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Interior of the Ron Robinson store in Santa Monica, Calif.

Novelty Textile Wins Major Case Over Fabric Design Copyright

By Deborah Belgum *Senior Editor*

More than one year after filing a copyright-infringement lawsuit over three different fabric designs, **Novelty Textile** has been awarded \$650,000 in a jury verdict.

The verdict is one of the largest monetary awards this year for a fashion copyright-infringement lawsuit in Los Angeles, said Scott Burroughs, one of the attorneys representing Novelty Textile.

The case, filed in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles on July 31, 2013, centered around three proprietary fabric designs that Novelty Textile said it had developed and then were ordered by one of the defendants, **Hot Shot HK**, doing business as **Brat Star Inc.** in New York.

Novelty Textile, based in Vernon, Calif., and owned by James Son, claimed that Hot Shot HK placed purchase orders for the fabrics and later canceled them only to have

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No Change on the Waterfront as Cargo Slowly Clears the Ports

By Deborah Belgum *Senior Editor*

By the beginning of the holiday shopping season, normally there would be no sign of any cargo-container ships moored beyond the port breakwater waiting in line for days to dock.

But this is no normal year for apparel importers unfortunate enough to still be waiting for their holiday merchandise to clear the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, which handle about 40 percent of all the cargo that is destined for the United States.

The protracted contract negotiations between the **International Longshore and Warehouse Union** and the **Pacific Maritime Association**, which employs the longshore workers at 29 West Coast ports, have stalled until Dec. 2. Charges of work slowdowns at the ports have continued.

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MADE IN AMERICA

LA-Based Britannia Sees Bright Prospects in Black Sheep

By Alison A. Nieder *Executive Editor*

Terrence Chermak has been spending the better part of the last six months knee-deep in wool—specifically, black wool.

The owner of Los Angeles-based **Britannia Mills Ltd.** is no stranger to wool, which is always part of his line of contemporary knits.

But Chermak recently became enamored with the hard-to-find wool of black sheep and has put together the supply chain necessary to process it and bring it to market as an eco-friendly specialty product with its own natural beauty.

According to Chermak, most of the world's wool is white—or more accurately, a natural color, which makes

the wool easier and more efficient to process and dye. The wool from black sheep—which actually ranges in color from black to gray to brown to a warm honey shade—is primarily sold within specialty markets.

“[Black] wool is a cottage industry—expensive and very crafty,” Chermak said. “Fine [black] wool in commercial quantities doesn’t exist—with one exception,” he said. “I figured it out,” he said.

To produce commercial quantities of black wool, Chermak had to overcome several hurdles, starting with finding enough black sheep. Ranchers might have thousands of white sheep but just a few black sheep to help them quickly estimate the number of sheep in a field. “Scattered in a lot of

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COMPANY PROFILE

Dragon Crowd Garment: Connecting Asia to the U.S. Through Orange County

By Julie Gallego *Contributing Writer*

The office of **Dragon Crowd Garment Inc.** President J. Spencer is neat as a pin. His big, shiny desk has nothing but a brass “J,” a computer and a cell phone on it.

“I’m a simple guy,” said Spencer, an Oklahoma native from a town of about 20,000. “I have a hard time focusing if I don’t keep things neat and tidy.”

The rest of the office is just as clean, and the 49-year-old’s calm demeanor seems to fit perfectly in the quiet setting. But what the office represents—an international knitwear manufacturer with more than \$100 million in sales last year—is

anything but sparse.

Based in Ningbo, China, with U.S. headquarters in Costa Mesa, Calif., Dragon Crowd makes apparel for specialty stores and private labels for department stores such as the **BP** and **Make + Model** brands at **Nordstrom**.

“We are, at our core, a knitwear manufacturer; that is our greatest level of expertise,” Spencer said. Knits may be the foundation of Dragon Crowd’s business, but the company also produces woven tops, pants, jeans and jackets for men and women. But despite such assertions, the company’s plans look more like a strategy for market domination.

