jolly good try. “No other company tests like this to the same degree,” she says, as a Cosmolite thuds through its umpteenth cycle in the tumble dryer. “People are really shocked that we punish a simple suitcase so much. But this lab represents the experience and know-how we’ve built up. After all this, we know that our products are ready to face whatever the world can throw at them.”



SIDESTORY 1

“We felt that word-of-mouth advertising had the double advantage of being the cheapest as well as the best form of advertising we could have,” Jesse said.

But he then went one better than flour sacks. Toward the end of the decade, a picture was taken that became emblematic for the future Samsonite brand. It showed Jesse, his three brothers, and his father, Isaac, whose combined weight outdid any display of piled-up comestibles, perched stiffly on a plank positioned precariously atop one of their suitcases above the legend: *“Strong enough to stand on.”* With the five portly Shwayders failing to make a dent in their unyielding product, the message hit home; sales climbed from \$85,000 in 1918 to \$300,000 in 1920, and the picture became the foundation for the principles on which all future Samsonite campaigns were built.

As well as The Golden Rule, Jesse Shwayder had found his life’s credo in the essay Self-Reliance, by the American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson: *“To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men – that is genius ... trust thyself.”*

Jesse had always done this, from his decision to launch into business on his own to his belief in quality and the power of an indelible marketing image. As the Roaring Twenties got underway, he trusted his judgement again – against the advice of his brothers, and after being turned down for a \$100,000 loan by virtually every bank in town – in moving the Shwayder Trunk Manufacturing Co. into a gleaming new 80,000-square-foot factory in South Denver bought from the Gates Rubber Co.; a plant that would gradually be expanded to encompass half a million square feet. It was set

up on an assembly-line basis, and even incorporated a state-of-the-art conveyor system to transport products and materials throughout the plant, an idea that Maurice Shwayder, who was in charge of plant operations, borrowed from the meat-packing industry. This allowed the company to boast in its literature that it built suitcases the same way that Ford built automobiles; at the cutting edge. *“Conveyors, assembling systems and automatic machinery, especially designed for us, enable us to produce quality luggage at prices previously considered impossible,”* read the introduction to the Samsonite Luggage Buyer’s Guide, published in the early 1920s.

1926 proved to be a red-letter year for Jesse and his company, with sales hitting the \$1 million mark for the first time. In response, he gave all his four brothers shares in the business and employed

the two who weren’t already working for him; eventually, Mark worked on sales, Maurice and Ben focused on manufacturing, and Sol became the company’s attorney. Friends would ask how he maintained law and order – and avoided family feuding – with all his brothers working in key jobs, and Jesse would have a ready answer: *“I worked out a formula for keeping the peace. I gave all my brothers shares and good jobs, but I held onto 52 per cent of the shares, so everyone always knows who’s boss.”*

When the railways suddenly doubled their rates for freight in 1927, a branch plant in the eastern US became imperative, both to keep costs down and to keep pace with spiralling demand.

After casting around for a suitable site, the Shwayders leased an 85,000-square-foot factory in September 1928 in Ecorse, a suburb of Detroit. By the following year it was producing luggage worth \$500,000. Some of those products are celebrated in a special *“Twentieth Anniversary Catalog”* that the company produced in 1930, from the *“Over-Size”* suitcase (\$2.35), in *“beautiful hand-boarded grain,”* featuring *“strong, Vulco-Cord straps”* and *“nickel-plated Samson corners,”* to the \$2.60 case made of *“genuine SamsonHyde,”* which, as one Jim Donald, *“foreman of the SamsonHyde department,”* elaborated, was *“a tougher, more elastic material, with the appearance of the most expensive grained leather ... it is hard to scratch or damage in any way, and is unaffected by moisture ... it is an important contribution to modern luggage science,”* and not only, as Donald averred, *“a big factor in the superiority of Samson popular priced luggage,”* but also an early example of Samsonite’s emphasis on the development of innovative materials.

By the time of the Catalog’s appearance, however, the effects of 1929’s stock market crash and the nascent Great Depression were already beginning to be felt. By the end of that year, sales began to fall off, and by 1932 combined sales for both plants would drop by half. Jesse Shwayder’s answer? To expand his company’s portfolio beyond luggage.

The Shwayder Bros. Inc. Plant at 1050 South Broadway in Denver boasted more than 500,000 square feet of floor space.



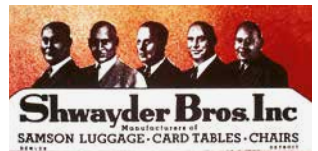
1931 – 1950

Modernization and diversification

Shwayder's sales dropped dramatically after the 1929 stock market crash; suddenly, Americans were cutting their cloth to fit their new straitened circumstances, and steamer trunks and cases – along with the cruises and Grand Tours through Europe and beyond that they accessorized – were one of the first casualties of a more sober decade. During the Depression years that followed, sales for both the Denver and Detroit plants fell by half. Jesse and his brothers, scrambling to meet payroll and pay their bills, started to look for new products to manufacture, beginning with automobile licence plates.

“Imagine a company, which had only known luggage manufacturing, tinkering with stilts, doggie dinettes, sandboxes, and eventually card tables,” recalled a member of Shwayder's board of directors of these lean years. *“But we were in the same boat as everyone else and looking for things we could make and sell to keep our plants operating.”*

To reflect the diversification, the brothers changed the name of the company to Shwayder Brothers Inc. in 1931. However, only the card tables paid off – the result of a happy accident when Maurice Shwayder stumbled across two wagon loads of card table frames at the company's luggage frame supplier, abandoned as the buyer was too far behind with his bills. All that was necessary to make finished tables from these parts was to assemble them;



In 1931 the company name was changed to Shwayder Bros. Inc., to reflect the fact that all the brothers were now shareholders.

using some stays for the legs similar to those found in luggage, covering the frame with the same material then being used on the suitcases, and finally finishing by applying trunk corners. Jesse brought the same upgrading eye to the tables as he had to luggage, printing woodgrain patterns on the fibreboard tops. They sold them for \$1.98 – almost twice the price of a basic table – co-opting the name “*Samson*,” as they had with their cases, to emphasize their strength, and, following major advertising campaigns in daily newspapers, began shipping them in their thousands (after a full-page newspaper ad was run in Detroit, one store sold almost two thousand tables in three days).

Inevitably, competition soon sprang up, with rival factories producing folding chairs to accompany their tables. Shwayder Bros. realized that it, too, would have to start making chairs to protect its business. The first chairs were wooden, but didn’t meet the company’s exacting standards. Next, the company tried buying the metal frames and upholstering them. Finally, in 1936, Shwayders began making its own metal chairs from lock-seam tubular metal. The following year a welded tube became available and, because it was much stronger and easier to shape, the company started using it. A tube mill was purchased and put into operation in the Detroit plant (at a cost of \$40,000, eight times as much as the Shwayders had ever spent on a single piece of equipment) to keep production ticking over (both the Denver and Detroit plants continued to make folding furniture until 1949; during much of that period, card table tops were printed and coated in Denver



Shwayder Bros. ran its first major national magazine advertising campaigns in the 1930s; the products’ luxe qualities were emphasized.

1941 Streamlite



In an early use of the cutting-edge technology for which Samsonite would be renowned, Streamlite was clad in a lightweight lithographed paper to create a “rawhide” effect; thus, matching sets of the low-priced leather-look cases became a reality for the first time. Jesse Shwayder’s own executives expressed fears that the style would be too radical a step for the public, to which he responded with a Ralph Waldo Emerson quote: “What I must do is all that concerns me, not what people think.”

and shipped to Detroit, while card table hardware made the opposite journey). For a brief period in the 1930s, card table sales actually outstripped luggage shipments.

The mammoth new plant in Denver, which by the 1930s had the most modern precision-tooled equipment and automated processes of any luggage factory in the world, produced Samson suitcases with such exclusive features as wood frame construction, virtually indestructible handles, extra large and secure locks, metal drawbolts, rayon linings, hinges riveted to wood, and a one-year guarantee. Samson luggage was made with cowhide, leather, enamel, steel, veneer and fibre finishes. The “*Samson-Hyde*” that had so exercised Jim Donald was actually a vegetable fibre that had been chemically and mechanically treated as a tough, durable covering for Samson cases and trunks. Despite these innovations, however, the Shwayders refused to rest on their laurels; they continued to improve and refine their luggage and invent new travel products. In 1939 the company introduced a unique suitcase that Jesse dubbed “*Samsonite*” – the first time that the future brand name made an appearance (though Superman had made his comic book debut the previous year, Jesse hadn’t got the idea from Kryptonite; the alien mineral wouldn’t get a mention on The Adventures of Superman radio show till 1943. “*I just liked the sound of it,*” Jesse recalled later of the name. “*To me, it suggested increased toughness, greater endurance.*”) The case was covered with sturdy vulcanized fibre that was melded with a chrome-tanned “*elkhide*” leather binding; its tapered shape was destined to become a classic within the industry. Luggage sales had dipped to their lowest point in years in 1940 –

SAMSONITE’S STARRING ROLES

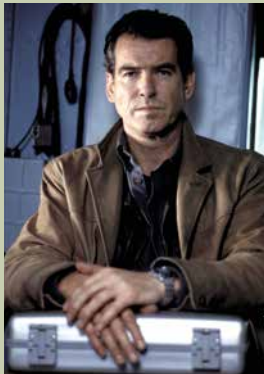
Some Samsonite products have played key roles in movies and TV shows. We take a look at these Oscar- and Emmy-worthy performances – on a case-by-case basis.

<p>The name’s 800 ... Xylem 800. When the world’s most famous – and debonair – secret agent needs the most stylish luggage to accessorize his other top-of-the-range toys – the Aston Martins, the Dunhill lighters, the Tom Ford suits – who does he turn to? Samsonite, of course.</p> <p>The Xylem 800 aluminium attache case – a sleek, modern updating of Samsonite’s original Classic Attache from the 60s, a product so urbane that the accompanying advertising campaign featured sharp-suited executives leaving sex shops while carrying them (“<i>No matter what’s inside your Samsonite Attache Case, you’ll always look professional</i>”) – was originally designed at Samsonite’s Oude-naarde plant in Belgium at the end of the 1990s, by head designer Erik Sijmons. “<i>There was a wish from top management for an aluminium case,</i>” he says. “<i>They saw that there was a market for something that had a classic feel but a very contemporary look.</i>”</p> <p>While Sijmons was working on the case, the producers of the 20th movie in the James Bond franchise, The World Is Not Enough, approached Samsonite: “<i>They asked us to make a special version,</i>” says Sijmons, “<i>a ‘money case’ that Bond could use to carry a large amount of cash in.</i></p>	<p><i>So we made a scaled-up model, especially for the film.”</i></p> <p>In the film, Pierce Brosnan’s Bond is seen loading up the case at a Swiss banker’s office in Bilbao; later, he has to make a quick getaway with the case from an 8th-floor apartment, and abseils down a rope, clutching the case as he does so. Needless to say, it survives the somewhat perilous descent intact. Sijmons was invited to the film’s premiere. “<i>I could barely watch the scene where he jumps with this prototype that I helped make,</i>” he says. “<i>I was really scared in case the handle broke as he came down. But it was such a great honour to be part of a tiny bit of movie history. I’ll never forget it.</i>”</p> <p>The Samsonite Xylem Scion made a return in the next Bond film, Die Another Day; eagle-eyed viewers will spot it in one of the opening sequences, where Brosnan’s Bond meets Zao in Korea. Bond naturally arrives by helicopter, carrying the aluminium business case, which in this instance is stuffed with diamonds. It’s then seen again in Casino Royale, Daniel Craig’s Bond debut, where it once again holds a pile of money to be delivered to Mr White toward the end of the movie. The connection with bundles of cash, treasure troves of precious stones and international espionage proved pure gold for Samsonite,</p>	<p>as Xylem cases were snapped up by would-be 007s (sales likewise spiked for Samsonite’s Streamline and Spark products, which also appeared in the films). A Samsonite briefcase plays an equally crucial role in the 1994 Jim Carrey movie Dumb and Dumber. The plot centres around the (effortful) efforts of sweet-but-none-too-bright friends Lloyd (Carrey) and Harry (Jeff Daniels) to return a briefcase full of money to its rightful owner, a beautiful and mysterious woman named Mary. When they try to call her, they realize they can’t recall her surname:</p> <p><i>Lloyd: Starts with an S. Let’s see. Swim? Swami? Slippy? Slappy? Swenson? Swanson?</i></p> <p><i>Harry: Maybe it’s on the briefcase.</i></p> <p><i>Lloyd: Oh yeah! It’s right here. Samsonite! I was way off. I knew it started with an S, though.</i></p> <p>This elementary misunderstanding leads to a running gag where the object of the heroes’ would-be affections (whose name is actually Swanson) is referred to throughout as “<i>Mary Samsonite,</i>” and the villain whose ill-gotten gains are contained in the case is addressed as “<i>Mr Samsonite.</i>” The latter appellation has enjoyed a cultural afterlife beyond the confines of film; it’s the name of a track on the album Lighthouse, by the Norwegian band American</p>
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Suitcase, and it's also the name of an Australian rock covers band. Samsonite also takes centre stage in The Suitcase, the fourth episode of the seventh season of Mad Men, and widely regarded as one of the show's greatest. It centres on the fraught relationship between Don Draper (Jon Hamm) and Peggy Olson (Elizabeth Moss), as they tussle over a proposed Sterling Cooper ad campaign for Samsonite. During the mid-60s period when the episode is set, Samsonite's actual ads were full of Don Draper lookalikes clutching their Classic Attache cases and heading for their nearest equivalent of Madison Avenue, as mentioned above; but the SC team decides to concentrate on the brand's noted strength by showing a case being dropped off the Eiffel Tower: *"We thought that 'Samsonite' is this very rare element, this mythical substance,*

the hardest on Earth," Peggy explains to a sceptical Don. She then proposes an endorsement by the former New York Jets quarterback Joe Namath, but Don derides the idea as *"lazy"* and tells her the ad should be funnier. After a typically heady Stirling Cooper evening, where many cocktails are consumed and secrets spilled, Don battles through an epic hang-over to come up with his own idea for the campaign; the episode has taken place on the day of the epochal Muhammad Ali–Sonny Liston fight, and he now presents a drawing of a victorious Samsonite case in a boxing ring, standing over the felled and busted-open competition, with the words *"THE CHAMP"* emblazoned above; it's based on the now-legendary Ali–Liston knockout photograph. Of course, you'll also find Samsonite products in many

supporting roles, given the number of characters in film and TV that are obliged to travel in order to keep their various plots humming along. Thus we have Harrison Ford in Frantic, reporting the loss of a white Samsonite case, and Ben Stiller, in Meet The Parents, arguing with an airline over his own misplaced luggage: *"Yeah, you gave me the wrong suitcase. Yes, it's a black Samsonite."* (Pause). *"OK, well don't you think that the Samsonite people, in some crazy scheme in order to make a profit, MADE MORE THAN ONE BLACK SUITCASE?"* They did, and continue to do so. And as long as comedies require suitcases as punchlines, or thrillers require them for crucial plot twists, or simply as glamorous accessories, then Samsonite will always be ready for its close-up.



just over \$700,000 – and it was the first manifestation of Jesse's belief that his company's luggage was out of date and needed to be redesigned. He was about to make another breakthrough.

In 1941, just before the United States entered the Second World War, he introduced Samsonite Streamlite, building on the success of his first Samsonite cases. For this range, the company switched from lithographed fibre-board to lithographed paper for better printing quality; thus, matching sets of the low-priced leather-look cases became a reality for the first time. Jesse's own executives thought the style would be too radical a step for the public and urged him to stick to a more conventional shape and form, but he had an apposite Emerson aperçu ready to fire back at them: *"Whoso would be a man must be a non-conformist. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of our own minds ... what I must do is all that concerns me, not what people think."*

During the Second World War, most of the Denver plant's production was converted to war materials. These included foot lockers and ammunition boxes for the military, and later incendiary bombs, hand grenades, and fire generator units for the Chemical Corps. The Detroit plant undercut the price of seven or eight much larger firms to make casings for Bangalore Torpedoes, which were used by front-line troops to blast away barbed wire, alongside components for Cadillac tanks. The activities of the sales department were suspended for the duration of the conflict; by 1945, the company was manufacturing more than \$5,000,000-worth of war goods, compared with



Bombs away; Jesse Shwayder examines one of the incendiary cases that the company manufactured in Denver as part of the war effort.

\$2,000,000-worth of civilian goods. However, the war also equipped each plant with modern tool rooms, alongside qualified engineering staff, and saw a shift to precision manufacturing. This would prove to be the basis for the company's post-war growth.



Ads for Streamlite gave equal weight to the case's durability and stylishness.

This came fast. In 1946, the first year of post-war production, Shwayders sold almost \$7-million-worth of luggage, foot lockers, and folding furniture, despite critical material shortages, sketchy distribution, and a depleted sales force of five men. The company now set about exploiting all the manufacturing knowledge gleaned during its wartime production. It purchased its first injection moulding press and began making its own bindings, as well as a moulded vinyl handle to replace the previous rubberized incumbent. To make a more integrated case, it also started to design and manufacture its own luggage hardware, modern in appearance and made of solid brass or aluminium. Cases were also fitted with the best tumbler locks. Most crucially, however, Shwayder Bros. began experimenting with new kinds of materials for its Streamlite range. It wanted a strong, resilient material that would be attractively uniform in colour. The Firestone Company had developed a polyvinyl chloride sheeting that fitted the bill perfectly, and Streamlite thus became the first plastic-coated suitcase. Now stores could stock Samsonite luggage in depth, and sales climbed accordingly, to a company-wide volume of \$13 million in 1948 – the first year to exceed \$10 million.

Prior to 1948, luggage and furniture were both manufactured at the Detroit and Denver plants. Jesse had the notion

that concentration on one product line in each plant would result in faster growth, and it was decided that Denver would focus on luggage and Detroit on furniture, including the first Samsonite product to be created by a renowned industrial designer: Russell Wright's sculptured, all-steel folding outdoor chair and companion table, an instant success which later gave way to lighter-weight materials when aluminium became available for outdoor furniture use. In fact, such was the demand for furniture products that Shwayders decided to build another production facility handily neighbouring their steel supply; in 1949, construction began on a 65,000-square-foot plant in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Within several years this plant was expanded by a further 100,000 square feet to manufacture large quantities of the all-steel folding chair and a complete line of school furniture. In fact, Shwayders would soon boast an entire Furniture Division which sold large quantities of chairs to such institutions as churches and municipal auditoriums as well as schools. This phase of the business became so successful that a separate Contract Seating Division was established in 1948 to specialize in this operation. Later it became known as the Institutional Equipment Division, selling, in addition to folding chairs, a variety of stacking chairs, special school furniture, banquet tables, and other essentials for keeping civic society humming. With its product variegations and multiple specializations, the company was poised to enter the second half of the century in expansive shape.

Go far with Samsonite... it travels with extravagant ease.

Chic is you and Samsonite Silhouette. Let the world beware. Total effect? Devastating! Take Silhouette's sleek, slim shape. Elegant. And it packs all the fashion you'll need to stay on the best-dressed list. Take Silhouette's dream colors. Willow Green, Venetian Red, Biscayne Blue, Oxford Grey, Marina Blue, Dover White. Take Silhouette's hidden locks, the strong light magnesium frame. It travels with extravagant ease. Made of resilient Samsonite Absolite® to reject scuffs, stains and dents. Go ahead, take Silhouette. You'll go far. It follows.
Shown below: Willow Green Handi-Tote \$21.95, 24" Pullman \$34.50, 29" Pullman \$55.00, Beauty Case \$27.95, Valette \$45.00.

1951-1970
Samsonite
SILHOUETTE
FROM \$25.00
The luggage that knows its way around the world

Available at all fine department and specialty stores.
Samsonite Corporation, Denver, Colorado 80202. Also available in London, England.
Also makers of Samsonite Furniture.

A world leader

The 1950s would turn out to be the most turbulent and critical years in Shwayder history. During the Korean War the company once again put itself on a war footing, producing more incendiary bombs during the three-year conflict than it had for the entirety of the Second World War. Following the war, Shwayder Brothers joined with the Chemical Corps in developing rocket carriers and fibreglass launching tubes. Meanwhile, the furniture division expanded its offerings, producing dining chairs and banquet tables along with armchairs and steel and plywood seats.

As the US post-war boom gathered pace, Shwayders found both setbacks and opportunities coming thick and fast. While the company's Pittsburgh plant was closed following a prolonged bout of labour unrest, with all the chair manufacturing equipment being moved to Detroit, a special laminating operation was set up in the latter plant to produce vinyl-clad material for use in automobile interiors, as the USA's car manufacturing output accelerated.

