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Taking Design Know-how Behind the Scenes

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Sublimation or Screen Two Printers' Perspectives

Screen-printed T-shirts have been a staple since the mid-20th century, when the introduction of plastisol ink made it possible to have more-flexible and -durable graphics. The introduction of sublimation printing introduced highly detailed digital imagery to the process. Both processes have their advantages and drawbacks. *California Apparel News Decorated* Contributing Writer Deirdre Newman caught up with two printers—Joel Monroy, owner of Rags to Riches Printing in Los Angeles' Lincoln Heights neighborhood, and Rob Davis, chief executive officer of sublimation printer Avid Ink in Corona, Calif.—to get the lowdown on the pros and cons of each technique.



Screen printing is economical and fast if the design is limited to one or two colors.

Joel Monroy Owner

Rags to Riches Printing
www.thehumansurprise.com

Having been screen printing and running my shop for five years now, I've become very familiar with the screen printing and apparel industry and the different processes of apparel printing. I focus on traditional hand-pulled/manual screen printing. This method, like all, has its benefits and drawbacks.

Traditional screen printing still holds strong as the go-to method for apparel printing. It's economical enough to handle large-quantity orders and has a relatively quick turnaround time. It does require a good amount of material, however.

To print with this method requires a variety of different inks, depending on the substrate, and also requires the use of screens,

emulsion squeegees—and the list goes on. But once you have the materials needed, traditional screen printing is more or less cost effective for design with one or a few colors. When it comes to designs with few colors, screen printing is the way to go. Cost becomes an issue with screen printing once designs start getting complicated, as with designs that have many colors or designs that are photographic in nature with different tones and shades. The thing with screen printing is it requires one screen for every color involved in the design. So when you have a design with a plethora of colors, you require many screens, and this is where the setup becomes expensive because you need a screen for each color. When you compare this to processes such as direct-to-garment printing, where no screen setup is required to print many colors, then screen printing begins to lose its economic incentive.

In my opinion, when it comes to screen printing, there is also the issue of environmental friendliness. Most of the inks and chemicals used in screen printing are not the safest for the environment, and some are downright hazardous. They do have eco-friendly materials, but they aren't as easy to use and are only eco-friendly to a certain extent.



Sublimation printing allows for more detail and color, but designs cannot be printed on 100 percent cotton (pictured, Avid Ink design).

Rob Davis Chief Executive Officer Avid Ink www.avidink.com

I was one of the first, if not the first, full-service, sublimation-print providers in Southern California. I chose sublimation because it was the process that allowed the most creativity—technologically as well as artistically. There was such a demand in the industry back in 1997.

I got my first experience when I was manufacturing snowboards. We were using sublimation printing and transferring inside the factory. As an employee, I came to the conclusion that it would be cheaper for my employer to outsource this process, so I sought out the tech resources like ink manufacturers and pre-press manufacturers so I could do the printing externally. I ended up leaving and took [my former employer] as my first customer. I bought a transfer machine from them and sublet a small office and hired one person, who is still with me today, to work on the graphics, and we produced them. It allowed me to focus on the printing process and technology rather than a whole multitude of processes of

snowboard manufacturing.

The creativity is almost limitless. I have 13 artists who work for me. We have over 60,000 open-line library and copyrighted designs, all created by my staff. Even technically, we have the most technically advanced printing presses in the United States. They print about 14,000 sheets per hour.

The cons are when we make technological advancements we have competitors that try and reproduce them. We have a lot of our customers that say these customers can do it for a cheaper rate. But about 75 percent of the time, we get those customers back because they find the quality, customer service and art aren't as good as we can do. The legalities also [are an issue to consider]. We're a totally compliant legal facility.

Another pro is we are diverse. We treat our customers as individuals and understand the competitive nature. They need that intellectual-property protection. We have over 300 customers; 90 percent of them are in LA.

I love being part of the print industry, especially that the apparel industry has allowed us to be the leader. I'm so thankful, especially that we are a leader as a U.S. manufacturer.

