

# Fibres & fabrics

BY PHILIPPA WATKINS

European textiles are a strong force again. Their creativity and inventiveness, which has kept growing despite the years of difficulties and still prevailing uncertainties, is helping them out of crisis. Fabric Fairs such as MFS, Milano Unica and Première Vision were busy, maintaining the increase in visitors noted a year ago – even London's little Textile Forum was buzzing with visitors. PV and Expofil recorded 53,065 visitors overall with EU visitors now accounting for 70%. Visitors from the US, whose economy has been showing signs of recovery, accounted for 5% and there was a surge in Asian visitors, mostly from Japan, South Korea and China. With buyers showing such interest, exhibitors were cautiously optimistic.

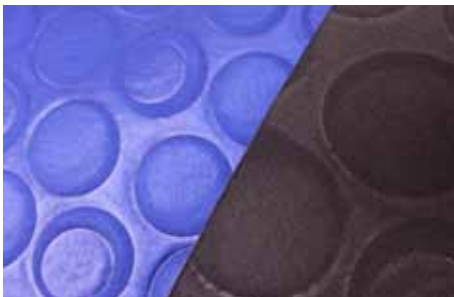
Notable also are new techniques, and sheer craftsmanship, which create both a new aesthetic as well as greater 'sustainability'. There's an air of responsibility, as the industry works towards more sustainable production. Use of water, for instance, is a serious issue, and new ways of water and chemical free finishing are making headway – such as digital printing and laser technology. Even more spectacular is the development of new ways of finishing through 'plasma' technology – one to really watch.

## PV AWARDS 2014

The Grand Jury Prize 2014 was awarded to **GDA** (Italy), for the most outstanding, most symbolic and most pertinent fabric of the season.

The Handle Prize was awarded to **Luxury Jersey** (Italy) for the fabric that had the most astonishing tactile and behavioural qualities, which touches the senses and the emotions.

The Innovation Prize was awarded to **Ala Campolmi Industrie Tessili** (Italy) for



*Inseta at Première Vision*



*PV Awards*



*Trend area at Milano Unica*

the most technically innovative, the most intelligent and creative fabric. And the Imagination Prize went to **Lanificio Faisa** (Italy) for the most daring, the most original, the most surprising fabric in terms of fibre, technique, decoration or finishing.

## IMPRESSIONS FOR A/W 15/16

This season, it was supple volume without weight, as well as slight stiffness, which stood out, giving fabrics body. Bonding different surfaces together, or sandwiching, continues to feature, giving fabrics this ability to shape, and 'neoprene' or 'scuba' like fabrics, 'spacer' fabrics, reversible double cloths and quilted effects, are all part of the look, included in many collections.

Neoprene like fabrics and fine spacers (which we are more used to seeing in our bras) are also going into suits and jackets – ideas seen in the Milano Unica trend theme *New Finance*, which had a strong, sober but

with a twist, masculine look. These fabrics are also printed – often in huge prints, and double faced reversing print to plain. Italian **Ratti**, for instance, had a new 'scuba' cloth in a crêpe-type quality made with crêpe yarns, also printed, and **Menta**, always experimenting with extraordinary printing techniques, had printed ribbed spacers.

While these fabrics have smooth volume, they are not flat – in fact nothing is quite flat. Dimensional or textured surfaces are in all fabric types - layered, in blistered cloqués and quilted effects, micro-weave patterns, jacquards with uneven surfaces, double cloths and surfaces created with fancy yarns, are all part of the mix.

## Versatile jerseys

Jersey fabrics are high profile, not just as print bases, but for shaping and tailoring for both men and women, and especially so this season, which sees jackets and coats as strong fashion items. Jerseys have taken off for menswear, shown throughout the fairs in different blends, mostly including wool, but also mixed with cotton, cashmere, viscose or polyester. Jackets are especially strong, in jerseys or woven jacquards, or in decorative wools and tweeds. Coatings were also everywhere (despite the mild winter) in full brushed qualities, felted knits and wovens and drawn, brushed mohairs.