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Ron Robinson Bows Standalone Shop in Santa Monica

By Andrew Asch Retail Editor

After almost 20 years of doing business in the well-off seaside city of Santa Monica, Calif., Ron Robinson was told in May to vacate his successful **Ron Robinson** shop at the landmark **Fred Segal** compound. The entire Fred Segal building at 500 Broadway was going to be torn down to make way for construction of a mixed-use building of residences and restaurants.

It could have been time to retire or slow down, but business was too good in Santa Monica, and Robinson and his staff had made too many friends and clients to leave. Even after 40 years of running a Ron Robinson boutique at the Fred Segal compound on Los Angeles' Melrose Avenue—he learned the art and business of boutique retail from Fred Segal at Melrose—Robinson thought that he had more to say. “Maybe it’s a bit like being addicted to something,” he said of boutique retail. “If I still have the energy, I’m going for it.”

Recently, he held a soft opening for the more than 5,500-square-foot standalone Ron Robinson shop at 1327 Fifth St. near Arizona Avenue. It’s a few blocks from his former space. (Fred Segal Santa Monica’s 420 Broadway address is still functioning as a compound for boutiques.)

Robinson called the new space, located in a former art gallery, a flagship concept

store. It will be a place where he; his business partner and wife, Stacy Robinson; and his longtime staff will experiment and try something new under the Ron Robinson nameplate.

For the Santa Monica location, there will be new sections. Taking a bow will be **Floral Art for Ron Robinson**. “**Take a Break**” is where coffee drinks and other prepared foods will be served. There also

is a 900-square-foot garden area outside of the shop, which Robinson designed. Bougainvillea and poinsettia flowers currently blossom there, and upholstered furniture is arranged around the garden.

The store also hosts a 2,300-square-foot area for children’s clothing from infants’ to pre-teens’ called **Lifesize Kids**. In the front of the store there is the **Apothia** section, devoted to fragrances such as Robinson’s own **Velvet Rope** line and his collaboration with the **Missoni** fashion house,

Missoni Home by Apothia, which produces scented candles and homewares.

The new shop also will sell gifts, coffee-table books, jewelry, personal electronics and apparel. Popular brands sold at the shop recently were **Cotton Citizen**, **PJ Salvage**, **Lulu Frost**, **Rabens Sallower**, **Nesh**, **Lucas Hugh** and **Teeki**. Popular men’s brands have been **Deus Ex Machina**, **Electric & Rose**, **John Varvatos**, **Scotch & Soda** and **Stance**.



Ron Robinson



Interior and garden area at the Ron Robinson store in Santa Monica, Calif.



While Robinson’s staff directs buying for various sections, his merchandising captures some of the best of the Los Angeles lifestyle, said Carl Louisville, founder of the **Guerilla Atelier** boutique in downtown Los Angeles.

“His attention to detail and his ability to find items that speak to his brand and lifestyle are extraordinary,” Louisville said. Robinson also retains a disciplined work ethic. He opened a shop-in-shop at Guerilla Atelier in 2013. When the store moved to a new address in downtown Los Angeles, 427 Hewitt St., Robinson showed up at 9 a.m. on a Sunday in early October to help Louisville move items for Robinson’s shop-in-shop. “He’s a consummate merchant,” Louisville said. “He works as hard today as he did when he opened. No detail is too small, no project is too big.”

Robinson also designed the interior of the new Santa Monica store with Ruben Ojeda, an architect who helped design some of the interiors at the Ron Robinson Melrose store.

The shop features an exposed, bow-truss ceiling; white epoxy flooring in the front; and a wood floor painted white in the back. Walls are white too. “It’s a big canvas to put product onto,” Robinson said. There’s also an open, airy ambience about the place, and shoppers are intended to have a clear view of the entire shop floor.

