

# CALIFORNIA ApparelNews

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## WAVE OF THE FUTURE

The Otis College of Art and Design's annual scholarship benefit and fashion show presented the creations of the junior- and senior-class students, who worked with various industry mentors to create fashions centered around the theme of "Celestial Bodies." This colorful piece was designed by Hanna Dorman.

For more images from the show, see page 6.

## Cotton Prices Are Rising—Whose Fault Is It?

By Dorothy Crouch *Associate Editor*

Hovering at approximately 85 cents a pound this week, cotton has been selling at record highs not seen in four years. The causes vary, but there is one issue taking a lot of the blame—the looming trade war between the United States and China.

Since the Chinese government in April announced potential 25 percent retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods, many in the cotton industry have wondered about the consequences. If implemented, the tariffs would affect approximately \$50 billion in goods—\$16.5 billion of which includes crops and food items the United States sends to China. China's proposed tariffs are in response to the 25 percent tariff the United States has threatened to tack on to \$50 billion in Chinese goods imported into the U.S.

While talks of a tariff war go on, some in the U.S. cotton industry aren't convinced this trade climate is the only culprit driving up prices. For Roger Isom, president and chief executive officer of the **California Cotton Ginners and Growers Asso-**

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### SUPPLY CHAIN

## Closer Lead Times in Apparel Are Benefiting Los Angeles Knitters, Dyers and Finishers

By Deborah Belgum *Executive Editor*

The stainless-steel vats that populate the factory floor at **Swisstex California** churn out ribbons of damp, recently dyed knit fabric that piles up in large plastic carts before being sent to the finishing machines.

These days, as blank T-shirts and activewear are among the fastest-growing categories in apparel, the machines are busier than ever dyeing fabric and applying special finishes to it. The rolls of fabric stacked in the company's warehouse are sent to T-shirt makers and activewear makers in Los Angeles as well as Central America as retailers and manufacturers look for shorter lead times on garments.

"Shorter lead times allow you to have two big advantages," said Keith Dartley, president of **Swisstex Direct**, a partner with Swisstex California, which provides circular knit fabric from outside sources to the company's dye and finish-

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Where fashion gets down to business<sup>SM</sup>



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# American Apparel to Open First U.S. Store in Los Angeles

In the world of déjà vu, the new reiteration of **American Apparel** is opening its first U.S. store in Los Angeles in the same Melrose Avenue spot it occupied before the company filed for bankruptcy a little more than one year ago.

The store will take over part of the vacant space left when the previous American Apparel store closed last year on Melrose Avenue, along with the more than 100 Ameri-

can Apparel's products are being produced in LA for those customers who prefer their clothes to be made in the United States.

"We are excited about the store," said Garry Bell, Gildan's vice president of corporate marketing and communications. "I think the timing is right. We launched an e-commerce store for American Apparel in August, and it was time to start thinking about the next phase of creating that total brand experience for the consumer. The brand grew up in Los Angeles and retains its DNA of Los Angeles style and fashion."

The store will let shoppers interact with digital platforms as well as be a place to roll out collections and hold events, Bell said.

Gildan, which is hoping to push American Apparel's sales to \$100 million this year, expanded the American Apparel e-commerce site last month to 200 countries. "American Apparel is doing very

well on the e-commerce front," said Glenn Chamandy, president and chief executive of Gildan Activewear, in a conference call last week with investors.

To roll out the expanded e-commerce site, Gildan launched a "Back to Basics" campaign on billboards and digital platforms featuring real people who represent various body types, ages and ethnicities. Eventually, the online site will have 400 styles. Currently, the best-selling category online is Ameri-

can Apparel's denim.

Recently, Gildan Activewear reported its first-quarter earnings results showing that net sales were down 2.7 percent to \$647.3 million from the same period last year.

Activewear sales, which include T-shirts, were up 3.2 percent to \$514.5 million, and underwear and sock sales were down 20 percent to \$132.8 million as more mass merchants establish their own private-label sock brands. Net income for the first quarter was down 18.7 percent to \$67.9 million.

Gildan executives said sales declined after production at its plants in Honduras was affected by last year's civil unrest centered around the presidential elections and its results. "We have the pedal to the metal now," said Rhodri Harries, Gildan's executive vice president, chief financial and administrative officer. "We are trying to regain the lost production."

He said the company had to destock \$60 million worth of merchandise that could not be produced on time.—*Deborah Belgum*



Inside an original American Apparel store

can Apparel retail stores in the company's chain. The "new" store at 7726 Melrose Ave. should open sometime between October and December.