Italian companies **Dondi Jersey** and **O'Jersey** do jerseys for men's jackets,





*Dondi jersey at Milano Uncia*



*Denim Italiano at Milano Unica*

coatings and even suits, which actually look like classic woven wools or tweeds. **Dondi** has flannels in cashmere/wool blends, brush backed jerseys and weave patterns to look like wovens, and a furry aspect for coats.

**Angelico**, which launched its new, contemporary *Ke Idea* collection, building on expertise in menswear fabrics and it's Biellese heritage, also included jerseys for tailoring. Made in extra-fine wools and blends, in double jersey and 3D constructions, including a quilted fabric with a wool/cotton filling and a contemporary look in boiled wool, fabrics are suitable for both men's and womenswear.



*Ke Idea by Angelico*

A spectacular addition in the *Ke Idea* collection is a range of vintage micro-prints, inspired by the 1960s and '70s, digitally printed on wool fabrics, for suitings, jackets and, in particular, coats as well as paisley

patterns on boiled wool. **Angelico** sees a return to colour for menswear, enriched with shades of blue, from formal blue to brilliant China blue, Naples blue and a surprising turquoise, with warmer colours in camel, yellow, orange, and burgundy, used pure or mixed to obtain movement and intensity.

#### Furry warmth and velvety pile

Furry aspects are prominent, and brushed knits become more hair-like or velvety. Faux fur specialist **Girmes** has warm 'furs' made with alpaca fibre, yarn dyed with short pile, and long shaggy wools. New to the collection are stretch furs, and 'astrakahan' with functionality - membranes are bonded between layers for functionality.



*Girmes at Première Vision*

Velvets are back in fashion as well as flocking. Flocked designs are applied to jerseys, seen at **Eusebio**, and **Europa**, which also has extraordinary flocked prints on stretch cotton denims (seen in the *Denim Italiano* exhibition in Milano Unica). Printed, devoré and embossed velvets are trending again, while introducing metal gives a creased effect.

Casual cotton velvets and cords are lighter, though still dense, with different washed and worn finishes, seen at **Girmes** and **Redaelli**. Redaelli has more luxurious viscose/silk velvets as well as wonderfully luxurious cotton/cashmere cords.

#### Heritage inspired

Another impression was of high quality, traditional fabrics brought out from the archives. Menswear suitings and jacketings



*British Fabrics at Première Vision*

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*Mantero at Première Vision*

are shown in traditional weights and looks, but somehow with a twist – the finish might be less formal, or it might be in double cloth, or bonded together as a reversible and mills are playing with different finishes.

Wools and tweeds, traditional English and Scottish, remain a strong trend. Harris Tweed is flourishing with recent popularity, from **Harris Tweed Hebrides**, with beautiful heathered tweeds and colourful checks. UK mill **Fox Brothers** has elegantly coloured tweeds in plains and checks – checks are now much bigger - flannels and reversibles, and is finding that its' traditional military coatings, with a slightly raspy handle, is in demand. Tartans and plaids are popular from **Locharron** as well as brushed mohairs, coloured from intense black, navy and maroon, to lighter neutrals, pastels and brights. **Moon**, sticking to its *Heritage collection*, which has proved so successful, has traditional tweeds, sometimes with brightly coloured overchecks.

Fabrics for coats are full, soft and blown with air, from broadcloths to brushed mohair. Coatings are in oversized unmatched checks, felted and given insulating properties through finishes and bonding.

#### Simply Fantasy

There's a strong fantasy element with embroidery decoration, sequins and beads. Heavy embroideries add to fabric surfaces, including wools and jacquards – decoration is even added to suitings, adding value and new handle.

Lace and guipure are both still massively important, and a new feature is bonding lace to another fabric, which could then be

laminated or finished in some different way, or made reversible.

#### Chaotic Allure

Pattern is everywhere in jacquards and prints, silky and otherwise, often chaotic but seductive. Jacquards are both dressy and for daywear, targeted at jackets and coats. They are big, quilted and blistered in double cloths, decorated with fancy yarn and fil coupé effects, or patterned with huge florals (**Goutarel**), geometric arabesques, damasks, more ethnic geometric themes (**Dutel Creation**) and even graffiti.