The past 12 months has been an eventful time for Ron Robinson. After Fred Segal shopkeeper Bob Serf retired, Robinson acquired his 2,000-square-foot space in the Fred Segal Melrose compound. He built an accessories hallway, lined with one-of-a-kind fashions such as hats by Gladys Tamez and snakeskin boxing gloves from Elizabeth Weinstock. There’s also a women’s active

section and more space for kids’. In November 2013, he opened a 1,800-square-foot section for **StylObjects**, which is devoted to design, gifts, accessories and books. He introduced the expansion in May.

Ron Robinson regularly puts on store parties with diverse themes. Recently, there was a party for eyewear line **Mothersbaugh by Mothersbaugh + Baum**, which was inspired by the satiric point of view of Mark Mothersbaugh, a founder of music group **Devo**. The store has also held events for eco-fashion, action-sports brands and new designers.

Ron Robinson captures a certain California lifestyle, said Adam Vanunu, president/chief executive officer and creative director for **Cotton Citizen**. “It’s quality basics, it’s colorful and fun, and it is a necessity,” Vanunu said of clothes at Ron Robinson boutiques. “It is very California.”

Cotton Citizen made its Ron Robinson debut for holiday 2012, and it was a crucial branding exercise. “The line was a brand-new line,” Vanunu said. “It helped us pinpoint our customer—see the brands that we wanted to be next to. They helped us brand ourselves.”

Looking back on 40 years in business, Robinson noted that retailers have to build lightning-fast reflexes to stay in business. “The world is faster than it was when I started. The awareness of a product comes at the speed of the Internet. Whatever comes from Europe or Japan becomes knowledgeable to others immediately. That means finding unique and more-unknown components becomes that much more challenging,” he said. “We have to work faster and make these finds and connections to bring these people to market and cultivate them early on.” ●

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Caruso Closes Escrow on Palisades Enclave

Rick Caruso, developer of **The Grove** and **The Americana at Brand** retail centers in the Los Angeles area, announced Nov. 25 that his company, **Caruso Affiliated**, closed escrow on Swarthmore Avenue in the wealthy enclave of Pacific Palisades in Los Angeles.

The announcement is a milestone in a two-year saga to develop the street into a retail district named **Palisades Village**. It currently is the address of boutiques, restaurants and many empty storefronts. Caruso acquired the land, said to be 2.77 acres, in December 2012.

However, his company found that parts of it had been contaminated by toxic chemicals left over from a dry-cleaning business. Caruso worked with California’s state Department of Toxic Substances Control to develop a plan to clean the space up, the

developer said.

“We are excited to move full speed ahead with our plans for the next chapter of Swarthmore Avenue,” he said. The developer is scheduled to discuss his plans for Swarthmore Avenue at a community meeting at 6:30 p.m. on Dec. 4 in Mercer Hall at **Palisades Charter High School**.

Caruso is also under contract to acquire the **Mobil** gas station adjacent to Swarthmore Avenue, on the corner of Sunset and Swarthmore. That deal is expected to close in mid-2016, according to a Caruso Affiliated statement.

Earlier this year, Caruso stated his interest in “street-front” retail, or developing shopping outside of malls. Palisades Village could be such a place where unique boutiques do business on pedestrian streets.—A.A.

Nasty Gal Opens on Melrose

A line of fans and shoppers snaked around the corner of Melrose Avenue and North Kilkea Drive in Los Angeles on the morning of Nov. 21 to take in the opening of the first physical boutique for **Nasty Gal**, the e-commerce emporium that mixes designer vintage with contemporary styles for a unique statement.

Jessica Rafael drove more than 55 miles from the South Orange County town of San Juan Capistrano, Calif., for a chance to be one of the first shoppers at Nasty Gal's Melrose store. "It's different from any brand," Rafael, a restaurant server, said. "It's very authentic and unique."

