

CALIFORNIA ApparelNews

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MERRICK'S RNCH

Unveiling the Autumn/Winter '21/'22 RNCH collection, Heidi Merrick hosted a ranch-inspired fashion event at The Alisal in California's Santa Ynez Valley. See more styles on page 9.



BLUE GABOR PHOTOGRAPHY

INDUSTRY FOCUS: FINANCE

As we head into the holiday season, what types of investments should apparel companies be making to fortify their businesses and ensure success for 2022?

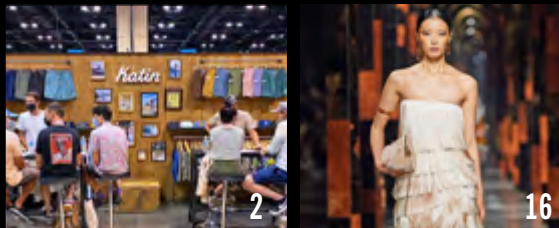
By Dorothy Crouch Managing Editor

As 2021 winds down, the apparel segment has been enjoying an uptick in business from different corners of the industry. The last few months have seen some of the largest trade shows in the industry return to on-site events. With consumers shopping and willing to spend, retailers are enjoying the benefits of the apparel investments their customers are making as they return to offices, college campuses, in-school classes and semi-normal life.

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Where fashion gets down to business SM



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DENIM

A Sustainable-Jeans Story: SFI, EB Denim Partner on Vintage-Inspired Collection

By Dorothy Crouch Managing Editor

When denim company **Star Fades International** announced its opening in January, the mission was more than simply cultivating the local Los Angeles jeans market. The Commerce, Calif.-based SFI sought to build an incubator space in which emerging denim designers could find inspiration and resources to build their brands. In September, SFI welcomed denimheads to its space, where the company revealed its partnership with **EB Denim's** Elena Bonvicini, whose sourcing of vintage **Levi's** 501s and upcycling the jeans to create unique women's pieces set the designer apart in sustainable denim.

"EB Denim grew to the point where we were having difficulty sourcing enough vintage to meet demand," Bonvicini explained. "I decided that I was going to recreate our best-

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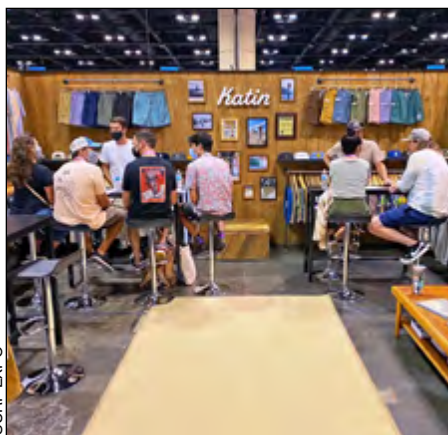
Surf Expo Supports Watersport, Beach-Lifestyle Communities

During its Sept. 9–11 run, event producer **Emerald's Surf Expo** show returned to the **Orange County Convention Center** in Orlando, Fla. For Surf Expo Show Director and Senior Vice President of Emerald Roy Turner, the success the show experienced during this most-recent edition was reflective of the industry, and he expects the momentum to continue into 2022, particularly when the event launches its Digital Market powered by Elastic Suite.

"Our job is often to simply be a mirror of the markets we serve, and this September Surf Expo showed that both buyers and sellers in the board-sports, beach and resort markets were ready to get back to business," Turner said. "We saw new buyers as well as veterans and saw many companies launch new brands with much success. Returning exhibitors got the opportunity to meet with customers unseen in the last 18 to 24 months. Like the industry we serve, there was business to be done."

Miami-based independent buyer Shirley Lippincott shopped for Caribbean retailer **Red Sail Sports**. Shopping for the stores' major season, which runs December through May, Lippincott placed a lot of orders for goods that wholesale from \$23 to \$65 and felt the show provided a variety of items across categories. Lippincott reported buying from men's lines **Huck** and **Henry Costa Coastal** in addition to women's footwear from **Shu Shop**.

