

REVOLUTION+EVOLUTION

Apparel Decoration Milestones & The Hottest Techniques Today

HOW THE DECO REVOLUTION BEGAN
(AND NEVER STOPPED)

Check out what got apparel decoration really rolling in the 1940s—and the innovations that have fueled its growth ever since.

1941
George's
GARAGE

SCREEN PRINTING

Early efforts use screens made of silk. In time, advances in materials and tech make it possible to print in large quantities.



RISE OF THE T-SHIRT WWII soldiers—and magazine photos of them serving in sweltering locales—helped the tee evolve from undershirt to stand-alone casual wear

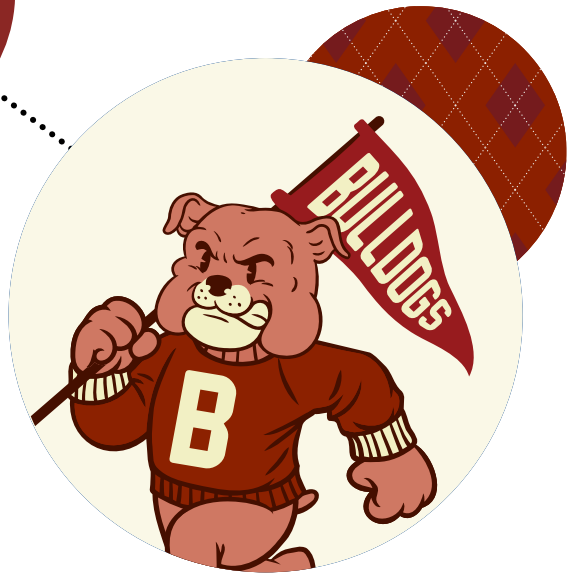
40s

THE BEGINNING OF APPAREL DECORATING

- WWII soldiers create paint-and-stencil tees to call out their units, bases, ships and deployments
- 1948's presidential campaign saw this marketing innovation: "Dew-it-with Dewey" graphic tees

CHENILLE PATCHES

These tactile decorations became an iconic look of the era on letter jackets, cheer sweaters and club wear.



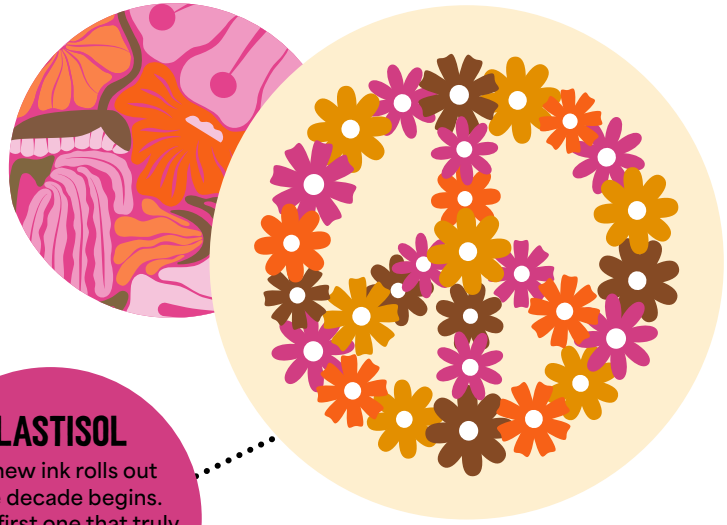


GO TEAM! American colleges and high schools begin screen printing their names and logos on apparel

50s

MORE FIRST STEPS

- Decoration starts appearing on tourist shirts, team gear, and spiritwear
- One of the first commercial licensing projects for printed apparel: Mickey Mouse Tees



PLASTISOL

This new ink rolls out as the decade begins. It's the first one that truly enables mass-producing screen print designs onto cotton tees.



THANKS, ANDY WARHOL He develops and popularizes a method for transferring photos into screen prints, impacting not only the art world but also apparel and other media

60s

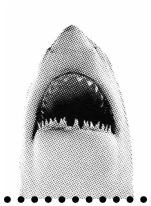
GROWING WITH THE YOUTH CULTURE

- The arrival of cost-effective screen printing coincides with rising social and political unrest, making graphic tees an engaging new platform for protest slogans
- Counterculture apparel designs also embrace fine art, tie-dye, and psychedelic prints



POLY-COTTON

Advancements in production improve the comfort, performance, look, and acceptance of this fabrication, making it a '70s go-to