The store opening has been highly anticipated because of the popularity of *www.nastygal.com*, which makes more than \$100 million a year, according to a statement on the company website, and interest in founder Sophia Amoruso, who published *#Girlboss*, a hardcover book that was ranked as a bestseller by *Publisher's Weekly* this summer.

The interest seeped into the realm of celebrity. At a gala debut dinner for the boutique on Nov. 20, Academy Award winner Charlize Theron appeared in Nasty Gal clothes accompanied by Sean Penn and his daughter Dylan Penn. Hip-hop musician Azaelia Banks also dropped by the festivities.

At the Nasty Gal boutique, designer vintage looks ranging from **Vivienne Westwood** to **Thierry Mugler** are mixed in with clothes from the Nasty Gal line. In the front of the boutique, clothes and jewelry are displayed. The center of the boutique is devoted to a bank of dressing rooms. In



NASTY PARTY: Two Nasty Gal shoppers take a shot of themselves using a photo booth by the Phhphoto company.

the back is a shoe salon and an alcove for hipster magazines and the Lena Dunham memoir *Not That Kind of Girl*.

The space for the Nasty Gal boutique formerly housed contemporary boutique **Madison**. It is located across the street from the pioneering boutique compound **Fred Segal**. Liz Porter, manager of **Channel Islands Surfboards** at 8175 Melrose Ave., forecast that Nasty Gal would bring a lot of foot traffic to the street. "They have no parking," Porter said. Nasty Gal shoppers will have to park on the street and walk past Melrose boutiques to shop at the store. "We'll get a lot of girls walking by," Porter said. "We'll get a lot of street sales."

—Andrew Asch

Wet Seal Hires Team to Explore Sale

Beleaguered retailer **The Wet Seal Inc.** announced Nov. 24 that it has hired a team to help the Foothill Ranch, Calif.-based retailer to look for "strategic and financial alternatives," which is industry lingo for considering an array of new directions for the business, including a sale.

Wet Seal hired **Houlihan Lokey**, a global investment bank with a Los Angeles office, to help chart its next steps. It also hired William Langsdorf, a former chief financial officer for **Tilly's Inc.**, to be an adviser.

Ed Thomas, who joined Wet Seal as its chief executive officer on Sept. 3, declined to give a schedule for a sale. A company statement noted that the exploration of alternatives may not result in a sale. However, Thomas noted that tough times demand hard choices.

"I'm proud of the progress we have made to date in light of the ongoing difficult macro environment and state of affairs at the company when I joined in September. Given our struggles and challenges, it is prudent for us to continue the review of alternatives. We welcome the addition of these advisers to our team," Thomas said.

The announcement comes on the heels of activist investors **Clinton Group** going public with its frustration with the Wet Seal turnaround. On Nov. 19, it distributed a letter to Wet Seal's board of directors through **PRNewswire**. The letter, signed by Joseph A.

De Perio, a senior portfolio manager, demonstrated frustration with Thomas, because it claimed that the stock price had dropped 80 percent since Thomas started helming the retailer. It also requested that the company seek different debt financing rather than **Bank of America**, its current lender. It also requested changes in the retailer's equity financing situation and that it make real estate concessions.

On Nov. 17, **B. Riley & Co.**, a financial-services firm, downgraded Wet Seal's stock from buy to neutral. Jeff Van Sinderen, a B. Riley analyst, wrote that Thomas is making the right calls for a turnaround but that it may not be enough.

"Although every possible effort is being made by the much improved WTSL leadership, those critical elements of the turnaround have not yet materialized," Van Sinderen wrote. "While we have believed that Ed Thomas is one of the few people on the planet with a shot at turning around WTSL, with less than \$20 million remaining on the balance sheet, time is of the essence."

Van Sinderen called for landlords to work with Wet Seal to help the company. Wet Seal continues to run a fleet of 528 Wet Seal stores across the United States offering juniors fashions. However, the last few years have been filled with turmoil, seeing declining sales, proxy battles, and, on April 25, the shuttering of its contemporary **Arden B** division.—A.A.