But it wasn't just cars that people were taking to; the mid-50s saw exponential growth in air traffic, and the company had been researching a product that would provide the perfect accessory to a burgeoning generation of frequent flyers. In 1956 it introduced Samsonite Ultralite; the first luggage to eschew wooden box construction in favour of a revolutionary combination of "jet

1958 Silhouette



The point when the modern suitcase was born; Silhouette's smooth, trim, sleek shape would become an industry standard. Locks, hardware and fittings were all part of the design, with the hardware being recessed – another first – to protect it from the wear and tear of travel. Later versions proved even tougher than the magnesium-vinyl original, deploying a high-impact grade of ABS (acrylonitrile-butadiene-styrene) plastic, riveted to a magnesium frame.

age” magnesium – the lightest, strongest structural metal known – and injection-moulded ethyl cellulose. Ultralite was developed in collaboration with the Dow Chemical Co., then the sole manufacturers of magnesium. The following year, the company added a Market Research Department and a product and process engineering operation; budgeted at close to a million dollars a year, they could ensure that products could now be market-tested for design, style, colour, quality and price, as well as being put through tortuous environmental tests for function, fitness, form and stress.

Both departments contributed to the next major Samsonite launch, Silhouette, in 1958. Its smooth, trim, modern shape – developed in collaboration with a leading industrial design firm – was to become an industry standard. Locks, hardware and fittings were all part of the design, with the hardware being recessed – another first – to protect it from the standard depredations and wear and tear of travel. Later versions proved even tougher than the magnesium-vinyl original, deploying a specially-compounded high-impact grade of ABS (acrylonitrile-butadiene-styrene) plastic, riveted to a magnesium frame (ABS is used to this day for top-of-the-line hardside products). The company's first national advertising campaigns stressed Silhouette's style (*“Choose your luggage like you do your china,”* exhorted one poster, showing a series of Silhouette colourways arrayed behind variously patterned tea sets), and utility (a transparent model demonstrated the case's internal pockets, with a copy of Playboy magazine set snugly in the



Silhouette's various colourways allowed customers to mix and match, both practically and aesthetically.

Silhouette's internal pockets provided ample room for customer essentials – in this instance, a copy of Playboy magazine.

largest). More than \$1-million-worth of equipment was installed in order to manufacture this line. The company also looked to corner two further markets; the lower price-point end – growing significantly as travel became more widespread, and not simply for the favoured few – and what was termed “*softside*” luggage, bags and packs of softer construction that were carried with the person rather than stowed. The first was tackled with the launch of Horizon, a line of inexpensive but quality-assured luggage which used fibreglass for the shell. The major problem with fibreglass was its rough-and-ready quality; Shwayder Bros. found a company which had invented a process for moulding fibreglass, and which eliminated its unfinished appearance. Shwayders bought the process and adapted it to the manufacture of luggage. The second market opportunity was addressed with the launch of a high-grade softside luggage line which immediately forced competitors to upgrade their own ranges.

Formation of a Supermarket Sales Division offered the company the chance to sell its wares through the gigantic food chain outlets, a growing retail force in America. Late in 1959 the lower-priced folding tables were offered to a supermarket chain in Illinois as part of its traffic-building promotion. This proved so successful that a separate division was set up in 1960 to handle the growing operation. From Illinois it expanded into all parts of the country; a 14-week packaged promotion programme, offering first tables and then chairs, stimulated the demand.

Due to expansion of the folding furniture operation, Jesse and the Shwayder management team felt that the location of a plant in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, would be more strategic for

AMERICAN BEAUTY
When Samsonite bought American Tourister, it acquired a brand worth going ape over.

Say the words “*American Tourister*” to anyone who’s familiar with the brand, and their reaction is likely to be the same; a big smile will spread across their face and they might even make a few primate-style whoops and grunts. They’re remembering the chimp. His name was Oofi, and he starred in a TV ad campaign for the luggage brand in the 1970s that went on to become one of the most famous and best-loved of all time, in which he savagely stomped, swung, and hurled an American Tourister case against the bars of his cage. Despite his abuse, the case – and its contents – remained pristine.

When Samsonite bought American Tourister, in 1993 – its first major acquisition – they brought the apes back. Oofi’s “family,” as well as a gorilla and an orangutan, now promoted the brand in print ads, with the tagline “*American Tourister: Making Travel Less Primitive.*” For Luc Van Nevel, shortly to become Samsonite CEO, it was more a question of bringing two beasts at the top of their respective food chains together. “*Samsonite was the leader in the mid-range field,*” he says. “*American Tourister was the leader in the lower price-point field. It helped us expand the breadth of our offering – in one fell swoop.*”

At the time of its acquisition by Samsonite, American Tourister had been serving its market faithfully for sixty years. It had been

founded in 1933 by Sol Koffler, who, like Samsonite founder Jesse Shwayder’s family, had immigrated west to the United States and found himself working in the luggage industry; in Koffler’s case, a plant that manufactured steamer trunks followed by a pocket-book factory in Providence, Rhode Island. The methods were primitive – thin strips of wood or plywood were glued together and covered with paper or cloth for inexpensive luggage or leather for expensive models. Koffler was determined to produce a more durable product – and one he could sell for a dollar.

Koffler set up in a vacant grocery store and soon made a breakthrough; he adapted machinery used to make plywood radio cases so that it could bend materials to make his luggage. The slim, round-cornered and capacious result, boasting linings and zippered pockets, soon saw the company earning revenues of more than \$100,000 by the beginning of World War 2. They were further boosted in the next couple of decades by pioneering all-vinyl cases and moulded plastic luggage. Their Hi-Taper cases were lighter and easier to pack; their prototypes were “flight-tested” by flight attendants as air travel took off, the most exacting of guinea pigs. And, like Jesse Shwayder, Koffler had a gift for memorable marketing. When the company started to receive reports of American Tourister luggage sur-

viving incredible accidents – one account had a case falling off a car roof as the vehicle was travelling at 60 miles per hour, then run over by another car, only to survive with a few scuff marks – it was incorporated into the company’s ad campaigns to stress the luggage’s virtual indestructability.

By the 1970s – with a little help from Oofi – American Tourister was acknowledged as the leading manufacturer of mid-priced luggage in the United States, with record sales as leisure travel boomed and owners replaced their cases at a more rapid rate. In 1978, Koffler sold his company to Hillenbrand Industries, a furniture manufacturer, and the business got caught up in the merger and buyout mania of the 1980s. It eventually became the property of Astrum Corp., a sales and manufacturing company formerly known as E-ll Holdings, which also owned Samsonite at the time. It made sense to Steven Green, than Astrum and later Samsonite CEO, to form an umbrella group: “*The combination of Samsonite’s vast global resources and American Tourister’s quality products will ensure success, as American Tourister enters the international marketplace, while enhancing the value of its name in the United States.*”

Green and his successors as Samsonite CEO, notably Marcello Bottoli and Ramesh Tainwala, have ensured that American Tourister complements Samsonite’s offer-

ings in markets worldwide. “We helped it realize its true potential,” says Bottoli. “I had some initial resistance to launching it in Europe – people said that Europeans wouldn’t buy anything with ‘American’ as part of the title – but we made it work by stressing the quality of the product, linking it with low-cost European airlines, and introducing non-luggage lines like computer and camera cases. Asia embraced the brand much more quickly.”

“We really started to explore American Tourister’s potential for Asia in 2009,” says Kelvyna Lam, the Global Brand Head of American Tourister. “There was a gap in the middle of the market which the Samsonite brand couldn’t reach. There’s a lot of competition in that area in Asia, so we had to make American Tourister more competitive.” Lam and her colleagues repositioned the brand by

launching new styles of luggage – from upright cases to backpacks – in rainbow colour ranges targeted specifically at younger consumers and families (“and those who are young at heart,” she laughs), who were travelling the world for the first time: “When life calls, be ready,” ran the advertising tagline. “It was a time when travel was becoming more accessible to everybody, and American Tourister was the perfect entry-level fashionable luggage option for those younger people who may not have been ready to buy into Samsonite,” she says. At the same time, the brand’s long history was emphasized – “since 1933” was retained on its logo, even as “by Samsonite” was dropped – and loyalty was fostered by stressing the brand’s utility and functionality (no suitcase launched under the AT name was heavier than three kilos). “Brand ambassadors,”

including Indian cricketer Virat Kohli and the Korean girl group GFriend, were also enlisted to promote the American Tourister cause. “Getting female role models like GFriend involved will help us to build up American Tourister as a unisex brand,” says Lam. “We already have a lot of female consumers – up to 60 per cent in some of the Asian markets – and it’s definitely something we want to concentrate on, going forward.” In some markets, she adds, notably India, American Tourister enjoys more brand recognition than Samsonite itself.

“In many ways, American Tourister was a sleeping giant for Samsonite,” says Kyle Gendreau, Samsonite’s Executive Director and Chief Financial Officer. “It was just sitting there for a long time, and we didn’t do anything to drive it. In the US, it was really only sold in Walmart. But now that we’re pursuing a multi-brand

strategy, it’s really doing a great job in opening up the market for us in regions like Asia and Latin America. Historically, that lower price point has been a really difficult market to crack, but American Tourister’s new incarnation as this young, fun brand is making spectacular inroads for us around the world.”

American Tourister was launched in Latin America a couple of years ago, “and it’s perfect for us,” says Roberto Guzmán, Samsonite’s President, Latin America, “because our income per capita is lower than some of the other regions, and the styles and bright colours of the American Tourister lines, whether you’re talking about back-to-school backpacks, women’s bags, or suitcases, are extremely popular. The key to cracking the market in Latin America is the middle of the pyramid, and American Tourister fits right in there. The

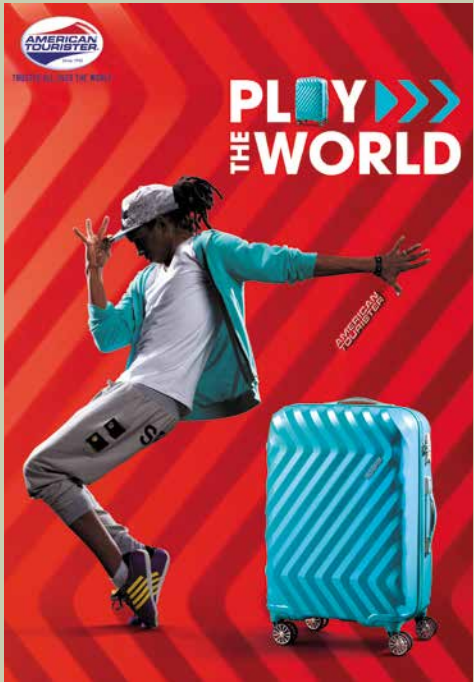
take-up here could be enormous, from Mexico to Brazil to Peru.”

“The eventual aim here in Asia is to have American Tourister cover everything, from travel to business to backpacks to accessories to kids and to women,” says Kelvyna Lam; “to make it a total travel lifestyle brand in all these different categories, and to roll that out across the world.” A sub-brand, Kamiliant, was also launched in 2015, to reach an even more youthful consumer; its candy-coloured range of backpacks and cases, inspired by the ever-changing skin tones of its near-namesake the chameleon, is designed to be “bright enough to stand out in a crowd, but smart enough to blend into your surroundings,” and is already selling \$40-million-worth of products across the region.

“The plan is now to take those lessons from Asia and relaunch

American Tourister in both Europe and the US as the ultimate can’t-fail mid-price product,” says Ramesh Tainwala. “In fact, we’ve already partnered with Disney in the US to make AT their official luggage brand, under the tagline ‘pack more fun.’ The acquisition of American Tourister was an important lesson for us in changing our focus toward becoming a multi-brand company, with a ready-made market and a presence in every market sector, rather than trying to cover all aspects of the market with our core brand.”

And what of Oofi? Today he lives in luxurious retirement in a chimp sanctuary in the Hollywood Hills, his trusty American Tourister case – rainbow-hued now, of course – by his side. Don’t believe those wicked rumours that he was a man in an ape suit all along – that’s just sour grapes. Or in this case, presumably, bananas.



the manufacturing and shipping of certain furniture products. In 1960, a 200,000-square-foot plant was built there, and the furniture manufacturing was divided between Detroit and Murfreesboro.

The company now also made its first moves into the international market. An Export Sales Division had been established in 1956, and a Canadian warehouse established in Toronto; Jesse had been watching a steady stream of Samsonite sales heading into Canada each year, and he now decided that the company should set up there, with the idea of shipping luggage to other nations in the British Commonwealth. Samsonite Canada, the first production facility outside the USA, went into full operation in the mid-50s, with the opening of a 60,000-square-foot plant in Stafford, Ontario. At the same time, the export sales department began to focus on Europe. Meanwhile, the flourishing furniture division was consolidated and relocated to a giant, 200,000-square-foot plant in Tennessee in 1960. “*We make travel a little easier,*” ran another tagline on one of Samsonite’s earliest posters – a promise that would be more than delivered on as the jet age really got underway.

The 1960s dawned in a white heat of excitement and optimism, symbolized by the election of John F Kennedy and the coming of age of the baby boomers. Shwayders, too, was looking forward; in 1961, King Shwayder, Jesse’s son, took over as president of Shwayder Bros., and started to restructure the company along more modern lines.



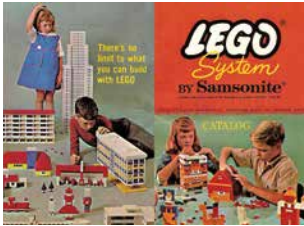
Table talk; “Samson” folding furniture was an instant hit – and a design award-winner.

1963 Classic Attache



The first Samsonite product to be thoroughly researched before it was launched, the Classic Attache became the perfect product for its time – a sleek, businesslike case that was as emblematic for the early-60s Mad Men-style executive as his skinny suit and tie. It was soon being toted to meetings in Madison Avenue and beyond, sending the Samsonite name around the world; two years later, Shwayder Bros. bowed to the inevitable and changed its name.

The early 60s also brought about a new and unexpected sales opportunity for the company with the introduction of LEGO by Samsonite. The snap-together plastic building toy, invented in Denmark, was already one of the largest-selling children’s lines in Western Europe; Shwayder Bros. management, with its knowledge of the company’s capabilities in the precision moulding of plastic, quickly realized the potential of such a product in the US market, and signed a licensing deal with its Danish creator to produce the bricks at the Detroit plant. LEGO performed brilliantly in its test markets, and was launched nationally at the 1962 New York Toy Fair (Samsonite Canada also introduced the toy north of the 49th parallel that same year). The LEGO operation would eventually have its own plant – built at Loveland, Colorado, sixty miles north of Denver, in 1965 – as it became a household name and new lines were continually added (a licensing dispute ended Samsonite’s involvement with LEGO in the US in 1972, but it remained the Canadian distributor of the bricks until 1986).



Snap to it; Samsonite began to distribute Lego toys in the US and Canada in the early 60s.

Meanwhile, new markets were opening up for the company’s principal products; air travel was liberating millions of people, and the entire world seemed to be short-hopping or taking advantage of the new long-haul routes, on both pleasure and business trips. Nothing became the image of the early-60s Mad Men-style executive better than his Samsonite Classic Attache. It was the first Samsonite product to be thoroughly researched before it was launched. This process, which included design, development, engineering, market research, proven production



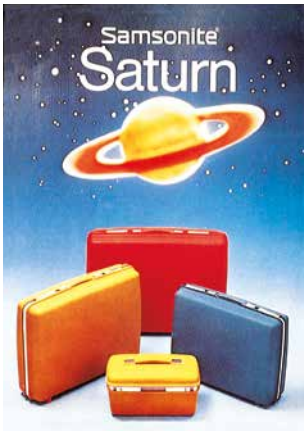
Naughty but nice; proof that you could take your Classic Attache anywhere.

Looking the business; the Classic Attache conferred executive status on its users.

techniques, expanded distribution and national advertising – including a poster which saw a besuited businessman floating with his attache through the clouds, and another (for the urbane French market) which saw him clutching an attache as he left a sex shop, with the line “No matter what’s inside your Samsonite Attache Case, you’ll always look professional” – was a new departure for the company. It proved its worth, as sales of the Classic Attache exceeded all expectations. It was probably this particular case, more than any other, that sent the Samsonite name around the world; hence it came as no surprise when, in

1965, the board voted to change the name of the company from Shwayder Bros. Inc. to Samsonite Corporation. For the first time in 55 years, the name of the founder was not to be found over the door, but Jesse’s values continued to prevail (the Detroit plant was the recipient of the City of Ecorse’s first Human Relations Award for the way in which it implemented the company’s policy of non-discrimination; Jesse himself was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Public Service degree by the University of Denver in 1957). The rebranding was underlined with the launch of a mid-priced version of the Attache in 1966, to satisfy demand; in the same year, Samsonite demonstrated its new global reach by setting up a licensing agreement in Australia, with Overseas Corporation (Australia) Ltd., for the assembly of attache cases. A further innovation followed with the launch of 1969’s Saturn suitcase, made of “*space age*” polypropylene with a structure fully supported by injection-moulded shells, Samsonite’s niftiest iteration of the lightness-strength combination yet. Its revolutionary design would set the template for producing modern

hardside luggage. And the furniture division wasn’t left behind; the Tennessee plant doubled in size in 1964, and went on to produce, among other lines, an award-winning patio furniture range covered in rich, tweedy fabric upholstery that was chosen by a group of leading US designers to be one of the products representing the country at the International Trade Show in London in 1965. Its ad slogan, “*too good to fold away,*” had proved to be as good as its word.



A ringing success; the launch of the polypropylene-crafted Saturn brought Samsonite into the space age.

Inter-stellar; ad campaigns for Saturn borrowed sci-fi imagery to emphasize its out-of-this-world qualities.

1969 Saturn



As the moon landings were taking place, Samsonite was also reaching for the stars; Saturn was the first case that incorporated “space age” polypropylene, the thermoplastic polymer that was used in its injection-moulded shells. It was Samsonite’s niftiest iteration of the lightness-strength combination yet, and its revolutionary design would set the template for producing modern hardside luggage. “Like no other luggage on Earth,” said the posters.

Alongside the increasingly sophisticated product lines came a significant geographical expansion. In 1963 Samsonite set up its first European operation, in the small Dutch town of Tilburg; like the small Denver store 53 years earlier, this would be the start of something very big. The following year, a 20,000-square-foot plant was erected in the mid-60s in Mexico City as part of a joint venture with the Perez Alonso family. Sales and warehousing facilities were set up in Zurich, Offenbach in Germany, and Paris. A London office and showroom was also opened near Heathrow Airport. Around the same time, a licensing agreement was signed with the Spanish company Tauro S.A., to assemble and manufacture Samsonite luggage for the Spanish market, while in Australia a licensing arrangement was agreed for the manufacture of Samsonite Attache cases. In Japan, the Ace Luggage Company, the country's leading luggage manufacturer, which had acted as Samsonite's distributor throughout the 60s, started to make Samsonite luggage under licence for Japanese distribution, from a 40,000-square-foot plant in Odawara, which, auspiciously, sat in the shadow of Mount Fuji. And in the mid-60s, Jack Schuman, who had been Samsonite's representative in Europe for many years, found a site in Belgium that would be suitable for a local plant, in the little town of Oudenaarde in East Flanders. Specialist staff from Denver were brought over to set up the facility, which was officially opened in October 1966, initially producing a grand total of 25 cases a day. When Renato Castelli, a Belgian with Italian roots, took over the plant in 1968, he initiated some important changes, building staff-management relations, forging close links with the local



Samsonite's Oudenaarde plant in Belgium – now the hub of European operations – was officially opened in October 1966.

community (which endure to this day), and changing the focus of the operation from assembly to manufacturing, enabling the engineers to adapt Samsonite products to local tastes – the first “*European*” innovation appeared when combination locks were added to the Silhouette range – which is a principle adhered to in Samsonite's plants across the world today. As the moon landings brought the decade to a close, and pictures of the planet were beamed back from space, it seemed like the world was getting smaller – and if you had the right products in the right places, it would be ripe for the conquering.

1971–1990

A global player

You don't have to travel drab to travel light. Now there are FleeBags, the easy-going luggage from Samsonite. Take a FleeBag to class. To the beach. On a 3-day weekend or a 3-month jaunt to Europe. Most are canvas, some are vinyl, and they all pack a whole lot of gear on the road and pack away into the smallest space at home. Flee to your dealer and see.



Samsonite was now firmly established as the world’s leading manufacturer of moulded luggage and attache cases; in its first half-century, it had shipped over 100 million pieces to accompany travellers of every stripe on their journeys. The company now set its sights on the growing softside luggage market. Its major American forays into the category, imported from Ace in Japan, were branded Flee Bag and Caribbea shoulder bags, carry-ons, and fashion totes (including a graphic floral-patterned “Mod” range that remains a cult favourite to this day). These were such a success that twin plants were opened to manufacture them in Nogales, Mexico, and Tucson, Arizona.