"There were a lot of new vendors that I haven't seen before, and I've been going to this show for a really long time. I bought a lot of product from vendors I had never worked with," Lippincott said. "Each category had a good selection of vendors, and I don't think it



Surf Expo's Sept. 9-11 show at Orlando, Fla.'s Orange County Convention Center saw buyers return, ready to shop, as exhibitors such as Compton, Calif., brand Katin USA felt business boom.

was missing anything. It was really good and really helpful for us."

Hülya Swim Chief Executive Officer and founder Hannah Patten noted that buy-

ers were searching for unique pieces with competitive wholesale pricing between \$25 and \$45. Meeting with buyers from the East Coast, Patten said that her brand's eco-friendly swimwear resonated with them.

"When I would mention that the suits are made out of recycled materials, that would be the stopping moment for people to come in and check it out," Patten said. "[I] made a lot of really great connections and met a lot of awesome brands that want to work together and do some collabs and meet some new buyers."

At the **Katin USA** booth, the Compton, Calif., company's senior vice president, Dale Rhodes, saw buyers from Florida and the United States' Mid-Atlantic region. The 67-year-old brand saw demand for its dusty colors and vintage hues as well as its walk shorts.

"It was a blockbuster. We had a new setup and look and feel. We were busy for three days solid," Rhodes said. "There were a lot of people who I didn't expect to show up and they did. People are feeling a little more confident. Everyone wore their masks and everyone was conscientious."—*Dorothy Crouch*

ATHLEISURE

DUER Opens Its Second U.S. Store

Vancouver-based performance-apparel brand **DUER** has opened its second U.S. bricks-and-mortar location and chose Los Angeles as the site.

Located in the Fairfax District on "streetwear row," the store will be a part of

District La Brea and will be situated among other retailers such as **American Rag Cie**, **Carhartt WIP**, **Champion**, **Stüssy** and **Union**. DUER will offer an in-store denim-repair program that offers customers free repairs for one year after purchase.

The store combines experiential and sensory elements such as plants, trees, wood chips and recycled plastic bottles that reflect the natural and sustainable materials DUER uses in its products. This type of design has been in DUER's DNA since the first location opened in Vancouver in 2016 featuring a product-testing ground known as the "performance playground."

"Opening a dedicated storefront in Los Angeles has always been the plan; it was just a matter of when," said Gary Lenett, co-founder of DUER. "For a few reasons, the most significant being our e-commerce and wholesale businesses showcasing a built-in fan base and demand in the L.A. area, our greatest opportunity for growth in this region is now."

DUER opened its first U.S. location in 2020 in Denver, Colo. It has captured attention with its approach to technical clothing, in which DUER begins with jeanswear, transitions the fabrics to natural and sustainable materials, and integrates the features and strengths of athleisure apparel.—*Tyler Shultz*



DUER's claim to fame is its "performance playground," which allows customers to "test-run" its products before purchase, or, as the company states: Get Dressed and Get On With It.

Inside the Industry

Foot Locker's acquisition of footwear and accessories retailer **WSS** recently closed following a \$750 million sale that was announced in August. WSS will retain its name and operate as a new brand under Foot Locker, with Foot Locker maintaining the WSS team and contributing to developing its success. "WSS is a highly complementary addition to our portfolio, and we are excited to officially welcome its team to the Foot Locker family. WSS brings an expanded and differentiated customer base rooted in the rapidly growing Hispanic community, diversifies and enhances our product mix, and strengthens our footprint with a 100 percent off-mall store fleet located in key markets," said Richard A. Johnson, chairman and chief executive officer of Foot Locker. Foot Locker also announced Anthony Aversa to the position of chief operating officer of WSS. Aversa was previously the vice president of customer experience at Foot Locker North America.

Browzwear announced **Derek Rathel** is joining the company as vice president of North America. Rathel's hire is intended to expedite the company's aggressive goals for platform development and market expansion. Rathel, who was previously a business-development executive at Foundry, brings nearly 20 years of experience building and leading teams across sales, marketing and customer success. While at Foundry, Rathel expanded into Europe's luxury-goods market, building a new revenue stream from the ground up. Following the closing of a \$35 million funding round from Radian Capital in August, Browzwear intends to achieve a 150 percent growth rate over the next two years.

