

# Gap Gearing Up Denim

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The skinny fit jeans in the bleeker wash from the Gap 1969 collection.

Photo By Courtesy Photo

Gap is raising the stakes on denim after a year of rebuilding what's always been the core of the store but hasn't been a huge draw.

Officials state denim is tracking better this year despite increased competition from Abercrombie & Fitch, Aéropostale, Buckle, Forever 21, J. Crew, American Eagle and a host of other retailers, and Gap is showing greater confidence and experimenting with new fabrics, finishes and other innovations for the seasons ahead and considering marketing some of the more forward items at higher prices as it raises the fashion bar. The strategy centers on selling in-depth jeans, priced \$59.50 to \$79, all under the Gap 1969 Premium Jeans label, to compete with premium jeans priced elsewhere at more than \$100.

"We are very pleased with what we did in boot cuts, straight-leg jeans, skinny jeans and authentics. Now the big opportunity is with constant innovation from a fashion perspective," said Marka Hansen, president of Gap North America.

That means getting in and out of fashion styles more rapidly to provide newness in the store and stimulate better traffic, while maintaining a foundation of more basic jeans styles and fits.

On Monday, Gap pushed its denim strategy forward by opening a 1969 creative design office in Los Angeles — a first for the company. The chain also rolled out to the 1,000-plus Gap stores in North America the fall 1969 jeans collection and launched [gap1969.com](#), a Web site with designers, fashion experts and musicians discussing denim styles and tips on how to wear them.

About 40 percent of a typical Gap adult store is merchandised with 1969 denim. "Our intention is not to grow the footprint. But going forward to holiday and spring, we will have a broader range. We will move a portion up further" on the price spectrum, Hansen added, noting that, "We haven't decided yet on price, but we are testing in our three 1969 stores," located in Los Angeles, Chicago and New York. "We may push it in those stores before we put it out to the fleet."

At the new office in Los Angeles, “We have new fabrics and finishes that we are working on and will be testing as soon as possible,” added Rossella Giuliani, who in May was named creative director for 1969 jeans and lead designer for the 1969 collections, signaling Gap’s intent to promote greater fashion. “From what Gap did last year with the introduction of new fits and waking up the premium market, now it’s moving it forward. There are lots of fabric innovations coming,” including jeans with greater stretch and recovery (meaning they hold the stretch and don’t bag out) and lighter-weight fabrics. The added degree of elasticity, she added, stems from a special finishing, rather than an increase in Lycra content. “Comfort is key,” Giuliani said.

Also under development is more color in the denim assortment, flair jeans, a black denim campaign in October, additional sportswear in denim fabrications, and an increased offering of feminine tops to complement the denim. Each month through the fall, Gap will add styles to the 1969 line highlighting extreme leg shapes — from the legging jean to wide-leg style.

Giuliani said the denim team at the 5,400-square-foot Los Angeles office, located at 316 Pico Boulevard, consists of talent in design, merchandising, production, wash development and technical services, a total of 15 to 17 people. “L.A. is really the heart of the denim industry. Here you kind of live in the denim world.”

The 1969 Premium Jeans collection launched last August, when Gap reinvented the fits, fabrics, washes and technical details. The collection has been expanded to babyGap, GapKids and GapMaternity.

The three 1969 stores are anchored in 1969 jeans and feature an assortment of fashion-forward pieces from Gap’s seasonal collections. Throughout the Gap fleet, almost 200 units so far have dedicated 1969 departments with styles in one place, merchandised with tops and key accessories that complement 1969 jeans.

On Thursday, Gap stores will show a preview of “Blue Gold: The Story of American Jeans,” a documentary that includes Gap’s founding family, the Fishers and Patrick Robinson, executive vice president of global design.