The American Apparel brand name was acquired in a bankruptcy auction last year for \$88 million by **Gildan Activewear**, a giant Canadian T-shirt, underwear and sock company that has moved most of American Apparel's T-shirt production from Los Angeles to Honduras. However, a small portion of

## No NAFTA Means Retailers Would Have to Increase Prices and Decrease Jobs

The North American Free Trade Agreement is still being negotiated between the United States, Mexico and Canada, but no new trade accord has been hammered out and retailers are getting worried.

Recently, the **National Retail Federation** commissioned a study on how the pact's demise would affect retailers and shoppers, and the news isn't good.

According to the study done by **AT Kearney**, the lack of a free-trade agreement would cost shoppers \$16 billion and result in 128,000 retail jobs being lost.

"It's clear NAFTA must be modernized, but we can't lose sight of the fact that this agreement helps ensure that American families have access to products they need at prices they can afford," said Matthew Shay, the NRF's chief executive and president, a trade group based in Washington, D.C. "As this report shows, withdrawing from NAFTA would jeopardize countless U.S. jobs and force consumers to pay more for everyday products like groceries and blue jeans."

Many Los Angeles brands manufacture their blue jeans in Mexico and rely on duty-free imports to keep costs down.

Last year, retailers imported \$128 billion worth of merchandise from Mexico and \$54 billion from Canada, according to the study. When it comes to textiles and apparel, imports in 2017 totaled \$4.8 billion from Mexico and \$1.3 billion from Canada.

If the United States withdrew from NAFTA, the study said, retail imports would be subject to \$5.3 billion in annual tariffs that would most likely be passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices.

Even with the tariffs passed on, retailers would see a \$10.5 billion hit to their bottom line, resulting in 68,000 jobs not being filled over the next three years and another 60,000 jobs, which are supported by the retail industry, being lost.

Food and beverages sold at grocery stores would take the biggest hit at \$2.7 billion, followed by apparel and footwear at \$501 million and household goods at \$498 million.

The remainder of the impact would come from flow-through costs of tariffs imposed on other industries, which would drive up retailers' costs for services, including transportation.—*D.B.*



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## Brooks Brothers to Leave Rodeo Drive

After a 15-year run on luxe shopping street Rodeo Drive, **Brooks Brothers** is scheduled to move from its two-story building on Aug. 1, with the property being put up for sale for \$300 million.

"The number \$300 million sounds high, but it's not an astounding number for Rodeo Drive," said listing agent Jay Luchs, vice chairman of **Newmark Knight Frank**. "It's rare that a property comes up on Rodeo Drive. Each time one comes up, there are multiple offers."

Located at 468 N. Rodeo Drive, the Brooks Brothers space covers more than 20,000 square feet, with 12,171 square feet on the ground floor and 10,080 square feet on the second floor. The building has been in the Anderson family trust for more than 50 years.

Last month, **LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton Inc.** paid \$110 million for a two-story, 6,200-square-foot building at 456 N. Rodeo Drive, down the street from the Brooks Brothers store. Luchs said that a square foot of commercial space on the street rents for \$50 to \$70 per month.

Brooks Brothers did not return a call requesting comment about why it is leaving the ritzy shopping street. Brooks Brothers operates two other Los Angeles County locations, according to its website. One is in



Beverly Hills store

downtown Los Angeles at the **Jonathan Club**, while the other is located at the **Del Amo Fashion Center** in Torrance, Calif.

The Brooks Brothers property has deep roots in Beverly Hills because the Anderson family built **The Beverly Hills Hotel**, a luxury resort known for its pink buildings and bungalows.—*Andrew Asch*



# Upgraded 3-D Platforms Get Real

By Dorothy Crouch Associate Editor

The age of fast fashion has led to a need for faster design technology, but breakthroughs to produce a better 3-D platform have been moving slowly. During the first half of 2018, leaders in the apparel-technology segment have elevated their digital solutions to generate realistic patterns, accurate samples and streamline product lifecycle management (PLM).

Last week, Connecticut-based **Gerber Technology** launched its latest version of **AccuMark 3D**. Through partnerships with technology companies such as San Francisco-based startup **Avametric**, a provider of fabric simulation tools, and Israel's **Virtuality.Fashion**, which provides applications to generate realistic digital imagery, Gerber Technology wants to digitize vital design resources. With this most recent installment, Gerber Technology has provided a solution that facilitates the process from simple sketches to interaction with consumers, explained Mary McFadden, executive director of CAD product management for Gerber Technology.