Growth was also the watchword back where it all began, in Denver. The company now moved to a new, state-of-the-art, 100-acre “campus” in Montebello, a development in north-east Denver, comprising a hardware plant, assembly plant, industrial relations building, power plant, and corporate office building. Sadly, the founding father of the company wasn’t around to see it; Jesse Shwayder had died shortly before, at the ripe old age of 88. Although his son, King, had been in charge for some time, Jesse’s personality and philosophy continued – and continues, via the marble – to have a major influence over company policy and principles. “How did we do it?” Jesse had mused on the success of the company he initiated, shortly before he died. “Well, there

Steel life; Samsonite executives test the strength of the company's patio furniture line, which was expanded through the mid-70s.



certainly is no magic formula, but there is one thing of which I'm sure, and that is my belief that the Golden Rule, somehow, has had more to do with our success than anything else. That, and our motto of 'Make it Better, Make it Different.'"

Samsonite's increasing presence in a variety of markets inspired the adoption of a new logo – the “*Samsonite Swirl*,” created by Samsonite's Design West subsidiary in March 1973, whose four interlocking “*leaves*” stand for design, development, market research and publicity, and which also highlighted the company's contemporary presence on four continents. Simple, clean, and modern, it encapsulated Samsonite's strengths and aspirations,

and is now as recognisable a hallmark as the Coca-Cola or Apple logos; something that would have delighted Jesse Shwayder, with his enthusiasm for communication and promotion.

Samsonite wasn't immune to the consolidation and buyout binge that engulfed corporations in the 1970s; after operating as an independent under the aegis of the Shwayder family for more than sixty years, it became part of the giant Beatrice Foods group in August 1973. Beatrice was a publicly owned conglomerate which oversaw 8,000 different products and 1,000 locations worldwide, and was growing rapidly through acquisition, but it planned to allow Samsonite to continue its operations with full independence, and to support its expansion efforts financially. Beatrice became the first of several companies that would own and sell Samsonite from the 70s through to the early 90s; during this time, the company would effectively jettison its furniture operations and focus its energy on the global luggage industry.

To that end, Samsonite continued to launch new products through the decade, including, in 1974, the first suitcase on wheels – introduced as part of the Silhouette line (“*on the go with the Go Generation*,” as the original advertising tagline had run), and an instant hit with customers, who sensed that, beyond the novelty, this could be a game-changer for the industry – and a new generation of moulded attache cases, building on the enduring appeal of the Classic Attache. The company also rolled out its first television advertising campaign, using Fresno, Peoria and Nashville as trial markets, with spectacular results (a national TV campaign was soon to follow), and allied itself with the

1974

First case on wheels



The innovation that would transform the luggage world – the point where cases got up off the ground and started standing upright – was born here, when two wheels were added to a Silhouette frame; a metal bar was also added, so that the case could be hauled up and dragged along. “On the go with the Go Generation,” ran the original advertising tagline, targeting the new generation of frequent flyers who sensed that, beyond the novelty, this was a game-changer.

snowballing sports market, enlisting grand slam tennis champion Rod Laver and racing driver Joe Leonard to appear in its ad campaigns (“*the baggage of champions*”), and unveiling the Samsonite Special racer, which won the Indy Car championship two years running with Leonard in the driving seat, before touring the country for two years in a glass-walled truck. Such initiatives offset any notion that Samsonite products were purely for an older, staid generation.

The post-oil crisis years were a spur to both innovation and to efficiency in production, and the new facilities in Denver and Tucson-Nogales quickly proved to be a springboard to feed sales growth. By 1979, hardside output in Denver had reached 17,000 cases per day. Growth also continued in Mexico, where, in 1975, Altro S.A. de C.V., the Mexican subsidiary, built a 165,000-square-foot plant, warehouse and office facility to satisfy the demands of the local market for both hardside and softside luggage. In Belgium, too, things were moving at a rapid pace. The plant at Oudenaarde had reached bursting point by 1972, with 200 people producing 850 cases per day. A new site was found – one that could accommodate a facility of 1,500,000 square feet. Despite the vagaries of the oil crisis, during which business dropped by 15 per cent, the plant was completed in a record-breaking nine months, officially opening on October 10, 1974. Its state-of-the-art facilities and workforce-first policies reflected the Samsonite philosophy that a quality product requires a quality environment, because people work better in custom-built, convivial surroundings; the plant should always be a reflection of the product it produces.

Jack Schuman (with trowel) and Renato Castelli (second left) inaugurate the new Oudenaarde plant in 1973; a “lucky” silver dollar was embedded in its foundation stone.



This is as true of Oudenaarde today, over thirty years later, with its pristine production facilities and hum of common purpose, as it was back then.

Sales began to climb again toward the end of the decade, fuelled by the small changes to make both the Saturn and Classic Attache more “*European*” – the first real European product, the Prestige Attache, appeared in 1974, and is still in production – along with an added push on softside products, including the Go-Go Bag, imported from Ace in Japan, which proved extremely popular. One of Jack Schuman’s last acts before he retired in the mid-70s was to sign an agreement appointing the Fremder

family as Samsonite distributors for Italy. Enrico Fremder had started his own leather business in 1947, manufacturing belts and handbags, so he had excellent contacts at the top end of the Italian retail trade for distributing Samsonite products; connections that would come in handy when the Italian arm of the company later launched its high-end Black Label line. Meantime, a new team joined Samsonite Europe, which was still only a third of the size of its sister company in the US, including Jim Peters, soon to become General Manager, and Luc Van Nevel, a former auditor from Touche Ross accountants, as Assistant Controller. The decade had not been without its challenges and upheavals, but Samsonite had retained its edge.

That edge was needed during the 1980s, when it seemed like the entire world was travelling, from students exploring distant frontiers on their gap years to businessmen clocking up long-haul face-time on overnight “*red-eye*” flights to holidaymakers discovering new resorts and indulging in cultural city breaks. At the same time, a distinct split occurred in consumer preference. Americans, with their more casual lifestyle and shorter holidays, were buying more softside luggage, while Europeans, who were travelling further and upgrading their kit as incomes rose, were opting for hardside luggage. The market was getting more volatile, however, as competition from low-cost foreign producers started to chip away at Samsonite’s market share.

In response, Samsonite upped the ante on its ad campaigns – a 1982 roll-out, dubbed “*Survivor*,” featured a Harrison Ford lookalike in a battered fedora and brown leather jacket facing down perils in the jungle and desert, armed only with

From urban jungle to desert wilderness; Samsonite's 80s ads channel Clark Kent and Indiana Jones.

A bird in the hand; Samsonite acquired the premium luggage company Lark in 1984.



his comprehensive hardside and softside ranges; the campaign’s impact was only heightened when Lucasfilm, creators of Raiders of the Lost Ark, threatened to sue for breach of copyright, before the matter was settled out of court – and Beatrice brought in Malcolm Candlish, a British-born 47-year-old seasoned consumer industry executive, to lead the company. His response was immediate; in 1984, Samsonite acquired Lark, a leading brand in premium luggage, manufacturing sleek, sophisticated softside bags and suitcases in a unique champagne colour scheme. Candlish also launched a comprehensive study to determine exactly what consumers wanted. That survey led

1986 Oyster



Oyster broke the mould – quite literally – by being the first case to entirely dispense with a metal frame, thus significantly reducing its weight. However, its bivalve-inspired name, and its three-point locking system of clawbolt latches, emphasized that there would be no compromise on strength, style and security; any pearls secreted within would be fiercely protected. Oyster was an immediate triumph, with 140,000 bought in its first year – the fastest-selling case of all time.

1990 Piggyback



Originally developed by Samsonite US, the Piggyback premiered a bunch of firsts: it marked the first steps toward the contemporary upright model of case; it boasted a patented elasticated strap system which made it possible to load extra pieces of luggage to the frame as required; and it pioneered another industry trend with its retractable handle. This was also the point at which bigger, stronger wheels started to take the strain.

to the introduction of what was termed the “*World’s Greatest Garment Bag*” in the mid-80s; the CarryPak 12 Valet suit carrier contained two fold-out locking hanger fixtures as well as nine internal pockets lined in nylon, and was tailor-made for the 80s yuppie to ferry his or her suits to as many meetings as their Filofax-brokered schedules would allow. It was followed by a string of new soft- and hardside products that served to renew Samsonite’s radical edge, not least 1986’s Oyster, which broke the mould – quite literally – by boasting an injection-moulded plastic frame rather than a metal frame, thus significantly reducing its weight. It was also the first case that boasted a three-point locking system of clawbolt latches and a rubber seal protecting against dust and moisture. Its genesis hadn’t been without hiccups – “*we had spent millions on research and development,*” says Luc Van Nevel, “*but the first version we had, with two locks, kept springing open when you pushed on top of it, and it was only the intervention of an enterprising guy in the design department, who suggested a third lock in the middle, on top, that saved the day, though production was then delayed by a year while the moulds were all refurbished*” – but it was an immediate triumph for Samsonite Europe, who developed it, selling over 150,000 in its first year alone. It would go on to become the fastest-selling suitcase of all time.

Samsonite USA responded with additional hardside innovations of its own. In 1987 it unveiled the “*Piggyback*” suitcase, and its smaller sibling the “*Piglet*,” which not only marked the first steps toward the now-standard upright model of case, but also boasted

a patented retractable strap system which made it possible to load extra pieces of luggage to the frame as required, and pioneered another industry trend with their retractable handles.



The upright stuff; 1997's Piggyback turned travelling on its head with its radical stack-and-pull system.

By the mid-80s, Samsonite was generating annual sales of about \$300 million (half of which came from overseas operations), controlling about 12 per cent of the US luggage market, and, thanks to Oyster and other new launches, making deeper inroads into the public consciousness than ever before. With production already stretched, Samsonite Europe was looking for a new plant location. Northern France was close to the existing European HQ at Oudenaarde, and a former textile factory in the town of Henin-Beaumont was rapidly refurbished and ready for production in just 8 months. The Prestige Attache case and Beauty case were the first products to be made there, freeing production capacity at Oudenaarde for the Oyster. At the same time, softside production was also set up. Key staff were trained at Torhout and were then able to pass on their skills to the rest of the Henin-Beaumont workforce. The value of having plants in reasonably close proximity had already paid off. Strong distribution networks had also been established in Italy and Spain.

Despite this solid growth, however, Samsonite wasn't immune to the cut and thrust of the markets. The Beatrice Group was split up in 1986, and a series of takeovers and buyouts ensued. Samsonite ended up as part of a new company called E-II, which was bought by American Brands, which sold the company on to the Riklis Family Corporation, headed by the flamboyant Israeli

billionaire Meshulam Riklis. While other brands in the portfolio – Elizabeth Arden, Fabergé Cosmetics, and less prestigious concerns including pet food companies and a TV station – were sold off, Steven Green, E-II's chairman, an entrepreneur and friend of Riklis who was later to become Samsonite CEO, saw great unrealized value in the Samsonite brand, and instead of divesting the company, he was determined to nurture it. In the two-and-a-half years up to the beginning of 1990, Green encouraged and approved a greater volume of investment in Samsonite than there had been under the combined efforts of its three previous owners. Thanks to his efforts, and the continuing appetite for Oyster and Samsonite's other runaway successes, the company was generating over \$400 million in sales by the end of the decade, and looking forward to further expansion.



Luc Van Nevel (left) and Steven Green, President of Samsonite Europe and CEO respectively, shake on the company's future.

1991 – 2004

New markets, new styles

The growth of budget airlines and the expansion of regional airports and intercontinental rail networks throughout the 1990s meant that people seemed to be in perpetual motion; this was the decade when the long-haul, short-stay business trip, the getaway weekend, and even the country-to-country commute became standard. As the European market developed, so Samsonite's Oudenaarde plant became ever more important. Production was healthy, but to maintain quality and increase volume it needed a substantial investment programme, as befits a company that has always been prepared to capitalize on its leading position and cutting edge. So, at the beginning of the decade, Samsonite invested in new machinery and the expansion of the production unit at the Oudenaarde site. It also installed new high-tech equipment for product development, and expanded the tooling operation which had been set up several years earlier. A new holding company, Samsonite Europe NV, was formed, and a new four-storey office building went up beside the Oudenaarde factory to accommodate its headquarters.

In Italy, Samsonite Italia had also reached full capacity at its Porto Ceresio plant, which had dated from the beginning of the 1980s, so a new plant was built in Saltrio and all production moved there in August 1991. Later in the decade, Samsonite



Building sight;
the Blue Building
at the expanded
Oudenaarde
plant.

Italia diversified into a footwear range, capitalizing on the firm’s experience in leather goods, Italy’s pre-eminence in footwear design, and years of image-building for the Samsonite brand. This would expand into a full-dress upmarket clothing line called Black Label for men and women, aimed at the Italian market. British fashion designer Neil Barrett, formerly of Prada, was brought in as creative director, to be replaced a year later by Gigi Vezzola, who’d previously worked at Dolce & Gabbana. The influential collection, using travel-friendly high-tech fabrics and heavily influenced by industrial design, featured safari-style suits, belted trenchcoats, padded flight jackets, slouchy track-style pants in luxe fabrics – perfect for kicking back in on a long-haul flight – and performance trainers.



Shoe business; Samsonite’s Italian division launched a footwear line – later expanded into a full clothing line – in the 1990s.

At the same time, the company was looking to all points east for further expansion. A few years earlier, Renato Castelli and Luc Van Nevel, then President of Samsonite Europe, had taken a 60% shareholding in the Palota luggage plant in Szekszárd in southwestern Hungary. When the Iron Curtain finally fell at the beginning of the 90s, the remaining shares were snapped up, and Palota became Samsonite Hungaria KFT. The spread of the brand through Eastern Europe was steady; in 1992, for the first time ever, Muscovites could buy Samsonite luggage from a dedicated Samsonite travel outlet which was opened inside the legendary GUM department store just off Red Square.

BAGS OF STYLE

Over the years, a selection of legendary designers have collaborated with Samsonite. These are the stories behind some particularly juicy joint ventures.

Samsonite has always been open to new ideas and radical departures – it’s been part of the company’s DNA since Jesse Shwayder’s early experiments in redefining the basic trunk to, latterly, Samsonite’s endless reinvention of the wheel to arrive at the ultimate Spinner. So it’s no surprise that it’s occasionally collaborated with some of the most renowned designers of the day in order to produce eye-catching ranges of cases and bags that marry the brand’s peerless technological know-how with a unique creative vision. “Samsonite’s always been a forward-looking company,” says former CEO Marcello Bottoli, “so the idea of bringing in cutting-edge designers to create limited editions was a no-brainer, really.”

The first designer collaboration, however, involved clothing; the company’s Milan-based European arm, Samsonite SpA, launched a line of Black Label Travel Wear and Footwear for men and women in 1999, initially for the Italian market. British fashion designer Neil Barrett, the former head of Prada menswear, was brought in as creative director, to be replaced a year later by Gigi Vezzola, formerly of Dolce & Gabbana. The footwear division was overseen by former Hogan designer Alberta Serantoni. The pioneering collection, using innovative

technical travel-friendly fabrics and heavily influenced by industrial design, featured safari-style suits, belted trenchcoats, padded flight jackets, slouchy track-style pants in luxe fabrics, and performance trainers.

A year later, the illustrious product designer Philippe Starck was invited to produce a range of luggage. The result, Samsonite by Starck, comprised 18 minimalist and lightweight, but not unelaborate, handbags, travel bags, briefcases and upright cases featuring moulded handles and zip fasteners, with functional extras including transparent compartments in the business bags for easy location of passport, keys, etc, and removable plastic boxes in the handbags for sunglasses, make-up, etc. “They are practical,” Starck said of the bags, “but I also wanted them to be fun.”

The latter quality is perhaps reflected in the whimsical names that he chose for the bags, including Och Noir, Yesa, Biri, Zibo and Zab. They went on to win several international design awards, including the Red Dot “Best of the Best”, and the collaboration continued until the mid-2000s; the products are now collector’s items. Starck explained the concept behind the collection in his own unique way: “We want something casual. We are striving

to achieve a new elegance that will give the impression of being immaterial, with understated cutting-edge technology. Wait and see, one day luggage will carry itself.”

While that day is yet to arrive, Samsonite’s next collaborations were certainly made to be carried with aplomb. When Marcello Bottoli arrived at Samsonite from Louis Vuitton in 2004, he described the brand as “a sleeping beauty – it’s a great brand that’s been around a long time, and we’re just trying to wake it up a little.” His method of rise-and-shine? A relaunch of Black Label (the original Italian iteration had been wound down some years before), and a repositioning of Samsonite as an aspirational lifestyle brand. “You choose a brand for an emotional reason, so you have to create that connection,” he says. “So we thought, OK, let’s start creating products that are different and new, and let’s get some top names in their field involved, and let’s see what we can do.”

Bottoli opened an HQ/showroom for Black Label in London, and appointed British handbag designer Quentin Mackay as Black Label’s creative director: “We were the first company in the market to do that,” he says. “The engineers brought the technical know-how, and

he brought the style.” Under a new tagline – “*Life’s a Journey*” – Black Label introduced a wealth of designer partnerships. Marc Newson, best known for his radical industrial-inspired work, from his Lockheed Lounge chair to his Spaceplane, produced a Scope collection of cases that married futuristic technology with a bold palette of colours. Conversely, the British fashion designer Matthew Williamson, known for his use of intricate print and pattern, teamed with Mackay to revamp a Samsonite classic, the Signat attache case. Retaining the mid-60s-retro exterior of the case, while adding some graphic latticework, they transformed the interior into a kaleidoscope of psychedelic swirls. The case, launched during New York fashion week, quickly became a cult item.

Two further Black Label collaborations generated enormous buzz and were destined to become classics. The British designer Alexander McQueen, then at the peak of his fame/notoriety, produced a range of cases stamped with patterns from

the natural world, including croc-skin and a human ribcage and sternum (the Samsonite engineer who was working on the ribcage case actually made a plaster ribcage of his own body, and then translated it into 3-D, in order to render the details as anatomically precisely as possible). To underline Samsonite’s new fashion presence, the McQueen bags were later issued in a striking limited-edition silver tone, using a specially-designed paint originally developed for the auto industry, with the range being unveiled at the achingly trendy Milan concept store 10 Corso Como.

The latter strategy was repeated with a follow-up Black Label collection from Dutch design duo Viktor & Rolf, whose “Happy Travel” range launched at Colette – Paris’ equivalent to 10 Corso Como. Inspired by the early jet-set years of the 50s and 60s, the collection featured a pop-art-style vintage plane print, with the uprights and carry-ons accessorized with outsized bows and belt buckles. “*We wanted to hark back to a time when travelling to*

new destinations was full of optimism, excitement, and glamour,” said the duo, who custom-built a 60s-style airport, complete with aircraft, ground vehicles and crew for the marketing campaign.

While the pace of collaborations has slowed since Black Label’s heyday, Samsonite continues to bring in the occasional outsider eye to reinvigorate its portfolio – and the way it’s presented. The company’s 2017 ad campaign, *The Serious Traveller*, showcasing the lightness and strength of its Cosmolite Curv and Lite-Box lines, was shot by the acclaimed British photographer Rankin, and features a cast including Royal Ballet soloist Eric Underwood and British model, blogger and DJ Charlotte de Carle. “*We’re the best in our field, so why wouldn’t we want to collaborate with the best in their chosen fields when the time is right?*” asks Arne Borrey, Samsonite’s European President. “*It can make for a great synergy – and you can get the best of both worlds.*”

But it was the Far East on which Luc Van Nevel had really set his sights. It had long been an important market for Samsonite, ever since the first licensing agreement with Ace in Japan, back in the early 60s. The “Tiger Economies” were growing at a dizzying rate, and with over half the world’s population living in the region, the potential was vast. “*I bought maps of Asia, and quickly concluded that we were dealing with four regions: China, India, Japan, and South-East Asia,*” recalls Van Nevel. “*It took me a year to write my business plan, and I went with it to the board in America. I was asking for big money – I needed to establish factories in China and India, and set up a distribution network virtually from scratch – but I’d done my homework. They said ‘The kid knows what he’s doing’ – they always called me The Kid – ‘so do it, as long as you become the CEO of the company, worldwide, so you’re responsible for carrying it out.’*”

The core strategy of Van Nevel’s business plan was to follow the tried and tested Samsonite formula that had proved successful over the years in Europe and beyond: to establish joint ventures. With local partners, the question of cultural differences – in working methods and practices, not to mention language barriers – could be virtually eliminated. Thus, joint ventures were quickly established in Singapore, for South-East Asia (1996), and South Korea (1997), both of which supplied Samsonite Europe with softside luggage. Hong Kong followed soon after, but mainland China proved more difficult – “*Engineers, and people with brains, were still working in the fields at that time,*” says Van Nevel – until he found a company who understood both Chinese and Western methods in Thailand’s CP Group,



then the biggest investor in mainland China, with interests ranging from agriculture and motorbikes to petrochemicals and poultry processing. A 50/50 agreement was signed between Samsonite and CP and a plant was built at Ningbo, producing hardside luggage to support sales inside China and throughout the Pacific Rim (all three joint ventures later became wholly-owned subsidiaries of the Group).