NEWS

Novelty *Continued from page 1*

the fabric copied in China. The fabric designs were made into clothes sold to **The Wet Seal**, another defendant in the case, which continued selling the garments to shoppers even though the Southern California retail chain received a cease-and-desist letter, Burroughs said.

"The facts here were egregious," Burroughs said. "Hotshot had actually issued a purchase order to Novelty Textile for the three designs and canceled them a day later and then had the fabric knocked off in China."

One of the fabrics had a yellow daisy design on a black background; another had a floral design in mint, orange and green; and a third fabric had a geometric design in blue, pink and teal.

The fabrics were copyrighted in 2012 before they were shown to Hot Shot HK, court papers showed.

Side-by-side photos of Novelty Textile's designs and the designs used in apparel sold at The Wet Seal appeared to be identical.

In a summary judgment by U.S. District Court Judge S. James Otero, both defendants were found guilty of willful copyright infringement under the Copyright Act of 1976. A jury then decided punitive damages. Motions are forthcoming for costs and attorneys' fees.

This is not the first time Novelty Textile has sued a retailer and an apparel maker for copyright infringement. Novelty has been a plaintiff in at least 14 cases against retailers such as **Nordstrom**, **Windsor Fashions**, **Charlotte Russe**, **Love Culture**, **Ross Stores** and **Rue21 Inc.**

But it is rare for these kinds of cases to actually go to court. Most are settled outside a courtroom to avoid an expensive trial, where attorneys' fees can mount to more than \$150,000 to \$200,000.

But going to trial has resulted in some big awards in cases concentrating on fabric designs and their copyright. Last year, **Advanced Visual Image Design LLC (Avid Ink)**, a sublimation printer in Los Angeles that sells directly to manufacturers, sued **Exist Inc.**, a Florida garment wholesaler,



SIDE BY SIDE: Novelty Textile said its fabric design on the left was illegally copied and used in the skirt on the right, which was sold at The Wet Seal.

for allegedly copying more than two dozen of Avid Ink's proprietary fabric designs.

Exist denied all the allegations, saying the vendor of the garments had obtained the designs in a transaction taking place in a hotel lobby in China.

But in a U.S. District Court trial in Riverside, Calif., Exist was found guilty of willful copyright infringement and a jury awarded \$1.75 million to Avid Ink. Avid Ink was represented by **Doniger/Burroughs**, the same law firm that represented Novelty Textile.

On the legal trail

In the past decade, many Los Angeles fabric converters and printers have had more than their day in court. Some have filed scores of lawsuits, with several fabric companies being accused of making more money filing lawsuits than creating fabric designs.

L.A. Printex Industries in Los Angeles has filed hun-

dreds of lawsuits over fabric design and copyright infringement. Between 2005 and 2009 alone, the Los Angeles company, headed by Jae Soon Nah, filed more than 200 federal lawsuits. And more have been filed since then.

L.A. Printex has sued retailers such as **Macy's**, **Mervyns**, **TJ Maxx** and **Forever 21** as well as clothing manufacturers such as **Ms. Bubbles**, **Stony Apparel Corp.**, **Just for Wraps** and **Topson Downs of California**.

Meridian Textiles in Commerce, Calif.; **EKB Textiles**; and **Neman Bros.** in Los Angeles have also hit the legal trail in copyright-infringement cases.

Jeff Kobulnick, an attorney with **Ezra Brutzkus Gubner** who has represented various parties in these kinds of cases, said at least 300 lawsuits are filed a year involving fabric design copyright infringement. Most of those are in Los Angeles with others in New York and Canada.

"Oftentimes the plaintiffs in these cases have raced to the copyright office to file for copyright registration on designs that have been in existence for a long time, such as animal prints or a fleur-de-lis," he said. "The plaintiff pays a copyright fee and then feels they have a ticket to sue whoever is using a design that may be similar."