"We have really good integration of data flow between these systems, as well as the ability to integrate with external systems that our customers use because they have many tools they need to use in their process, so having 3-D product offerings makes our offerings more robust and complete," she said.

By utilizing this technology, every person who contributes to the apparel-making process can easily make detailed changes to digital patterns, illustrating in real time how they can achieve a specific style, without the challenges of shipping patterns or samples.



Gerber Technology's AccuMark 3-D platform

"By allowing the artwork to actually be in the CAD data, you can eliminate these hard pieces going along the factory floor," McFadden said. "It really helps with communicating instructions to factories, especially when they don't speak your language, because often you have these huge language barriers."

Through using integrated software solutions from one source at every stage of design, brands can eventually utilize the technology for merchandising and virtual try-on for customers.

"Rather than doing photo shoots with the samples and the colorways that you would need to populate an e-commerce website, you could use 3-D simulations instead," McFadden explained.

Offering a comprehensive system for apparel design was also the goal at **Lectra**, the French technology-solutions provider, which recently upgraded its 3-D technology to streamline the **Fashion PLM 4.0** platform.

Through its **Connected Development** application, which was launched during the first quarter of 2018 along with the company's **Connected Design**, Lectra now features enhanced tools for patternmaking, 3-D sampling and marker making. Believing this is the natural evolution of the business, Carlos Jimenez, professional

services manager for fashion and apparel, explained how the new application ties together loose ends.

"The Connected Development is that portion of the Lectra PLM 4.0 that includes the application, which involves pattern developers, technical designers, 3-D sampling and marker making," he said. "It's those applications that are packaged in Connected Development."

Reapproaching its 3-D platform to become integrated with a 2-D patternmaking feature was integral to upgrading

this technology to create easy communication between a designer and the team that interprets his or her designs.

"The 3-D sample can be used early in the design process to make decisions in terms of style lines, the size of the garment or ensure the vision of the designer is clearly communicated and understood by the technical-design team or patternmakers," Jimenez revealed. "It can also be used later for fitting purposes, which is a very strong feature for Lectra's 3-D offering."

Despite the influence of fast fashion on apparel-industry software innovation, there is also a push for more sustainable solutions to make the design process more efficient for the planet.

"Companies are being more conscientious about our impact on the planet, and we have customers who come to us to have samples faster," Jimenez said. "The 3-D was very slow and now it's becoming a reality. People are looking at samples on screen and seeing what it looks like as a final product."

In addition to fully integrating these necessary fashion design steps into digital platforms, technology providers are excited to develop applications that allow detailed samples to be viewed and altered by professionals who might be located in different corners of the world.

Developing a product that provided a crisp, digital vision of designs was the goal of Amnon Shalev, the chief executive of Virtuality.Fashion, whose technology allows fashion brands to bypass 2-D patternmaking, creating a detailed sample in less than 48 hours. Based on software created for the video-game and movie industries, the applications provide a realistic vision of designs.

"There is pressure on designers to introduce new collections faster, more collections in a single season and faster to the market. If you have to do 3-D and go through 2-D, it takes time," Shalev said. "With our technology you don't have to go through 2-D. Presentations can be done very fast for buyers and management."

Through investing in innovative upgrades to their own software and joining cutting-edge digital partners, apparel-software providers are creating virtual creative spaces and options to help designers reduce waste, cut costs and bring collections to market faster. ●

## SUPPLY CHAIN

# Ziran Travels Across the Ocean for Sustainability

By Andrew Asch Retail Editor

Sustainable fashion has long been criticized as being unable to go beyond the category of basics. Kelly Wang Shanahan hopes that her sustainable brand **Ziran** can bust that theory.

"The aesthetic of eco is minimal," Shanahan said. "It's minimal colors. There are not a lot of prints. There's a void in the sustainable market for something that is different."

The Los Angeles-based label hopes to present a sustainable alternative by offering women's and men's contemporary clothing using an eco-conscious Chinese silk called Xiang Yun Sha, which translates into "perfumed-cloud clothing."

The silk has been made in China's southern Guangdong Province for more than 500 years and is handmade and colored with natural dyes. Shanahan said that Ziran is one of the only U.S. brands using this fabric.

From Ziran's offices, which are about a five-minute walk

COURTESY OF THE ZIRAN



From left, Ziran's Mallory Belter, Mirko Antich, Kelly Wang Shanahan

from the **University of Southern California**, Shanahan said that making sustainable clothing can seem like a cottage industry. Since launching in 2016, her brand is becoming more prominent but faces the challenges of many other small apparel businesses.