India was a market on which Samsonite was particularly keen, with its expanding middle class and their increasing amounts of disposable income available for luxury items such as travel. However, given the huge number of businesses in India, finding the right partner could have been very difficult. *“Then I got a call, saying a Mr Ramesh Tainwala wanted to see me,”* says Van Nevel. *“He showed up at Oudenaarde and said, ‘I heard you were setting stuff up.’”*

Tainwala had begun his career in 1981 with a family-owned plastics trading and manufacturing company. *“He knew about manufacturing, and he convinced me that he could build a distribution channel in India for us,”* says Van Nevel. *“He made his own business plan, and I went over to India, where Ramesh took me through places like Bangalore and Chennai, showing me these fish shops and the like which he convinced me ‘had potential’ as luggage outlets.”* Eventually, the Tainwala Group and Samsonite entered into a 40-60 joint venture called Samsonite South Asia to manufacture luggage at Tainwala’s existing plant in the Nashik district of Maharashtra. It was the beginning of a long and fruitful relationship between Samsonite and Ramesh Tainwala.

1994 Ziplite



The first polypropylene suitcase with a zipper closure, thus combining hardside and softside concepts for the first time, Ziplite was a lighter version of a US case made with an ABS shell and a polyester textile. Sales took off quickly, and the market for hardside shells with zippers was born.

1997 Ultratransporter



The first case to demonstrate something that became a truism for modern luggage; two wheels good, four wheels better. The Ultratransporter – initially developed by Samsonite US as the EZ CART – was the first upright check-in suitcase with a balanced four-wheel push or pull system, along with a height-adjustable handle. Now your case could precede you as well as follow you, a fact accentuated by the smooth, aerodynamic design.

Meanwhile, Samsonite was expanding its product portfolio to match its global ambitions. In 1993, it acquired American Tourister, a force to rival Samsonite itself in the US luggage market. It had been founded sixty years earlier by Sol Koffler, who mirrored Jesse Shwayder's family history in being an immigrant to the United States who found himself working in a steamer trunk plant. The company operated at a lower price point, but was complementary in many ways to Samsonite, with its own reputation for quality and reliability (not to mention durability; its legendary TV ad campaign featured a chimp called Oofi vehemently hurling a suitcase against the bars of its cage, while the bag's contents remained pristinely intact). The acquisition brought with it just under 100 retail outlets across the United States that posted sales of over \$75 million per year.

Samsonite was also adding to its long and venerable collection of luggage firsts. In 1993 it produced the Handy Case, a new kind of beauty case for women. It included a set of internal pockets, where make-up and perfume could be easily stowed, and a handle that pulled out to form a shoulder-strap. The side-panel opening system, which enabled the bag to “unfurl” from the middle, like the petals of a water lily, was hailed as a groundbreaking concept.

The following year, the company produced the first polypropylene suitcase with zipper closure, thus combining hard- and softside concepts for the first time. The design was pioneered at Samsonite US, who called the range Ziplite; it was made from an



An open and shut case; Erik Sijmons' Handy Case was designed for women on the move.

ABS shell and a heavy polyester textile. The case was “*Europeanized*,” and made lighter by laminating a polypropylene textile outside and inside, to make a kind of sandwich of materials. Sales took off pretty quickly, and the market for hardside shells with zippers was born.

A further breakthrough came the following year, with the launch of the EZ CART in the US – the first upright check-in suitcase with a balanced four-wheel push or pull system, along with a height-adjustable handle; this was released in Europe, later in 1997, as the UltraTransporter. In the same year came the Big Wheel, with – as the name suggests – larger wheels, to make lighter work of guiding the case up stairs and over curbs. The ultimate wheeled statement came in 2000, with the arrival of the four-wheeled Samsonite Spinner cases, which could be steered in any direction and which radically improved mobility and convenience for travellers as they navigated their way through the yawning spaces of the new generation of super-airports. “*These wheels were state-of-the-art at the*

time,” says Rik Hillaert, Samsonite’s Vice President of Manufacturing and Hardside Development. “*They had gone through a rigorous testing process in our laboratory, on stair machines and conveyor belts that dragged them through sand and grit. Today, we are adapting the basic models of wheel that we’ve already produced for new cases. We don’t need to reinvent the wheel all the time, which is a good thing, because you can only start testing a wheel after a case is ready. And a wheel that’s already proven itself means a new case can come to market faster.*”



Testing time; a Samsonite case rolls with the punches in the company’s testing lab.

2000 Xylem



The first luggage produced in aluminium. Its matching attaché could be strapped on in a similar way to the earlier Piggyback system, and would later go on to play a key supporting role in the James Bond movie *The World Is Not Enough*, where it was used to tote bundles of cash across Europe.

Show me the money; Pierce Brosnan gets to grips with James Bond's toughest case yet.



One case represented a special first: a Samsonite debut in a James Bond film. In 1999, Erik Sijmons, Samsonite Europe's Travel Design Director, was asked by Karlheinz Tretter, then Samsonite's European president, to design a hardside aluminium case. The sleek, sharp-looking result, the Xylem, caught the eye of the producers of *The World Is Not Enough*, the 20th film in the Bond franchise. Sijmons and his team were asked to produce a special version, a 'money case' in which Pierce Brosnan, playing Bond, could carry a load of cash. In the film, Brosnan abseils down a rope from an 8th-floor apartment, carrying the case in his hand. *"I went to the premiere, but I almost had to cover my eyes*

in that scene, because I was scared the handle was going to break when he jumped," says Sijmons. *"Of course it didn't, and it was a great honour to see this prototype I helped construct, up there on a massive screen."*

James Bond wasn't the only one making a break for it; in 1995, after more than two decades as a subsidiary of various consumer goods conglomerates, Samsonite Corporation merged with its former holding company, Astrum International Corporation, which had spun off its last non-Samsonite operating business earlier that year. The merged entity was named Samsonite Corporation, and, for the first time since 1973, Samsonite was once again a stand-alone business. The figures boded well for Samsonite's new phase; European sales had been 172 million Euros in 1990, but by 2000 the figure was 339 million Euros. A new, independent Samsonite could, it seemed, face the future with confidence, and it began the new millennium with a suitably forward-looking project; a collaboration with renowned designer Philippe Starck, the first time an outsider had been brought in to design a Samsonite luggage range. The minimalist and lightweight collection of expandable backpacks, business bags and shoulder bags under the *"Samsonite by Starck"* umbrella, with their clean detailing and functional features, such as transparent internal compartments, went on to win several international design awards – including the Red Dot *"Best of the Best"* – and started to subtly shift Samsonite in the public mind from a luggage brand to a lifestyle brand.



Design for life; the "Samsonite by Starck" collection proved to be very à la mode.

However, a series of geopolitical events in the early part of the new decade, from 9/11 to the Iraq war and the SARS scare, led to a severe travel slump that proved how dynamic and volatile the whole sector, including the luggage market, could be. Furthermore, Samsonite was highly leveraged following the serial buyouts of the 80s and 90s. In the mid-90s Richard Nicolosi, Luc Van Nevel's predecessor as Samsonite CEO, had raised wholesale prices, forcing retail shops and department stores to pass these costs along to consumers; he also doubled the number of branded shops in outlet malls that sold the bags at close to wholesale prices, thus further pressuring the retailers. Samsonite's customers rebelled, and its costs began to spiral. Major stockholders decided to bail, and buyers were thin on the ground. So in 1998 Samsonite turned to junk bonds and bought back half its shares at \$40 a share, a 38 per cent premium over the market price. *"We went from a company in great financial shape to one that was highly leveraged,"* said Tom Sandler, then head of Samsonite's US operations. *"We were paying a lot of money in debt service, and we lost sales from customers who couldn't do business with us because of our credit profile. It was very frustrating."*

So, in 2003, Luc Van Nevel embarked on a recapitalization programme, bringing in investment from the likes of Ares Management LLC and Bain Capital (Europe) LP, and reorganizing the company. *"I had to look at the unprofitable operations,"* he says. *"For instance, we had warehouses all over Europe, a lot of which were tied to independent distributors, which were costing us too much money. I thought it would be better to centralize everything from*



Shifting sands; by the mid-2000s, Samsonite's softside/hardside figures were switching, so the company could face the future with confidence.

Oudenaarde and send products from there all over Europe, direct to stores. So we closed 15–20 warehouses, country by country." Van Nevel also shuttered poorly-performing retail outlets and boosted production of casual bags, backpacks and computer cases, taking the company into markets less reliant on a buoyant travel industry. *"When I joined Samsonite, in the late 70s, our business was 90 per cent hardside, 10 per cent softside,"* he says. *"When I left, in 2004, it was 75 per cent softside, 25 per cent hardside. That was a big switch, and one I felt left us in a much stronger position to face the challenges ahead."*



2005 – 2017

Staying ahead of the curve

In 2004, Marcello Bottoli joined Samsonite as CEO. A former CEO at Louis Vuitton, he arrived armed with a clear strategy: to reposition Samsonite as an aspirational lifestyle brand. *“The company wasn’t in the greatest position when I arrived,”* he says. *“It was still highly leveraged, and we had junk bonds that we were paying 12–14 per cent interest on. We tendered those and reissued new ones on better terms. The next issue was to try and re-inject growth with that financial space we’d made for ourselves.”*

Previously, Bottoli argued, the bulk of Samsonite purchases had been “passive” rather than “active” – “you buy a product but you don’t choose the brand, you simply need a container; so you go into Macy’s and end up with Samsonite either because it’s on promotion or you’ve heard of it before.” Bottoli aimed to turn this around by applying “two simple rules that we considered the essentials of luggage: firstly, you buy for a functional reason, but you choose a brand for an emotional reason, so you have to create that connection between consumer and brand. Secondly, the smaller the piece of luggage and the closer it is to your body, the more important the emotional connection, while the larger and further from your body, the more important the functionality. It’s rather intuitive; the carry-on is attached to you and seen as an extension of yourself and how people see you. That’s where the emotion comes in.”

2004 Spinner



The ultimate wheeled breakthrough. The Spinner could be steered in any direction and toted right alongside the traveller, which radically improved mobility and convenience for the new generation of millennial on-the-movers as they navigated their way through the yawning spaces of modern super-airports and termini. The Spinner model, hardy but nimble, went on to become the industry standard for hardside cases.

Bottoli decided to create that “*emotion*” – and target the burgeoning luxury market – by creating Samsonite Black Label, an upscale line of bags and luggage that would be sold through its own dedicated retail outlets in prime sites from Sloane Street in London to Raffles in Singapore. “*The idea was to enhance the concept that Samsonite’s Italian subsidiary had come up with some years before,*” says Bottoli. “*The idea was good, but the timing was wrong, so we took that initial concept and ran with it.*”

Bottoli opened a design studio in London, and brought in a creative director, the British handbag designer Quentin Mackay, to launch or revamp a range of new products. “*The engineers brought the tech, while Quentin brought the style,*” says Bottoli. “*We wanted to combine design, tech and aspiration. The pace of introduction became maybe three times higher than in the past. Black Label was only meant to be an excuse to rediscover Samsonite, but it became a business in itself. There was a real buzz around it.*”

The buzz was helped by the raft of celebrities brought in to front Black Label advertising campaigns. Designer Marc Newson was pictured with Scope, a range of industrial-look luggage he’d helped design; the worldwide launch of a new business collection, Pro-DLX, was fronted by Sir Richard Branson; the actress Isabella Rossellini and her daughter Elettra posed with the retro-modernist pieces that comprised the feminine Vintage collection; design duo Viktor & Rolf came up with a “*Happy Travel*” collection, recalling the glory of the jet age with a vintage-style plane print; and,



Black magic; Isabella Rossellini, Marc Newson and Sir Richard Branson were three of the celebrities to front Black Label ad campaigns.

Skin and bone; Alexander McQueen's Black Label designs featured patterns based on snakeskin and a human rib cage.



perhaps most significantly, the flamenco dancer Joaquín Cortés was pictured performing a pas de deux with the new X'Lite case, built using an exclusive thermoplastic composite called Curv, developed in collaboration with a research team at the University of Leuven. *“This came out of the understanding that the consumer wanted light and strong luggage, a combination that we had been trying to crack for a long time,”* says Arne Borrey, President of Samsonite Europe. Curv, a woven polypropylene that could be formed into shells, was to play a leading role in Samsonite’s future. In the meantime, the largest buzz for Black Label was generated by a collaboration with the British fashion designer Alexander McQueen; his bags were stamped with patterns

AHEAD OF THE CURV
The miracle material that’s taking Samsonite into the future.

In 2005, a striking ad was released for Samsonite’s newly-launched upmarket Black Label collection. The flamenco dancer Joaquín Cortés was pictured performing a pas de deux with a new X'Lite case, created using an exclusive thermoplastic composite called Curv, Samsonite’s strongest, lightest material yet. *“We knew that the consumer wanted highly portable, yet tough luggage,”* says Arne Borrey, President of Samsonite Europe. *“But Curv took things to another level.”*

Curv was the result of a five-year research process that bridged the gap between traditional fibre-reinforced materials and commodity plastics. *“Before, a composite would combine a fibre and a resin,”* says Rik Hillaert, Samsonite’s Director of Hardside development and Innovation. *“But Curv is self-reinforcing, meaning that it comprises high-performance thermoplastic fibres in a matrix of exactly the same material.”* Curv is 100 per cent polypropylene, but yields stiffness and strength values around five times those of regular PPs. In addition, Curv has an impressive impact resistance which, in combination with exemplary tensile strength, means a Curv case will keep its shape and protect the contents within, whether it’s being subjected to the depredations of the world’s baggage handlers or being flung about by a Spanish dancer. It can even withstand

temperatures as low as minus 12 degrees Celsius. *“With any other material at those temperatures, you would have a possible breakage,”* says Lieve Beelen, the head of Samsonite’s Europe testing lab. *“Never with Curv. We drop darts on it from over a metre in height, and we don’t even see any cracks.”*

Curv is produced exclusively by Propex Fabrics; the big challenge for Samsonite was to harness its hot compaction process to form a suitcase shell. This was eventually achieved - and patented - in collaboration with a research team at the University of Leuven. The heart of Curv’s patented technology is *“selective melting,”* where highly-drawn fibres are submitted to carefully controlled temperature and pressure conditions so that a thin layer from the skin of each individual fibre is melted, then crystallized to form a matrix. Most importantly, a very high proportion of the original fibre properties are maintained in the 100 per cent polypropylene sheet. Given that the fibres have a very low density, the Samsonite pieces made with Curv are lightweight even when added features such as shoe or wet pockets, cushioned divider pads for laptop compartments, or garment sleeves are factored in; even the largest models will weigh no more than 3.6 kilos, with some Cosmolites coming in at 1.3 kilos.

“Curv was difficult to work with at first,” says Rik Hillaert, Samsonite’s Vice President of

Manufacturing and Hardside Development. *“We knew it was our strongest-ever material, but we had to adapt our machines at the factory in order to work with it.”* It was the launch of Cosmolite, in June 2008, that finally vindicated the company’s faith in their radical new material. The case’s seashell-inspired ridge design and the graceful robustness of Curv proved a perfect match, and became an instant best-seller.

“Initially, we only had one machine to produce Cosmolite,” says Rik Hillaert. *“After we came back from the summer vacation, it was already sold out, and our then-CEO, Tim Parker, ordered another machine. Quite soon after that, we needed two more. Curv has really helped the hardside division of Samsonite come storming back after many years of softside bags doing better. But it goes to the heart of one of our core beliefs here at Samsonite; innovation is manufacturing and manufacturing is innovation.”*

Cosmolite’s innovative design, which went on to win many awards, including the prestigious Red Dot *“Best of the Best”*, also gained Samsonite many new converts. *“I think it put the brand in a different light,”* says Erik Sijmons. *“Previously, we emphasized strength and durability, but Curv enabled us to make a distinctive design definition with Cosmolite; it was more of a style statement,*

but at the same time the seashell served as a symbol for the lasting durability of both form and material. We all knew that it was something special, something that would inspire a strong reaction in people. It had an immediate emotional appeal.”

Samsonite itself followed Cosmolite with a further series of Curv-crafted ranges. Lite-Biz, a dedicated cabin collection and another Red Dot “Best of the Best” winner, married a striking chevron design with a single-point TSA locking system; the boxy

Lite-Cube boasted a sleek, metal-lized look and matte effect and came in a variety of rich, industrial-style hues (a DLX deluxe version added sophisticated contrasting leather and stitching details); Lite-Shock refined the Curv concept by adding ridged corners, making the case more shock-absorbent; Lite-Locked combined the three-point integrated locking system first developed for Oyster back in 1986 with the Curv frame; and Lite-Box, with its graphic vertical

design and state-of-the-art corner protectors, brings the Curv story up to date.

Curv has quickly become an essential tool in Samsonite’s armoury, striking a chord with modern jet-setters who want some of the burdens of travelling eased. What of the future? “We always want to go lighter and thinner, and Curv will be a big part of that,” says Rik Hillaert. “To be honest, I think we’re only just beginning to explore its potential.”

from the natural world, including croc-skin and a human ribcage and sternum. All the campaigns featured Samsonite’s new tagline: “Life’s A Journey.” “The idea was to underscore the brand’s heritage in the travel industry, while emphasizing its prominent role in the multi-faceted lives of modern consumers,” says Bottoli. Black Label’s launch, in 2005, saw a worldwide “House of Samsonite” event, with models parading the new designs on catwalks in New York, London, Tokyo and Hong Kong.

At the same time, Bottoli acquired the rights to license handbags, duffels and accessories by Lacoste and Timberland, and he was also determined to realize the full potential of the American Tourister brand, launching it in Europe and Asia. Ramesh Tainwala had overseen India’s growth, to the point where it had become one of the fastest-growing units in the Samsonite family by 2004; he had offered to resign when his mentor Luc Van Nevel stood down, but now Bottoli persuaded him to stay and address the underperforming Chinese business. Though millions of the country’s citizens were travelling for the first time and the luggage industry’s turnover there was doubling every year, Samsonite lagged behind. In India, Samsonite had created a network of 150 retail stores by the end of 2002, with a lot of them franchisees; Tainwala now repeated the same strategy across China, reducing the time it took to get new designs to market as the economy heated up and adopting a similar retail store-franchisee mix of distribution. “I knew nothing about the business outside of India, but I told Marcello, ‘OK, why not?’” recalls Tainwala. “I felt that the distributors in China, and across



2008 Cosmolite



Nearly a hundred years into its existence, Samsonite was still breaking boundaries. Cosmolite was the latest radical step; it was made of Samsonite's patented Curv material, a thermoplastic composite that was the lightest, strongest material yet developed, and its ridged, sea-shell-inspired design not only proved extremely popular, with millions of cases sold, but went on to win many design awards, including the Red Dot "Best of the Best".

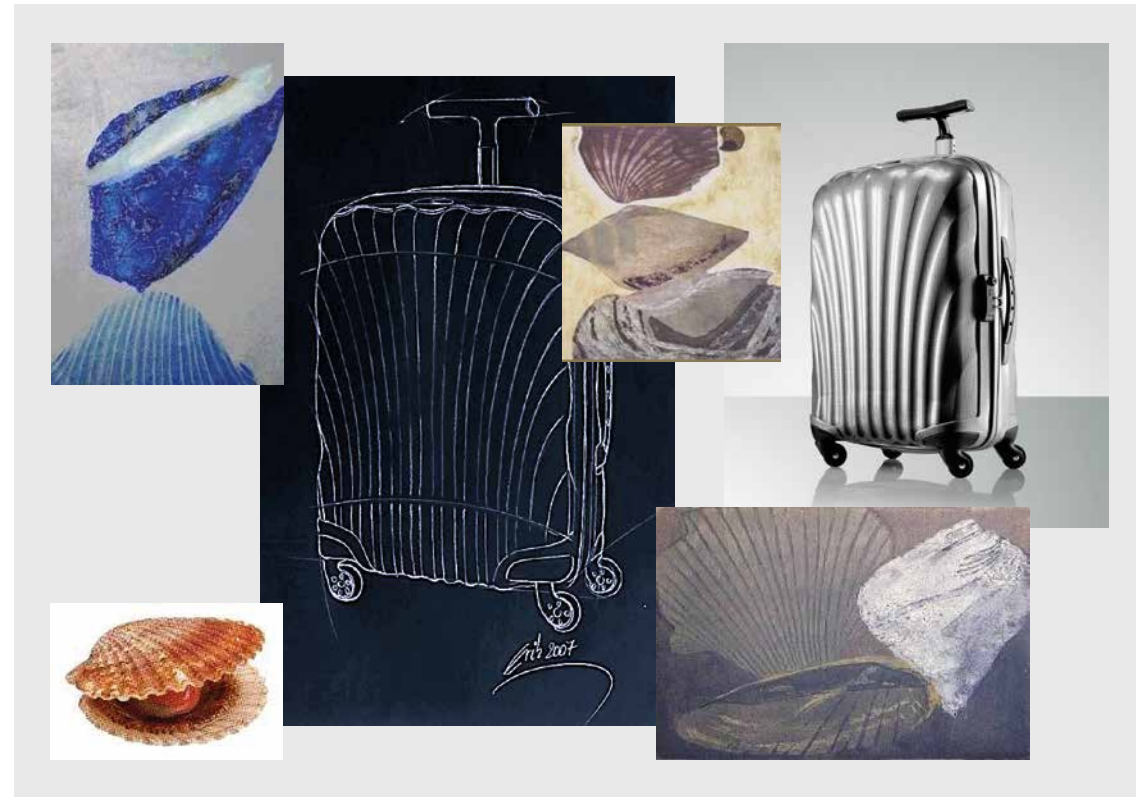
Asia as a whole, were holding the company back, so I decided to go to the consumer directly – in Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, Eurasia, the Middle East, and Australia, as well as China – by opening retail stores, with 100 in China established within a year. That made a big difference to our offering in Asia."