Outerknown launched its reselling platform **Outerworn** in a step toward becoming fully circular by 2030. Outerworn will help keep product in circulation and out of landfills by giving Outerknown customers the option to sell their used products directly on Outerknown's website. Users can submit their own photos, descriptions and select a recommended price for their items, which will then be authenticated by Outerknown and listed on Outerworn. For any items sold, users will be reimbursed with store credit. Outerknown worked with Recurate to develop Outerworn. Recurate's technology allows customers to resell items through its integrated peer-to-peer marketplace. "Outerknown designs with durability and a timeless aesthetic in mind. We are excited to help our garments remain in circulation while opening Outerknown up to a new demographic through products sold at an accessible entry price point," said Mark Walker, Outerknown's CEO.

CanopyStyle has added more than **400 brands and retailers** to its fashion and forest-conservation initiative. The initiative aims to end sourcing paper, packaging and viscose textiles from forests and scale up the use of next-gen alternatives. Brands that have joined the initiative include Puma, Hugo Boss, House of Anita Dongre, and Scotch and Soda. Nearly 200 of the brands joined CanopyStyle within the past 18 months to demonstrate the severity of the climate crisis. Canopy says producers responsible for 90 percent of the global viscose supply have committed to stop sourcing from old and endangered forests in response to the initiative.

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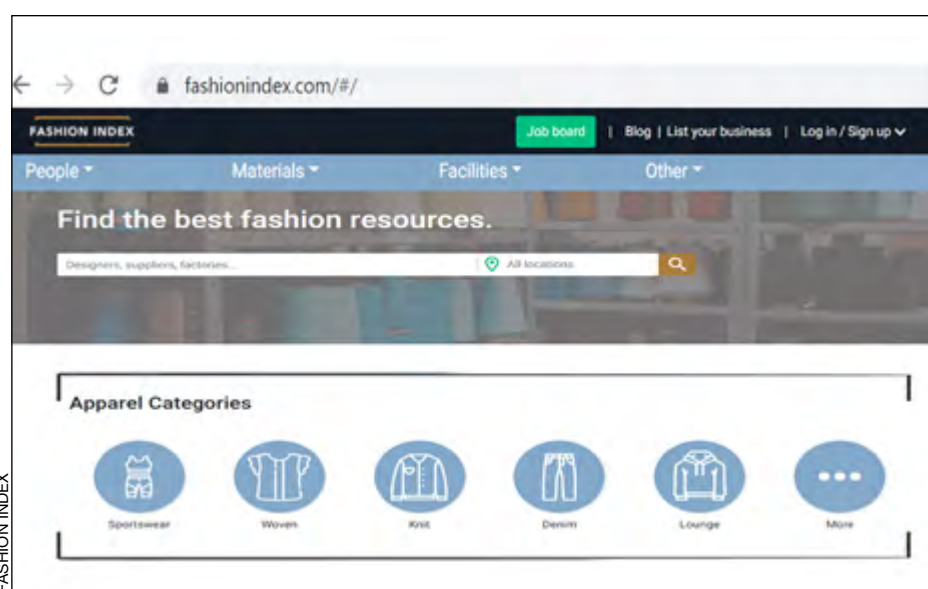
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Only launched in July 2021, Fashion Index has already proven itself as a valuable resource to visitors from 16 countries around the world.

Fashion Index Aims to Be a One-Stop Industry Resource

By Tyler Shultz *Assistant Editor*

Fashion Index is a one-stop service that wants to serve every aspect of the apparel industry by connecting apparel professionals and companies to a variety of industry resources on one streamlined platform.

Through *fashionindex.com* users can look for specific people and companies, from pattern makers, sample sewers and merchandisers to fabric and yarn suppliers. Also available are various facilities such as sample rooms, dye houses and warehouses. The platform directly connects users and allows them to collaborate with one another to fit the needs of a project.

The platform was launched in July 2021 by Marge Pietrera and Tirsia Parrish. When the pandemic hit, they found that a lot of people were reaching out to them to find resources for fabrics and different production processes. Fashion Index wants to be a key resource for anyone, whether it's a large-scale operation or a small company in addition to people looking to start a business or those who are searching for work in the apparel industry.

The pair have been in the apparel industry for some 30 years each and originally met in college at design school, becoming best friends since the second day of classes.