Mark Brutzkus, also with Ezra Brutzkus Gubner, advises his retail and fashion clients to have warranties and agreements in place with their fabric vendors and clothing manufacturers guaranteeing that they own the copyright to the fabric's design. "We have been advising our manufacturing clients to have indemnity agreements with their fabric suppliers and with representation and warranties from the fabric supplier that they own the copyright to the fabric designs or have a license to sell the designs," he said.

Attorney Staci Riordan, who chairs the fashion-law team at **Nixon Peabody** in Los Angeles, said it is hard to check which print designs have been copyrighted at the U.S. Copyright Office because they are only listed by number or name and have no accompanying photos or drawings. "The system that is in place is extremely problematic," she said. "You are rolling the dice every single time." ●

Port Continued from page 1

In addition, a chassis shortage has continued as larger ships make their way to the West Coast.

That meant that as of Tuesday, Nov. 25, there were six cargo-container vessels waiting for dockside space. That is a vast improvement over the 12 cargo-container ships that bobbed beyond the breakwater on Nov. 23. But it is a see-saw situation with more ships on the way.

Between Nov. 26 and Nov. 28, another seven cargo-container vessels were scheduled to show up with no space immediately available at the twin ports. The vessels would have to play the waiting game like everyone else.

"The fact that seven more are coming to anchor between now and the end of the week indicates the congestion continues," said Capt. Kip Louttit, executive director of the **Marine Exchange of Southern California**, which monitors the arrival and departure of ships at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

The situation was no different at the **Port of Oakland** in northern California, which had four cargo-container ships waiting for spaces at the smaller port. Normally at this time of the year, there are no ships waiting for berths. "It is days to weeks to get cargo off the docks here," said Capt. Lynn Kor-watch, executive director of the **Marine Exchange of the San Francisco Bay Region**.

The Thanksgiving holiday didn't help matters. Longshore workers officially have a 24-hour holiday on Thanksgiving, but things had already slowed down at the docks for various reasons. "We are still seeing problems with dispatch of yard crane operators at the two ports," said Steve Getzug, a spokesman for the **Pacific Maritime Association**, the group of terminal operators and shipping lines that employs the longshore workers.

Backups continued at the **Port of Long Beach** and the **Port of Los Angeles**. "This is



kind of Thanksgiving-shutdown week," said Port of Long Beach spokesman Art Wong. "Everything just slows down."

Phillip Sanfield, spokesman for the Port of Los Angeles, said cargo congestion is still an ongoing problem. "We are working to do as much as we can to relieve the situation," he said.

To add to the congestion woes, 13 shipping lines announced they would impose port-congestion fees of \$1,000 per 40-foot container at West Coast ports.

Meanwhile, the ILWU and PMA continued to hold small subcommittee meetings to address port-by-port issues, but more-general meetings over larger issues were suspended for 12 days and scheduled to resume on Dec. 2.

One bit of good news is that as of Nov. 21, a handful of independent truck drivers who deliver and pick up cargo containers at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach stopped picketing truckers working for eight companies that serve the ports. It had added just one more problem in digging out cargo from the docks.

The truckers, hoping to be full-time employees at the companies, were supported by the **Teamsters Union**. Truckers, after an eight-day strike, returned to their jobs as talks are expected to take place between the trucking companies and the truckers. ●

Element Goes Global: New Executives, New Boutique

Element, an Irvine, Calif.-based brand owned by **Billabong International Ltd.**, announced on Nov. 24 the hiring of two European executives.

Reynald Gautier was hired as vice president of Element's global design. Julien Duval was promoted to vice president of global marketing.

Frank Voit, the global general manager of Element, noted that the two new hires are accomplished at their respective disciplines and are both skateboarders. "Element continues to solidify its brand strength by hiring skateboarders who are creative experts in design and marketing to ensure future product lines resonate with consumers. Reynald and Julien will lead global teams while driving the creative process forward to create the freshest product for our customers," Voit said.