"We can't say, 'Here's a PO [purchase order], we want to make this amount of units and order a huge amount from this factory.' We inspect everything. We make sure everything is of high quality and is up to our standards. Especially with this silk, it can't be mass cut. It has to be cut individually," she said.

The apparel business has long been criticized as being one of the biggest industrial polluters, but a number of large companies, including **Walmart**, joined sustainable label **Patagonia** in 2009 to form the **Sustainable Apparel Coalition** to develop a universal, industrywide approach to measure sustainability.

While sustainability is her goal, Shanahan doesn't consider



Some Ziran Fall/Winter '18 looks

Ziran a purist brand. Not every single element in the operation is 100 percent sustainable, but the label's founder and colleagues believe a small business can make a big splash.

"We're not changing anything," said Mirko Antich, Ziran's brand director. "It's a long-term play where smaller brands like us are shifting the conversations for larger brands to think in a new way, where someone on that level can start change locally. But it starts with us at the grassroots."

Shanahan and Antich's point of difference in the brand is to put a contemporary, Southern California-inspired feel to the traditional fabrics.

Men's looks include club-collar shirts inspired by Aloha shirts. Other styles include coach's jackets and Baja-style pullover sweaters.

For women, there are jumpsuits, kimono-style jackets, bomber jackets, suit trousers and halter dresses. Last year, Kylie Jenner wore one of Ziran's floral maxi robes on "Life of Kylie: Ask Kylie." Retail price points range from under \$100 to \$750.

Ziran is scheduled to produce a trunk show this summer for its Fall/Winter '18 collection at the prominent Los Angeles boutique **Ron Herman**. At **New York Fashion Week**, Ziran held a presentation for its Fall/Winter 2018 styles and screened a movie on the production of its silk.

Up next, Ziran might look for other traditional Chinese fabrics to use in its line. Dechel McKillian, owner of sustainable fashion boutique **Galerie.LA**, said that Ziran will be facing more competition from fashion-ready eco brands.

She noted that a lot of eco brands have focused on basics, but an increasing number of stylish, emerging brands are working with sustainable production methods. ●



Ziran's Xiang Yun Sha silk is handmade in China.

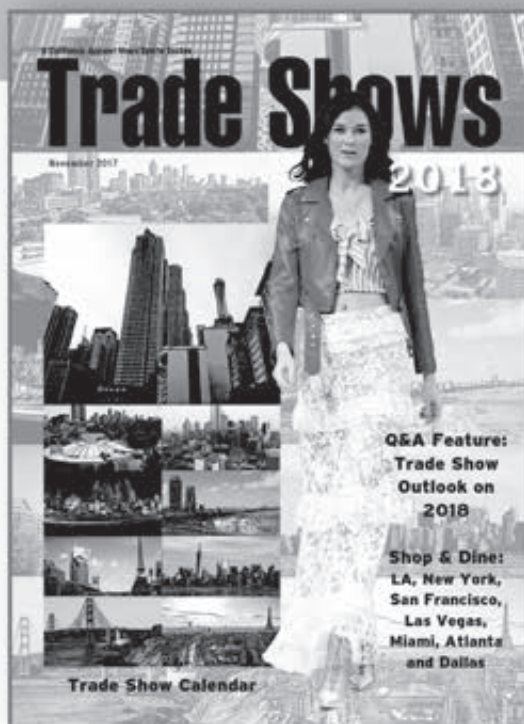


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## New Event Being Introduced for Swim Week in Miami Beach

**Swim Week** is an annual event packed with fashion shows and trade shows in Miami Beach, Fla.

Until now, the events have been geared toward retailers and manufacturers, but trade-show producer Sam Ben-Avraham wants to open the week up to consumers.

With that in mind, he recently announced a festival called **Paraiso**, which will be produced in conjunction with **Cabana**, a swim-and-beach lifestyle trade show he started with entrepreneur Janet Wong.

In recent interviews, Ben-Avraham talked about the need to experiment with the trade-show model. "We need to create more layers to every event," he said. "We need to analyze every activation to figure out how to maximize our potential and create more usable content."

Ben-Avraham said that Swim Week has lacked direction ever since **IMG** stopped producing runway shows there in 2015. "Small players have come in and done one-offs," he said. "Nothing has really been organized with one organization building a bigger picture and putting everything under one umbrella. We're looking to include everyone under the same umbrella under Paraiso."

Ben-Avraham is launching Paraiso with Aleksandar Salé-Stojanovic, the founder of

**Funkshion**, which has produced runway shows and events at previous Swim Weeks. However, Funkshion will not be producing separate Swim Week events this July, Ben-Avraham said.

