

On

WWD

07 Gennaio 2021

JANUARY 8, 2021

27

WHAT TO WATCH **WWD**

Will Antiviral Fabrics Sustain Momentum in 2021?

These "new gen" fabrics became all the rage in 2020 and are poised to become a new market standard despite vaccines. BY MARTINO CARRERA

MILAN — In addition to the challenges it created, the pandemic has also accelerated more than one trend in the fashion industry, including the textile sector's crucial role in spearheading innovation.

As the first wave of COVID-19 cases was spreading internationally and the importance of customers' safety and health care came to the fore, a number of storied textile firms in Europe pushed ahead amid lockdowns and brought to the market a new family of performance-driven fabrics with antiviral qualities.

They were believed to become a new market standard along the same lines as odor control, wrinkle-free and natural stretch treatments, offering a response to the fears and preoccupations of the average fashion consumer in 2020.

Looking forward to 2021 with prospects of several vaccines being distributed globally, consumers might show less interest in antiviral fabrics, even less so as fear of getting infected by just touching or trying on clothes seems to be an issue of the past when less evidence was provided by the scientific community on whether fabrics and other materials could themselves represent a means for contagion.

Consumers have also become more educated about the risky behaviors they should avoid, and that isn't primarily touching garments as the dominant means the virus spreads is airborne.

In the last few months, though, more suppliers have developed antiviral finishings and treatments, signaling that the potential of such fabrics remains large — and brands seem to be taking note.

Fabio Tamburini, chief executive officer



of Cottonificio Albini, the Albini Group's production arm, which developed the ViroFormula family of antiviral fabrics in partnership with Swiss company HeiQ, said several brands spanning from luxury to contemporary have embraced their fabrics, including Italy's Xactus and storied Hong Kong-based Ascot Chang, among others.

"Although the vaccines will allow us to get back to a normal and safe life as we were used to, we're convinced that consumers will still be looking for antiviral fabrics," he said, noting that increased travel and the use of public transport will drive consumers to look for safety in their fashion purchases.

"We're still convinced that the antiviral properties are required market-standard in the future even when the pandemic will be fully controlled. The main goal for every

[fashion] company is to respect and satisfy its clients' needs and after all these difficult months, everyone wants to get back to its usual routine feeling safe," he said.

At the Marzotto Wool Manufacturing company, which launched antimicrobial fabrics made of natural yarns treated with the ViralOff finish developed by Sweden-based Polygiene, ceo Giorgio Todesco ascribed their success to a shift in customers' perception, with more attention given to technical performance.

The executive underscored that the ViralOff fabrics have been particularly appealing to retailers that provide their sales associates with uniforms, for brands in the Asian market and more generally in the contemporary fashion segment.

Along the same lines, Lecco, Italy-based

Luxury Jersey, which also tapped into HeiQ's Viroblock finishing like the Albini Group, saw a spike in demand by companies in the ath-leisure market, with around 10 brands already making prototypes.

The company's general manager Federico Boselli projected a less rosy scenario for consumer attitudes even after the vaccine is distributed and overall he believed that "consumers will be keener on hygiene and will pay more attention to microbes in general."

To this end he forecast "a widespread circulation of antimicrobial clothing," echoing the sentiment of Alberto De Conti, head of the fashion division at Germany-based chemical company Rudolf Group, which has conducted lab tests on its RUCO-BAC AGP technology introduced in 2005 and proved it boasts antiviral properties on the family of coronaviruses.

De Conti believes these fabrics will continue to play a pivotal role based on customers and brands alike seeking hygiene finishings, even though a vaccine might reduce their demand.

The executive also touched on another crucial factor: "Because of a proliferation of misleading information, the market has been increasingly expressing interest in reliable and understandable test results. The textile market is looking for real performance that can be communicated to customers rather than short-sighted marketing gimmicks," he said.

To be sure, no company can casually claim antiviral properties in Europe and the U.S. and these companies have made clear these fabrics are no substitute for PPE, nor do they prevent the risk of contagion.

While some expect the market for antiviral fabrics to grow, thus fostering R&D activities and a reduction of their production costs, Todesco was less confident that demand will continue to surge in 2021 even if, he said, there will always be specific sectors to target, such as workers' uniforms.

<https://wwd.com/fashion-news/textiles/antiviral-fabrics-become-market-standard-1234685029/>

GUITAR