Both Duval and Gautier will work out of Element's European offices in Hossegor, France. Gautier will direct the company's different regions to ensure a consistent vision for Element's product, according to an Element statement.

Element began as a skateboarding brand in 1992, and it will develop international retail before the year ends. In December, the company is scheduled to open a London boutique.

—Andrew Asch

Calendar

Dec. 4

The Professional Club's networking event
The Palm
Los Angeles

Dec. 6

Line & Dot sample sale

2807 S. Santa Fe Ave.
Vernon, Calif.

Dec. 7

ITMA/Showtime
High Point, N.C.
Through Dec. 10

There's more
on ApparelNews.net.

For calendar details and contact information, visit ApparelNews.net/calendar.

Submissions to the calendar should be faxed to the Calendar Editor at (213) 623-5707. Please include the event's name, date, time, location, admission price and contact information. The deadline for calendar submissions is the Tuesday prior to Friday publication. Inclusion in the calendar is subject to available space and the judgment of the editorial staff.

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MADE IN THE USA

But with the pressures of fast-fashion retailers such as **H&M**, **Zara** and **Forever 21**, department and specialty stores began having a hard time delivering trends to their customers quickly enough.

“We are seeing a trend of foreign-owned U.S.-based companies taking advantage of a vertical model to thrive. The U.S. side gets competitive pricing, timely delivery, financing terms and production flexibility. The Asia side gets a more



DIVERSE MIX: Knits may be the foundation of Dragon Crowd's business, but the company also produces woven tops, pants, jeans and jackets for men and women.



• **Social Republic** is a graphic tee line sold at **Macy's** that Spencer said is meant to be a category killer. "It utilizes our abilities in knitwear, our expertise in being able to identify ways to reduce cost and build fabrications and still maintain

An advertisement for Asher fabric concepts. The background is a light gray brick wall. On the right, a woman with blonde hair styled in a 1950s-inspired bouffant is shown from the chest up, wearing a black sequined halter top. Several large, vibrant red roses are tucked into her hair. In the lower-left foreground, a cluster of red roses is placed on top of a black and white striped piano keyboard. The text 'ASHER' is in a large, green, stylized font at the top left. Below it, 'fabric concepts' is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. Further down, the website 'www.asherconcepts.com', email 'sales@asherconcepts.com', and phone number '323.268.1218' are listed in a black sans-serif font. At the bottom, a black banner contains the text 'Fabric made of luxurious fibers with love in California.' in white.

the look to provide a product to big-box retailers that meets their quality needs, their design aesthetic and their pricing.” Social Republic T-shirts boasting giraffes dressed like singer Pharrell Williams in his signature oversized hat and rapper chains, an ostrich in a bowler hat, and a winged pig retail for about \$24 each.

Propping up Dragon Crowd are 2,500 employees, four offices, three factories and three fabric mills. Plans for a fourth factory and a research-and-development department are underway for 2015, Spencer said.



3RD & ARMY: One of Dragon Crowd's three in-house brands, 3rd & Army is described as “a brand built for a semi-contemporary young man who is looking for an Americana type of look.”

Expanding with R&D

“There’s a lot of exciting things that are happening,” he said. “We’re focused intently on the innovation side of what we do and on building out our capacity.”

In January the new factory—and consolidation of other operations in China—will increase the number of employees to around 3,200, Spencer said. “On the top floor we’re going to put in 30 knitting machines so that we can continuously kick out fabric from that facility.”

The new factory and knitting facility will accommodate a research-and-development department that Spencer is especially excited about.

“If you look at some of the largest companies in the world—the **Pfizers**, the **Glaxo-SmithKlines**—they spend 5, 10, 15 percent of their annual revenue on R&D,” he said. “While we’re never going to do that, there’s lessons to be learned from that. So we’re focusing intently on that department—taking it out of the specific business units within

our organization and creating a unit that’s not gauged on driving topline revenue but that’s gauged on the innovation that they provide, which I think is a unique thing in this industry.”