Ben-Avraham is the founder of the **Liberty Fairs** trade show, which runs biannual events in Las Vegas and New York City. During its Las Vegas run in February, Liberty Fairs worked with the **Agenda** and

**Capsule** trade shows to produce **Assembly**. It was a conference featuring panels and speakers such as Doug Palladini, global president of **Vans**. Last month, Liberty announced it had acquired Capsule for an undisclosed amount.

Paraiso will take place July 12-16 in Collins Park, a green space next to the Atlantic Ocean where Cabana is held. Other Paraiso events will take place at the **W**

**Hotel**, adjacent to Collins Park, and the green space around **The Bass**, a contemporary art museum across the street.

The new event, which is forecast to have 5,000 attendees, will feature musical performances, runway shows, brand exhibitions and food stations. It will also have a forum for wellness companies to exhibit their beauty treatments and other wares.

—Andrew Asch



Sam Ben-Avraham, left, and fashion blogger Jovel Roystan at the May 5 launch party for Paraiso at the W Hotel in Miami Beach

## Calendar

### May 15

**Apparel Sourcing Show**  
Grand Tikal Futura Hotel and Convention Center  
Guatemala City, Guatemala  
Through May 17

### May 21

**Apparel Textile Sourcing**  
Mana Wynwood Convention Center  
Miami  
Through May 23

### Coast

Seagate Country Club  
Delray Beach, Fla.  
Through May 22

### May 22

**Texprocess Americas**  
**Techtextil North America**  
Georgia World Congress Center  
Atlanta  
Through May 24

### Licensing Expo

Mandalay Bay Convention Center  
Las Vegas  
Through May 24

### May 26

**"The Wonderland: Mad Fashion Show," LBCC's 38th Biannual Fashion Show**  
Long Beach City College  
Long Beach, Calif.

### June 3

**Denver Apparel & Accessory Market**  
Denver Mart  
Denver  
Through June 4

### ITMA Showtime

Suites at Market Square  
High Point, N.C.  
Through June 6

### June 6

**Kingpins**  
Basketball City  
New York  
Through June 7

### Dallas Apparel & Accessories Market

Dallas Market Center  
Dallas  
Through June 9

### FIG

Fashion Industry Gallery  
Dallas  
Through June 8

### June 8

**IFJAG**  
Stewart Hotel  
New York  
Through June 11

### June 10

**Fame Moda AccessoriesTheShow [Pre] Coterie**  
Javits Center  
New York  
Through June 12

There's more  
on [ApparelNews.net](http://ApparelNews.net).

For calendar details and contact information, visit [ApparelNews.net/calendar](http://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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## FASHION

# Otis College Celebrates Student Fashion Show and Fund-raiser With New York Designer Jason Wu on Hand

The special guests lined up for photos as the students at the **Otis College of Art and Design** got ready for their 36th annual student fashion show.

Among the invitees was New York designer Jason Wu, who was keeping a low-key profile as he was given a tour of the newly expanded campus. Wu must have been impressed with the recently constructed academic building and residence hall at the Elaine and Bram Goldsmith Campus because he is planning to be one of the school's prestigious student mentors next year.

Other special guests included U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters, whose district encompasses the school's campus in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Westchester; Sid Williams, former ambassador to the Bahamas and Waters' husband; Elaine Goldsmith, benefactress of the Elaine and Bram Goldsmith campus; and actress Hana Mae Lee.

This was the first year that Otis held its student fashion show for juniors and seniors on its recently expanded campus instead of at the **Beverly Hilton** in Beverly Hills, which has been a traditional venue.

The May 5 fashion show was held atop the campus parking lot, creatively enclosed in black with large video screens on the stage to display colorful galactic photos, which were in tune with this year's theme of "Celestial Bodies."

Otis is known for its pairing of professional mentors who work with students throughout the semester. In the past, mentors have included costume designers Bob Mackie and Albert Wolsky, Cynthia Rowley, Isabel and Ruben Toledo, Claire Pettibone, and Todd Oldham.

This year the mentors were Claudia Cividino, the chief executive of **Bally Americas**; costume designer Louise Mingenbach; Jose Fernandez, head of **Ironhead Studios**; Johnson Hartig of **Libertine**; and Davora Lindner of **Prairie Underground**.

Other mentors included alumni Rod Beattie of **Bleu** swimwear, Marisol Bradford of **NBC-Universal**, Chris Chang of **Poesia** and Sapna von Sick of **Alo Yoga**.