So big, in fact, that Asian sales rose tenfold in the five years of Bottoli's tenure as CEO, from \$60 million in 2004 to \$600 million in 2009. China became the company's second largest market by 2013, by which time Bottoli had promoted Tainwala to head of the entire Asia-Pacific region. Bottoli's efforts also boosted Samsonite's retail offering, from 220 worldwide stores in 2004 (including 180 US outlet stores, with less than 10 in total in Europe and Asia) to 600 directly-operated stores, with a further 500 franchises.

However, along with the expansions came a number of notable closures. Samsonite factories in France, Spain, Italy and Slovakia were all closed down between 2000 and 2005, as the company looked to cut costs. Undoubtedly the most significant – and poignant – was the closure of the historic factory and campus in Denver, where the brand's story had begun with Jesse Shwayder's vision a century earlier. Bottoli also shut down Samsonite's other plant at the old American Tourister HQ in Providence, Rhode Island, shifting the American base to a new hub in Mansfield, in the southwestern suburbs of Boston.

Amid the array of product launches during Bottoli's time as CEO – soft "weekender" lines like Resort, the sleek industrial lines of Graviton – one of the last proved to be the most important.

Shore thing;
the inspiration
for Cosmolite's
striking design
came from the
natural form of
the seashell.



Cosmolite first appeared in 2008; it combined the new Curv material with a radical ridged design based on a seashell, and came in at a featherweight 2.2 kilos (in the past decade, this has gone down even further; the latest cases can weigh as little as 1.3 kilos). The seashell proved to be the perfect metaphor for the case; a symbol for lasting durability of both form and material, protecting its contents like a valuable pearl. From a pure industrial design point of view, it was a leap into the unknown. But for many consumers, the shell motif evoked pleasant memories of being on the beach, while the lightness of the case's construction helped to ease some of the stresses of modern travel.

In 2007, the decision was taken to IPO the company; it was bought for \$1.7 billion by British-based private equity firm CVC, who invested just a few hundred million pounds of its own money in the business, with the rest coming from lenders including the Royal Bank of Scotland. Unfortunately, the deal was signed just one week before Lehmann Brothers went bust, initiating the credit crunch and another volatile period for the markets in general and the travel industry, especially its luxury end, in particular. By 2009, Samsonite was in breach of its banking covenants. Suffering because of the financial crisis and stymied by an enormous interest bill, it was thrown a lifeline when CVC was able to hammer out a restructuring deal with RBS. As well as handing over 40 per cent of the company's shares, CVC injected another \$175 million into Samsonite. Marcello Bottoli left the company, and Tim Parker, the British private equity boss credited with turning around companies including Clark's shoemakers, was brought in as CEO.

“I felt that the Black Label launch had been an interesting experiment, but that trying to turn Samsonite into a lifestyle- and image-based brand presented some challenges, all the more so as the market contracted,” he says. “Plus, we’d been relying on a centrally-driven design structure, and a common policy that could be applied globally, whereas the tastes and requirements of consumers in the US, Europe and Asia are all different. To generalize, Americans tend to want rugged, solidly-built, heavier items. Europeans are more sensitive to design, technical innovation, and lightness. Asians are more particular about detailing, quality, and attention to what’s on and in the product.”

Shine on; a limited edition Black Label design in 2008 took Jesse Shwayder's original trunk design of 1910 and swathed it in Swarovski crystals.



Parker felt that Samsonite needed to do two things: *“Firstly, to go back to what it’s always been good at – not luxury, but premium quality that stood for durability and technical innovation, where image alone wasn’t the driver. Secondly, I felt we needed a more federal structure, devolving decision-making to the regional centres so that they decide on what products they need and how they want to sell them. Thus, design ideas come from all our worldwide design centres onto the company intranet, and the managers in each territory will choose what works for them and order accordingly. Small handles work better in Asia; boxier bags seem to go down well in the Middle East. So all our regions operate independently, with quality being the only function that’s still centralized.”*

Ramesh Tainwala made sure that Asia was in the vanguard of the new devolved style of management and the freedom it brought in decision-making. *“When you run a global business, it’s very easy to assume that a consumer has global tastes,”* he says. *“But I was finding that certain Samsonite products were received very differently in different regions. For example, in one of my visits to Japan I saw two women picking up our luggage, toying with it, spinning the wheels, looking amused. I asked the assistant about it, and he told me they were wondering why the hell the wheels were so big. They were designed for American surfaces, not Japanese ones; Americans pull luggage through subway stations, up stairs and massive kerbs, whereas in Japan there are escalators everywhere. Another example: our luggage opens on the right-hand side, whereas in Japan, it’s the opposite. And if your lid isn’t opening the way the Japanese are used to, they’ll simply never buy it. It’s the little things that make a big difference, and if you’re on the ground, observing these things, you’ll be able to implement them.”*

This strategy certainly paid dividends for Samsonite in China, where Frank Ma has served as President, Greater China, since 2015. Along with Tainwala, he implemented a strategy known as Project Tiger, using the latitude Tim Parker had given all the company’s regional managers to boost Samsonite’s profile and introduce American Tourister to the region. *“We saw that the 80s generation, the baby boomers, are coming of age in China, and were keen to travel,”* he says. *“So we launched a campaign with American Tourister in 2009, called ‘Let’s Go See The World,’ targeting them specifi-*

cally. We introduced more colourful products, where previously we only had blue or black, and also more affordable products for families and first-time travellers, along with non-luggage items, like ladies’ bags, day-to-day bags, and backpacks.” It was this strategy that boosted the Chinese market from \$2 million annually in the late 90s to \$300 million today. China has also been quick to embrace e-commerce: “In fact, China is the world’s largest online retail market,” says Ma. “This year it’s already 30 per cent of our business, and soon it will be a third, and more.” He adds that it was Parker’s decentralization strategy that made all this possible: “The luggage business is very diversified, so you need to catch your opportunities every day, and take action quickly,” he says. “The level of autonomy Tim gave us means we have a fast, flat decision-making process.”

Those sentiments are echoed by Leo Suh, Samsonite’s President in South Korea. From a background in the luxury industry – he previously worked for Chanel and Bally – he identified a gap in the luggage market and, with the leeway granted by the new devolved Samsonite management structure, he launched Samsonite Red, a new line of backpacks and business-casual bags aimed at a younger consumer, in 2010. “I had two objectives: to rejuvenate the Samsonite brand; and to engage a younger customer,” he says. “I also wanted to expand our non-travel business, so I saw that, with the rise of the smartphone and the less formal strictures of the modern office, a clean, minimal hands-free backpack was the way to go.”

Samsonite Red deployed a range of K-pop and K-drama stars – among them Song Joong-Ki and Lee Min Ho – to emphasize

RED ALERT

The Samsonite brand that’s targeting the younger Asian market – with primary-coloured success.

Nothing exemplifies Samsonite’s ability to reinvent itself – and its new freedom to do so across the world, thanks to the devolved management style put in place by then-CEO Tim Parker in 2009 – like Samsonite Red. The sprightly line of backpacks, Boston bags and totes, combining youthful style and premium functionality and launched by Samsonite’s Korean arm in 2010, is designed to appeal to what its founder Leo Suh calls “social beginners” – graduates in their 20s and 30s who, as he says, “don’t wear a formal suit to work and want a business-casual bag to match their outfit. There was a gap in the market,” he continues, “which also gave us the opportunity to rejuvenate the Samsonite brand in Asia.”

Suh was well-placed to spearhead that rejuvenation. His background in the luxury sector – he previously worked for Chanel and Bally, among others – gave him a thorough overview of the market-place, and he arrived at Samsonite Korea in 2005 with a bold vision. “We needed to enhance the brand in Asia by boosting our non-travel offering,” he says. “The travel industry is affected by external factors, like wars, the SARS virus and its ilk, and financial crises, so I felt that, to protect ourselves from that volatility, we should concentrate on a younger business bag range. Not only would that shift Samsonite’s

image in the region from being a sort of mom-and-pop heritage brand; it would also establish a new business-casual sector for us.” Suh quickly determined that the backpack – albeit a sleek, office-friendly version – would lead the way. “Back then, everyone was starting to use the smartphone,” he says, “so I saw that a hands-free bag was the way to go.” Samsonite Red was officially launched in February 2010, a mere five months after it was first proposed. “That’s Korean speed,” Suh laughs. “Usually, the process would take at least a year. But I strongly believed that we should move faster, as the market does.”

Samsonite Red was one of the earliest beneficiaries of the new system of regional empowerment that was one of Tim Parker’s first acts when he became CEO in 2009. “Before Tim arrived, we had this kind of globalized decision-making process,” says Suh. “Everything had to go through the London HQ, where they weren’t always aware of what would work best in each region. Now, we could start behaving as a truly local brand.” Despite this, Samsonite Red didn’t take off immediately; it wasn’t until 2013 that sales started exploding, thanks to a series of marketing campaigns enlisting K-pop and K-drama “brand ambassadors” including Song Joong-Ki, Kim Woobin, Lee Jong Suk, and Lee

Min Ho (the limited-edition Voy backpack set a new sales record after the latter was seen wielding it in a series of ads). “Their involvement pushed the message that this was an aspirational brand,” says Suh, so much so that Samsonite Red was rolled out across China, Hong Kong and Taiwan – it posted sales of \$75 million across the region last year – and has also launched in Europe and Latin America. Suh also has his eye on Indonesia: “That’s quite an interesting market,” he says. “There’s a population of 250 million and a younger demographic compared to other Asian markets, so we have a tremendous opportunity there.”

To keep its younger audience engaged, Samsonite Red is structured like a fashion collection, launching new spring/summer and fall/winter lines each year. All the products have a clean, minimal, millennial-friendly look, but Suh stresses that Samsonite’s reputation for premium functionality is retained: “All the bags contain compartments for tablets, laptops, and whatever,” he says, “so the Samsonite DNA is definitely there.” The backpacks in particular have been successful as unisex products, he says, but there’s more to do to overcome the perception of Samsonite as a male-centric brand: “The female customer is our current challenge. From this year we’ll be launching a lot more women’s

items, from totes and close-body styles to fashion ranges. At the moment, women's sales are below 10%, but we believe we can get them up to 25% by 2021, and we're very focused on this. We have to create a niche market, between luxury and everyday, but I think we can fit in."

Suh was appointed Samsonite's President for the Asian and Middle East regions in 2014, and he's introduced other innovations, starting Samsonite's home shopping division, which established itself by selling sets of luggage – the record stands at 6,000 sets sold in one hour – and also

presiding over the launch of Kamiliant, a kid-friendly brand whose colourful cases are inspired by the ever-changing skin tone of its near-namesake the chameleon. But his ongoing strategy is to reposition Samsonite as a refreshed, reinvigorated brand, and he's pioneered an initiative called Project Unicorn to bring this about. "We have to be more attractive in design, more innovative; we have to approach things in a more creative manner," he says. "I never relax, I'm always looking for the new opportunity. That's how Korea became the No. 3 market for

Samsonite globally after the US and China." And with Asia experiencing rising per capita income, and boasting a young population keen to tote a fashionable bag to offices and airports alike, his confidence surely isn't misplaced. "Samsonite's moving beyond being a luggage company to a company that caters for people on the move," he says. "Our target is to become a \$5 billion company by 2020, with Asia contributing \$2 billion of that." There's the shortest of pauses. "It's eminently achievable."

the brand's youthful outlook and raise awareness, with startling results; since its launch, Korea has become the third largest market for Samsonite with the highest per capita sales. In 2016, Samsonite Red did \$75-million-worth of business as it was rolled out across Asia, and it's now poised to reinvigorate the Samsonite brand in Latin America and Europe. Hard on its heels has come Kamiliant, an even younger range of pop-coloured cases whose bright hues are based on the ever-changing skin tones of its near-namesake the chameleon. "I never relax, I always look for new initiatives," says Suh, "and the way the company is now structured gives me a lot of freedom to do that."

At the same time as he was giving managers more independence, Parker removed every non-essential cost of the business, shutting down Samsonite's London HQ, halting the licensing agreements with other brands, halving the workforce in the US, putting the retail business into Chapter 11, and reducing overheads by a third in Europe. The company went from a profit of around \$50 million in 2008 to \$196 million – a record profit – in 2010. "That was due to a combination of market recovery, our costs going down dramatically, and having the right products in the right place," says Parker.

Among those products, of course, was Cosmolite – "we had to order three extra machines to produce it, it took off so fast," recalls Rik Hillaert, Vice President of Manufacturing and Hardside Development in Europe – which has proved so popular that it's switched Samsonite Europe's hardside/softside sales percentages, along with other innovations, including Lite



2015 Neopulse



The first polycarbonate product entirely designed and produced at Samsonite's European plants at Oudenaarde in Belgium and Szekszárd in Hungary, Neopulse redefined the benchmark for the lightweight polycarbonate luggage market, adding a "pulsing" design and a metallic colour palette, and a "Made in Europe" stamp. It exemplifies Samsonite's ability to refine its offerings and stay ahead of the game.

Cube (a squared-up Cosmolite, in various colours), B-Lite (the lightest ever softside case), and Lite-Locked (the triple lock from Oyster, applied to a super-light Curv frame). Their popularity, along with the company's renegotiated financing structure, meant that it emerged from the crisis not only intact, but stronger; it made its debut as a public company when it was floated on the Hong Kong stock exchange in 2011, raising \$1.25 billion; shares quickly rose by 50 per cent thereafter. *"It became a truly independent, listed company with proper access to finance, should it need it,"* says Parker.

The region where the impact of these changes was felt the most was the one where it all began – the USA. *"Prior to Tim coming in, we had this globally-driven matrix management organization, which was a little unwieldy,"* says Tom Korbas, former President of Samsonite North America, and now a non-executive director of the company. *"But even prior to that, Samsonite had too high an overhead in the US region, historically. It wasn't exactly a stellar performer, going back years, but the management style just made it worse. After Tim came in, first and foremost, we were able to provide products that were tailored specifically to the US. The other part, importantly, was that we cut our overheads, including 50 per cent of every position held here, from clerks to vice presidents. That gave us more licence to spend money on marketing programmes that we used to increase sales and profits. That local decision-making, and the flexibility with our new cost model, meant we could do anything we wanted to do."* The results, as with Korea, were dramatic; in 2009 the US market was worth \$3.9 million for

Samsonite, in 2015, \$125 million, with annual sales increases of 15.7% without acquisitions, and 22.7% with them.

“When CVC showed up, they actually thought about closing the US business,” says Kyle Gendreau, Samsonite’s Executive Director and Chief Financial Officer. “Today it’s one of our most successful regions. That transformation came about through allowing the local presidents to do what they needed to do.” At the same time, he says, the IPO, which Gendreau himself led, has totally transformed the capital structure of the business and given it the capacity to pursue a multi-branded, multi-category, multi-channel vision. *“Ten years or so ago, we were a one-branded, largely wholesale business, selling mostly travel luggage,”* he says. *“That’s all changed; we’re now 40 per cent non-travel from less than 5 per cent a decade ago, and our retail and e-commerce arms are growing amazingly rapidly. After the IPO, our healthy balance sheet and less hidebound structure meant we could consider acquiring brands that would complement the Samsonite brand, and allow us to play in those adjacent spaces where we’d historically fallen short.”*

Those acquisitions, giving Samsonite a presence in virtually every market sector in the luggage business, are also a reflection of the entrepreneurial instincts of Ramesh Tainwala, who became global CEO of the company when Tim Parker stood down in 2014 (Parker remains non-executive chairman). Samsonite bought the US backpack brand High Sierra in 2012, giving it a larger foothold in the \$4 billion North American casual bag market; in the same year, it acquired Hartmann, a US luxury goods brand founded in 1877 whose plush leather cases were

once the accessory of choice for American presidents. In 2014, it bought the iconic Gregory backpack brand, extending its presence in the outdoor category, and further boosted its softside offering by acquiring Chic Accent, the Italian handbag and travel chain, later the same year: *“It will boost our non-travel categories, including handbags, accessories, and business products,”* says Tainwala. Other acquisitions in the last five years include Lipault, a youthful, female-oriented French brand; and Rolling Luggage, whose 36 airport retail stores in such hubs as Heathrow, Hong Kong and Sydney helped Samsonite strengthen its multi-brand retail platform. In 2017 came the Denver-based eBags, an e-marketplace for bags and luggage in the US, bought for \$105 million. *“E-commerce is increasingly important, of course,”* says Ramesh Tainwala. *“I have no doubt that it will comprise around a quarter to a third of our total business in the next three to five years, and eBags will allow us to get ahead of the curve. We get the largest bag and luggage platform in the US, but also a pool of talented people and technology that’s been fine-tuned for this strategy. We can leverage their knowledge outside the US, and also fill the gap we have in our own online brand offering.”*

Samsonite’s biggest acquisition, however, came in 2016, when it closed a \$1.8 billion deal for Tumi, the luxury brand whose range of stylish bags and cases is the choice for switched-on business travellers. *“It’s a transformative deal for us, because it allows us to play at the high end of the market, but also gets us into the area of business/casual/women’s bags, which is going to be the next phase of growth for this business,”* says Kyle Gendreau. *“Tumi gives*

us a genuine high-end presence. Samsonite Black Label fell short because the parent brand couldn't transcend its mid-upper brand DNA, but Tumi gives us access to the premium/luxury market in one fell swoop, plus their business is 60 per cent non-travel. It's helped us open our eyes for the rest of our business. You'll see us pursue a 'women first' strategy with what we learn from Tumi going forward. It's a market sector we've struggled with in the past; our brands were very masculine. But now we've got the conviction that we can be a genuine player in that area."

After a century of world travels, Samsonite has proved to have all the qualities of one of its classic cases: strength, durability, lightness of touch, adaptability. It recently expanded its plant in Szekszárd, Hungary, enabling it to produce 900 units a day, while the plants in Oudenaarde and Nashik continue as the manufacturing and distribution hubs. Along with the double-digit growth in Europe and the US, the Asian markets continue to soar, with India becoming the fourth largest market, after the US, China and Korea; the Nashik plant is now supplemented by factories across the region, from China and Cambodia to Taiwan and Korea. And the brand has a truly worldwide presence, from joint ventures in Russia and South Africa to a subsidiary in the Chilean capital Santiago. Latin America is a region that Tainwala has his eye on: *"Around 35% of our business is from Asia, another third from North America, 25% from Europe, and 5% from Latin America,"* he says. *"It's a market that's been under-serviced, and we're going to adopt the same strategy as we did in Asia – investment in retail, marketing*

TUMI OR NOT TUMI

There's no question about it; Samsonite's most prestigious acquisition is a jewel in its portfolio.

When Samsonite announced that it had agreed to pay \$1.8 billion to acquire Tumi in March 2016, the deal represented more than two of the biggest names in the travel industry joining forces; it meant that Samsonite would become a more dominant force at the up-scale end of the market, a sector it had found difficult to crack in the past.

"We always wanted to have a play in this segment, but we've never been able to do it in a very credible way," says Ramesh Tainwala, Samsonite CEO. *"Tumi now represents our traveller lifestyle line, in the way we tried to establish with our own Black Label in the past. It allows us to thoroughly cover the \$500-plus end of the market, and gives more presence to our multi-brand strategy."* Plus, he adds, not incidentally, Tumi is a pretty covetable brand in its own right.

In fact, over the course of its 40-year existence, Tumi has become the stealth-luxe brand of choice for switched-on business travellers, its sleek nylon cases, holdalls and totes accompanying frequent flyers and intercontinental executives through airport lounges and hotel suites. *"If you're the type who likes to make an impression, you can't go wrong with Tumi,"* says Arne Borrey, Samsonite's European President. *"If, on the other hand, you're concerned with performance, Tumi's always had a repu-*

tation for going above and beyond. It's built a huge and loyal fanbase, and it's also earned a portfolio of patents for its design excellence and technical breakthroughs."