DIVE IN This decade cements graphic tees as a culture-shaping force, with big sellers for blockbuster movies like Jaws, cartoon characters, and cheeky one-liners

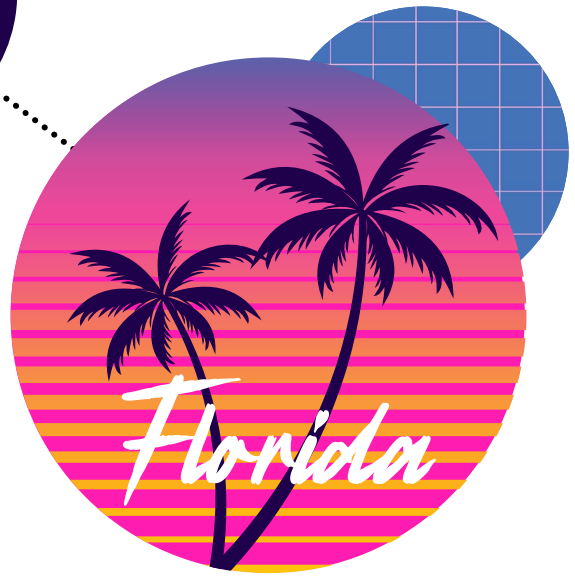
70s

CAN'T SLOW THIS ROLL

- Popular deco includes iron-on transfers, commercial graphics, and sublimation transfer printing
- Just about every cause and statement finds its way onto apparel in this decade—and it still does today

BEEN THERE

The tourist tee quickly becomes ubiquitous as companies devoted to making graphic apparel for smaller clients start popping up





LOVE THIS PLACE By the mid-'80s, your favorite arcade, pizza parlor, mom-and-pop grocer, bar, and almost every other biz have promo tees and merch for sale by the register

80s

THIS IS RAD

- Puff ink, neon ink and metallic prints are fun advancements for apparel decoration
- Walking ads: more and more big brands start making their logos a major focus on apparel, reshaping both fashion and advertising



SURF & TURF

Boarding, hip-hop, grunge—the cultures around streetwear and music both play big roles for design and decoration.

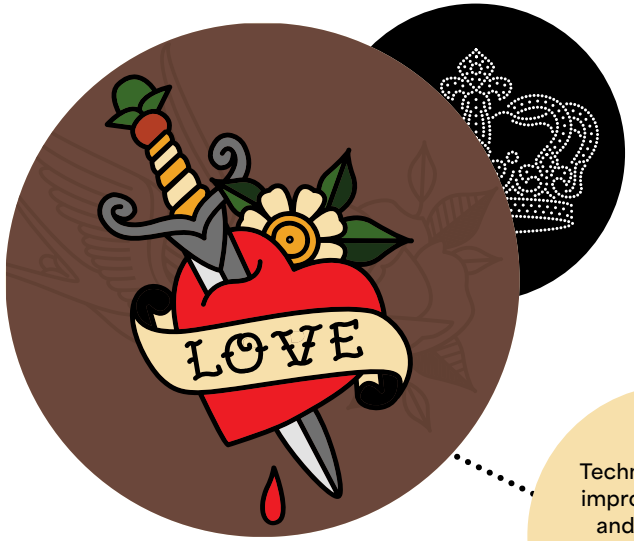


HEAVYWEIGHT MIX Streetwear is as integral to hip-hop culture as rap—the oversized tees and sweats, bold colors, and big energy add up to statement-making style that's still trending decades later

90s

WHAT'S POPPIN'

- Distressed & vintage prints, oversized graphics, plus even more merch for bands & tours are hot
- New techniques: heat transfer vinyl and early (soon-to-be viable) direct-to-garment deco



DTG

Technical advances improve ink, speed, and print quality to help make custom direct-to-garment printing commercially viable.



SHOP FROM HOME The internet quickly grows into a shopping destination, including sites that design, print, and sell massive varieties of low-priced graphic tees

