



*Jackson Wayne says the material it uses is "the type of leather your grandfather would have appreciated".*

ALL CREDITS: JACKSON WAYNE



Tennessee-based leathergoods manufacturer Jackson Wayne eschews superfluous aesthetic details when designing its products; it prefers to let the vegetable-tanned, full-grain leather it uses speak for itself.

# Jackson Wayne lets leather do the talking

Andrew Lynch, founder of leathergoods manufacturer Jackson Wayne, is a lawyer by trade. While practising law, he often came in contact with veterans of the profession. This in itself is nothing unusual, but what intrigued him most about the encounters was that several of these lawyers carried sturdy leather briefcases which appeared to be nearly as old as they were. It struck him that they were still in remarkably good condition, despite their age and extensive use.

Mr Lynch was already growing frustrated with the poor quality and lack of durability offered by the mass-produced leather briefcases he typically bought. He came to the realisation that he was essentially renting his briefcase for a couple of years before having to replace it with a new one. Accepting he would need to spend a little more to get a product that lasted longer, he was disappointed to discover how limited his options were. He found that, in reality, his choice was between a cheap, mass-produced product or a product of comparable quality but which had an inflated price due to retail mark-ups or because it carried the name of a recognised brand.

After tracking down some older, used leather briefcases online, he examined them closely to try to learn why they had withstood the test of time. He decided that if these products were no longer being made, he would make them himself. Jackson Wayne was established in 2015. The brand, based in Franklin, Tennessee, uses thick, vegetable-tanned, full-grain leather to make bags and briefcases which are made to last. Its range also features

wallets, tote bags, journals and notebooks.

They are made at a small, family-owned factory by craftspeople who have decades of experience working with leather. Although Mr Lynch is proud that the products are manufactured in the US, he does not relentlessly bang the 'Made in the USA' drum in the hope that customers buy his brand's products for that reason alone. In fact, he reveals he experimented with manufacturing in other countries. This included having prototypes and samples made in four countries. Although he eventually chose to manufacture in the US, he says these experiences gave him a better understanding of the business models in developing countries, where the competition for contracts is sometimes so fierce that factories are forced to cut corners so they can undercut their rivals in lead-time. This ultimately leads to products of inferior quality.

## Love for leather

Jackson Wayne describes the material it uses as "the type of leather your grandfather would have appreciated". Its leather comes from North American steer hides and is sourced from a few different tanneries, most notably Pennsylvania-based Wickett & Craig, which has more than 150 years of history and is one of just a few vegetable-tanned leather producers left in the US.

Originally founded in Toronto, Canada, Wickett & Craig moved across the border as a result of the city's bid to host the Summer Olympic Games in 1996. Although the bid was ultimately unsuccessful, it led to a programme of land acquisition by city authorities,

including the land on which its tannery stood. It supplies leather to customers in the equestrian, high-end leathergoods, footwear and interior design markets. The company was a finalist in the 2015/16 global Tannery of the Year competition, eventually receiving a Highly Commended award for the Americas region.

"We've put a lot of thought into our supply chain and take great pride in using the best of the best when it comes to materials," Mr Lynch explains. Jackson Wayne believes the leather it uses is "truly a work of art in its own right", with its choice of vegetable-tanned leather in part due to the rich patina it develops with age. Its design principle is simple: "get out of the way of the leather". This is reflected in the minimalist aesthetic of its leather bags, which are inspired by those from the 1920s and 1940s. It thinks the leather can speak for itself, so avoids any unnecessary clutter or design quirks. There is also an emphasis on functionality, which is why you will find no fake closures or decorative stitching on its products. "Everything you see serves a purpose and is functional," it says.

All components are carefully planned with durability in mind. The aim is for the finished product to emulate the longevity of the classic briefcases which inspired its founder. Beyond its use of quality leather, this mantra extends to the incorporation of antique brass fastenings, which the company says increase durability without adding too much weight. The company also uses a heavy gauge bonded nylon thread, which it favours ahead of cotton or polyester threads. It points to the use of nylon in parachutes and ropes during the Second World War as evidence of its strength.



Founder Andrew Lynch was inspired to launch Jackson Wayne after becoming frustrated with the lack of quality briefcases available.

### A fair price

The brand sells directly to its customers, allowing it to shield them from the mark-ups added at retail level. It says consumers buying through retail channels, both in stores and online, subject themselves to what is known as 'Keystone Pricing'; this is when a retailer charges customers double (if not more) the price it paid to the manufacturer of the item. When you also factor in that the manufacturer has applied its own mark-up before selling to the retailer, the price the consumer pays is hugely inflated in relation to what the product actually costs. Jackson Wayne doesn't condemn the Keystone Pricing model, however, pointing out that it is the consequence of different members of the supply chain needing to make a profit to sustain their businesses. It has simply chosen to go about its business in a different way, only selling through its own website.

In order to keep its prices at an affordable and fair level, the company has taken steps to limit its overhead expenses; it doesn't operate its own physical stores, it doesn't have customer service telephone lines, and it doesn't advertise in expensive publications.

Jackson Wayne believes the price of its products fairly reflects the quality of material and craftsmanship required to make them. This means it doesn't offer flash sales, holiday deals or discount codes. The only discounts it offers are on what it calls "blemish items"; these are products which, while perfectly functional and durable, have some sort of cosmetic defect.

"Our leather is sourced from North American steers and each hide is as unique as the bovine brother that donated it," the company says. It embraces and celebrates the variation that comes with handcrafting products, insisting this uniqueness and character is one of the reasons consumers choose to buy them. It doesn't feel right charging customers full price for the "blemish items" so they appear on a separate section of its website, where there are also products that have been handled lightly for photo shoots or displays.

### Leather 101

Just five minutes browsing the Jackson Wayne website and it is clear the company cares about more than just selling products and making money. It has invested a great deal of effort into providing online tools which help its customers build up a better understanding of leather. "Most

of the bags being churned out today use cheap, inferior leather labelled as 'genuine leather' to fool you into a sense of quality," Mr Lynch explains. He adds that once a consumer knows more about the material and has experienced a quality leather bag, they will never go back to buying the cut-price imposters.

In a section on its website entitled 'Leather 101', the company offers a series of articles designed to help its customers increase their knowledge about leather. The topics include the different grades of leather, how vegetable-tanned leather is made, and the characteristics of hides from North American steers (which Mr Lynch knows well having spent the summers of his youth on his grandfather's farm and cattle ranch). "Confusion and misinformation is rampant in the world of leather," he laments. It is for this reason that Jackson Wayne's commitment to transparency and its desire to educate its customers are so admirable.

These efforts will greatly resonate with anyone who is interested in the way leather must present itself to consumers today. As initiatives such as the Nothing to Hide ([www.nothing-to-hide.org](http://www.nothing-to-hide.org)) essays have made clear, the debates are ongoing, but hard scientific facts, such as those included in Nothing to Hide, are a big help. 🌐



Jackson Wayne's products, including the Messenger Bag, are only available through its own website. It wants to shield its customers from the mark-ups typically added by retailers.