



## Where can I source sustainable materials?

The most important thing when sourcing sustainable materials is knowing what your company considers a sustainable material. Once the company defines the essential environmental attributes, you then have the challenge of finding mills that can deliver those features. Some of your best options are looking at trade shows and trade organizations. For instance, Texworld Paris has had a big increase in the number of mills offering environmentally friendly materials. Organizers even identify mills providing eco-friendly materials in the trade show guide, making these specific mills easy to find.

A new trade show called Continuum is launching in Winter 2011 and is dedicated to eco-friendly textiles. The organizers describe Continuum as “a unique trade show that brings together the most progressive and innovative solutions to product sustainability.” The inaugural show will be held in New York City on January 18 and 19.

Another opportunity is to use trade organizations. The Organic Exchange is in the process of changing its name to the Textile Exchange in order to promote and educate on all sustainable fibers not only organic cottons. Executives will be providing information and resources for suppliers of sustainable materials. The Organic Trade Association also has link to organic fabric suppliers. (See *EcoUpdate* story for more details.) ●

## OUT OF CONTEXT | KURT GRAY

### Resurrecting Rich, Robust Apparel Making Right Now

the ‘made here, made now’ mantra is becoming zeitgeist. my new favorite quote on the subject comes from a story in this very magazine.

“the most important thing on our minds right now is educating the consumer on the systemic impact of purchasing American Made products as it relates to job creation, economic recovery and sustainability.” – Celeste Lilore

she had me at the word systemic. our culture is becoming aware that it needs to domestically produce its own consumer goods, and the acceptance of price, with the resultant dollar in your neighbor’s pocket, makes sense to a growing consumer segment that crosses political and social boundaries. what we could use is a flexible, clean, sustainable, consumer goods industry with a low barrier to entry for both capital and workers. sound familiar? we heard the same logic applied to the outdoor market as factories moved technical outerwear from china to thailand, indonesia and vietnam.

now, perhaps, it is our turn.

american made goods have a secret sauce of culture, ingenuity and design. we have the fabric, the know-how and the ingrained expectations of the hard working rural class still in our veins. witness: american workwear.

our retailers are anxious about the price of american made goods, understandably. and the expectation is that you’ll never make boxer shorts in north carolina that are cheap enough for wal-mart. but then again, consumers usually aren’t allowed to make that choice.

i think this quote sums up the retail landscape, and it’s search for authenticity and heritage.

From Melbourne to Gothenburg to Minneapolis, retailers of everything from vegetables to fine knitwear are surveying the landscape, speaking to consumers and responding accordingly. When these businesses venture out into the wholesale market to purchase goods they’re disillusioned by rails filled with expensive, shoddily stitched garments made in countries with dirt-cheap labour costs and questionable employment laws. They’re unimpressed by porcelain companies that still sell their Swedishness but manufacture in Thailand. They’re worried that there’s no respect for finish or detail and that some of the world’s most respected premium brands (many gobbled up by dim private equity firms all working to the same, short-term strategies) have squandered everything in order to improve their margins while unwittingly offloading the real intellectual property - the painters, pattern makers, seamstresses and master carpenters.

—Tyler Brûlé, Canadian-born journalist, entrepreneur, and magazine publisher, who founded *Monocle* and *Wallpaper*.

america has a rich and robust history of apparel manufacturing. the cultural intelligence to do so is still here. the millers and cutters and sewers from the operations in the carolinas are there. while i was working for a large jeanswear maker in the area our project led us to what remained of their R/D department. we left the air-conditioned corporate headquarters and went to the manufacturing plant close by, an old, old, fashion industrial building. during my tour a couple of the sample sewers took me back to a long, low warehouse room. stacked against each other on wooden plank floors were hundreds and hundreds of sewing machines. i turned to a sewer and said, ‘you kept the machines, how.. why?’ she replied that the beancounters didn’t know what they were and they were going to hang on to them as long as they could. i have a feeling that a lot of the wisdom and gumption to make clothing remains in this country.