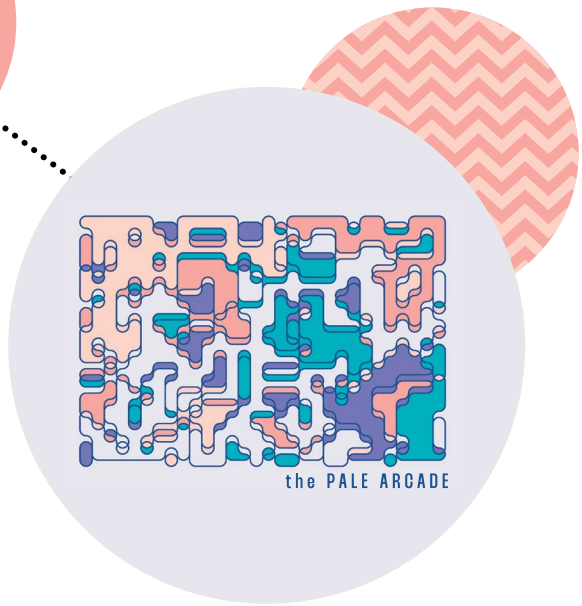
00s

SMALL QUANTITIES, BIG BUSINESS

- Increased computing power and DTG make small-run printing of 10-100 pieces for a team, event or merch drop easier and cost-effective
- Similarly, on-demand printing lets you run just one or a few tees for yourself or a friend group

GO BIG

More and more apparel brands collaborate with popular music artists on merch—including entire fashion lines for major tours.



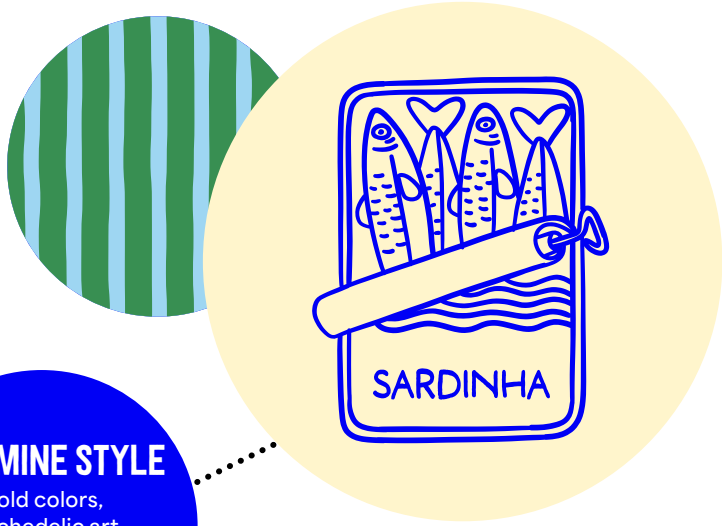


DON'T MISS OUT By leveraging social media, brands and creators can effectively promote limited edition design drops, turning them into gotta-be-there events

10s

THE NEW NORM

- Oversized logos, bold placements, and merch collabs are decade-defining influences
- Athleisure becomes a new everyday fashion canvas
- Demand grows for high-impact finishes like foils, reflective materials, and specialty inks & effects



DOPAMINE STYLE

Bold colors, psychedelic art, and kitsch '90s Y2K graphics are hot, particularly for print-on-demand.



