

Each Eco incorporates **21 recycled plastic bottles** in the fabric and requires 80 percent less water to make (no dye).



**KILLER VALUE**

#### Nau Quintessenshell \$245

**BEST FOR:** City slicking.

**THE TEST:** When you're traveling, put away the hard shell and opt for something less teched out. (You're at the airport, not in the damn Rocky Mountains.) For us that's the Quintessenshell, a two-layer, water-proof-breathable jacket that shed pouring Vancouver rain for two hours without a leak. Afterward, as we merged into shopping-district pedestrian traffic, the pocket-rich style (four on the chest plus two for hands) and back waist snap that cinched the hem snug helped us blend in with the crowd. Made with organic cotton and recycled polyester that's coated with a PVC-free DWR treatment, the Quintessenshell looks a bit like denim and is almost as soft, adding to its casual look.

**THE VERDICT:** Function meets fashion, perfectly. 1.4 lbs.

#### Columbia OutDry Ex Eco \$199

**BEST FOR:** Staying moisture-free ethically.

**THE TEST:** This is the greenest shell we've ever tested. Proof: It contains zero harmful PFCs, zero water-consuming or -polluting dyes, and 100 percent recycled materials. The best part is that it actually works. The Eco jacket is as breathable as its less environmentally friendly relative, the standard OutDry Ex Diamond, which won Gear of the Year last summer. The rain-slicker look comes from the membrane layered on the outside (as with the Mammut on page 55, there's no face fabric), so it vents sweat and heat way better than the competition. We thought we'd destroy the white in just a few hours (remember: no dye), but dirt miraculously wipes right off.

**THE VERDICT:** Columbia nails the holy trinity—affordable, functional, and good for the planet. 12 oz (men's) / 9 oz (women's)

#### Mountain Hardwear Lithosphere \$140

**BEST FOR:** Women-specific rain protection with a low-key cut.

**THE TEST:** Nowadays, pretty much any shell from a well-respected brand will keep you dry and breathe reasonably well. It's the fit and the details that really win us over. We were quickly smitten by the Lithosphere, which nails both. The cut is long and flattering, with a tapered waist and a hem that hits just above mid-thigh. (The jacket runs a hair big, so consider going down a size.) It's also built with loads of great features: wide, stretchy cuffs that hug bare wrists or gloves, four well-placed pockets (including one in back like you'd find on a bike jersey), and an oversize hood. Oh yeah, and the VaporDry fabric, with its tiny perforations, shields you from rain without turning into a sauna.

**THE VERDICT:** A lightweight spring jacket made with an eye for detail. 12 oz.



Ortovox collects the wool for the Dufour from fall shearings. The stuff's too rough for base layers but makes for **fabulous insulation**.

#### Outdoor Research Ascendant Hoodie \$199

**BEST FOR:** Snuggling up.

**THE TEST:** Imagine a cozy knit blanket transfigured into a high-performance midlayer. That's the Ascendant (seen here in the women's version). The secret to its extreme comfort and versatility is in the fabric. Outdoor Research used Polartec's new Alpha Direct insulation, which is durable enough to forgo an inner liner and lies directly next to skin. That soft, loose weave feels like your favorite fleece but breathes about a thousand times better. Testers wore this jacket running and biking on cool days without overheating. The water-resistant Pertex outer is just thick enough to fend off light rain, and bonus points for the soft, zipperless hand pockets.

**THE VERDICT:** This Seattle brand may just have perfected the midlayer. 14 oz (men's) / 10.9 oz (women's)

#### Ortovox Swisswool Dufour \$300

**BEST FOR:** Easy maintenance.

**THE TEST:** Wool from Swiss sheep doesn't have the warmth-to-weight ratio of down feathers, nor is it as soft as merino. But stuff it into a wind-resistant jacket and its breathability will blow you away. "I wore it damn near everywhere," said a tester. The Dufour so impressed another that he used it—and only it—on a weeklong hiking and scrambling trip through Canada's Banff National Park. The wool is packed into discrete baffles, where we found that it regulated temperature and moisture even better than many synthetics. The athletic fit pairs well with a base layer, and the insulated hand pockets were very much appreciated during cool morning starts.

**THE VERDICT:** Warmth that's easier to care for than down and just as warm as synthetic. 8 oz (men's) / 7.1 oz (women's)

#### Flylow Tamara Micropuff Hoodie \$225

**BEST FOR:** Women seeking technical chops in a stylish package.

**THE TEST:** Sure, it looks like a true winter midlayer, and with 60 grams of Spaceloft insulation, it plays well on the slopes. But the Tamara is also just light enough that we wore it throughout the summer on cool days up high. It easily serves as outerwear in dry climates. (The face fabric deflects only the lightest precipitation.) Testers wore it hiking—six-inch underarm vents dump heat, and the long hem doesn't ride up under a pack—but it's too bulky for faster activities. And that's fine by us: we ended up wearing the Tamara around town on cool mornings and evenings. The cowl-like collar and snap hand pockets add class to what's ultimately a stellar year-round companion.

**THE VERDICT:** Wear it all season, then ski with it when snow starts to fall. 12 oz.