

# lululemon athletica

Growing up in Vancouver as a girl with an eye out for what was going on in fashion, I picked up on the lululemon trend about as fast as it hit the shelves...and onto those daring enough to wear spandex in public. As time progressed (perhaps three to four weeks...) it became socially acceptable to show up to an event, to a club, even to prom, dressed in your black lululemon's with a pastel hue'd waistband.

I've watched as this brand has taken the nation by storm and become a household name from yogi's to pre-teens alike.

On a recent trip to Vancouver, I had the opportunity to interview Chip Wilson, founder of snow/skate/surf giant Westbeach, as well as the immensely successful Lululemon, and just had to know...what went so unbelievably right? And how on earth did he get the general population of women into skin tight, unforgiving, bare all pants--willing to trade their first born for a pair...

words\_roseanna roberts  
photos\_lululemon athletica, roseanna roberts

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**Conscious Media:** What were your greatest influences and inspirations—specifically for Lululemon?

Chip Wilson: Growing up, I spent time in Calgary and San Diego. I learned how to surf in California. I saw designs changing in Calgary. There wasn't such a global spread—it took years to get new styles across.

My mom was hobby sewer and my dad was a Phys Ed. Teacher. I always followed new sports.

My dad spent a lot of time at the Esclim Institute in California, which looked at treating the body as a whole, in regards to illness. So, I learned a lot from him. I also took Landmark education seminars, which focused on releasing the past and moving forward in life.

I knew that I loved the endorphins high that I got by doing athletics. I had never had any stress in my life and concluded that because I was constantly active I was eliminating stress from my life.

Some people have Jesus, others run marathons—finding a way to get that endorphin high is a way to make life great.

**CM:** What did you study in school?

CW: I'm a petroleum economist. My degree is from University of Calgary. I got kicked out of business school. I couldn't pass accounting!

**CM:** So you were obviously big into surfing/skating. How about yoga?

CW: I started doing yoga because my body was so wrecked from surfing and skate boarding. Yoga gave me the same adrenalin rush. I knew it was going to be a big hit when the attendance went from six to 60 people (mostly women) in my yoga class in the first 60 days.



CM: ...and yoga wear?

CW: I loved the technical part of clothing. I could see that the sweaty baggy yoga stuff that was available just wouldn't do.

CM: Ok, so you obviously know first hand what an ideal yoga outfit consists of. Tell us about your design team at lululemon:

CW: The design room is set up so that I'm surrounded—by about 20 people. I set out a six month to a year long general direction plan that the design team follows and base their designs on. It's maybe about six or seven concepts—it could be anywhere from moving out of colour blocking to focusing on simplicity; bringing in technological elements and fabrics or sustainable fabrics. I tell the team to go with it and then I have the final look over.

CM: How do you feel about all the “knock off” companies that have emerged?

CW: The same thing happened with Westbeach. I expected it to happen. It's a compliment. By the time people catch up, I'm already moving on...

CM: What do you see in lululemon's future?

CW: We've started the Coco line, which is basically focused on sustainability. Its purpose is to get environmentally friendly fabrics up and going...

get it on the market. It's a way to give back to the world—by getting these fabrics in circulation. If large quantities of the fabrics are ordered, it makes it more affordable for them to be made into garments and sold.

CM: What about keeping lululemon under the Wilson family wing...?

CW: If lululemon starts expanding into foreign markets on a large scale (there are already stores in Japan, the US and Australia), I would sell a small portion of the company.

CM: So, the secret to all of this...?

CW: I think the key to any successful business is training your staff and loving your customers...and for that matter, loving your staff.

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Chip is the proud father of three boys and is expecting identical twins (boys as well) any day now...