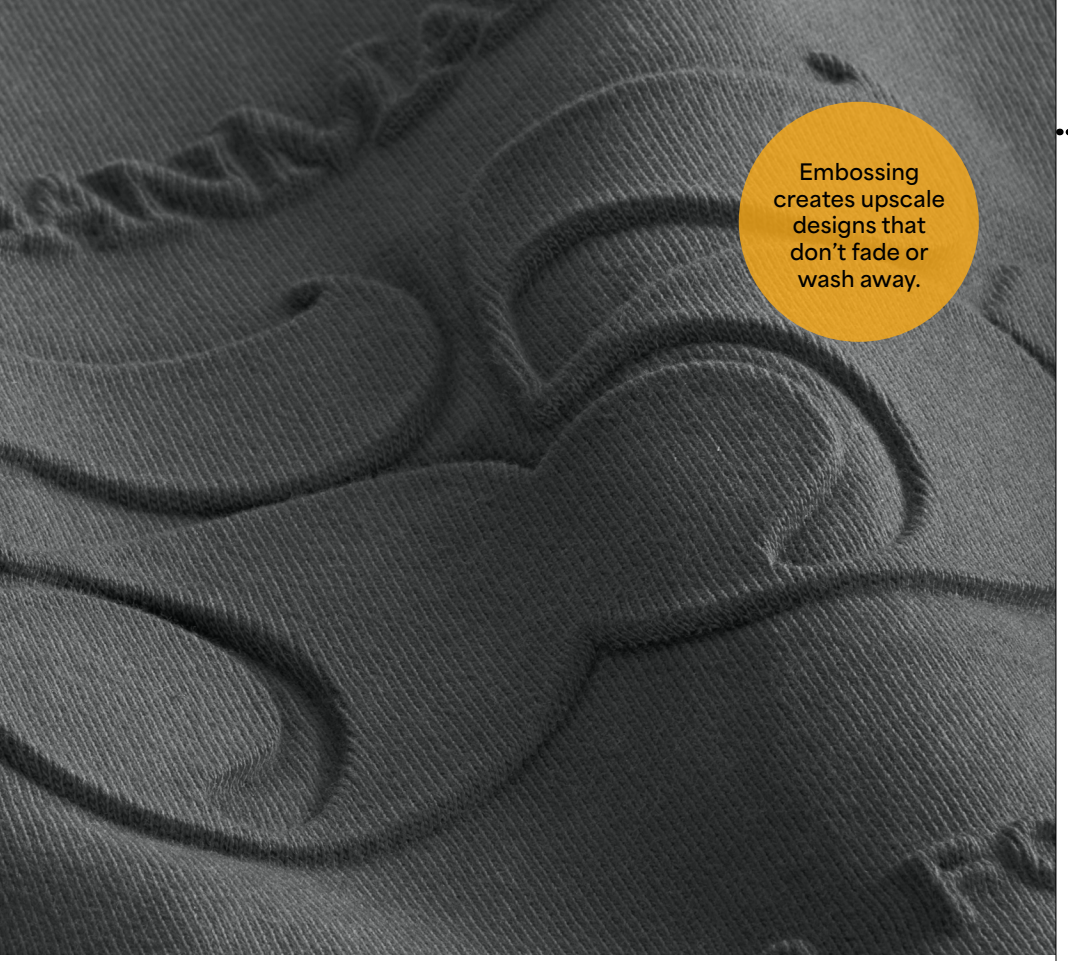
SUSTAINABILITY INFLUENCES Demand keeps growing for organic, recycled, and lower-impact fabrics, as well as decoration using less water, cleaner ink systems, and reduced deco coverage

20s

WHAT WE'RE LOVING RIGHT NOW

- Minimalist graphics, personalized elements, mixed layered methods, vintage designs, and direct-to-film (DTF) are trending techniques
- Coming on fast: smart textiles, NFC tags, and AI-generated graphics

7 EVOLUTIONS DEFINING APPAREL DECORATION NOW



EMBOSSING

With a metal-engraved die, plus a careful mix of time and temperature, this method presses areas around the design to craft a raised look.

IDEAL PRODUCTS

Mid-to-Heavyweight Hoodies & Crewnecks
1/4-Zips | Bags | Outerwear | Caps

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Understated Corporate Branding
Fashion Retail | Refined Uniforming

SOME OF OUR TOP PICKS



DT2204
District Wash™
Fleece Crew



SXU028
Stanley/Stella®
Unisex Cooper Dry
Hooded Sweatshirt



F904
Port Authority® Collective
Smooth Fleece Jacket



LST581
Sport-Tek® Women's Pro
Perform 1/4-Zip



CTP0000502
Carhartt® Firm Duck
Sherpa-Lined Blanket



MRB1001
MiiR® Kondoh Classic Pack



Today's patches are as much about style-driven design as they are about identification.

WOVEN PATCHES

Patch decorations have structure and visual depth, helping them rise up distinctly from the surface of apparel, caps, and bags.

IDEAL PRODUCTS

Outerwear | Uniforming | Headwear
Backpacks | Bags | Duffels

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Government | First Responders | Security
Clubs & Service Groups | Spirit & Fanwear

SOME OF OUR TOP PICKS



112
Richardson Trucker Cap



91010
OGIO® Utilitarian Pack



CT104597
Carhartt® Watch Cap 2.0



LST940
Sport-Tek® Women's Teknical Hybrid Jacket



EB516
Eddie Bauer® Packable Quilted Vest



J763
CornerStone® Duck Cloth Work Jacket



Tonal decoration uses dimension instead of color contrast to craft elevated visual interest.

TONE-ON-TONE

Today's top tonal design techniques include clear gel effects, silicone high density inks, puff printing, embossing/debossing, and laser etching.

IDEAL PRODUCTS

Streetwear | Caps | 1/4-Zips | Polos
Premium Tees | Tech Jackets | Bags

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Lifestyle Brands | Upscale Corporate Wear
Resorts | Premium Gifts | Limited-Edition Drops

SOME OF OUR TOP PICKS



NE501
New Era® 9SEVENTY®
Perforated Snapback Cap



OG826
OGIO® Luuma Flex
Hooded Henley



MRA110
MiiR® Alta Polo



J714
Port Authority® C-FREE®
Rain Jacket



STF200
Sport-Tek® Drive Fleece
Pullover Hoodie



MM7223
Mercer+Mettle® Women's
Brookline Quilted Vest



Screen printing continues evolving through innovations in ink, texture and finish.

