

# Boxfresh

## Original British Streetwear



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**Boxfresh**

**Boxfresh has gone from being a stall in London's Greenwich market to a multi-million pound 'streetwear' brand with global reach – stamping the notion of British 'streetwear' indelibly on the UK's public consciousness.**

The story begins in New York in late 1989, when founder Roger Wade (working for a leading advertising agency) started sourcing old US sports and college wear for his mates in his spare time. When he returned to the UK (jobless and directionless) he teamed up with friends Ben Joseph, Olaf Parker and Sue Denny to set up a stall in Greenwich Market, reprinting old dead-stock t-shirts and sweatshirts with new designs. Olaf and Sue 'borrowed' the name Boxfresh from 1980s US hip hop trainer jargon. 'Fresh out of the box' – it was to prove auspicious.

While the roots of 'streetwear' lay in America's urban dance and hip hop music, at that time only about a dozen shops in the UK stocked and sold urban fashion. These were the outlets Boxfresh first approached, the likes of Duffer of St George, American Classics, Manchester's Affleck's Palace, Hoi Polloi... pioneers of British streetwear.

In 1991 when Olaf and Sue left, the Roger and Ben production line continued to churn out assorted garments made from the ends of fabric rolls and re-labelled job-lots of sports clothing from Romania and America. With no design background it was very much a case of DIY fashion – long before customising

became the rage – demonstrating a fresh and creative approach, aimed at the young fashion conscious market. 1991 signalled a turning point when Boxfresh started selling to Japan, and wholesaling American work label, Carhartt in the UK. The timing was judicious; workwear was de rigueur in fashion circles and the following year Boxfresh consolidated its position when it opened its first shop in Covent Garden – becoming a focal point for streetwear when it became the first shop to stock G-Star.

Pushing boundaries has always been a central part of the brand ethos so when money problems arose during the mid 1990s Roger took the brand to California, marketing it as 'British urban sportswear'. The risk paid off and by 1998 Boxfresh had a keen US following and was seen as the definitive British streetwear label. When demand in the UK grew, Roger returned. 'British urban sportswear' evolved into 'Urbanwear', heavyweight financial backing materialised, and by the end of the 1990s Boxfresh had gone from a negligible turnover to that in excess of £10 million.

While the Boxfresh profile continued to rise (with new shops opening in Tokyo, Sydney and London) increased competition led to the realisation that the brand's future success lay in the right 'parent company'. In 2005, Boxfresh sold the brand to the Pentland Group, a company that despite a rapidly expanding fashion portfolio let brands run themselves.

The brand's marketing activities have always been heavily influenced by its links to urban culture – from fly posting, street stenciling and stickering to guerilla stunts, pirate radio heists and viral campaigns – a link which crosses over to the music industry through Boxfresh

sponsorships and collaborations with urban artists such as Massive Attack, Goldie, Roni Size, Roots Manuva, and Sway. And its collaborations aren't limited to just music; in 2005 the brand dressed the cast of the British urban cult classic film, Kidulthood, showing an unwavering support.

Boxfresh has always been more hardwearing street clothing than fashion label, as Roger sums up, "Boxfresh has never gone into the elitist end of the market, and in that sense we have a place in the history of British streetwear".

