

# textiles

## Working on Denim's New Day

By KATYA FOREMAN

PARIS — Environmentally and ethically responsible production continues to be a key focus for denim brands and mills, despite resistance from consumers to pay more for sustainable jeans.

Along with water conservation, recycling, alternative dyeing techniques and supply-chain traceability, the development of commercially viable sustainable denim proved one of the hot topics for industry professionals gathered at the recent Denim By Première Vision salon.

The show ended its two-day run here on May 26, attracting 2,353 visitors, up 18 percent compared with last year's June session, according to organizers.

"We're using water like in Roman times," said Enrique Silla, owner of Jeanologia, which presented its new G2 process, developed with Marithé + François Girbaud, combining laser and ozone techniques. "If we eliminate water from the process, we will eliminate the problem."

The company staged live demonstra-

tions, where blue jeans were rendered vintage-looking with a few zaps of a laser.

"Our main customer, who is aged from around 16 to 24, would put fashion and value before the environment," said Marcus Rigg, senior designer at Topman. "However, as an industry I think it's very important to be seen to be encouraging it [environmental sustainability], especially

in the denim industry with the use of washes and chemicals."

Neil Bell, denim fabric development manager at Levi Strauss & Co., said, "The next generation will probably be more interested. It's already evolving and in the future maybe there will be an opportunity, but for now, it's pretty difficult."

Indian firm Arvind said it is working with one of its biggest clients, Old Navy, to devise cost-saving fabric

development processes that use less water, power and chemicals. The mill, which is also collaborating with Levi's to develop denim with 20 percent recycled fibers, aims to increase its production of sustainable fibers, such as Lyocell, which currently make up around 15 to 20 percent of total production.

"Denim uses the maximum fabric per square yard," said Rajesh Gupta, Arvind's design and development head. "It's the heaviest fabric, so we are focusing more on the fiber side than on the processing side."

Adriano Goldschmied, who joined a group of industry leaders to debate the challenge of continuing to create authentic vintage-looking denim using a more environmentally friendly approach, cited recycled denim among key directions for the industry. Certain mills are already recycling waste denim scraps. Goldschmied is pushing to introduce public denim recycling centers.

Specialty chemical company Clariant, a new exhibitor, presented its indigo-free Pad/Sizing Ox process solution, dubbed Advanced Denim technology, which claims to reduce water consumption by 92 percent and save up to 63 percent of waste cotton compared with conventional dyeing procedures.

As cotton shortages and price increases continue to plague the industry, some mills cited flat sales due to a drop in order volumes. While certain mills and brands, including Gap Inc. and Levi's, are said to have taken huge hits to margins in absorbing part of the cost of cotton cost surges, prices on some denim ranges at the show had increased by up to 25 percent. The industry is waiting to see how consumers react to the first significant price increases on product that will hit the market next month.

Mills such as Cone Denim, which was one of the original Levi's suppliers, said plants were running at full capacity, however, citing robust business in the U.S. With consumers expecting more value for their money, mills cited rising demand for premium product.

"Stores like H&M offer such low prices that your product has to really be so different, with better feeling fabrics, amazing washes on really good basic fabrics, great comfort for stretch," said Bryan Boone, design director at David Kahn, which was recently repositioned for the contemporary premium denim market, and will launch a signature premium denim men's line for fall 2012.

Tavex introduced its first full high-end line of denim fabrics at the event, featuring soft washes and sateen constructions.

Experts pointed to the blurring of



Jeanologia's laser machine in action.

# 92%

The amount of water consumption Clariant claims to save with its indigo-free Pad/Sizing Ox process solution, dubbed Advanced Denim technology.

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the denim and nondenim sectors. Ready-to-dye fabrics continue to be in big demand, while denim blends, which have silky, drapy hands while retaining the look of denim, were in abundance.

"It's no longer just denim; it's become more of a fashion bottoms market," said David Kahn's Boone.

Jeans has taken a backseat to chinos, with the chino influence — comfortable, supersoft, supple hands — visible across denim collections. Topman's Rigg said the store has seen a massive shift to chinos, perhaps boosted by the warm weather, with chino sales overtaking denim. Strong primary-color denim will figure among fall 2012, according to Rigg, who added that for traditional denim, "everyone is going back to that Fifties 501 look."

Other key trends include clean, refined tailored denim; slightly distressed denim, and skinny and pencil silhouettes.

Levi's Bell lauded Cappio Tessuti's "interesting" wool, viscose and Modal blends and Cone's recycled denim made using brown plastic beer bottles collected at sporting events.

New developments in the super-stretch area, which has fueled sales on women's denim over the past few years, included Invista's Lycra DualFX fiber stretch denim fabric, which combines the Lycra spandex and Lycra T400 fibers to optimize stretch and recovery.

Jean Hegedus, Invista's international marketing director for the denim sector, said Lycra DualFX responds to demand from mills, brands and retailers for better recovery on high-stretch fabrics. It allows for 2 to 3 percent growth, compared with the standard 6 percent currently offered by major denim brands on their super-stretch lines.