"Because she could sew and I couldn't, I stuck to her," Pietrera joked.

Pietrera has worked for **Jennifer Lopez**, **Tommy Hilfiger** and **FUBU**. Parrish has worked with **Gap Inc.** and **Fox Racing**, managing their production departments and overseeing their supply chains. Both Pietrera and Parrish have spent a significant amount of their time in the industry overseas and say they have visited more countries abroad than destinations they have traveled to within the United States.

Fashion Index allows users to easily message one or multiple companies directly on the platform. With the bulk-messaging feature, users can write one message and send it out to multiple companies, streamlining the process of looking for the exact product and price point for which they are searching. Users can also compare multiple messages at once so they do not have to keep switching

between tabs and screens to analyze and compare information.

Companies can list themselves as a resource on the platform following a straightforward process. Pietrera and Parrish believe there are no downsides to being listed as it is a free process and it puts a company in a position to receive new clients or have collaboration opportunities.

The service has already proven itself as a valuable resource and has already welcomed visitors from 16 countries around the world.

"We have one company that started using us when we first launched in July that is about to explode because she made the right connections on the platform," Pietrera said. "We're helping her because her business is increasing nearly tenfold due to using our resources." The platform includes a job board where companies can list apparel industry-related jobs available for users. Positions are listed across various parts of the industry such as design, production, marketing, sales and creative. The job board also allows users to create teams and communicate with team members directly to work together in a virtual space. Future plans for the job board include adding the option for job seekers to post and promote themselves as available candidates.

There are already plans to continue to grow Fashion Index. The platform plans to offer an entrepreneur kit that will help users get their businesses started as well as resources to give financial advice. The founders are most excited to offer continuing-education and fashion-dictionary services so users can continue to learn about and keep up with the ever-changing apparel industry. The owners also hope to eventually add a system that allows for users to leave feedback regarding a company's services and the ease of process.

In addition to adding services to the website, a long-term goal is to host a trade show where all users and companies can meet in person to see and discuss their work.

"Long term, we want people to go into their offices, open their email and then open Fashion Index," Parrish said. "We want people to feel like they should be there all the time because of the great resources and content available on the platform."

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What features in fiber, yarn and fabric are your clients demanding, and how is this trend shaping the future of your business?

By Dorothy Crouch *Managing Editor*

Within the foundation of every garment constructed, at the core of each piece of clothing that is made, is the cornerstone of fashion that lays the groundwork for apparel from fiber, yarn and fabric. While consumers of the past were simply satisfied with the composition listed on the tags of their clothing, today's customers want more.

A demand for transparency along the supply chain has increased due to the desires of customers to decrease their negative impact and increase their responsibility for people and the planet. As consumers drive the move toward more-sustainable practices, producers of fiber, yarn and fabric are meeting this need to ensure brands and designers are able to tell their side of a responsible story. *California Apparel News* asked experts in this category: *What features in fiber, yarn and fabric are your clients demanding, and how is this trend shaping the future of your business?*

Daren Abney
Senior Business Development Manager
Lenzing Fibers, Inc.



Clients across the supply chain are looking for more-tangible ways to incorporate sustainability into their products, including fiber. Customers want the ability to credibly tell a story around a wide variation of sustainability topics. From water savings to carbon neutrality, the key capability is being able to weave elements of a final product together in a compelling argument for why that product deserves your attention.

Another key feature clients continue to demand is comfort. Even as the world shifts back into more in-person activities, that 2020 comfort continues to translate into everyday life.

With these trends in mind, Lenzing continues to push for innovative new ways to manufacture high-quality fibers, even incorporating new sources. Like the Carbon Zero TENCEL that launched at the end of 2020 or the TENCEL Modal x Indigo Color Technology, slashing water consumption by 99 percent from traditional indigo-dyed denim. Even addressing circularity with technology like REFIBRA, incorporating cotton textile scraps into the new TENCEL fiber. These are just a few examples of how we're responding to the market trends and pushing to be a leader in the wood-based cellulosic-fiber industry.

Carlo Centonze
Co-founder and CEO
HeiQ



Sustainability across the entire textile supply chain would be a short and succinct response to what both clients and customers are increasingly demanding. Our industry has a terrible reputation for its environmental footprint, and our future lies in innovating toward more circularity.