**Ratti's** jacquards really stretch the imagination in cloqués, tweeds with cut fancy yarns, in wools and brushed flannels. **Mantero** had wonderful silks and blends in cloqué jacquards, fil coupé with woolly yarns and prints, also pleated.

**Limonta** has extraordinary fine micro pattern jacquards in double cloths, which actually looked printed. **Dutel Creation** has brought back a plush surface with chenilles in jacquards and decorated with big wool yarns in weft floats.



*Henry Bertrand at Première Vision*

In silk, **Stephen Walters** has silk honeycombs, hand writing and small Lurex patterned jacquards and **Henry Bertrand** had extravagant multi-coloured feathery pile, fil coupé effects, and its signature ombré chiffons.

Print themes include food and vegetables, which seem fashionable, florals, as ever essential and also spiced with images of butterflies, trees, birds and animals, seen at **Att. Concorde**. Paisleys are more casual, alongside geometric arabesques, and retro scarf prints, all of which go into luxury shirtings. Alongside are cosmic visions and clouds, and also landscapes, digitally printed in large scale.

#### Shirting prints explode

Printed shirtings are growing in popularity – all made possible by digital printing. Shirting companies are adding a wealth of prints, giant or small scale, and jacquard patterns – printed onto plains, as well as overprinted onto yarn dyes and flannel effect shirtings.



*Testa at Milano Unica*

Shirting company **Testa** launched a new print line *TEXTA*, digitally printed on cottons, in traditional engraved florals, conversationals (snails), and reworked traditional patterns and paisleys, graffiti, wood grain patterns and jacquard effects.

**Ratti Shirting's** collection just keeps growing – darker, this season, in rich but smouldering smokey maroons, mulberrys and blues, with designs ranging from classics in micro motifs, to deco patterns and geometrics, florals and paisleys. Different printing techniques – discharge printing or blotch ground prints and seersucker effects created through printing – give the collection greater character.

**Albini's Albiato** range had prints on jacquard denims and chambray, in big dogtooth patterns, and tiny, printed micro dobby patterns on cotton chambray, as well as big flowers and camouflage. Plus wool/ cotton, indigo chambray, cotton/linen brushed flannel shirtings (also in big checks) and pure brushed linen. Even newer is an indigo, emerised moleskin!





Taiana at Milano Unica



Albiate at Milano Unica

**Leggiuno's** range included lots of prints on shirting cottons and flannel cottons, in themes including birds, conversationals, florals and paisleys, plus cotton jacquards in floral motifs, fine jacquard double cloths, and cut wefts. At **Taiana**, there were huge photographic mountain landscapes, somewhat kitsch but impressive, as well as folk patterns and flock printed on denim.

Linen, which tends to be seen as a summer fibre, is more and more used in blends suitable for winter such as linen with wool, or alpaca, which adds a sort of dry, crunchy feel.

#### THE SUSTAINABLE VIEW

This was a record year for the **Future Fabrics Expo** in London, with over a thousand registrations from leading high street and luxury brands, demonstrating how people are looking to source sustainably, and understand what our clothes are made of and how they are made.

This was the 4th Expo, showing fashion fabrics with a reduced environmental impact, sourced and curated by The Sustainable Angle - whose mission is to help minimise the fashion industry's environmental impact. Many commercially available fabrics were on show, from organic silk and low impact leather, to different types of cotton (including qualities from Africa, grown with careful use of pesticides and efficient use of rain water), and innovations including recycled fibres. Notable among these were a 'scuba' cloth

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*Ariaprene*, an easily compostable, readily recyclable & hypo-allergenic non-toxic synthetic rubber and, still in its infancy, a unique, soft leather-like material made from *mushroom caps*!