Tumi was founded by Charlie Clifford, a former marketing man in New Jersey who went into the luggage business after a stint in the American Peace Corps in Peru; its name is taken from a Peruvian ceremonial knife once used in sacrifices. Enamoured with Peruvian handicrafts, he set up an import business and amassed start-up capital selling leather tennis bags.

With no business plan or market research – and certainly no focus-grouping – Clifford found two factories in Colombia to produce big, soft, unstructured bags. *"Our biggest hit was a rugged duffel bag made from what's called naked leather – very rustic, with a pungent aroma,"* he recalls. The \$50 bags were an instant hit; in its first year, Tumi sales reached \$625,000. Clifford brainstormed with shop owners and customers, trying to discern what travellers were looking for, and in the 80s he established the defining aesthetic of the brand when Tumi branched out from leather and introduced soft, smart, ultra-functional black-on-black bags made from a heavy-duty ballistic nylon that was originally designed for flak jackets. The brand's marketing targeted business travellers who

wanted style and substance; *"100,000 miles and this bag will look better than ever,"* read the ad slogans, but the detailing was equally important. The iconic design incorporated a wide opening with a U-shaped zipper and plenty of organizational pockets to streamline the packing process: *"We also made constant changes and tweaks,"* says Clifford. *"Better handles, more pockets, stronger screws to hold the piece together."* Tumi started selling in Europe in the 90s, quickly establishing stand-alone spots in eminent department stores like Harrods in London and Galeries Lafayette in Paris. *"These markets were perfect for Tumi,"* says Clifford. *"We found an affluent clientele that cared about how a product was made and styled."*

Tumi also gained a reputation for cutting-edge collaborations. A PowerPack backpack, incorporating technology for charging phones and PDAs, was designed in partnership with the British artist Anish Kapoor; some of their bags carry a *"global locator"* device to let you know how close it is when you're waiting at the airport, and many also carry a Tumi Tracer, a unique 20-digit registration number printed on a metal plate to help reunite customers with lost or stolen items. They have also partnered with Italian motorcycle manufacturer Ducati and graffiti artist John "Crash" Matos to produce limited-edition ranges.

Such innovations have elevated Tumi to a prime position in every sense – it pulled in \$548 million in sales in 2015 – and make it a star offering in the Samsonite brand portfolio. *“It starts where the Samsonite brand stops, at around 500 Euros, or 350–400 for softside,”* says Arne Borrey. *“Tumi enhances our offering, and it’s always been very much a retail brand, which helps Samsonite on its journey to becoming a direct-to-consumer brand.”*

“Ever since our IPO and the change in our capital structure made our multi-brand strategy possible, we’ve been looking to capture a portion of the high-end market,” says Kyle Gendreau, Samsonite’s CFO. *“Tumi is a huge, transformative deal for us, because it allows us to play at that high end, but it also brings us a big foothold in the area of business/casual/women’s bags that are going to be the next*

phase of growth for this business. Samsonite Black Label fell short for us because we couldn’t transcend the mid-upper brand DNA; Tumi gives us that premium/luxury sector in one fell swoop. Their business is 60 per cent non-travel, and 40 per cent luggage, and they’ve had amazing success in the last two to three years with what we call functional women’s products; business bags for women who don’t necessarily want to carry a LVMH bag to work. So what it’s done is opened up our eyes in a cross-brand kind of way; you’ll see us pursue a ‘women first’ strategy with what we’ve learned from Tumi. This is a market sector we’ve struggled with in the past, because our brands were perceived as being very masculine. We never had the conviction to really go for the female market, until now. In the next few years, a large part of our growth will come from our focus on that area.”

“Tumi’s always seen itself as a lifestyle brand,” says Victor Sanz, Tumi’s creative director. *“And, today, luggage is very much a part of your lifestyle. In the past, your case was just a black box that hauled your stuff from A to B, but today, fashion, design, architecture and engineering are more and more interwoven, and the bag you carry reflects that. It also reflects the fact that the old lines between formal and informal have really broken down. I call it ‘from the boardroom to the bar’ – your bag should be able to take you from one to the other with ease, because business and leisure slide into each other today. We try to create products that are sophisticated and smart enough to work in all those contexts, and even make them feel inspired, and we know this is also a journey that Samsonite’s been on; after all, the globe’s a*



much smaller place, business has become truly international, and people are going straight from the airport to a meeting and then maybe out for dinner with prospective clients. I want a bag that enables me to express myself in all those moments.”

Tumi’s ambitions are matched by Samsonite’s for their game-changing acquisition. *“We intend to expand Tumi’s reach in international markets,”* says Rob Cooper, General Manager, North America, Tumi. Currently, the brand gets 68 per cent of its sales in North America, with just 17 per cent coming from Asia and 14 per cent from its Europe, Middle East and Africa division. *“There’s obviously great potential there,”* says Cooper. *“Plus, we think it could be a stronger business in hardside luggage, which Samsonite is obviously expert in. We can certainly learn from each other.”*

“Samsonite has a tremendous history, and Tumi is a much younger company in comparison,” says Victor Sanz. *“The really interesting part, for me, is that we both exist in the same space, but we’re built on two different and distinct stories. When Charlie founded the company, it was on the principles of durability and quality and innovation, and that’s been a through-line for the brand, allowing Tumi to explore different avenues: how do we change the industry? How do we create new methodologies for constructing luggage? How do we look at our customer base and bring them new products in line with their needs? Through it all, we’ve always striven to bring the highest-quality product we can to our customer. Working now with Samsonite, we’re able to tap into some of the technology that they pioneered, and we have an amazing opportunity to grow the*

brand alongside a huge team of like-minded people. With the resources at Samsonite’s disposal, it feels like we’ve got loads more eyes in the world to look at things like new materials and access to new markets. Combine all that with our mutual sensibility of quality and customer-first outlook, and it’s a real recipe for success.”

Tumi has built its enviable reputation on its constant innovations in design. In the 1970s, adventurers on the hippie trail loved the handcrafted leather; in the 80s and 90s, high-flying yuppies embraced the opportunity to pack their socks in a separate, immaculately-crafted compartment from their shirts. Now that it’s part of the Samsonite family, it seems destined to establish itself as the brand of choice for tech-savvy people on the move who want luggage as smart as they are.



and communication. There's no reason why Latin America shouldn't make up 15–20% of our revenue in the next 5–7 years." Roberto Guzmán, Samsonite's President, Latin America, agrees: *"We've doubled the number of stores in the past two years, from 90 to 180, with 90 more coming in the next couple of years,"* he says. *"We've done that by developing products at a lower price point, because our per capita income is lower than many other regions, so we've concentrated on areas like back-to-school backpacks and handbags; we have our own women's line here. American Tourister has also gone down really well. There's great potential here for our multi-brand strategy. We have 32 stores in Brazil alone, and Mexico is also strong. In Chile we already have the highest per-capita sell-through figure for the brand worldwide; if we invest in our long-term vision, we'll do great things."*

Samsonite enjoyed a market capitalization of \$6 billion in June 2017. From such a position, it can look with confidence to the future, while celebrating its illustrious past; its 2017 ad campaign, shot by the celebrated British photographer Rankin, featured a bunch of hipster travellers – including a Royal Ballet soloist and a bunch of DJs and vloggers – flinging, dropping, bashing and kicking their impervious Cosmolite cases, in a modern echo of the Shwayder brothers perched atop their early trunk. But laurels aren't being rested on. *"Competition and tastes in the luggage industry are dynamic,"* says Tim Parker. *"If you can't move quickly you'll get left behind."* To that end, Samsonite is well on the way to transforming into a bag company that makes suitcases, rather than vice versa; one of Ramesh Tainwala's strategies is to get to a

point within the next five years where 50 per cent of Samsonite's business is non-luggage. *"In Asia, non-luggage sales are already 50 per cent, in Europe it's 20 per cent,"* he says. *"In America it's a little further behind, but there's no reason it shouldn't catch up."*

Over all the changes Samsonite has seen through the last century, however – hardside to softside, horizontal to vertical, heavy trunk to Cosmolite, single-offering to multi-brand – one thing has remained constant: the ethics embodied in the Samsonite marble. *"Nothing has changed as far as human relations are concerned in this company,"* says Veerle Batteauw, Samsonite's Executive Secretary and the longest-serving employee in Europe; she joined the company in 1973. *"If you have a problem, you can share it. I've loved seeing the growth and watching people all doing their utmost to reach their objectives. I firmly believe that you get back what you give out, which has always been the way here."*

"Samsonite has gone from a production to a wholesale company, and is now well on its way to becoming a retail company," says Arne Borrey, President of Samsonite Europe. *"That's an interesting trajectory for a 110-year-old business. It's constantly moving, and stays absolutely relevant, which is one of the beautiful things about it. We've always made great products, but adapted to consumers' changing needs. Eight out of ten innovations in the luggage world have come from us."*

"Everyone travels, and they're becoming more and more aware of the kind of bag they're carrying," says Tim Parker. *"Bags need to be smarter to match the people that are using them. Samsonite's always stayed ahead of the game, and it's never let people down. That's the message we'll be carrying with us as we go forward."*

1721
1
Lost and found

Samsonite
(SAMSONITE)
A journey through the
Samsonite archive

DATE JUL 1 1985
SUBJECT
TECHNICAL DATA



When a company has been manufacturing, developing, and innovating as long as Samsonite has – 117 years and counting – it amasses a large, and intriguing, archive of material that documents social, cultural and technological change alongside the evolution of its products from solid trunks to high-tech, featherweight cases.

During the compiling of this book, many of these images – vintage advertisements, commemorative photos of factory openings, behind-the-scenes shots – have come to light. The following pages present a series of snapshots of a company that’s always looked forward and embraced the new, while acknowledging its rich heritage; a company that’s covered almost as great a distance as its celebrated luggage.

“It’s going places,” promises one of the earliest Samsonite ads. This look back at the archive reveals some of the more significant places and lives the company’s touched along the way.

A ROOM WITH A VIEW
Jesse Shwayder's private office at Samsonite's Denver HQ in 1970 (1)
BROTHERS IN ARMS
Ben, Jesse and Mark Shwayder stand outside the huge new Samsonite plant at 1050 South Broadway in Denver (2)
BUILDING A BRAND
Samsonite's various factories, on three continents, represent a century's-worth of building styles, from the grand facades of Shwayder Bros.' original plants in Denver (3) to the evolution of the Oudenaarde plant, from classic 60s red-brick (4) to sleek and postmodern facilities as Samsonite Italia at Saltrio (5), Belgium's Torhout factory (6), the Montebello "campus" in Denver (7), the recently expanded plant in Szekszárd, Hungary (8), the Henin-Beaumont factory in France (9), the plant at Tres Cantos in Spain (10) and Nashik in India (11).



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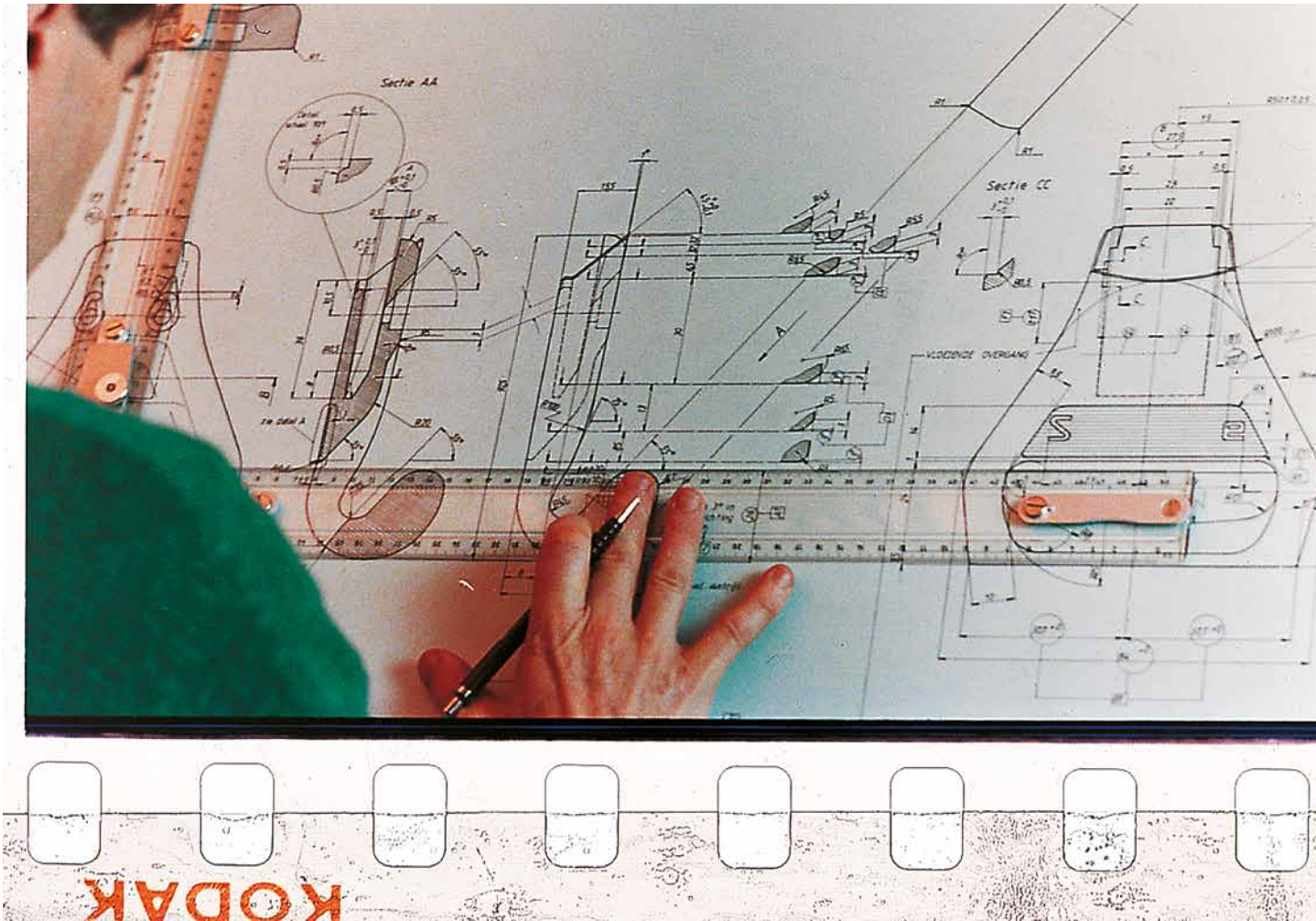


11

BREAKING THE MOULD
Samsonite has always combined traditional technical know-how (2), and state-of-the-art equipment and facilities (3, 4, 7, 8) to create a workforce-first environment (1, 5, 6) reflecting the company's philosophy that a quality product requires a quality environment, and that people work better in custom-built, convivial surroundings.



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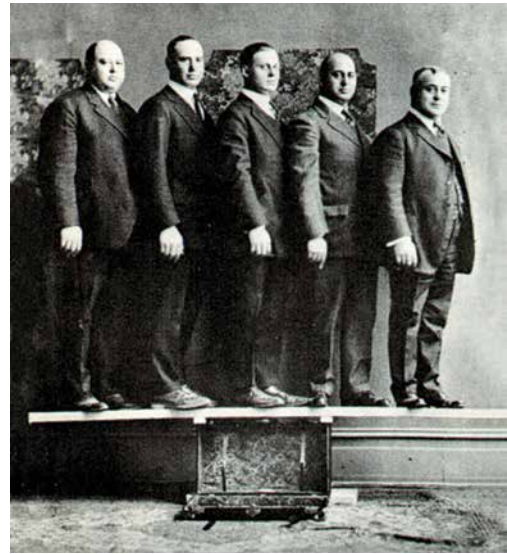
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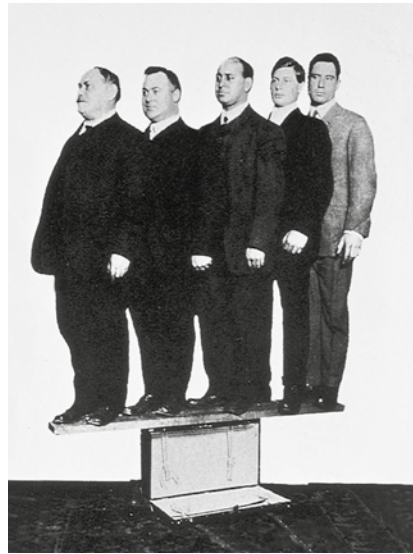
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MIGHT IS RIGHT
"Strong enough to stand on" was the initial promise made of the Shwayder Bros. trunk, illustrated by the failure of the combined weight of the whole of the Shwayder clan to make a dent in it (1, 2). Later versions of the same eye-catching marketing campaign were used to promote the Samsonite suitcase (3), the Classic Attache (6), and the Oyster, refusing to succumb to the efforts of former Samsonite CEO Luc Van Nevel and marketing director Rita Debou (5). Meanwhile, in a publicity shot for the 1964 movie *The Pleasure Seekers*, Carol Lynsey, Ann Margret and Pamela Tiffin prove that Samsonite is also strong enough to sit on (and won't be punctured by the sharpest stilettos) (4).



6

TOUGH LOVE – Just how much punishment can a Samsonite case withstand? Various indelible ad campaigns have attempted to illustrate this over the years. You can pour boiling water on it (1); you can arm-wrestle with it (2); you can allow various animals to abuse it (3, 4, 5); you can downhill-ski on it (6); you can even wheel it along a bulldozer’s blade (9). Though why you would want to do any of these things is another question.



1



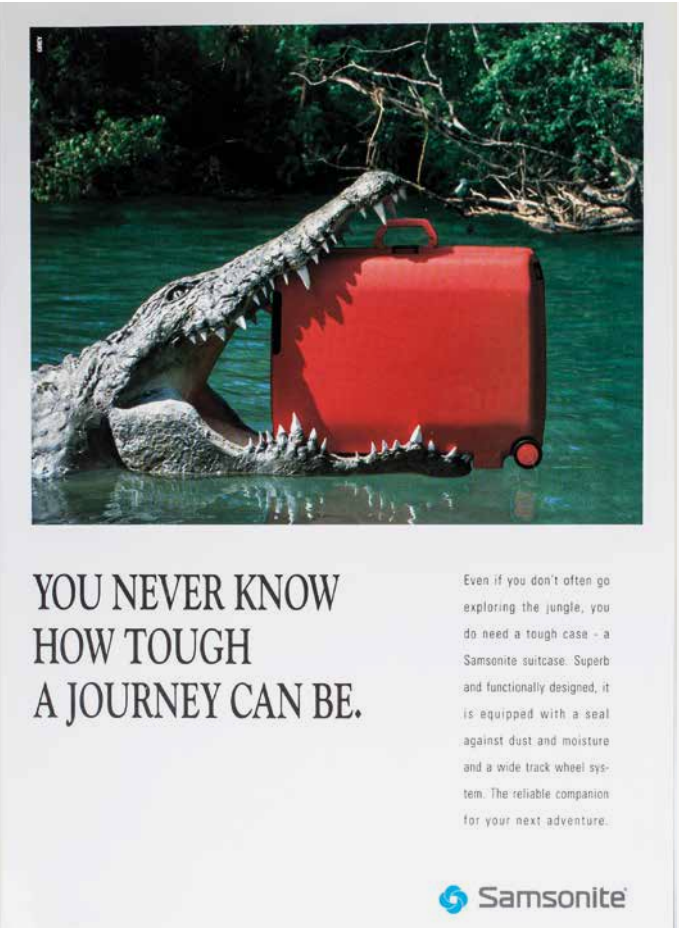
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ROLLING NEWS – The 90s was the era when cases sprouted wheels, briefcases grew shoulder-straps, and mini-backpacks became fashion statements. The Silhouette cases – the first to be fully pullable – were a revolution in both the literal and the figurative sense, while the off-the-shoulder bags made the whole idea of a carry-on less of a, well, carry-on. The reaction to one of Samsonite's most fundamental luggage innovations, as the age of the mobile case was ushered in? What a wonderful whirl.





Samsonite
Streamlite Luggage

It's going places!

From Marseilles to Manila to Mason City, you'll find Samsonite luggage the favorite travelling companion of our men and women in uniform. They've been doing rugged jobs, and they appreciate rugged luggage . . . luggage that stays smart in any climate. That's why Post Exchanges and Ship's Service Stores all over the world have sold more Samsonite than any other brand of luggage.

Now that our war job is done, we'll be supplying Mr. and Mrs. America with more and better Samsonite luggage . . . distinguished for its advanced design, its smart beauty, its rugged utility, its matchless value . . . the luggage that's "strong enough to stand on." At better stores everywhere.

Men's overnight case, above. • Men's two-suitcase, at right, typical of Samsonite style, Samsonite value.

Popular price range—in men's and women's luggage—from \$12 to \$30 approximately, according to size and style.
Subject to existing United States government taxes.