At HeiQ, sustainability has been the ruling principle since our inception, and everything we do is targeted at creating and developing technologies for textiles that adhere to the most stringent principles of sustainability. We anticipate megatrends and react to these with functionalities that are designed for the future.

As we continue to strive for eternal circularity, we'd like to share a simple example of a groundbreaking new yarn that has all the potential of being a game-changer in textile production—keep your eyes peeled for news on this exciting new HeiQ innovation scheduled for release very shortly.

François Damide
President
Solstiss Inc.



Solstiss customers are looking for innovative and unusual yarn knotting in order to make the design different. This is the reason Solstiss uses and will always use **Leavers** looms, which date back to 1876 and are still the same machines we use today.

With the pandemic and lockdown, our business shifted from red-carpet, gala and special-occasion designer dresses to luxury lingerie. For lingerie, designers

were looking for the true Chantilly-lace designs, the ones made out of 12 points per square inch—our highest crossed-yarn knotting quality—showing the most amazing details a lace can feature.

With businesses reopening, gatherings authorized and weddings finally back, our bridal business has been booming. Brides are looking to wear lace that is genuine and authentic, featuring traditional craftsmanship and knowledge of the source. The best example is the wedding dress made by **Ralph Lauren** exclusively for Lilly Collins and featuring Solstiss Lace. The origin of our historical area of manufacturing, Calais-Caudry, was actually made public, a first in our business. Authenticity is definitely in fashion, and we are pleased about this.

Jay Hertwig
Senior Vice President of Commercialization
Unifi



Consumers are now demanding three things: comfort, performance and sustainability. The great thing about our REPVEVE recycled performance fiber is that you can seamlessly weave all three of these into everything from apparel to shoes to home furnishings. Products made with REPVEVE provide the same quality and performance characteristics as products made with non-recycled polyester—they are

just as soft and comfortable and can be made with the same performance additions such as stretch, moisture management, thermal regulation, water resistance and more.

We offer innovations such as Unifi Waterwise, TruEffects, Reflexx, A.M.Y., Inhibit, Sorbtek, ResistO, Mynx, XS Cross-section, TruTemp365, Cotton-like and ChillSense that can be embedded into our fibers. In addition, we can add more than one of these innovations into most fibers to create edge-to-edge performance and comfort. Our commitment to sustainability combined with these innovations is helping to shape the future of our business.

Marc Lewkowitz
President and CEO
Supima



Demand for natural fibers has risen, and the demand for responsibility and actual authenticity has taken on a leading role relative to the sourcing of ingredient materials. There continues to be a lot of confusion, green wishing and green washing that is being facilitated through partial messaging or overstated claims. The fact remains that there are leaders within the textile space that are pushing beyond the surface

pleasantries and digging into the supply chains for deeper insights and actual validation.

Supima has taken this approach to provide a fully forensically verifiable solution that has been made available for all Supima cotton that represents 100 percent American grown

and is also 100 percent extra-long staple cotton. Our partner in this effort, **Oritain**, has collaborated with us to map out the entire Supima production area to create a unique fingerprint for the origin based on the unique and measurable combination with specific trace elements.

Working in collaboration with platforms like the **Better Cotton Initiative** and the **U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol**, Supima cotton growers are demonstrating the comprehensive approach used to being sustainable through the minimization of the use of resources while maximizing outputs and deriving a viable value for sustaining the efforts on an ongoing basis.

Susan Lynn
Global Brand Manager LifeStyle
Indorama Ventures PCL



The world is changing. The environment and how we protect it is now one of our greatest concerns. Responsible use of resources and combating carbon emissions is a key objective for industry and society.

As the world's largest producer of PET resin for over 50 years, IVL knows the circular value of this resource. We aim to be a climate leader, which is why we are leading change internally and ex-

ternally with innovative solutions that will help to design out waste, increase recycling and lower the carbon footprint. We are working toward closing the loop for a more-sustainable future.