#### Re.Verso – purely recycled

*Re-Verso* is an eco-centric collection of fabrics made from recycled, pre-consumer textile waste, which was presented at Premiere Vision by **Lanificio Stelloni**. With a primarily wool content, the waste is collected through a fully integrated supply chain in Italy. It is converted into yarn through a mechanical process, and can be blended, for instance with alpaca or cashmere, for woven and knitted fabrics. In the first instance, **Lanificio Stelloni** showed some lovely felted flannels and loden, for coats and jackets, including a laminated version.

**Re.VerSo** is a partner in the **C.L.A.S.S.** eco-hub enterprise and their products can be seen in the **C.L.A.S.S.** fabric library in Milan, London, Copenhagen, Madrid and New York.



Safil Biella

#### Bluesign for Safil

Biella worsted spinner **Safil** has signed a 'screening agreement' with *Bluesign Technologies* (Swiss leader in the textile sustainability certification) to become a 'Bluesign system partner'. The system works towards reducing the environmental impact on the textile chain and provide efficient solutions for the entire production cycle from the suppliers of chemicals and raw materials to spinners and fabric producers, closing the circle with clothing manufacturers and fashion brands. **Safil** will be the first in Italy to become a 'Bluesign system partner', and encourage its suppliers to increase efforts towards sustainability.

#### Focus on organic ELS cotton

Italian cotton spinner **Filmar**, is strengthening its longstanding commitment to eco-sustainable development by an agreement with the Egyptian Government, to implement a five-year program to enhance

the cultivation, industrialization and fair-trade of Egyptian ELS (extra long staple) organic cotton. In partnership with the Egyptian Cotton Research Institute-CRI, **Filmar** aims to enhance sustainable cotton production by providing financial support and know-how to pilot the cultivation of ELS cotton, in line with environmental and ethical standards. Components will be integrated to guarantee the cotton being produced in the selected pilot areas is not only organic, but respectful of environmental and fair social standards, with specific attention to children's and women's protection.

New Waterless Finishing with Plasma In eco terms, the profligate use and loss of water is serious, and traditional textile production generally uses lots. The big advantages of digital printing are now obvious, as it becomes more widely put into practice – as it requires little water. And more waterless methods of finishing are appearing – such as laser finishing to 'age' denims and give them a washed look - with no water at all.

But even more exciting is finishing using *plasma technology*, which has the crucial advantage of reducing the use of water and chemicals, uses little energy and has no waste. Moreover, it offers the possibility of improving the fabric and its properties, without changing the textile's key properties.

Plasma technology is so exciting because it has the ability to modify the surface properties of the textile, without affecting its bulk, thereby improving the quality as well as creating different performance attributes, such as water and dirt repellence, or in the case of wool, a cleaning effect to increase its anti-pilling properties and make the surface more water repellent. Flocking, which has become fashionable again, is another process made easier and more stable by plasma pre-treating the fabric, thereby increasing the bonding capability of the modified surface, making it highly effective.

No wonder there is big interest in developing the processes!

#### Textile Forum Discoveries

London's little fashion fabric show, **Textile Forum**, looks really set to grow. Attracting more and more visitors, including from the major retail groups and brands, this is the only show where designers and buyers can find fabrics in small quantities, often stock supported. One interesting exhibitor was **The British Alpaca Fashion Company**, a vertical producer of alpaca fabrics and knitwear, rearing its own alpaca in the UK, spinning its own fibre and making it into a variety of woven and knitted products. The story starts in Exmoor and ends in the design



Fashion Cork UK

and production of high quality luxurious cloth for suitings, knitwear and fabrics for the fashion industry – all made in Britain. While production is small - with only around 35,000 alpacas in the country of which only around 5000 would have fine enough fleece - the quality is high. But it's the story, which attracts, and as we've seen, people are buying British.