The challenges [over the past 16 years] have been the same—just satisfying the customer. When you produce something that is beautiful and elegant, they say, "What's next?" As we are constantly progressing—from a creative, artistic level and a customer-service level—a constant imperative is to stay No. 1, and that's our goal—to be No. 1 in the United States from the perspective of our customers. ●



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Keep Me Consulting Going Behind the Scenes

Ali Kay and Anne Des Barres, the co-founders of the luxury knits loungewear line **Keep Me**, were not the kind of fashion-brand entrepreneurs that craved the spotlight. All the back-of-the-house work that came with having their own line—the design, production, operations and fulfillment side—was their happy place. All of the front-of-the-house marketing necessary that came with selling and promoting a branded product—that was a burden.

When the two came to a crossroads in continuing their knits brand, Kay said, they asked themselves, “What do we want to be doing on a daily basis?”

She said, “One of the things we didn’t love is we weren’t naturally great at marketing ourselves, and we didn’t love and enjoy it. The things we enjoyed were making a quality product, running a great business and working together.”



online contemporary e-tailer.

“Our relationship with our factories is huge. Anne is so experienced in production,” Kay said. “We are super organized with the manufacturing side of things. Part of what we were so committed to was we didn’t want to be breathing down the necks at any of our factories. We like to have a very nice business. We never felt like it was worth it—and we’ve

ways seen eye to eye on this—to be yelling at someone over a tank top being on time.”

The product-development clothing includes some of Keep Me’s proven original styles and exclusive women’s casualwear bodies, depending on the needs of the customer.

“On the design side ... people still email us, [saying,] ‘My Keep Me pants are all worn out. I need new ones. Where do I get them?’ Our sell-throughs with our private-label side have shown that our design is pretty on point, too,” Kay said.

For new clients, they tailor their services based on which aspect of the business the client requests advice. One example is **Spirit-Hoods**, which has its own clear fashion vision but needed Des Barres’ expertise to tighten up its day-to-day-operations side.

For a start-up brand, Kay said, Keep Me offers the “bigger-picture” ideas that the two learned from launching their own business—finding the right product assortment and fabrication choices that make manufacturing more cost efficient.

“[We] lead them down a path where they could not spend unnecessary capital at the beginning,” Kay said. For more information, visit www.keepme.com.—*Rhea Cortado*



When they decided to shift from brand building to private-label consulting, Kay and Des Barres found their first business with Keep Me’s wholesale customers. The two offered private label and product development to stores that had stocked Keep Me’s well-fitting knit basics. Some were boutique retailers, and one included a major

Banta Graphics With Humor



Logos and screen-prints are back in style. And that’s great news for **Banta**, a design operation from Los Angeles. The T-shirt company is devoted to the graphics of Brett Banta. His art is guided by his idiosyncratic take on the world.

Banta T-shirts have been sold at hipster boutiques such as **Giant Robot** in Los Angeles’ Little Osaka neighborhood and pioneering action-sports shops such as **Val**

Surf in Los Angeles’ San Fernando Valley. A Japanese distributor, **5 Nuts**, has placed the shirts in some Japanese shops.

“I usually choose things to print that make me laugh,” Banta said. “I love beach culture, surfing, skating and marine life, so those themes always find their way into my shirts alongside the humor.”

Some recent Banta graphics include a manatee, probably destined to be a team mascot, holding a trident. There’s a picture of a surfer riding an amazing wave with a great white shark leaping from the surf right behind him. Another T-shirt depicts



drawings of household items such as a wrench, a hanger and a toilet scrubber.

Banta uses **American Apparel** blanks. The T-shirts wholesale for \$12.25. The fit is designed

for slim bodies and open minds. “The goals of the company are to have fun and make shirts that we think our friends would wear,” Banta said. For more information, contact Dan Johnson at (562) 480-9004 or dan@wearebanta.com or email Banta at brett@wearebanta.com.—*Andrew Asch*



Android Homme Duty Now for Future Fashion

Call it streetwear with a luxe edge. Or maybe it's casual luxury with a street look.

Los Angeles-based **Android Homme** has been charting a course between luxury looks and street edge and has attracted attention from celebrities who can look as debonair as Frank Sinatra or as stylishly ragged as Lil Wayne.