Our customers and their consumers are demanding more from businesses—more sustainable materials, more transparent supply chains and better use of existing resources, and IVL is happy to commit to delivering this. As part of the "New Plastics Economy Global Commitment" with the **Ellen MacArthur Foundation**, IVL has made a global commitment by 2025 to recycle 50 billion bottles per year and recycle 750,000 tons of post-consumer PET materials per year. We are also investing USD \$1.5 billion in technology to ensure we reach these sustainability targets.

Business solutions must also be purposeful, which is why IVL introduced an enhanced suite of sustainable offerings under the Deja brand. Deja brand fibers and yarns are GRS certified and sustainable, assuring high-grade quality with a lower carbon footprint and providing confidence for your brand.

Working with our customers and forging new relationships to share the benefits of Deja recycled polyester and other innovative specialty products such as CoolVisions dyeable polypropylene and iCare heavy metal/antimony free PET is a part of my job that I look forward to every day.

David Sasso
Vice President of International Sales and Marketing
Buhler Quality Yarns Corp.



One must separate the features between fiber and yarns, choose the right fiber for the desired outcome in fabric attributes and, if demanded, the best integrated sustainable fabric/garment solution. By this, I mean the most-sustainable fiber produced does not necessarily mean it has the best integrated-supply-chain performance.

The features that brands and retailers demand in fiber are traceability and that it is considered a sustainable fiber. Other fiber features would be built-in functionality, strength and a soft hand. Fibers that provide the softest hand are normally the finer and longest fibers.

In addition, we do see more demand for dope-dyed fibers. It is one of the best ways to reduce water and energy consumption for fabric wet processing.

Yarn-spin systems seem to be the least known in the industry on how to optimize the features and attributes of fabric and garments. The features demanded in fabrics and garments will determine the fiber and yarn attributes. This, in turn, will

determine the best spin system.

When brands and retailers request better sustainable apparel, it is about choosing the right fiber and spin system to enhance the life of the garment.

No matter what fabric attribute you are requesting, it is the fiber and spin system you choose that helps achieve it. Some of the most important features requested in fabrics are lowest fabric pilling, lowest fabric torque, best fabric hand, best fabric strength and brightest fabric sheen.

Asher Shalom
President and Chief Executive Officer
Asher Fabric Concepts



At Asher Fabric Concepts, our customers are pushing for better prices, faster deliveries and more-sustainable fabric options available for immediate and small runs.

The instability in yarn pricing is making it impossible to keep fabric prices the same as 2020 due to increases in raw materials such as fibers, dyeing and finishing, and freight costs, which have more than tripled over the last

18 months. Freight issues have affected our business in two ways—the steep increases in the shipping costs for yarns have caused price increases on the fabric side, and the open-ended delivery delays at the **Port of Long Beach** are causing a wave of delivery challenges for the finished product.

We are also experiencing an increase in brands and clients asking for sustainable fibers. We are developing sustainable fabric styles using REPREEVE, a polyester yarn made from recycled water bottles. We are also using yarns made from recycled cotton, recycled nylon, hemp, viscose, Tencel and more. We are also growing our Heat Transfer Print Division, which is the most sustainable method of textile printing, using no water in the print process.

In order for us to respond to today's challenges, Asher Fabric Concepts will be positioned with yarns for our best-

selling styles, offer competitive pricing on our very extensive in-stock inventory, and continue to offer sustainable fabrics in jersey, rib, French terry and more.

Mike Simko
Global Marketing Director
Hyosung Textiles



Conversations around sustainability have matured and become more sophisticated. Brands and retailers are asking to not only supply them with sustainable materials but to also demonstrate how we can provide sustainable solutions that tie back to their corporate objectives. Regarding sustainable synthetic fibers, the key driver that is emerging is the reduction of the carbon footprint; where recycled nylon and polyester are becoming commonplace, supply can be challenging.

With the introduction of our 100 percent recycled creora regen spandex, brands and retailers are excited that they can now offer a completely sustainable fabric to their consumers—it completes the story. While the industry is asking for recycled yarns, they are not willing to compromise on quality, comfort and performance. This is why Hyosung is introducing high-quality recycled yarns with multifunctional properties such as our MIPAN regen aqua X cool-touch nylon with UV protection and regen aerocool, rapid moisture-absorbing and quick-drying polyester—just to name a few.