Cork was another interesting material found at the show, shown in products marketed by **Fashion Cork UK**. The cork industry in Portugal really suffered as screw top wine bottles displaced corks and has had to find new outlets. In this instance, flexible fine sheets of cork, are bonded onto polyester, and shown made up in a clothing and products, also for interiors insulation. Handbags and shoes made in cork looked great – and looked as if they have great potential. ([www.fashioncorkuk.com](http://www.fashioncorkuk.com))

#### FIBRE AND YARN DEVELOPMENTS

##### Lenzing's new jumbo facility

Austrian cellulosic fibre maker, **Lenzing**, has started production of *Tencel* fibre at its new super-sized factory at the Lenzing site in Austria. This is the largest factory in Austria (and largest fibre producer in the world) with an annual capacity of 67,000 tons - four times the size of previous production lines. The company is optimistic that it will be able to fulfill its production target of 30,000 tons by the end of 2014.

Towards that end, Lenzing is working to increase the use of its branded lyocell fibre Tencel into different market sectors, highlighting its potential because of its

particular characteristics. Tencel has higher strength than cotton, thus making it a suitable partner with cotton for denims, a sector in which Tencel is already strong.

#### Tencel for knits

This season **Lenzing** was showing just how successful *Tencel* can be in knitwear and flat bed jersey – either on its own or in blends, where it adds softness to its partner fibre as well as sheen and colour brilliance. *Tencel* has a more pronounced depth of colour compared with cotton, viscose and modal. *The Tencel A100* version is a smoother low fibrillating version, with other features such as deeper dyeing, which make it suitable for blends with wool and synthetics. Because of its breathability it is also broadening into active wear.

#### Triacetate returns

**Mitsubishi Rayon** is bringing triacetate back into the fashion market with its brand Soalon, branded as being the only triacetate filament yarn globally. Classified as a semi synthetic, its advantages are that it is from a natural cellulosic source, has a bright lustre and is able to be dyed in vivid colours. The other advantage of triacetate is that it is possible to permanent pleat – the only other permanently pleatable fibre is polyester.

Mitsubishi Textile is also manufacturing the fibre into textiles through its own manufacturing, so that it can keep the high standard that is required to weave or knit the fibre. Fabrics are in blends of triacetate with polyester and other fibres, in a wide variety of crepes, and jerseys, including versions for sportswear.





Cotonificio Ferrari

Ferrari presents new cotton

**Cotonificio Ferrari** presented new proposals for summer yarns at yarn fair Filo in Milan for circular knitting and weaving. Divided into 4 themes the collection offers basic melange yarns in both cotton and viscose in different counts, stock supported. Tweedy or nubby effect yarns in various counts and slubs of various irregularities and uneven melange. There is also a series of yarns with a ‘crepe’ handle, which is currently in demand, achieved through over twisting, or by twisting fancy yarns together.



