



PHOTOGRAPH BY JESSICA SCRANTON

↑ RISING STARS

Leaders of the Pack

Meet the dapper duo behind George Guest bags and accessories. **BY ANNE VICKMAN**

WHEN AVID HIKER

George Keeler couldn't find a waterproof backpack with a bit more urban zing than the ubiquitous North Face carryall, he took matters into his own hands—literally. Then a sophomore at Lehigh University, the Wayland native borrowed a neighbor's sewing machine, learned how to use it, and cranked out a prototype for his canvas and leather "Hillside" pack.

But that was just the beginning. With the help of a \$5,000 grant from his college's entrepreneurship program, Keeler started his leather-goods line George Guest, and, after graduating in 2009, brought childhood pal Alex Schultz onboard as business director. Together the pair tweaked Keeler's bag design a dozen times.

Why so many iterations? The devil's in the details, Schultz says, and "all of our products have that highly engineered twist to them."

To wit: Smart backpack features include well-placed pockets and loops for sunglasses, not to mention a roll-top closure—secured by a unique string mechanism—that Keeler and Schultz are patenting. Beyond bags, the two offer belts and bracelets with exposed stitching, and are also planning to add a duffel and a convertible briefcase to the line later this year.

The George Guest aesthetic is classic New England: understated, handsome, and practical. "Everything we make, we love to wear and use," Keeler says. "We wouldn't design something we didn't have a passion for."

AVAILABLE AT BACKWATER TRADING COMPANY, UNCLE PETE'S, DRINKWATER'S, AND AT GEORGEGUESTUSA.COM.



Above, George Guest double-ring belt, \$75; left, George Keeler and Alex Schultz at Drinkwater's in Cambridge.

STYLE FILE

Dream splurge?
George Keeler › A surfing trip to Costa Rica.
Alex Schultz › A JohnnyLove winter coat from Louis.

Fave local designer?
G.K. › Eric Heins of Corter Leather.
A.S. › Gary Drinkwater.

Date spot?
G.K. › "Twin Donuts [laughs]. Just Newbury Street and the Back Bay—I love walking around outside."
A.S. › Lucca, for the drinks and mussels.

Describe your style.
G.K. › "I'm a simple, classic New England dresser: jeans and button-downs, with a lot of earth tones."
A.S. › "I like to think I'm versatile. It's getting cold, so I might go into the mountain-man look—grow the beard out and get some beanies."

Craft beer of choice?
G.K. › Cape Ann Brewing Company Fisherman's IPA.
A.S. › Pretty Things.