

let there be denim

LA'S TRUE RELIGION HAS BEEN BRINGING DENIM TO THE PEOPLE FOR 10 YEARS. BY DEBORAH L. MARTIN

Jeffrey Lubell has a passion for denim. Today, a decade after starting True Religion Brand Jeans, the company has 129 stores and is sold in more than 50 countries with more expansion on the way. A new boutique opened in Beijing in June, and subsidiaries and licensing deals include swimwear, accessories, men's shoes, and a fragrance—Love Hope Denim—that launched this month. True Religion, having begun its life in the back of a van, is now a global brand.

Lubell began his love affair with denim as a teenager growing up in Brooklyn, NY. "I would embellish all my favorite jeans, adding leather patches to worn spots, then fraying the edges and bleaching them." He adds, "I also drew album covers on jackets and added hand-embroidered designs. I was obsessed." At 21, after a couple of years skiing in Utah, he moved to Los Angeles. "My dad worked in the LA garment industry, and under his advice I started in the textile business before getting into manufacturing."

In 2002 Lubell produced his first run of jeans bearing the True Religion name and the now-iconic Buddha logo. Instead of making a collection and taking orders, he invested

\$300,000 into production before he sold a single pair of jeans. "When I made the samples, I fell in love with the product. I said, 'If I can't sell these jeans, I shouldn't be in the jean business.'"

He approached a major retailer with the line and, Lubell says, "They hated it." So he camped

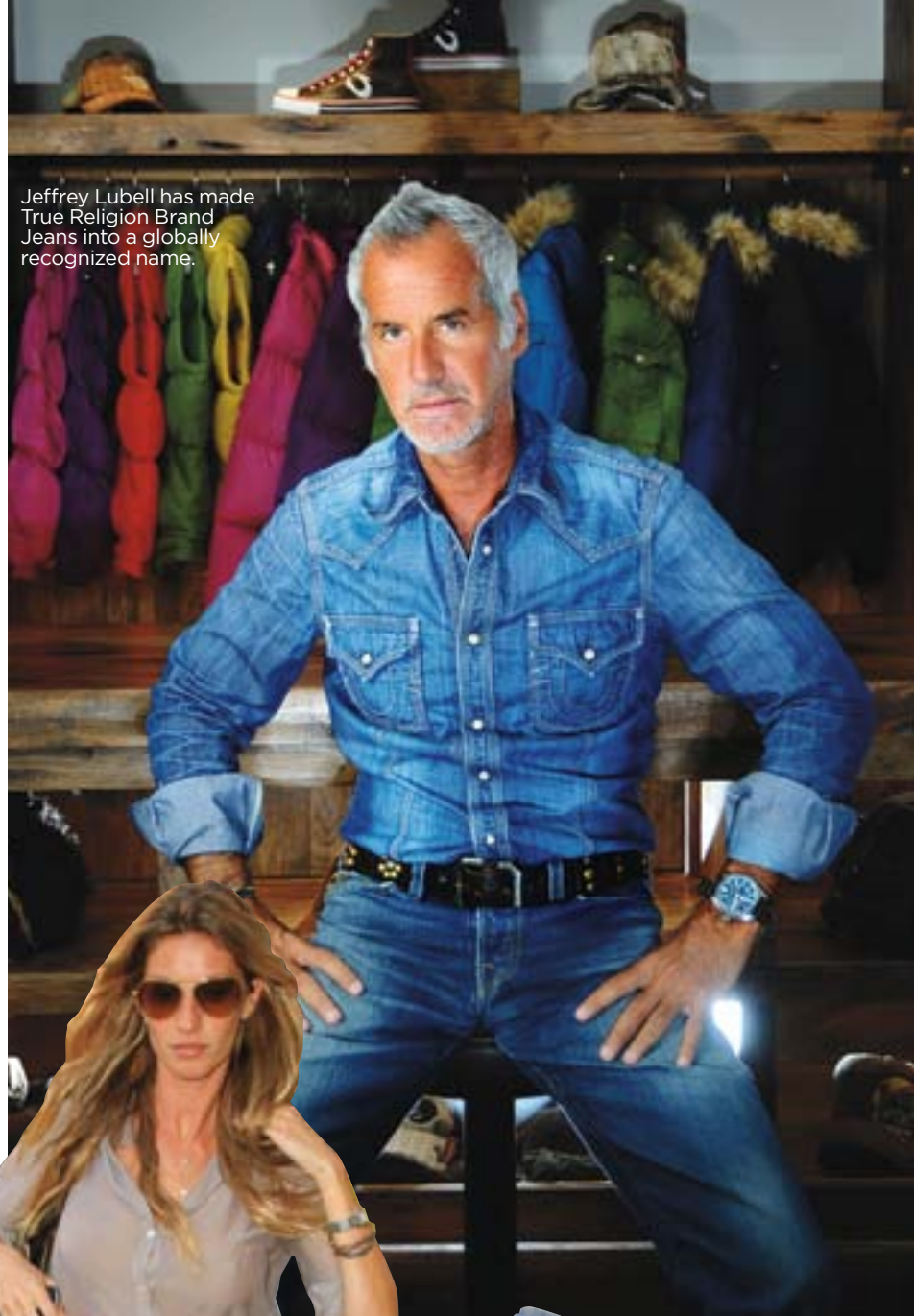
out in the vice president of menswear's office and convinced her to order 24 pieces. He then asked the sales staff to come to the parking lot, where he showed them the jeans. According to Lubell, it was love at first sight. "I had about 200 pairs of jeans in my truck and I said, 'Take whatever you want.'" They wore the jeans on the floor and a few weeks later they were sold out. "That was my entire marketing campaign. The best way to sell jeans is on the body, not in print."

And sell he does. The Joey jean, one of the label's most iconic styles, has been seen on everyone from Angelina Jolie and Gisele Bündchen to Colin Farrell and Keith Urban. And every pair is made in LA. "I am proud of the fact that I support local businesses, and I'll never forget the denim mills and wash houses, as well as the producers of zippers and trims, that supported me when I started this brand." Lubell adds, "Producing here actually gives me a 'speed-to-market' advantage. I can make [the jeans] here in six weeks. If I made them overseas, it would take six months."

As he moves forward into the next decade and beyond, Lubell remains focused on the company's mantra: fashion, fit, and fabric. "I continue to experiment with different washes, fabrics, colors, and prints. It's all about finding balance and creating your own trends." **LAC**

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—JEFFREY LUBELL

Jeffrey Lubell has made True Religion Brand Jeans into a globally recognized name.



Gisele Bündchen in Joey cutoff shorts.



The iconic pointed flap pocket and Buddha logo on the Joey jean. LEFT: Love Hope Denim launched this month.

PHOTOGRAPH BY REBECCA SAHN (JEANS)