LAYERED SCREEN PRINTING

Pop a design's focal point by layering glow-in-the-dark and fluorescent inks over the base print.

IDEAL PRODUCTS

Tees, Tees & More Tees | Fleece
Tanks | Any Cotton-Rich Style

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Sports & Entertainment Venues | Tourist & Gift Shops | Company & Community Events

SOME OF OUR TOP PICKS



SXU001
Stanley/Stella® Unisex Creator 2.0 Tee



BG424
Port Authority® Cotton Canvas Tote



DT106
District® Perfect Weight® Icon Tee



1717
Comfort Colors® Heavyweight Ring Spun Tee



PC107H
Port & Co® Foundation Fleece Pullover Hooded Sweatshirt



BC6110GD
BELLA+CANVAS® Women's Heavyweight Garment-Dyed Tee



LEATHER PATCHES

Laser-etching is nearly as dramatic to watch in action as it is at elevating both your design and the piece you're decorating.

IDEAL PRODUCTS

Polos | Outdoor Gear | Aprons
Headwear | Bags & Accessories

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Medical | Agriculture | Adventure Brands
Food, Beverage & Hospitality

SOME OF OUR TOP PICKS



FF110M
Flexfit 110® Mesh Cap



336
Richardson Burnside



CSJ41
CornerStone® Washed Duck Cloth Insulated Hooded Work Jacket



A903
Port Authority® Signature Workwear Apron



MRB1001
MiiR® Kondoh Classic Pack



CTB0000687
Carhartt® 16-Inch Molded Base Heavyweight Tool Bag



The rich colors, bold textures, and versatile finishes of this technique give your designs max impact.

DIMENSIONAL TRANSFERS

For unforgettable decoration with sharp dimension, texture, and detail, choose this high-def printing and adhesive integration technique.

IDEAL PRODUCTS

Headwear | Outerwear | Accessories
Team Gear, Spiritwear & Fanwear

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Limited Releases | Premium Collections
High-Impact Branding & Gifting | Sports

SOME OF OUR TOP PICKS



OG608
OGIO® Kinetic Unstructured Adjustable Cap



STC71
Sport-Tek® Impact Mesh Stretch-Tek Adjustable Cap



FF180AP
Flexfit Delta® Perforated Cap



ST550
Sport-Tek® PosiCharge® Competitor™ Polo



NKIO8129
Nike Women's Dri-FIT Primary 1/4-Zip



MM7104
Mercer+Mettle® Comfort Soft Shell Jacket



PUFF EMBROIDERY

Puffing agents under the decorative sewing bring even more boldness and dimension to a classic tactile technique.

IDEAL PRODUCTS

Snapback, Trucker & Fitted Caps | Bags
Jackets | Heavyweight Hoodies

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Food Service | Sports Venues & Retailers
Schools & Clubs | Outdoor & Active Brands

SOME OF OUR TOP PICKS



CSV40
CornerStone® Washed Duck Cloth Vest



PC107
Port & Co® Foundation Fleece Pullover Crewneck Sweatshirt



AL5004
Allmade® Unisex Organic CVC Fleece Crewneck Sweatshirt



NE400
New Era® Flat Bill Snapback Cap



112
Richardson Trucker Cap



SXU027
Stanley/Stella® Unisex Striker Hooded Sweatshirt

MORE TO EXPLORE



DYE-SUBLIMATION PATCHES



CHENILLE PATCHES



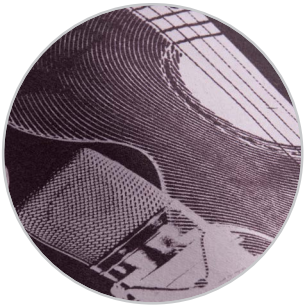
DIMENSIONAL EMBLEMS
(SEQUIN, LEATHER, ETC.)



DIRECT-TO-FILM (DTF)



LASER ETCHING



SCREEN PRINTING



DIRECT-TO-GARMENT (DTG)



EMBROIDERY



EMBOSS/DEBOSS



SILICONE TRANSFERS



HEAT TRANSFERS



FOIL TRANSFERS



SIMULATED STITCHING



2D/PVC TRANSFERS



HD FLOCK