



Fabric buyers at the recent Material World show in Miami Beach were hunting for ecotextiles. In response the New York version of the exhibition will have an eco-friendly theme in September. By Kathlyn Swantko.

“There is little question that ‘green’ has become the ‘new black’ in fashion today,” according to Suzanne Pruitt, spokesperson for Material World, the US fabric show which recently took place in Miami where a broad array of exhibitors featured a plethora of eco-friendly fabrics. In response to significant industry-wide interest, Material World says it will be moving forward with an eco-friendly trend as a vitally important industry segment and growth category for its next show in New York, which will be held September 25-27, 2007.

The joint gathering of Material World, SPESA Expo and Technology Solutions resulted in a large attendance, a busy exhibition floor and standing-room-only seminar presentations. Representing countries and regions throughout America,

Europe, China, India and Pakistan, exhibitors reported steady traffic and brisk business throughout the three-day event.

Eco-friendly/sustainability issues were on the minds of a broad cross-section of both exhibitors and attendees. A wide selection of sustainable fabrics were offered including the popular organic cottons, bamboo, soy, seaweed, coconut and even Manoir Knitting’s new milk-based fabric.

April Booth, national sales manager for Eclat Textile Co., stated, “The organics were really huge! Organic cotton and bamboo were the winners – I would say almost equally. We’ve been producing fabrics from both of these fibres for about two years now, but it’s just been within the last six months that it has really taken off. So, I would say that it’s definitely a trend going forward!”

Jim Hopkins of Hamrick Mills concurred, “We’ve investigated and utilised many of the major ecologically friendly fibres available on the market, such as bamboo, to ‘Cocona’, to organic cotton, to recycled polyester. Six to eight months ago, we had done very little with these fibres, but today we’ve tested most of them and we’re poised to take advantage of any opportunities. In addition, from an energy conservation standpoint, we have implemented projects that conserve electricity and energy consumption in all of our facilities.”

With mill locations in Albemarle, NC, Gentry Mills is working as the dyeing/finishing partner for a new patented fabric development being produced by Alandale Knitting, Troy, NC, called StrataTek. The unique StrataTek technology

creates for the first time a truly two-layer, double-sided knit construction with comfort stretch and no grin-through from side to side. The two separate layers of the StrataTek fabric are connected by elastomeric yarns. The construction permits each side of the fabric to maintain its own character and integrity, allowing an apparel designer to customize differences between the outer and next-to-skin fabric layers. The ability to create raw-material combinations in a variety of new-generation, reversible, two-colour applications is numerous.

At Material World, 'StrataTek' was featured in a variety of fabric blends, including eco-friendly fabrics of 100% bamboo and bamboo/cotton blends on the face with Unifi's 'Repreve' on the back. Other recent environmentally-friendly StrataTek fabric developments involve the use of Beal Manufacturing's 100% post consumer recycled polyester and Traptex's Cocona in combinations with wool and other natural or 'sustainable' yarns.

According to Donald Trexler, president of StataTek, "We are currently working with a variety of companies to solve specific problems. There is a limit as to how many attributes that can be spun into a yarn. So, with the StataTek construction, you can take the performance yarn and put it where it is needed. There are also some yarn technologies available in the market, which can't produce a true white fabric. So, you can use that yarn on the next-to-skin StataTek layer and use another white yarn on the outside layer with no grin-through."

Circular knitter

Manoir Inc. is a Canadian-based vertical manufacturer of fine circular knit combed cotton fabrics and is responding to the demand for "green" fabrics with its new collection of organic cottons, soya blends, bamboo/organic cotton blends, recycled polyester and also its milk fibre.

Neil Hogan, VP of sales & marketing, noted, "At this show, people have been looking mainly for organics. The bamboos have been very popular and we're also showing our new, performance bamboo fabric. This is a plaited product that is bamboo on the face, and 'eco-poly' on the back of the fabric, which provides both anti-microbial and wicking qualities."

Manoir also announced the development of its new milk protein fibre at the show. Cyam Textile Co. in China is the producer of the yarn, which is made through a bio-engineering technique of de-watering and skimming the milk, which in turn produces a protein spinning fluid that is suitable for use in a wet spinning fibre production process.

According to the fibre producer, the milk protein fibre contains eighteen amino-acids, which provide beneficial health benefits, as well as providing a nourishing skin-care function.

California-based Hemp Traders showed several new products including hempboard, which is created from the hemp hurds – the woody inner fibre of the hemp stalk. This is normally a waste product after the long fibre used for spinning has been removed. The hemp hurd is said to be strong, absorbent and lightweight.

Lawrence Serbin, president of Hemp Traders, explained, "We use hemp hurd, taken from the middle of the hemp stock and is the woody part that has been thrown away in the past. By using a special non-toxic glue as a binder, we can make a particle board that is totally sustainable. All other wood particle boards on the market are made with formaldehyde in the glue binder. And, the other good thing is that not one tree was sacrificed in the production of our hempboard."

According to Serbin, another featured product at the show, was a new hemp/wool yarn, which is now being used by several carpet companies in making environmentally friendly carpets that are naturally biodegradable.

Family-owned Hamrick Mills based in Gaffney, SC, is a leading producer of high quality, lightweight greige woven fabrics for use in the apparel, home furnishings and industrial markets.

On the eco-friendly side, Hamrick Mills has

developed some new woven shirting fabrics, made in a blend of Cocona, cotton, and polyester, in herringbone, twill and plain weaves. They are also actively looking for partners in developing a variety of other woven eco-friendly products, said Jim Hopkins of Hamrick.

Wal-Mart tie-up

Taiwan's Eclat Textile Company is a vertical producer of knitted fabrics and finished apparel for the performance activewear, intimate apparel, swimwear and casual sportswear markets. It claims to be one of the largest producers of organic fabrics in the world, due mainly to its involvement with Wal-Mart.

April Booth of Eclat explained, "Wal-Mart has given us a projection of 250 million pieces (finished garments) through 2010. And, this is only in organics. So, it's a huge business for us, and we're purchasing the raw materials like crazy."

At Material World Booth estimated that about 70% of the traffic to their booth was looking for organics, and about 30% was looking for functional fabrics. While organic cotton and bamboo were the most popular, there was also some interest in soybean and sea kelp, which Booth refers to as the "exotics". She noted, "I think that the minimal interest in these 'exotic' organics is because they're still relatively new. We've found that it typically takes a couple of years for a new fibre to catch on."



Sustainable carpet yarn from Hemp Traders, CA, which is 55% hemp/45% wool, 2 ply, worsted weight, Needle: 4.5mm, Gauge: 20 st/ 4in (10cm).