The mentors gave each class a challenge. Bradford's challenge was for students to create a family sportswear collection inspired by the "Jurassic World" franchise. The result was filled with camouflage outfits, dinosaur shapes and lots of dramatic outdoorsy looks.

Beattie asked his students to design swimwear in white and metallic inspired by futuristic architecture. Students came up with silhouettes that used shiny fabric and incorporated geometric details.

Von Sick told her students to design an activewear collection that would take the

modern woman from the workout studio to the street. Students used those instructions to cleverly design tops that transformed from jackets to capes in lightweight fabrics and other transformational pieces.

Hartig instructed students to design a sportswear collection inspired by UFOs and aliens, giving way to images of space aliens and colorful palettes, while Lindner's challenge was to create a collection inspired by the lunar eclipse.

Cividino directed her students to design a collection inspired by Bally designs, which resulted in sophisticated clothes playing on Bally's penchant to produce well-made out-



Benefit Chair Shelley Reid and Otis College President Bruce Ferguson



Congresswoman Maxine Waters with designer Jason Wu

erwear, sweaters and pants.

Poesia's Chang instructed students to push the boundaries with dresses inspired by the infinite possibility of space while costume designers Mingenbach and Fernandez asked students to create gowns inspired by the constellations of the zodiac. The results were ethereal gowns in white and light tones topped with amazing headpieces that resembled constellations and stars.

Mentors try to instill various skills in these young designers. Bradford of NBC-Universal said she likes to teach patience, reliability, openness and thick skin. "It is important for me to teach them how to be great communicators and logical thinkers," she said.

Fernandez of Ironhead Studios said his goal was for students to learn to complete an idea. "I also want them to understand that they must be willing to fail," he said. "You have to take chances and push yourself or you will never grow."

Each mentor announced the winner from his or her class. Nastaran Eskandani was the winner in Beattie's swimwear

class. Oliver Zheng won the activewear award given out by von Sick. For the "Jurassic World" challenge, Jonathan Levine and Melissa Marsella were the student winners.

Minji Park and Britney Kim won for their Bally-inspired designs taught in Cividino's class.

Hartig selected Hanna Dorman as the winner in his UFO-inspired challenge. Lindner selected Brittany LaPointe as the winner for the lunar-eclipse challenge, and Chang chose Qi Miao as her category's winner.

—Deborah Belgium



A zodiac-inspired dress by students Qi Miao and Yoo Mee Kang



## FASHION



Dress by Audrey Tien and Sharon Zhang



UFO-inspired dress by Doris Yoo



Dress created by Julia Jang and Julia Park



Lunar eclipse-inspired outfits by Sarah Kim and Hailey Lee



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## SUPPLY CHAIN

### Lead Times *Continued from page 1*

ing house. "Brands or retailers are keeping less inventory to replenish quicker and they can make the right product at the right time."

Swisstex California, which has been a major dye and finishing house in Los Angeles since 1996, said it is bringing in more machinery and equipment to ramp up production by at least 35 percent to 40 percent by the first quarter of next year, when the company will increase its annual capacity to 40 million pounds of fabric. "This year, the expansion will start gradually, and by next year we should be up and running with the expanded capacity," said Michel Morger, vice president of Swisstex California.

Swisstex is also ramping up by 35 percent to 40 percent its production capacity at its factory in El Salvador, which was established shortly after the Dominican Republic-Central American Free Trade Agreement first went into effect in 2006. The complex has a cut-and-sew factory as well as a dye and finishing facility that now employs 200 people compared to 160 workers when it started.

As Swisstex's customers—which include Nike, Under Armour, Adidas, North Face and Reebok—look to get goods on store shelves faster but cheaper than U.S.-made goods, they are increasingly employing Swisstex's factory in El Salvador. "Three years ago, 70 percent of our fabric came from Los Angeles and 30 percent from El Salvador, and that has completely flipped," Dartley said.

Other Los Angeles knit and dye establishments are also seeing a push by brands to produce more in Central

America. Antex Knitting Mills, a division of Matchmasters Dyeing & Finishing, has been on a campaign to beef up its production capacity by 30 percent in the last 18 months. "I think brands want things faster and faster," said Bill Tenenblatt, president and owner of the knitting and dyeing complex he started in 1973 with his father, Jacob.

He said about 50 percent of the company's production is now being sent to Central America, where workers sewing T-shirts and activewear earn at least 60 percent less than Los Angeles workers. "The price of labor here is going up like crazy," Tenenblatt said. "Our plant is all computerized and automated, so you don't need as much labor, but sewing is different."

