

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE PART 2

FUTURE KNIT

Textile companies are showing the way to a 'green' future that offers exquisite cutting-edge, high-performance fabric that is light and safe on fragile human resources. By Ryan Amor

Who knew that eco-fashion, once languishing in facetious conversations centred on how you can smoke your hemp jandals, would cement itself as not only a growing niche in the multi-billion dollar fashion industry, but also be responsible for spurring ethical consumerism?

Even the maligned hemp joins an elite group of fabrics praised for possessing sustainability in production and versatility in usage and function. This is the paradigm that Levana Textiles has chosen to define its operations as one of New Zealand's oldest textile companies. Being in operation for the past 50 years has

given it the advantage of knowing exactly where both the market and the technology are headed which is a future that offers cutting-edge, high-performance fabric that is light and safe on fragile human resources.

That future in truth is already upon us, made possible by a surge of consumer demand for ethical products and of R&D companies, manufacturers and designers who recognize its value both from a philosophical and business perspective.

Such industry collaboration has been displayed at this year's run of New Zealand Fashion Week where top Kiwi designers paraded clothes that seamlessly married nature and technology. Bannered by New Zealand's largest Crown Research

Institute, AgResearch Ltd, four new fabrics were interpreted by 10 designers who themselves were more than surprised at the aesthetic and functional characteristics of the textiles they used.

"We provide the science," declares Dr. Surinder Tandon, senior scientist for Apparel & Functional Textiles and Bio-based Products and Textiles at AgResearch. "And it's a collaboration that fulfills the self-same objective of sustainability."

Levana, which developed one of the fabrics, a Merino Sports Compression textile that was interpreted by swimwear designer Emma Ford, finds the collaboration with AgResearch instrumental in pursuing its belief that technology, innovation and investment are necessary in being a sustainable and successful business. It's a two-fold adaptation; one on evolving consumer needs and two, a constantly changing environment.

And it's no longer lip service or worse, half-hearted science. Textile house Charles Parsons New Zealand (CPNZ), which has been in operation since 1915 is on the same path as Levana. Its promotion of digital printing on fabric is hinged not only on the process' advantageous production qualities, but also on its impact on the environment. With less water consumption and less wastage, digital printing is touted to be the most sustainable method of printing. CPNZ also offers organic knit and woven cottons and tries to offset the rising global costs of silk and cotton with the production of a softer silk hand polyester print as an alternative (if not better) base.

A leader in the production of high performance compression garments, Levana's R&D forays have led it to pick innovations in the medical and industrial fields with special yarn and fabric treatments that have been confirmed to enhance blood flow by 30 percent.

But does high-technology fabric, regardless of their potent characteristics pass aesthetic muster? New Zealand Fashion Week 2010 affirmed that. Stand out designs included Emma Ford who used the Levana produced Merino Sports Compression fabric and taking full advantage of the textile's luxurious



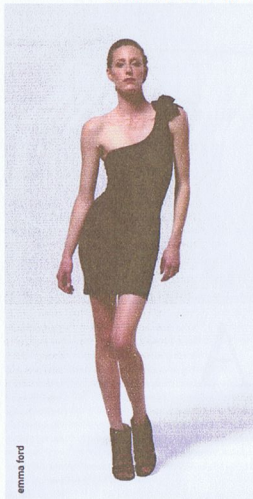
trix & dandy



alexandra owen



salasal



emma ford

stretchability and sculptability to create their signature swimwear silhouettes.

Alexandra Owen's sculptural designs made full use of the Gimonno Ltd produced 'Fortitude' fabric that was aptly intended for the field of martial arts. The double-sided wool/polyester fabric lent itself well to Owen's look this season which demanded plenty of complex tailoring and pleating. Feeling like doing a high-kick in Owen's garment? You can; the fabric has been designed to be incredibly sturdy, antimicrobial and odour-resistant.

Hamilton based label Salasal, already well-known for its fashion-forward designs takes knitwear to a whole new level with AgResearch's Fabric 3 which is the world's first reversible two colour fabric produced on a single dyeing.

But creating the look is just the first step and a relatively easy one. The next one - commercialization - is a bit more complicated.

Labels Stitch Ministry and Sable and Minx are interested in using the fabrics commercially, but have expressed concern on one pivotal issue - price point.

AgResearch Textile Team Leader Dr. Stewart Colic puts it this way: "We are in the business of scientific research and discovery and our new fabrics are excellent technologies. We hosted today a range of commercial organisations at our runway show and we hope they will see the value of taking our fabrics to market."

Tandon emphasizes that this is one case where money - plenty of it - can unequivocally pave the way for something good where everyone wins,

a rarity really in an industry often accused of not having a deeper social conscience.

But technology is expensive all-around and yet Levana knows that the equation balances itself out in the long run especially when it comes down to how technology determines the price-point for its products.

Only recently, it has invested in a high-tech single jersey jacquard knitting machine that is capable of very defined and specialised structure and designs. The machine gives Levana the capability to churn out natural yarn jacquards, textiles with more

lightweight structures, complex and massive designs and repeat sizes.

Levana has also acquired a single jersey machine that does lightweight products ranging from 80gsm to 130gsm, promising more variations and quantities for in-demand lightweight fabrics.

While some fabrics will see marginal price increases due to the wider width, the cost proportion essentially gives the customer same value for money. In the long run, costs will fall with ever increasing production speeds and efficiency.

KNIT WEAR TRENDS SUMMER 2010-11

LEVANA

There will be a lot of trans-seasonal knits - a lot of layering pieces with texture and surface interest. These will be metallic fibres combined with natural fibres such as bamboo, cotton and merino but in very light weights. Colours will be neutral notes such as shade, taupe, light grey and marle versions. Contrasts would be in bright sorbet shades of turquoise and bright blues. Nautical stripes and colours are also making a comeback.

CHARLES PARSONS

For our Spring/Summer 2011 collection, we see strong clean colours, bold prints and pattern dashes as design key directions. The season's prints range from stripes, foliage, pretty floral motifs, messy splatter patterns and refined photo realistic digital designs. In terms of fabrics and textures, linen, ramie and hemp will continue to be strong for summer. Their cool handle and breathability suit warmer climates. Another new trend that we have rounded to is using laser cutting and perforation techniques to embellish fabrics.

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