Strong enough to stand on
SHWAYDER BROS., INC.
Denver • Detroit

MAKERS OF SAMSONITE LUGGAGE, SAMSON CARD TABLES & SAMSON FOLDING CHAIRS

STYLE STATEMENT
"Luggage for the fashion individualist," promised the tagline for Samsonite Fashionaire, and the company's ranges have always aimed to cut as much of a dash as their users, from the trunks accompanying demobbed soldiers after the Second World War to the new generation of long-haulers jetting off with their Samsonite Silhouette cases and the sporty 80s couple heading off on their latest jaunt with their FleeBags.



Room—Rangoon to Rhode Island! "Smartest set" you'll see is Silhouette, for men and women with taste . . . and appreciation of the practical. Silhouette is molded of airtight magnesium, covered in wear-resistant vinyl. Hidden locks can't fly open. Precision-planned interiors hold more than you'd dream. Go Silhouette! Available in an array of four exciting colors: Oxford Grey, Desert Tan, Dover White, and Riekyne Blue.

Elegant magnesium luggage without a lock in sight **Silhouette by Samsonite**

©1952 Shwayder Bros., Inc. Luggage Division, Denver, Colorado. Makers of Samsonite Folding Card Tables. Prices plus shipping. Made in Canada U.S.A. The Samsonite of London Ltd., Bradford, England. Price subject to change.



From San Valley to sunny Sorrento, the "smart set" is Silhouette, sleekest luggage in the world—and the most practical. Light as a cloud, yet strong! And Silhouette has hidden locks that can't spring open accidentally. The interior is designed to keep clothes tailor-made, ready to wear. Your choice of four smart colors: Oxford Grey, Desert Tan, Dover White, and Riekyne Blue. Elegant magnesium luggage without a lock in sight **Silhouette by Samsonite**

©1952 Shwayder Bros., Inc. Luggage Division, Denver, Colorado. Makers of Samsonite Folding Card Tables. Prices plus shipping. Made in Canada U.S.A. The Samsonite of London Ltd., Bradford, England. Price subject to change.



Luggage for the fashion individualist
She chooses the luggage that travels with dash—and durability. Roomy, beautiful interiors, pliable sides, a lightweight magnesium frame that weathers the roughest journeys, and exclusive hidden locks. Luggage this versatile could only be... **Samsonite Fashionaire®**
The Fashionaire luggage that doesn't go to sleep.



IS THE SAMSONITE WAY?

Only Samsonite Offers All These Outstanding Features!

SAMSONITE



flee!

Samsonite Streamlite
NOW AT NEW LOW PRICES!



Class.
It never goes out of style.

Samsonite Fashionaire. Luggage that's classic. Its soft sides give a little to take a lot. It's rugged frame, of lightweight magnesium never buckles under. And its streamlined locks will never fly open in public. Our Fashionaire line is available in a number of fashion-conscious solids plus several dazzling patterns like Wild Garden, rio, shown.

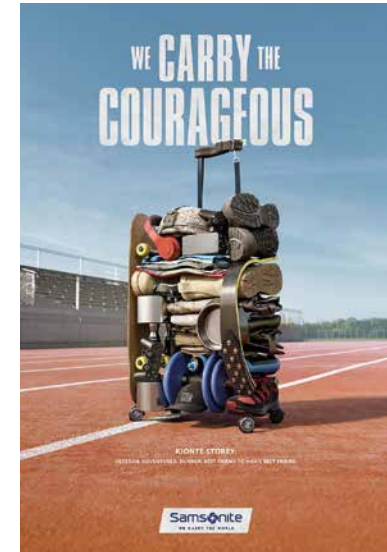
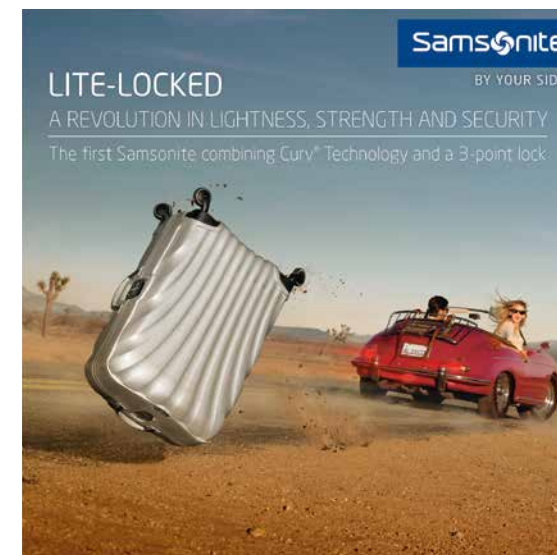
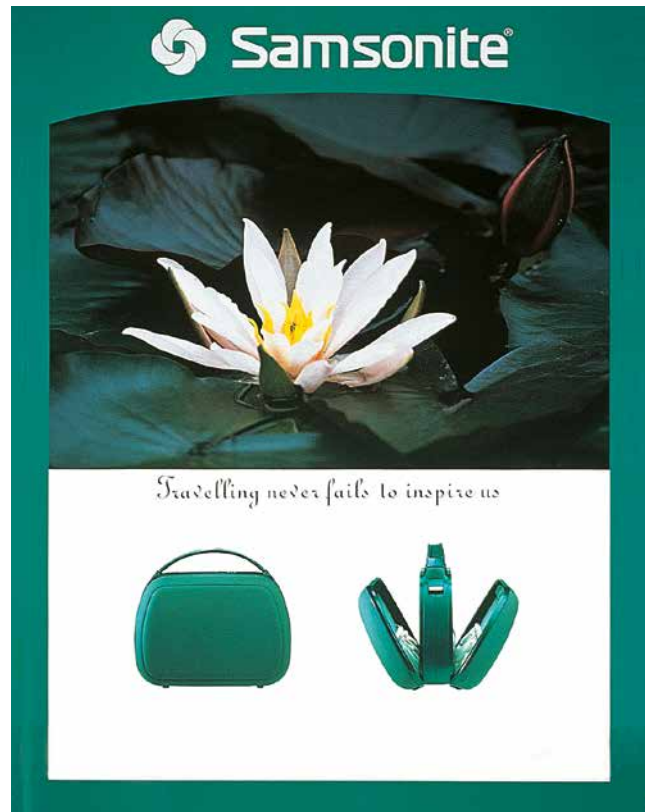
Look for Samsonite Fashionaire whenever fine luggage is sold. You'll carry it all with style. Shown, from left to right, the 29" World Traveler, \$80; Ladies Petite Tote, \$33; Ladies Beauty Case, \$45; and 29" Pullman Case, \$70.

We make travel a little easier.
Samsonite



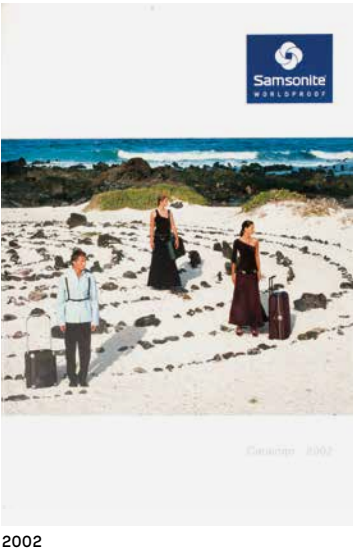
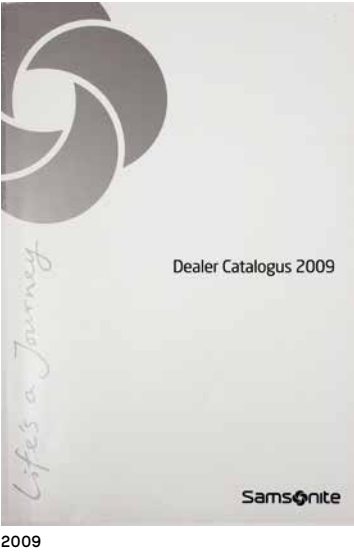
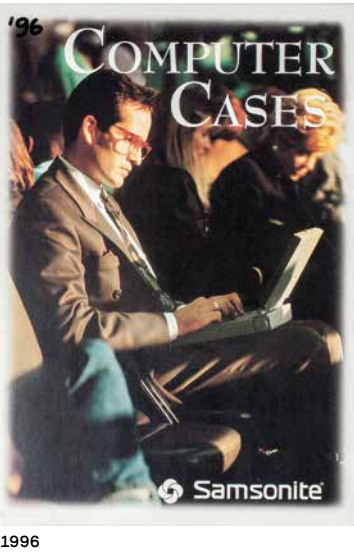
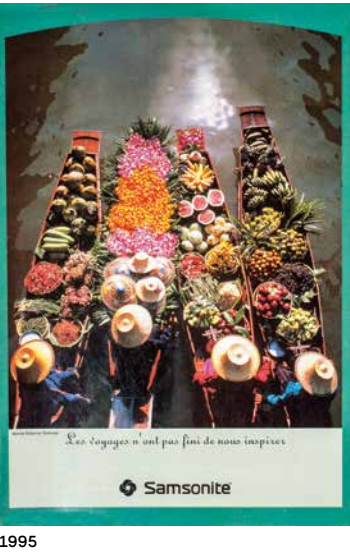
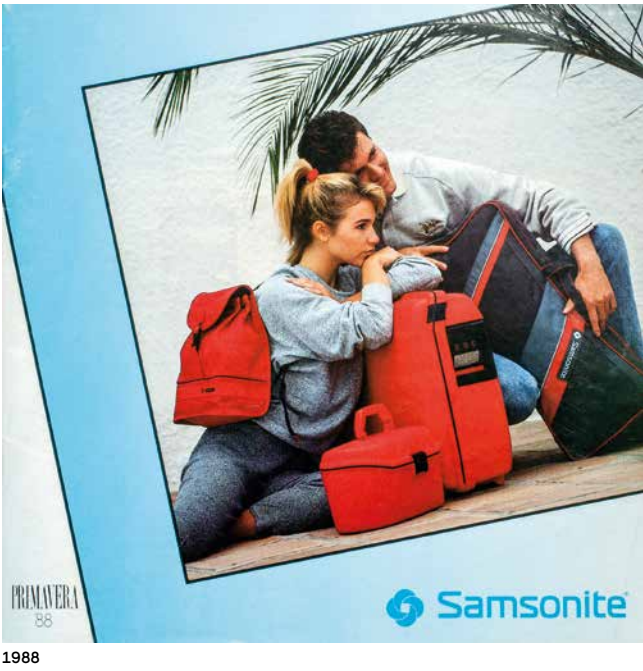
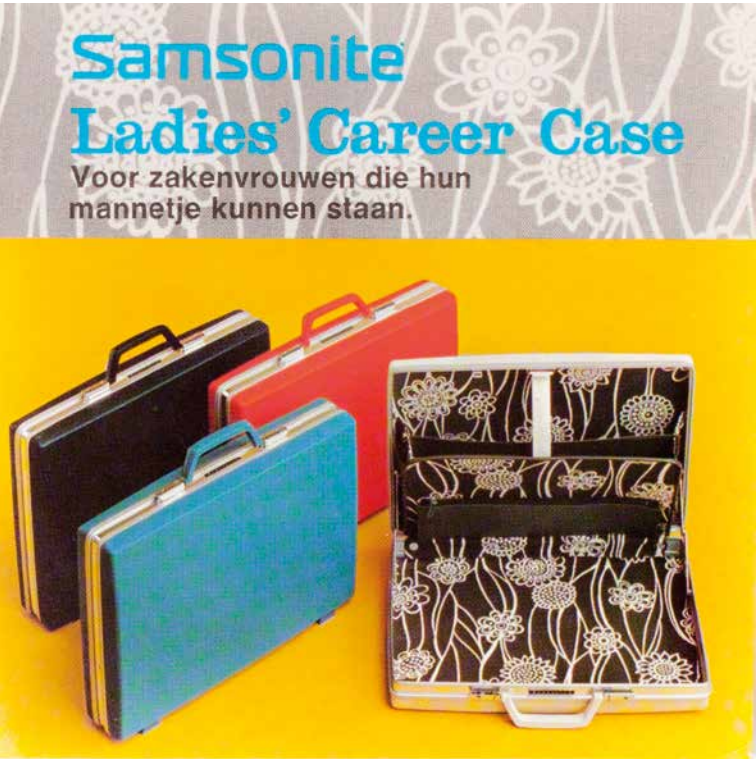
FleeBags

Samsonite



WORLD IN MOTION
As the planet got smaller, and journeys got more involved, Samsonite campaigns began to stress the ways in which their lighter, more portable, more stylish bags could help ease frequent flyers' burdens. Thus, the businessman with the carry-on gets to the head of the taxi queue; Sir Richard Branson's bags are featherweight enough to accompany him into zero gravity; and the hipsters can manoeuvre their Cosmolites through the tightest spaces.





BY THE BOOK – Samsonite’s worldwide brochures have long been showcases for the brand and its wares, from the strong graphic punch of the 50s and 60s, through the more aspirational lifestyle focus of the 80s, to the more elliptical art and design-centred presentations of the 90s and 2000s. Throughout all the changes in emphasis, however, the underlying message has remained constant: style and practicality go hand in hand.



Appendix

- Timeline
- Index
- Epilogue

1882



FOUNDING FATHER
Samsonite founder Jesse Shwayder is born in Central City, Colorado, one of eleven children of Polish immigrants to the American west. He learns about business by working in his father’s grocery and used furniture stores.

1905



FAMILY SNAP
The extended Shwayder family pose on a staircase at the Green Gables Country Club in Denver, Colorado, to celebrate the 80th birthday of the matriarch Rachel Shwayder, Jesse’s grandmother.

1910



START-UP
Jesse Shwayder founds the Shwayder Trunk Manufacturing Company on March 10th, with his life savings of \$3,500 and a workforce of ten men.

MILESTONE SUITCASE: TRUNK
Jesse redesigns the basic hand case, applying metal studs and christening it “Samson” to emphasize its strength. Its premium nature is stressed by its \$4.98 asking price.



STANDING TALL
Jesse (in the centre) and his three brothers, plus his father, are pictured standing atop a Shwayder trunk. The picture is used extensively in direct-mail circulars, and the message hits home; sales climb from \$85,000 to \$300,000 in the space of two years. Following the death of his father, Jesse replaces him in the picture with another of his brothers.

1917



STRONG STUFF
Shwayder Co is selling \$76,000-worth of luggage annually, thanks to some canny marketing; the durability of its “Samson” case is demonstrated by its ability to withstand boiling water and the weight of the portliest gentlemen. “*Strong enough to stand on*” is the slogan the company adopts.

1920



FLOUR POWER
Jesse Shwayder’s marketing skills come to the fore when he devises a window display for his new “*wonder case*” that shows it supporting a thousand-pounds-worth of flour sacks; the campaign brings in a wealth of new business.

1923



POWER PLANT
Shwayder Co moves into a gleaming new 80,000-square-foot factory in South Denver with a state-of-the-art assembly line. It will eventually grow to half a million square feet of floor space.

1926



BROTHERS IN ARMS
A red-letter-year for Jesse and his company, with sales hitting the \$1-million mark for the first time. He employs all his brothers in the business and gives them all shares.

1928

GOING EAST
Shwayder Co opens a second plant, an 85,000-square-foot factory in Ecorse, a suburb of Detroit. Within a year, it produces luggage worth \$500,000.

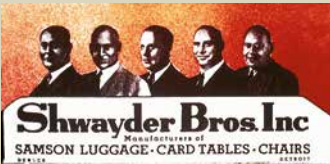
1930



CASE STUDY: “OVER-SIZE” SUITCASE
This \$2.35 case is described in a contemporary company circular as made in “*beautiful hand-boarded grain,*” featuring “*strong, Vulco-cord straps*” and “*nickel-plated Samson corners.*”

TURNING TWENTY
The Shwayder Manufacturing Co’s “Twentieth Anniversary Catalog” celebrates products including a \$2.60 case made of “*genuine SamsonHyde,*” a tough-but-elastic metal compound that anticipates the Samsonite brand name by a full decade.

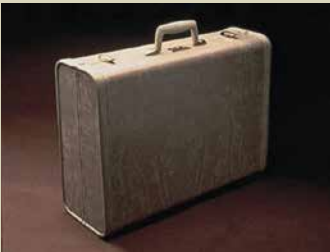
1931



CARD TRICK
Shwayder starts manufacturing furniture and accessories, including card tables – which for a while outstrip luggage sales – in an effort to respond to the stock market crash of 1929.

NAME CHANGE
The company is incorporated and changes its name from Shwayder Trunk Manufacturing Co to Shwayder Bros. Inc., with Jesse as president.

1939



CASE STUDY: SAMSONITE
The company introduces a suitcase covered with sturdy vulcanized fibre that Jesse dubs “*Samsonite.*” Its tapered shape is destined to become an industry classic.

1940



ON A WAR FOOTING
Jesse Shwayder holds an incendiary bomb; the company converts its plants to manufacture bombs, torpedo casings, grenades, and fire generator units for the Chemical Corps during World War 2.

1949

STEEL LIFE
Such is the demand for Shwayder Bros.’ all-steel folding outdoor chair and companion table that the company opens a 65,000-square-foot plant in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on the doorstep of its steel supplier.

1950



MILESTONE SUITCASE: STREAMLITE
For Streamlite, the company switches from lithographed fibreboard covering to lithographed paper, making for better printing quality; thus, matching luggage sets become a reality for the first time. A later plastic-coated version makes Streamlite even lighter.

1953



SAMSONITE MARBLE
For many years, the marble is presented to all new Samsonite employees as a reminder of the company’s founding values; a poster bearing the marble and the Biblical legend is one of the first things visitors see at Samsonite’s American HQ in Mansfield, Massachusetts. “*It’s a reminder of our ethos, writ large,*” says Lynne Berard, President of Samsonite USA.

1955



CARRY-ON
A Special Products Division is set up to design, manufacture and market specialized carrying cases that can be used to convey everything from musical instruments to electronic equipment; as a result, major industrial players like Collins Radio, IBM, and Western Electric all become Shwayder customers.

LOOKING NORTH
Shwayder Bros. establishes its first production facility outside the US, with the opening of a 60,000-square-foot Canadian plant in Stafford, Ontario.

1956



CASE STUDY: ULTRALITE
Lite by name, lite by nature; Ultralite is the first case to forego wooden box construction in favour of a revolutionary combination of “jet age” magnesium and injection-moulded vinyl cellulose.

1958



MILESTONE SUITCASE: SILHOUETTE
Silhouette is a range strong on innovation – locks, recessed hardware and fittings are all part of the smooth, sleek design – and style; “Choose your luggage like you do your china,” exhorts one of the posters showing off the range’s various colourways. Later versions are even tougher than the magnesium-vinyl original.

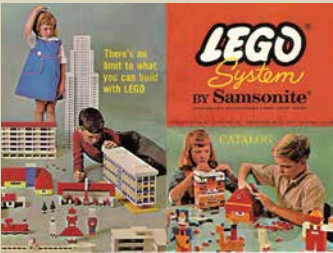
1960



PLAYING BY THE RULES
Jesse Shwayder shows off his “Golden Rule” marbles, on which are inscribed the company motto – “Do Unto Others As You Would Have Them Do Unto You” – which, at one time, were issued to every new Samsonite employee, as well as visitors to its various production facilities.

1961

KINGDOM COME
Jesse’s son, King David Shwayder, takes over as president of Shwayder Bros., and starts to restructure the company along modern lines. Jesse sits back, but retains an active role.



TOY STORY
Shwayder Bros. begins manufacturing and distributing Lego for the North American market under licence from the Danish parent firm. A licensing dispute eventually ends the arrangement in the US in 1972.

1962



MILESTONE SUITCASE: CLASSIC ATTACHE
The first Samsonite product to be thoroughly researched before its launch immediately becomes the Mad Men-style executive’s magnesium-reinforced ABS document carrier of choice, and sends the company’s name around the world.

1965

NAME CHANGE
The board votes to change the company name from Shwayder Bros. Inc. to Samsonite Corporation; after 55 years, the name of the founder is no longer emblazoned above the door.

1965



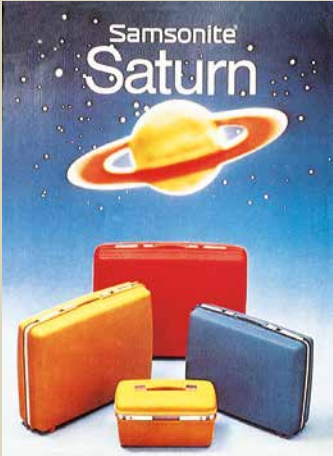
INTO EUROPE
Samsonite’s European HQ is founded in the town of Oudenaarde in East Flanders, Belgium – it initially produces a grand total of 25 cases a day. The mid-60s also see the opening of Samsonite plants in Mexico City, Japan, and the small Dutch town of Tilburg.