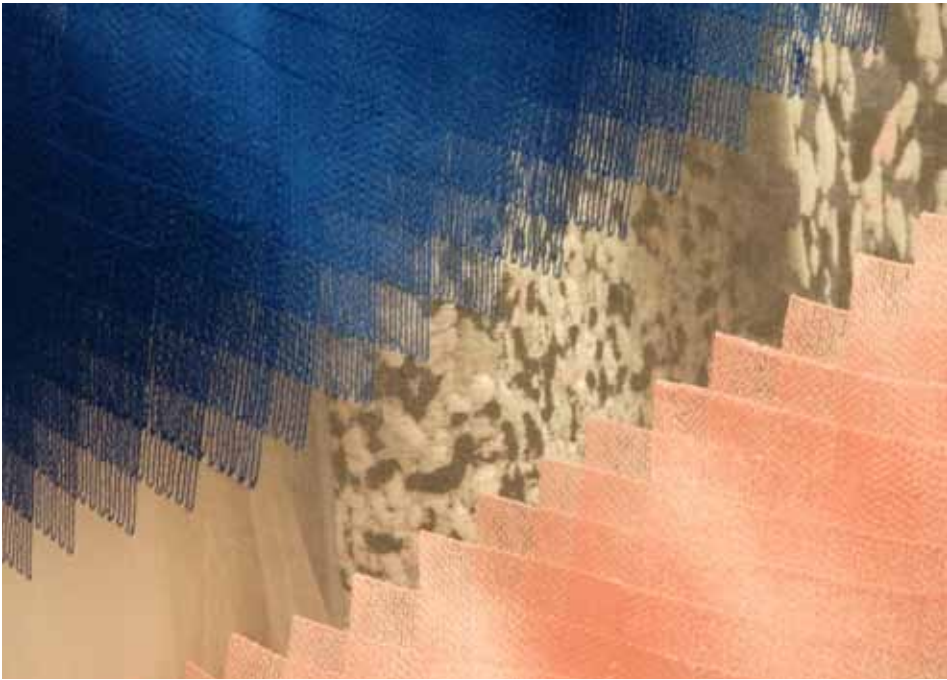
Fantasia and Favola by Jersey Lomellina

Jersey Lomellina adds new mélange

Italian Jersey Lomellina has new jersey fabrics *Fantasia* and *Favola*, which have a mélange effect in 86%polyamide/14% elasthane. Soft and very elegantly comfortable, the fabrics are ideal for underwear garments, and perfectly fit the silhouette and shape it. They are compact non see-through and breathable. They are also suitable for general fitness and sportswear.

NINO CERRUTI HONOURS TEXPRINT 2014 AWARDS

**Texprint** which each years selects the most exciting and talented new textile designers



Federica Tedeschi



Charlotte Heatheridge



Tali Furman



Charlotte Beevor

from UK colleges, announced the Texprint prizes at Indigo in Paris, where the selected designers were showing their work. The awards were presented by the eminent designer and entrepreneur from Biella, Nino Cerruti, who was generous in his praise of the quality of work on show.

Four prizes were given in four categories: *The Colour prize* for the most innovative use of colour went to **Charlotte Beevor**; *The Pattern prize* (sponsored by Liberty Art Fabrics) went to **Jane Zhang**; *The Space prize* for the best design for interiors (sponsored by The Clothworkers Foundation) went to **Georgia Fisher**; and the *Body prize* for the best fashion fabric design went to **Federica Tedeschi**.

Further awards were also given: The first **Miroglio Texprint Award** for Digital Innovation, which gives an opportunity to gain professional experience at Miroglio, was awarded to **Charlotte Heatheridge**. It was awarded for her innovative screen print and finishing process to create extraordinary images and 3d surfaces, on different materials.

The **Woolmark Company Texprint Award**, judged by Nino Cerruti together with Agi Mdumulla and Sam Cotton of the trend-setting menswear brand Agi & Sam, went to **Tali Furman**, whose cohesive collection impressed the judges because of its beautifully subtle use of print on fine quality Merino wool.

Charlotte Beevor and Federica Tedeschi also won the **lululemon athletica** prize.

INTERTEXTILE SHANGHAI: THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

Well the figures just keep climbing and climbing. There were 3,751 exhibitors from 35 countries at last October's Intertextile Shanghai. That's a 12 percent increase on last year with seven new countries including Belarus, Bulgaria, Lebanon, Macau, South Africa, the UAE and Uzbekistan making first time appearances. These seven might not be the biggest players in the world, but it is a reflection of how this show has become a magnet for the global textile industry. Indeed, it is the 'jewel in the crown' for Messe Frankfurt, which organises 40 other textile shows in 12 countries around the world.

But exhibitors is one thing, business is another. The show attracted 69,000 visitors from 98 countries and regions – a five percent increase on last year. The show was certainly busy, but it's too early to say how that will convert into hard business. During the show, China's National Bureau of Statistics announced that the world's second largest economy grew by 7.3 percent from July to September 2014, down from 7.5 percent in the second quarter. The figures, though hugely enviable to many Western economies, are the weakest for 66 months or the first three months of 2009, when China was hit by the global financial crisis.

Premier Li Kequiang, however, remains upbeat stating that the economy had been running within "a reasonable range" in the first three quarter of the year with evidence of some "positive and profound changes". Wendy Wen, Senior General Manager of Intertextile is also optimistic about prospects for the Textile business, "Despite the challenges in the global economy, the textile sector in this country remains upbeat, as evidenced by the growing participation here."

