

New Textile Show Attracts Buyers Seeking Tech Fabrics for Active Lifestyle.

## Function Meets Fashion

The Functional Fabric Fair made its New York City debut last month garnering interest from buyers, designers and retailers on the hunt for innovative, performance textiles for the seasons ahead. The trade event bustled with energy as 1,000+ attendees perused new materials and learned the latest trends in design and development during presentations from industry experts. With 7th Avenue brands increasingly looking to textiles to help differentiate product in today's competitive marketplace, and consumers leaning toward a "tech casual" wardrobe, the two-day Functional Fabric Fair is a well-timed entry into New York City's market week.

"The sport/outdoor crowd understands functional fabrics, so this is good opportunity to talk with fashion people who want to learn about performance textiles," said Angela Domsitz a representative with The WoolMark Company. "It's a good mixed crowd. We've met new people as well as seen our partners, and re-connected with others."

"We've seen people from Everlane, J.Crew, PVH, Free Country and Untuckit among others," commented Jennifer Miller of Concept III Textiles. "They see merino (wool) as a trend and want to get their customers onboard. These brands are looking to incorporate merino but in a way that sets their garments apart from brands like Smartwool."

The Functional Fabric Fair is "powered by Performance Days," a leading textile trade event for lifestyle and active/outdoor markets held twice a year in Munich, Germany. The effort made to replicate the European ambiance and targeted approach of the Munich events paid off as attendees and exhibitors at the new NYC Fair commented on the high-quality offerings and the laser-focused attention to materials with advanced properties.

American Eagle-Aerie, Banana Republic, Brooks Brothers, Burton, Levi Strauss, Lilly Pulitzer, Lululemon, Ralph Lauren, Target and Reebok, among many others were scouting and shopping the show.

High-tech fabrics engineered to enhance comfort – be that via moisture management, lightweight weather protection and/or easy care – were top of mind, but interestingly sustainability and smart textiles garnered notable attention, too. Indeed, there was talk among suppliers that perhaps this urban fashion crowd – with its savvy marketing skills, substantial promotional budgets and roster of celeb endorsements – could make the most impact in the years ahead in terms of getting mainstream consumers on board

with eco/recycled products as well as wearable garments.

"Brands are looking for down alternatives," said Joe DiGiroLamo of Thermore, who met with execs from American Eagle, Ralph Lauren and Reebok. "They are talking about sustainability and concerned about animal welfare issues related to down." Thermore showcased its EcoDown synthetic insulation along with a stretch insulation product.

### Performance Approach Appeals

A performance forum greeted attendees at the entry of the venue – a terrific light-filled space with views of the New York City skyline and Hudson River. Even longtime Javitz exhibitors and industry folk never knew this Pavilion existed let alone that it was a perfect fit for an intimate setting for textile shopping. The FORUM displayed professionally curated trend boards showcasing an extensive selection of high-tech materials ranging from next-to-skin qualities to outerwear offerings in addition to accessories such as yarns, tapes, prints, buttons and zippers.

In her presentation Active Sports Design's Alexa Dehmel highlighted the latest trends in her presentation, stating, "Function is very fashionable and fashion is becoming more functional." She noted the natural feel, yet high performance properties of today's materials along with modern interpretations in texture and aesthetics, particularly in waterproof/breathable constructions. In the category of shirts and pants, Dehmel mentioned fashion knits for leggings and shirting with plaids that are more sophisticated and less "outdoor" traditional.

Overall, developments for the season ahead offer creative approach to performance textiles with lightweight functionality enhanced with distinctive visuals and a soft hand.

"Tech that adds an extra element of comfort is on a growth path," said Christy Raedeke, of Cocona/37.5. Recent developments for the ingredient brand have come in men's suiting and footwear. The company partners with Banana Republic as well as Carhartt in denim.

"Reflective has a role in design and fashion trends, but also trends in functionality," said Chuck Gruber, president, Safe Reflections. To his point, a stylishly contemporary dress displayed in the company's booth showed how reflective can be incorporated in a fashion garment, proving that the material has evolved far from its safety origins.

The July dates of the inaugural Functional Fabric Fair coordinated with New York's Market Week and as such the Fair co-located with a handful of other trade events ongoing. The only wrinkle from a performance standpoint of being in NYC was that Outdoor Retailer Summer Market was happening simultaneously in Denver. Next year ORSM will be held in June. It will be interesting to see if the outdoor textile community comes east to attend the Functional Fabric Fair. Show dates for 2019 are July 22-23, at the River Pavilion at Javits Center in New York City. ●



Attendees enjoyed panel discussions on popular topics like smart textiles, and browsed collections from 70+ exhibitors.