U.S. textile exports to Central America have grown markedly in the past year. Fabric exports from the U.S. to Nicaragua rose 15 percent to \$183.3 million for the one-year period ending in March. U.S. fabric exports to Honduras increased 8.35 percent to \$286.7 million during the same period, and textile mill products to El Salvador in the past year picked up 10.4 percent to nearly \$131 million.

Activewear is driving much of this increase as are online sites such as Fanatics.com, said Mike Todaro, managing director of the Americas Apparel Producers' Network.

Fanatics.com is the leader in licensed

sports merchandise and the e-commerce business for all major professional sports leagues. Want a T-shirt right away with the name and number of a newly drafted NFL quarterback? Fanatics can provide it fast. "Swisstex and Antex and other people are making it as fast as they can and it is going right to Central America," Todaro said.

Producing garments in Central America is not cheaper than in Asia. Some calculate it is 10 percent to 15 percent costlier to manufacture in Central America, where energy costs are high, than in China or India. But the shorter lead times make up for that.

Swisstex shortened its lead times to three



**DYE MASTERS:** Fabric that has been dyed and is ready for finishing at Swisstex California



**FIELD OF FABRIC:** Carts filled with circular-knit fabric at Swisstex California

weeks from the time the order is placed until it is shipped. Shipping can take another three to five days while from China it can take two to three weeks. "Even with CAFTA and duty-free goods, you can't beat Asia's cost," Dartley said. "But everything is lead times."

On a grander scale, Gildan Activewear, which bought the American Apparel brand name last year and cuts and sews most of American Apparel's goods in Central America, is about to open a new 600,000-square-foot textile factory in the next few months. It will employ more than 1,000 workers. It is Gildan's sixth factory in the Rio Nance complex in Honduras, where most of its T-shirts, underwear and socks are made.

The factory will be able to handle lighter-weight, more fashionable fabrics and will service a growing demand for fabrics in the athleisure and sports-performance market. "Speed to market has been a driving factor in that [new factory] as well as the demand by consumers to know where their products are coming from," said Gildan spokesman Garry Bell.

"The number of seasonable turns happening at retail is driving a lot of these supply-chain shifts, and the other thing is the movement of apparel sales online," he added. "Millennial consumers want to see now and buy now. They don't want to see it in February and buy it in June." ●



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## Cotton *Continued from page 1*

**ciation**, one of the largest threats to the state's cotton industry has been a lack of water.

"The biggest difference would be water," he said. "Because I can tell you, in December we were looking at a 10 to 15 percent increase, but it didn't rain until March and guys already made planning decisions. It's only been 20 percent water allocation."

Despite 2017's high rainfall, which yielded a precipitation index of 95 inches, according to the California Department of Water Resources, the agency couldn't forecast the same wet weather for 2018. After an unimpressive storm season that ran from December 2017 through February 2018, this year's water supply doesn't look promising for California's cotton crop.

This dry spell isn't limited to California. Jon Devine, the senior economist at **Cotton Inc.**, was concerned about other regions of the country as well.

"A little bit more than half of our cotton acres are in Texas, located in the northwestern part of the state in Lubbock," he explained. "They are in a pretty severe drought right now, which is feeding into concerns."

With these dry conditions, farmers are cautious about growing and their lenders aren't as generous. As growers wait to see what the second half of 2018 brings, there is still a bit of hope for this cotton season. While 2018 hasn't delivered a lot of rain in certain regions, other threats from last year—such as insect infestations—seem to have been resolved.

"One thing that happened last year, even though we had more acres, was a big problem with lygus. People lost half a bale to a bale per acre," Isom said. "We don't think we'll have the lygus

pressure like last year. We might have fewer acres, but we hope yields are better. We want price, quality and yield, but we'll take two out of three."

### Tumult in the cotton trade

After stepping away last year from the Trans-Pacific Partnership free-trade accord, the United States' trade policies with Pacific Rim countries have been a hot topic since the beginning of 2018.

While Devine agrees that China is an important trade partner for cotton, he emphasizes the Asian country's cotton imports from the United States have fallen over the years from approximately 40 percent to 15 percent to 20 percent. Chinese tariffs on U.S. cotton would be problematic, but they are not the only country importing this commodity.

"China is an important customer of U.S. cotton and has been for the past two or three decades, but the U.S. has been shipping more cotton to other locations over the last few years," Devine said. "There is not as much of a concern as five or 10 years ago when [this tariff] would have been catastrophic."