Rapper and **Brooklyn Nets** basketball team owner Jay-Z has been frequently photographed wearing Android Homme's high-top "Propulsion" sneakers, which were inspired by the fury and the color of a rocket's blast-off. Usher and Justin Bieber have been spotted in Android Homme sneakers, and another fan, Anthony Gonzalez of hip French electronic band **M83**, deejayed last summer's opening-night party for the Android Homme showroom and by-appointment boutique **IX II II** in a gritty section of downtown Los Angeles.

The neighborhood is scheduled to blossom later this year when the highly anticipated **Ace Hotel** opens. The area is forecast to attract a great wave of wealthy hipsters and like-minded businesses to the area. Android Homme designer Javier Laval shares the sprawling space, located at 922 S. Olive St., with brother-and-sister designers Brandon and Sarah Scott.

Building the new brand has been a long haul for Laval, a former nightclub promoter and brand consultant who advised **Nike** on appealing to youth and streetwear audiences. After finding success by counseling others on polishing their designs, he decided to jump into the fashion game himself. But he had lousy timing.

Android Homme started just as the Great Recession put the economy in a deep freeze. Laval survived those years because of his nightclub past and some luck. Through club

connections, he was able to introduce his brand to a cadre of well-known musicians. Also, prominent boutiques such as **Atrium**, **Traffic** and **Karmaloop** were willing to take a chance on Android Homme during those years, when a majority of retail-

ers were only willing to bet on the proven and established brands.

Laval officially introduced Android Homme's Summer and Fall 2013 at the **Agenda** trade show. Along with new looks for the "Propulsion" sneakers, he exhibited cut-and-sew cotton T-shirts that satirize the world of high fashion. One shirt spoofing tumult and brand change at venerable fashion house **Yves St. Laurent** bears the slogan "Yves Was an Android." In a **Chanel**-style font, another shirt bears the legend "Los Angeles, New York, Paris, Mars."

Also on display were his "Story of Creation" T-shirts. Made in a heavy, poly-cotton blend, the shirts bear intricate graphics representing different ages of human history. There's a bright-green reptile on one shirt representing the Garden of Eden and a golden bust of a Pharaoh on another shirt representing the achievements of ancient civilizations. The series ends with a picture of the space shuttle blasting off. "We're expanding what is possible," Laval said. "We're a brand of the future. ... We believe in every human's ability to reprogram for success."

Next up for Android Homme, Laval plans to develop a handful of branded shops for his line.

For more information, email melissa@androidhomme.com or call (213) 896-0025.

—Andrew Asch



STARMAN: Javier Laval of Android Homme

Graphic Collection American Apparel Adds Images

For years, American Apparel's tees eschewed graphics. But that will change with the launch of a new collection, created by streetwear pioneer Rick Klotz.

Known for sexually provocative ad campaigns, American Apparel recently launched **The Graphic Collection**.

The Los Angeles-based vertical manufacturer and retailer, which runs a fleet of 251 stores, has been adding more printed product to its mix in recent years. But largely it stuck to simple slogans such as its "Legalize" collection, which had phrases such as "Legalize LA" emblazoned on T-shirts and sweatshirts.

The new collection is the company's first foray into a full graphic-tee collection.

With wholesale price points of \$14, The Graphic Collection will be first sold at American Apparel's online store and at some American Apparel bricks-and-mortar locations. The line will be printed on



American Apparel bodies and will feature graphics and pictures by Klotz, who created provocative printed T-shirts for his **Freshjive** label for 23 years.

The Graphic Collection includes a wide range of imagery. On one end of the spectrum is the tee with a big dog in big red sunglasses and another with the words "Aloha Summer" in puff print. On the other end of the spectrum are the T-shirt with a topless woman wearing a unicorn mask and another depicting a set

of vintage cameras with the wording "weapons of mass creations."

Klotz said enigmatic subjects have staying power. "The most memorable and compelling graphic designs that stick in your mind have an undeniable wit and intellectual playfulness," Klotz said. "They utilize humor, irony and ambiguity."

For wholesale information, contact American Apparel at (213) 488-0226.—*Andrew Asch*



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James Haunt

The World Is a Canvas

To James Haunt, the world is a big canvas.

He's painted murals on walls at the LA Fashion Week venue **Box Eight**, at the **US Open of Surfing** and on streets around Los Angeles.