And indeed it is. According to Messe frankfurt's partner, CCPIT, there is a huge waiting list of companies which want to exhibit at the show, which was celebrating its 20th anniversary and started with just 100 exhibitors in 1994. If they were to accommodate everyone," says Mr Xu Yingxin, Executive Vice Chairman , "they would need to add another 20,000 sq mts to the 15 exhibition halls they already have at the Shanghai New International Expo Centre. Hence, the planned move to the new National Exhibition and Convention Center in the commercial district of Hongqiao, Shanghai, where the next spring edition of the show (March 18-20, 1915) will cover a 100,000 sq mts. Not only that, it will be held in conjunction and proximity to Yarn Expo Spring, and Chic, the massive apparel show.

"How big is big?" we asked, especially considering the oft quoted Chinese maxim to move into "high quality, value added"

production and existing problems finding taxis in downtown Shanghai let alone Hongquiao . "We will be careful vetting all applicants for show space," said Mr Xu, "and the exhibition centre, still to be completed, has good transport access and comprehensive facilities, which will increase the efficiency and convenience of the show. Of course, after the success of the Beijing Olympics and Shanghai Expo, it would take a brave man to question such claims.



20th anniversary of Intertextile

The Milano Unica viewpoint

A good barometer of Chinese business conditions could be the Milano Unica segment of the show, now in its sixth edition with 127 high-end Italian exhibitors of textiles and accessories. During the first six months of 2014, Italian fabric exports to China declined 13 per cent, with the carded and worsted wool business particularly hard hit. That could be due to various reasons. All sectors of the luxury market from cognac to watches have been hit this year by Government initiatives against corruption. There is a general slowdown of the Chinese economy and clothing stocks, at both retail and manufacturing level, are know to be uncomfortably high. But, above all, it might reflect a more 'feet on the ground' approach from both the Chinese and Italian sides of the market, as they clear their lines. Certainly, the Italians are coming to understand that the market might not be as big as they or their very optimistic local agents thought it might be. Everybody talks about the growing middle class in China, but the reality remains that Italian fabrics cost five times as much as Chinese and over 95 per cent of merchandise on sale in Chinese malls is based on €4 fabric.

But, on the positive side, as Silvio Albini, president of Milano Unica pointed out, Italian exports to China, Italy's second

largest textile export market after the EU, clocked up a very significant €380 million (compared with the €418 million imports from China into Italy) and mills are working hard on productivity issues to contain and even reduce their prices. General clothing and fashion business in China grew 11percent in 2013 (less than the 18 percent of 2012 but still remarkable) and, even though Italian fabrics are destined for the upper middle class, just a small incremental growth in that social category, considering the size of China's population, would have a huge impact on sales generally.

Above all, the number of carefully selected visitors to the Milano Unica sector keeps increasing (up almost 15 percent at 3900 as against 3400 in the October 2013 edition). "The confidence of Milano Unica exhibitors about this enormous, strategic market continues," says Silvio Albini.

"We are ever more convinced that China will continue to represent an important part of the future for the Italian textile industry." And the exhibitors are behind him. Although too early to say how the growing sampling orders would convert into hard orders, exhibitors points to five significant changes in their dealing with the Chinese market.

1. Chinese clients were developing a 'loyalty' factor. Instead of flitting from one supplier to the next, every season, they were building ongoing relationships with existing suppliers.
2. Customers are showing a better understanding of fabric quality and value.
3. They were taking a more structured approach to their business. Instead of just picking what they liked, willy-nilly, they were planning collections and being consequential in choices.
4. The Chinese luxury market has always been lead by menswear business. Companies are now reporting more womenswear manufacturers buying high value, Italian fabrics.
5. Childrenswear has become an important new market for Italians as Chinese seek to dress their 'little emperors' in appropriately regal clothing.

Something for everyone

The number of product zones, from Salon Europe to the Sustainability zone (now including an Educational Zone and ecoBoutique display), continue to grow. Most striking was the growth of the Beyond Denim section to cover an entire hall with 150 domestic and international exhibitors showing not just denim fabrics but wash innovations, new technologies and sustainable practices.

David R. Shah