With U.S. cotton exports expanding to other countries, the market has opened up more. Last year, Devine said, the U.S. saw its second-highest cotton export yield and would have been

successful without China's business.

The cotton trade between the United States and China might be jeopardized if tariffs are implemented, but that doesn't mean all U.S. cotton products to China would incur tariffs. There is a roundabout way to get around this import tax.

"Vietnam has seen tremendous growth. Growth in Vietnamese spinning has been fueled by China, too," Devine explained. "If you take a look at Vietnam, more than half of its spun cotton is shipped to China. There is still a lot of U.S. cotton fiber being shipped to China through Vietnam, but it's spun into yarn first."

In marketing year 2016/17, U.S. cotton exports to Vietnam totaled 644,229 metric tons, or 2.95 million bales, valued at \$1.07 billion. The United States comprises 53.7 percent of the market share for Vietnam's cotton imports—an increase from 42.1 percent in 2017, and China imports 75 percent of its cotton yarns from Vietnam, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In this climate of unpredictable growing conditions and threatening tariff talks, the apparel industry should be concerned, but it's not all doom and gloom. Prices still haven't risen to the \$2-per-pound high seen in 2011. ●



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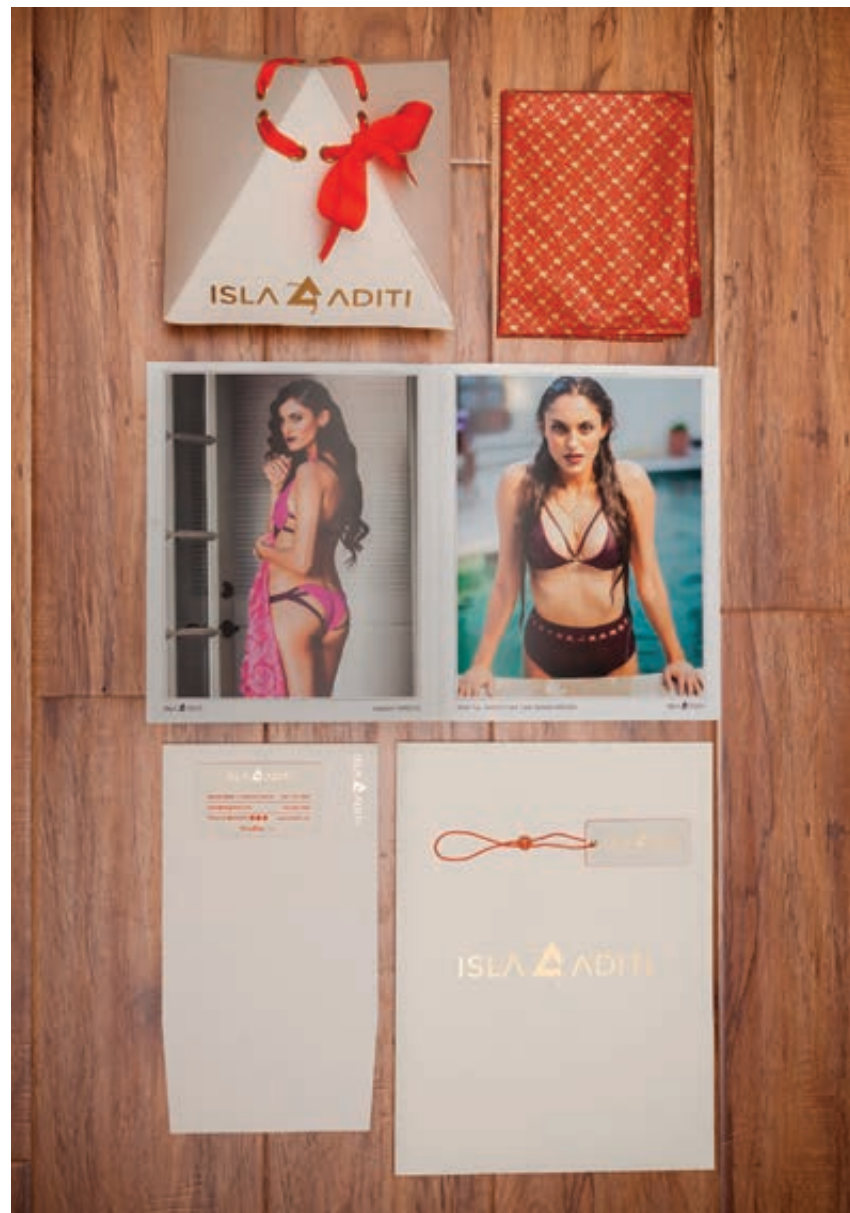
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