1966

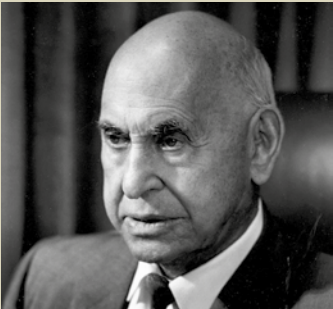


DENVER EXPANSION
King David Shwayder holds aloft a model of the new Samsonite headquarters building, the centrepiece of a 100-acre “campus” built in Montebello, a development in north-east Denver, that also includes a hardware plant, assembly plant, industrial relations building, and power plant.

1969



MILESTONE SUITCASE: SATURN
As the moon landings take place, Samsonite also reaches for the stars with the first case to incorporate “space age” polypropylene with a structure fully supported by injection-moulded shells, Samsonite’s niftiest iteration of the lightness-strength combination yet. Its revolutionary design will set the template for producing modern hardside luggage.



DEATH OF THE FOUNDER
Jesse Shwayder dies at the ripe old age of 88. Samsonite pledges to stick to his core philosophy of “Make it Better, Make it Different.”



ATTACHE
The Classic Attache was such a sales success that, in 1966, Samsonite launched a mid-priced version to satisfy demand. It was joined by new luggage lines and a new range of outdoor furniture.

1969

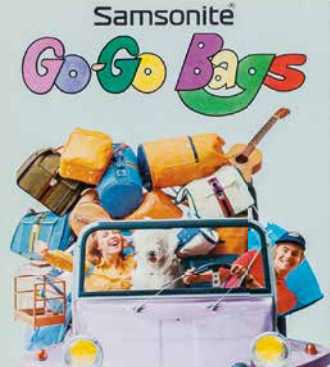


FLYING HIGH
Advertising campaigns for the Classic Attache become classics themselves, particularly those featuring a businessman wielding his lightweight case through the clouds, and a French campaign featuring an executive leaving an adult store with the tagline: “No matter what’s inside your Samsonite Attache Case, you’ll always look professional.”

1970



CASE STUDY: SILHOUETTE BLUE
The first “European” innovation in Samsonite luggage is pioneered at the Oudenaarde manufacturing facility in Belgium, when a Silhouette version fitted with combination locks is produced.



SOFTSIDE SALES
In the early Seventies, softside sales in Europe started to take off. The Go-Go bag imported from Ace in Japan proved particularly popular.

1972

IRVING SHWAYDER
From 1972 to 1987 a nephew of Jesse Shwayder, Irving Shwayder (1922–2003), held the company presidency.

1973

BUYING POWER
Samsonite is bought by the giant Beatrice Foods group, which allows the company to continue its operations independently.

1973



STATUS SYMBOL
Samsonite’s new logo is introduced. The “Samsonite Swirl” features four interlocking leaves that stand for design, development, market research and publicity, and also highlights the company’s presence on four continents. Simple, clean and modern, it encapsulates the company’s strengths and aspirations.



SOFT TOUCH
The first durable softside luggage is produced in Europe at Samsonite’s new plant in Torhout, Belgium.

1974



EUROPEAN EXPANSION
The plant at Oudenaarde is extended; the new facility will eventually encompass 1,500,000 square feet. Its initial brief is to produce European variants on Samsonite classics and to beef up softside production.

1984



GOING FOR A SONG
Samsonite acquires Lark, a leading premium luggage brand targeted at business travellers, manufacturing sleek, sophisticated softside bags and suitcases in a unique champagne colour scheme.

1985



SUITS YOU
Under new CEO Malcolm Candlish, Samsonite launches what it calls “*The World’s Greatest Garment Bag*,” aka the CarryPak 12 Valet suit carrier, which contains two fold-out locking hanger fixtures as well as nine internal pockets lined in nylon.

1986



MILESTONE SUITCASE: OYSTER
Oyster breaks the mould – quite literally – by boasting an injection-moulded plastic frame rather than a metal frame, making it Samsonite’s lightest case yet. Its three-bolt locking system and all-round stylishness help it become the fastest-selling suitcase of all time.

MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS
The Beatrice Foods group is split up. After a series of takeovers and buyouts, Samsonite ends up as part of a new company called E-II, which is later sold on to the Riklis Family Corporation. Steven Green, E-II’s chairman, becomes Samsonite’s CEO, and pledges to nurture the brand.

1990



BIGGER AND BETTER
The plant at Oudenaarde expands further, with new machinery and a larger production unit. High-tech equipment for product development is also installed, and a four-storey office building is erected to accommodate the administrative HQ. Now there is even more scope to act on founder Jesse Shwayder’s dictum: “*Make it better, make it different.*”

1990



POWER PLAY
Samsonite continues its sporting sponsorships, backing former Miami Vice star Don Johnson in the first Samsonite/Revlon Battle on the Seas 154-mile powerboat race.



CASE STUDY: SPECTRUM
Spectrum is unique in having a built-in braking system to stop it from rolling away; unfortunately, it doesn’t take off – literally or figuratively – because the system makes the case too heavy.



1990



MILESTONE SUITCASE: PIGGYBACK
Originally developed by Samsonite US, the Piggyback is the first upright wheeled case; its retractable strap system makes it possible to load extra pieces of luggage to the frame as required. Its smaller but no less effective sibling is naturally christened the Piglet.

1991



NEW PLANTS
Brand new Samsonite facilities are inaugurated at Saltrio, Italy, and in Szekszárd in southwestern Hungary.

1992



TO RUSSIA WITH LOVE
After the Iron Curtain falls, Samsonite products are finally available to buy in Russia, from a dedicated outlet inside the legendary GUM department store, just off Red Square.

1993



CASE STUDY: THE HANDY CASE
Handy by name, handy by nature; Samsonite’s dedicated beauty case for women on the go is distinguished by its fold-out panels – perfect for accessing make-up – inspired by the petals of a water lily.

1993



AMERICAN BEAUTY
Samsonite buys American Tourister, a lower-priced and long-established luggage company; the acquisition brings with it just under 100 retail outlets across the US, posting sales of over \$75 million per year, and a much-loved TV ad campaign, featuring an angry chimp called Oofi.

1994



MILESTONE SUITCASE: ZIPLITE
The first polypropylene suitcase with zipper closure, Ziplite combines hardside and softside luggage concepts for the first time, and inaugurates the market for hardside shells with zippers.

1995



ITALIAN JOB
Samsonite Italia launches its own line of casual shoes, capitalizing on Italy's pre-eminence in footwear design. This will eventually expand into a full-scale clothing line, encompassing safari-style suits, belted trench coats, padded flight jackets, and performance trainers.

INDEPENDENCE DAY
After more than two decades as a subsidiary of various consumer goods conglomerates, Samsonite Corporation merges with its former holding company, Astrum International Corporation, to become a stand-alone business for the first time since 1973.

1996



TRUNK CALL
Samsonite launches Trunk & Co., a fashion-led but functional line aimed at younger travellers.

1997



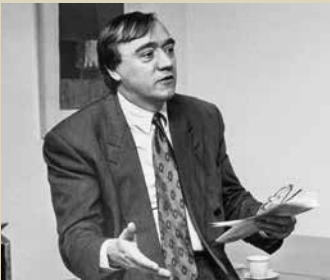
CASE STUDY: OYSTER II
The follow-up to Samsonite's best-seller builds on its success, refining its features, making it lighter still, and improving its strength; to demonstrate the latter, Samsonite's European president Luc Van Nevel and marketing director Rita Debou pay homage to the legendary Shwayder family photo by clambering on top of it.

1997



MILESTONE SUITCASE: ULTRATRANSPORTER
The first upright check-in suitcase with a balanced four-wheel push or pull system, along with a height-adjustable handle, had been launched in the US a few years before as the EZ CART. Now your case can precede you as well as follow you.

1998



COOL HAND LUC
Luc Van Nevel becomes Samsonite's CEO and sees the company through some of its toughest financial times, recapitalizing more than once and eventually taking it into Asia for the first time.

EASTERN PROMISE
Samsonite sets its sights on the Far East, with joint ventures eventually established in Singapore, South Korea, China, with a hardside plant built at Ningbo, and India – the latter, known as Samsonite South Asia, is set up with Ramesh Tainwala, later to become Samsonite CEO.

1999



STAR TURN
A Samsonite Xylem aluminium case plays a crucial role in the James Bond film *The World Is Not Enough*, when Pierce Brosnan's Bond is seen clutching it as he abseils down a rope from an 8th-floor apartment. Needless to say, it survives the perilous descent intact.

2000



MILESTONE SUITCASE: XYLEM
Post-Bond, would-be 007s can get their own version of Pierce Brosnan's "money case." The Xylem's sharp, retro-futuristic look is a big hit, particularly in Asia. Its matching attache can be added to the frame, as pioneered by the earlier Piggyback system.



STARCK POWER
Samsonite collaborates with renowned designer Philippe Starck to launch a minimalist and lightweight collection of expandable backpacks, business bags and shoulder bags under the "Samsonite by Starck" umbrella. The collection goes on to win a Red Dot "Best of the Best" design award.

2004



BLACK MAGIC
Samsonite's new CEO Marcello Bottoli launches the upmarket Black Label line, featuring collaborations with designers including Alexander McQueen, Viktor & Rolf, and Matthew Williamson, and ad campaigns starring Richard Branson, Isabella Rossellini, and Joaquín Cortés. Hundreds of dedicated retail stores are opened to showcase the brand in prime sites from London's Sloane Street to Raffles in Singapore.

2004



MILESTONE SUITCASE: SPINNER
The ultimate wheeled breakthrough, the Spinner, with all four wheels rotating through 360 degrees, can be steered in any direction alongside the traveller, radically improving mobility and convenience. It will go on to set the industry standard for hardside cases.



LICENCE TO THRILL
Samsonite acquires the rights to licence handbags, duffels, and leather accessories by Lacoste and Timberland.

2005

PLANT CLOSURES
Following the worldwide depression in the travel industry caused by the 9/11 attacks and subsequent recession, Samsonite reluctantly closes its factories in France, Spain and Italy, along with the historic factory and campus in Denver. The brand’s US base is moved to a new hub in Mansfield, in the southwestern suburbs of Boston.

2007

CHANGING HANDS
The company is IPO’d, and bought for \$1.7 billion by British-backed private equity firm CVC. Marcello Bottoli leaves the company, and British private equity boss Tim Parker becomes Samsonite CEO. He immediately reduces overheads and devolves decision-making to the regional managers in the US, Europe and Asia.

2008



MILESTONE SUITCASE: COSMOLITE
Cosmolite combines Samsonite’s patented Curv material – a thermo-plastic composite that’s the lightest, strongest suitcase material yet developed – and a radical ridged design based on a seashell, to become one of the company’s most popular cases. It goes on to win a Red Dot “Best of the Best” design award.

2010



RED ALERT
A new brand specifically targeted at younger consumers is launched by Samsonite’s Korean arm; Samsonite Red features a dynamic business-casual range of backpacks and Boston bags, and “brand ambassadors” include K-pop and K-drama stars such as Song Joong-Ki and Lee Min Ho.

2010



MILESTONE SUITCASE: B’LITE
Samsonite celebrates its centenary with the launch of its lightest ever case. Where Jesse Shwayder’s trunks weighed a hefty 10 kilos, the cabin-size case in the B’Lite range, made of twisted polyester, comes in at a featherweight 2.3 kilos. The ad campaign shows a wire-walker demonstrating the case’s next-to-nothing-ness; don’t try this on holiday.

2011



PUBLIC OFFERING
Samsonite makes its debut as a public company when it’s floated on the Hong Kong stock exchange, raising \$1.25 billion. Shares quickly rise by 50 per cent thereafter.

2012



HITTING THE HEIGHTS
Samsonite acquires the US backpack brand High Sierra, further expanding its presence in the all-important sporting bag sector.

2012



PRESIDENTIAL SEAL
Samsonite buys Hartmann, a US luxury goods brand founded in 1877, whose plush leather cases have been the accessory of choice for American presidents, for \$35 million. Samsonite cases have actually been carried by previous incumbents of the White House, including Jimmy Carter; adapted Samsonite briefcases are also favoured by members of the United States Secret Service for toting their agent’s essentials.

2014



LEADING THE PACK
Samsonite buys the iconic Gregory backpack brand, extending its presence in the outdoor category of luggage.



À LA MODE
Samsonite acquires the French brand Lipault, whose youthful, female-oriented ranges of totes and shoulder bags are a byword for casual chic.

2014



NEW CEO
Ramesh Tainwala is appointed as Samsonite’s global CEO and successor to Tim Parker, in recognition of his achievement in building the brand in Asia, with India, China and Korea becoming major markets for Samsonite as sales rise tenfold.

2015



HUE AND CRY
Kamiliant is launched by Samsonite’s Hong Kong arm, aimed at young families and first-time travellers; the vibrant shades of the cases, backpacks and clutch bags are based on the ever-changing skin tones of the line’s near-namesake the chameleon, and feature jungle-inspired patterns and designs.



HUNGARY EXPANSION
Samsonite extends its plant in Szekszárd, Hungary, increasing capacity by 28 per cent and enabling it to produce nearly 1,000 units a day.

TRÈS CHIC
Two further acquisitions are made; Chic Accent, an Italian handbag and travel chain, designed to boost Samsonite’s presence in non-travel categories and business products; and Rolling Luggage, whose 36 airport retail stores help Samsonite strengthen its burgeoning multi-brand retail platform.

2015



MILESTONE CASE: NEOPULSE
The first polycarbonate product designed and produced at Samsonite’s European plants in Belgium and Hungary, Neopulse redefines the benchmark for the lightweight luggage market, and exemplifies Samsonite’s ability to stay ahead of the game.

2016



PREMIUM PURCHASE
Samsonite buys TUMI in a \$1.8-billion deal. The acquisition of the American luxury brand, whose range of stylish bags and cases is the choice of switched-on business travellers, gives Samsonite a presence in every sector of the luggage market.

2017



DIGITAL DELIVERY
Samsonite buys the Denver-based e-tailer eBags for \$105 million to further boost its online presence; e-commerce is a developing story in Samsonite’s transformation into a direct-to-consumer brand.



FOR THE SERIOUS TRAVELLER
Samsonite celebrates its 117th year with a market capitalization of \$6 billion and an ad campaign shot by the celebrated British photographer Rankin, featuring a bunch of hipster travellers – including a Royal Ballet soloist and various DJs and vloggers – flinging, dropping, twirling and rolling their imperviously stylish Cosmolite cases; a very modern twist on Samsonite’s perennial brand values of strength, style, and durability.

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LIFE’S A JOURNEY

“Samsonite is probably one of the top five to ten American brands in history,” says its former CEO Marcello Bottoli, “as important and meaningful to consumers as Kelloggs or McDonald’s. It was one of the very first to expand beyond the United States after World War 2 into Europe and Asia; it’s a part of history in itself.”

This has always been one of Samsonite’s key strengths; it’s always pushed forward and never rested on its laurels. As it embarks on its second century of business, it has many aims: to double its market share in the next decade; to widen its product range, particularly in the smart luggage and softside areas; and to thoroughly integrate e-commerce into its direct-to-consumer offering. *“We’ve always been a pioneering company and will continue to be so,”* says Tim Parker, Samsonite Chairman of the Board of Directors. *“We’ve always embraced change; we’re in the business of travel, so we must travel too.”*

Samsonite’s entrepreneurial can-do ethos is very much in the spirit of its founder Jesse Shwayder. *“That’s our biggest asset, no doubt,”* agrees CEO Ramesh Tainwala. *“Samsonite may be a global brand, but it still has the feel of a family company. That’s why people tend to stay here; most of us in top management got our first jobs with this company. We all have that sense of ownership, which gives the company a unique strength. As long as people want the best bags, we’ll be here, doing our best for them.”* Here’s to the next hundred years.



About this book

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FASHIONAIRE HANDBAG

1960

21

SAFARI II - SAHARA SAND CANADA

1960

SEAL EDGE WITH WARM IRON. DO NOT TOUCH FILM.

MADE IN U.S.A.

'KODACHROME' TRANSPARENCY

PROCESSED BY KODAK

CLASSIC ATTACHE BLACK

PROCESSED BY KODAK

1970

SATURN BLUE

14

Ektachrome SLIDE

SUITS CASE AMERICAN TOURISTER GREY

PROCESSED BY KODAK

+

1970

BACKPACK RED

14

MADE IN U.S.A.

1970

SUITS CASE SKY BLUE SILHOUETTE

91

1970

SILHOUETTE PB RED

29

me ENCY

BY Kodak

MADE IN U.S.A.

1960

91

BEAUTY CASE (SOFTSIDE)

1970

37

MADE IN U.S.A. U.S. PAT. NO. 3013,324

1970

BEAUTY CASE SATURN BLACK

29

SUITS CASE SATURN BLACK

COLOR TRANSPARENCY

1976

THIS SIDE TOWARD SCREEN

1974

SPORTS BAG WHITE

SEAL EDGE WITH WARM IRON. DO NOT TOUCH FILM.

MADE IN U.S.A.

SVM22161

1975

PRESTIGE ATTACHE CASE BLACK

37

Ektachrome TRANSPARENCY

SILHOUETTE STRAWBERRY

PROCESSED BY Kodak

'KODACHROME' TRANSPARENCY

PROCESSED BY KODAK

1980

'KODACHROME' TRANSPARENCY

PROCESSED BY KODAK

BY Kodak

DEL 7503

MADE IN U.S.A. U.S. PAT. NO. 3013,324

1981

SATURN BORDEAUX SUITS CASE 62 CM

29

1981

SUITS CASE MALAGA BLACK

17

1986

BEAUTY CASE OYSTER BLACK

MADE IN U.S.A.

91

LARK BOARD CASE

MADE IN U.S.A. U.S. PAT. NO. 3013,324

1986

9661

MADE IN U.S.A.

1986

BEAUTY CASE OYSTER BLUE

16

1987

OYSTER PEACH

Ektachrome TRANSPARENCY

PROCESSED BY KODAK

1990

OYSTER I SC 68 GREEN

14

1990

HANDY CASE RED - SPARK

17

MADE IN U.S.A.

ALUMINIUM

SUITS CASE CLASSIC BLACK

COLOR TRANSPARENCY

THIS SIDE TOWARD SCREEN

Ektachrome TRANSPARENCY

1990

SPECTRUM SUITS CASE GREY

PROCESSED BY KODAK

1995

SUITS CASE EPSILON RED

14

MADE IN U.S.A. U.S. PAT. NO. 3013,324

1995

9661

SUITS CASE OYSTER I 68 LIGHT GREY

SEAL EDGE WITH WARM IRON. DO NOT TOUCH FILM.

MADE IN U.S.A.

EKTACHROME TRANSPARENCY

SUITS CASE OYSTER I 68 RED

SIGNED BY RED DEVILS ITALIA

PROCESSED BY Kodak

1999

UPRIGHT CLASSIC GREY

MADE IN U.S.A.

Ektachrome SLIDE

1999

CLASSIC 1000 ATTACHE SILVER

PROCESSED BY KODAK

+

lor

f-d

SVM22161

1999

BRIEFCASE STARCK GREY

37

2000

BACKPACK STARCK GREEN

SEAL EDGE WITH WARM IRON. DO NOT TOUCH FILM.

MADE IN U.S.A.

29

2005

NEWSON/SCOPE BACKPACK YELLOW

MADE IN U.S.A. U.S. PAT. NO. 3013,324

29

'KODACHROME' TRANSPARENCY

PROCESSED BY KODAK

1999

'KODACHROME' TRANSPARENCY

PROCESSED BY KODAK

1999

SIGNAT MICRO ATTACHE GOLD

2005

SVM22161

2005

SIGNAT MICRO ATTACHE GOLD

37

MADE IN U.S.A.

2005

SIGNAT LARGE ATTACHE YELLOW

91

MADE IN U.S.A.

2006

MCQUEEN OVERNIGHT BAG BLACK

91

ome ENCY

MADE IN U.S.A.

2007

MCQUEEN SPINNER IVORY CROC

16

COLOR TRANSPARENCY

THIS SIDE TOWARD SCREEN

MADE IN U.S.A.

2007

SUITS CASE FASHIONAIRE WHITE/BLACK

16

MADE IN U.S.A. U.S. PAT. NO. 3013,324

2007

29

2008

COLOR TRANSPARENCY

2008

VIKTOR & ROLF - BLACK LABEL - CABIN SIZE - RED

14

MADE IN U.S.A.

2010


FOCUS ATT. 14CM

14

AT F'LITE BASIC SPINNER 82 - ANISE GREEN / 2011

tachrome TRANSPARENCY

PROCESSED BY KODAK



When Jesse Shwayder founded Samsonite in 1910 in Denver, recreational travel was the preserve of a privileged few, with the means – and the burning desire – to see the world. The original “jet set” needed luggage that was as robust and intrepid as they were – and Shwayder’s “Samson” trunks fitted the bill perfectly.

Over 100 years later, with a world that’s constantly in motion, Samsonite remains the market leader, trading on a glorious heritage while continuing to innovate, creating stylish, high-quality cases, bags and accessories for people on the move.

Life’s a journey – and wherever it takes you, Samsonite will be there.

Samsonite