Sometimes those images can be found on the mobile billboard of a T-shirt. "One day, I'm given an opportunity to paint a mural, then I have to come up with a concept," said Haunt, who was born with the name James Gillette. "Then I say, 'I really like this piece; maybe it would work well on a T-shirt. ... It lends itself with being creative.'"

For his self-named downtown Los Angeles-T-shirt label, **James Haunt**, the artist uses a number of graphics from his murals. Graphics could be flying saucers, a robotic-looking face with eyes and a smile that seems way too big, or Southern California beach girls. Of course these pop-art pinups are wearing James Haunt T-shirts. The label also offers T-shirts that are primarily blank except for a small pocket on the front bearing James Haunt graphics.



James Haunt T-shirts have been placed at retailers such as **Tilly's**, **Zumiez** and **Kitson**. The graphics are printed on custom-made T-shirts. They wholesale for \$11 to \$13. For more information, email info@jameshaunt.com.—Andrew Asch



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Cleaning Up the Dye Process

Typical fabric dyeing is a messy process, involving large water use and harsh chemical waste water, which must be treated before disposal.

Several yarn and fabric makers have new



products that promise to eliminate many of the drawbacks of the dyeing process.

Some are based on the cationic process, a chemical process that increases the affinity between the fiber and the dye. Treated fibers absorb nearly all of the dyestuff, producing waste water that is nearly clear and can be reused for the next dye bath.

Mt. Pleasant, N.C.-based spinning mill **Tuscarora Yarns** has been showing fabrics made from its **ProTura** yarn, made from cationic reactive cotton, according to Andy Long, Tuscarora's vice president of sales. Mixing the ProTura yarn with traditional yarns can yield new knit patterns dyed using less water and chemicals.

The company recently teamed up with international color-solutions provider **DyStar** to offer a water-saving fiber and dye process for colored denim using Protura cotton and DyStar's pre-reduced indigo and its **Lava Chemicals & Dye**.

Another company offering an alternative to traditional dyeing is New York-based **ColorZen**, which will pre-treat cotton fibers with a chemical process similar to cationic treatment—"but a whole lot more than that," said Michael Harari, president of the 2-year-old company. Fabrics made from ColorZen-treated fibers also come out of the dye bath with clear effluent, which can be reused in the next dye bath. Treated fabrics use 90 percent less water, 70 percent less energy and 95 percent fewer chemicals, Harari said. The dye process is shorter, reducing energy costs and increasing capacity.

ColorZen's products cost more than traditional untreated cotton, but the added costs are offset by the water and energy savings.

"There are significant dollar savings with water, chemicals, energy and dyes," Harari said. "With our process, you use 50 percent less dyes, and [the shorter cycle time means] the dyehouses can increase production. All of these savings are tangible and offset most of the costs associated with the technology. It's almost like a shock to the industry."

For more information about these products, visit www.tuscarorayarns.com and www.colorzen.com.—Alison A. Nieder



WATER SAVERS: Color Zen (top) and Tuscarora Yarns (bottom) have introduced new products and processes for dyeing using less water, salt and chemicals.



Brown Sound is reminiscent of music and nature with elements of pop vice culture and simplistic edge.

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Brown Sound's mission is to make clothing that suits the day's war, nights of love life style. Their designs are influenced by the proletariat, military cuts; worn in a rock and roll tradition. Did they say rock and roll? They should have just said a Men-at-Work tradition.



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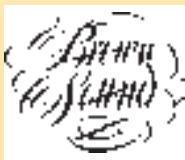


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It is a very exciting time right now for **Brown Sound**. We just brought on a new team of rising designers and are in the process of finalizing our latest collection of rock-inspired graphic tees that are due to hit retail floors in March. The looks for 2013 are reminiscent of music and nature with elements of pop culture and a simplistic edge. Most commonly, the Los Angeles-based men's brand is praised for the softness and body-conscious fit that accompanies its unique graphic collection, birthing ultra-hip styles that have earned in excess of \$1 million in sales each! "We have been receiving a lot of requests for sportswear and are flirting with the idea of relaunching the contemporary sportswear division for Brown Sound this F/W season," says Jonathan Knapp, key account exec for Brown Sound. "However, this summer, graphic tees will especially be the category to watch for us." (714) 670-8886. info@amerithreads.net

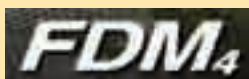


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