Spencer expects the research-and-development effort to focus on adapting new technologies for synthetics that could be used in the burgeoning “athleisure” category.

“All of the athleisure wear—going from gym to street—it’s crushing the denim market now,” Spencer said. “It’s comfortable, but it’s all synthetic-based, so we’re focused intently on how can we take some of these things that are happening in the cotton-based market and develop those in the active market in synthetic fibers.”

For all of Spencer’s optimism, he said Dragon Crowd is mindful of its place in the sector—even with revenue projected to triple by 2019.

“We’re not a huge business; we’re a large business,” he said, “but we have some pretty-aggressive growth plans over the next five years.” ●

Sleepy Jones Opens in Santa Monica

Andy Spade is getting into the pajama game.

Spade, the co-founder of the **Kate Spade** fashion label, started **Sleepy Jones**, an independent New York-based sleep and loungewear company geared toward men and women, last year. On Nov. 20, he held a grand opening for a 650-square-foot Sleepy Jones boutique at 1318 Montana Ave. in Santa Monica, Calif. It is a couple of storefronts down from the **Aero Theatre**, a popular cinema that has been screening films since 1940. Another Sleepy Jones boutique opened in New York recently.

Chad Buri, co-founder and chief operating officer of Sleepy Jones, said the label was started because he and his partners, Spade and Anthony Sperduti, felt that pajamas could make a comeback. They noted that in the past men lounged around their homes and studios in pajamas, and with the right fabrics and proper sizing they felt that sales for pajamas could increase. Sleepy Jones has been sold at **Barneys New York**, **Nordstrom**’s e-commerce site, and leading boutiques such as **Stag** and **Unionmade**.

“There is no reason to think of pajamas as something only to be worn to bed,” Buri said. “It’s something nice and comfortable to be wearing around the house.”

The label also makes artist-edition pajamas. Mike Mills, an artist and filmmaker, made a graphic of sleeping pills for the label, which are printed on the pajamas. Other prints on pajamas are the more conventional black watch plaid, stripes and a plain gray. Pants retail around \$140. Shirts retail around



Andy Spade, left, and Chad Buri



\$150. The label also designs robes, men’s boxer shorts and women’s panties as well as T-shirts.—*Andrew Asch*

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SHADES OF SHEEP: Most wool is a natural white shade, which makes it easy to process and dye. Britannia has put together the supply chain necessary to process and dye wool from black sheep—which can range in color from black to gray to brown to a warm honey shade.

Britannia *Continued from page 1*

flocks you might be able to find 100 or 200 pounds,” Chermak said.

The next challenge was to find mills to process the black wool into usable yarn.

“It was so tricky to figure out how to get it produced because everyone who’s running white wool doesn’t want to touch it,” Chermak said. “No one wants to process it because it will contaminate the rest of the wool. I have to go through all kinds of minimums for processing.”

Chermak is keeping all his resources close to the vest, but he said he found a rancher located somewhere “in the United States”—who has a sizable number of black sheep.

He is similarly circumspect about the companies he is working with to process the wool, although he does say, “It’s completely sourced in the U.S.”

The result is enough wool to produce about 5,000 to 10,000 garments this year.

“It’s exceptionally limited,” he said. “This is literally ranch to market.”

Chermak has approached just a select few brands—and only companies that are best able to convey the eco-friendly story to their consumers.

“It requires no dyeing, there are no chemicals, no effluent,” he said, adding that it uses about 75 percent less water to process and the cycle time is shorter, so it uses less electricity, as well.

“And I happen to think it’s pretty,” Chermak said.

For now, Chermak envisions blending all



The wool from white sheep



Terrence Chermak

the shades of black wool into one natural neutral. But as he builds a wider network of ranchers and a larger supply of wool, he sees a future where the different shades of wool can be blended to make new shades, heathered yarns and mélange looks. ●

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