As the industry is asking for more garment end-of-life solutions, brands and retailers are looking at separation technologies and recyclable materials. For example, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's Jeans Redesign project is helping denim brands and mills with guidelines to make products that are durable, traceable, recyclable and made with safe materials and processes. Hyosung's creora 3D Max spandex uniquely enables denim brands to design and develop jeans that align with Jeans Redesign's guidelines as it delivers a high-performance stretch with a small portion of fabric content.

Steve Stewart
Chief Brand and Innovation Officer
The LYCRA Company



Versatility and sustainability are key trends we are seeing across the apparel industry. Today consumers are looking for versatile garments that can adapt to their unique body type, even when their body size or shape may change or fluctuate. This is something that is especially important during the pandemic when many consumers have admitted to gaining weight. To address these needs, The LYCRA

Company recently launched LYCRA ADAPTIV fiber, which has a unique chemistry that allows garments made with this fiber to adapt to many body shapes within a size range.

As consumers become more cognizant of the impact that fast fashion has on the planet, they are more interested in buying fewer, better-quality garments versus more disposable clothing. As a result, we are seeing more and more brands and retailers set ambitious sustainability goals and look toward their strategic suppliers, like The LYCRA Company, to provide sustainable solutions that support a more-circular economy.

Under our EcoMade family of fibers across the LYCRA, COOLMAX and THERMOLITE brands, we have developed a variety of offerings with pre- and post-consumer content, including LYCRA EcoMade fiber, which is GRS certified.

As our industry looks to rapidly develop solutions for a circular economy, we are committed to offering a variety of fiber and fabric solutions that reduce or divert waste, keeping materials in use.

➔ Fiber page 8

ATLANTA

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UNCOMMON FASHION, ESMAEE

What features in fiber, yarn and fabric are your clients demanding, and how is this trend shaping the future of your business?

Fiber *Continued from page 7*

Pat Tabassi
Product Development and Marketing Manager
Design Knit, Inc.



We continue to see a steady uptick in the number of inquiries for sustainably driven and locally made goods. Much commerce coming in and out of the country has become quite challenging. This has made space for local and domestic manufacturers and suppliers to not only fill that gap but to also play a more prominent role in the supply chain. We will continue to see the demand and value for domestically produced goods

increase.

As a Los Angeles-based fabric mill, we look for solutions that will allow us to offer more and more-sustainable fabric options. We have nurtured strong relationships and partnerships with fiber producers, yarn spinners, dye houses and customers who share this vision. For us, sustainability and quality go hand in hand. If we continue to be innovative and create high-quality fabrics with renewable raw materials, then fashion can move away from a linear product cycle to one that is hopefully more circular. The goal is to create goods that will last longer so that they aren't discarded so quickly, which in turn also helps reduce waste.

Recently we collaborated with one of our fiber partners, Lenzing, to create a collection using their REFIBRA technol-

ogy. In order to further our efforts to make these fabric choices more accessible, we have also launched Studio DK, a curated collection of knit fabrics with MOQ flexibility. This provides new designers with the opportunity to source quality knits locally without high minimum-quantity restrictions.

Katie Tague
Vice President of Denim Marketing and Sales
Artistic Milliners PVT LTD



Within fiber, we're seeing a continued push comprising recycled material including PIW and PCW, and that coalesces pretty well with Artistic Milliners' total-circularity philosophy. We're literally building a new purpose-designed facility called Circular Park to help us process post-industrial fiber at an even more massive scale than before. It's also made our partnerships with fiber-tech partners

such as Lenzing that much more important to us. We have multiple blends that utilize everything from TENCEL Modal to REFIBRA.

Hemp is another material we've seen consistent demand for thanks to its sustainability and durability cred. This year, we've partnered with **Cordura Denim** made with French-sourced hemp in blue stretch-denim qualities and featuring soft, comfort handles and a natural slub character, really ticking those boxes for comfort and authentic character. These continue to be hot tickets for our clients, though we've seen the demand for stretch fabrics cool a bit.

Sherry Wood
Director of Merchandising
Texollini



Texollini's core business is within the active, swim and athleisure segments of the market. We are continuing to see strong interest in our synthetic fibers—nylon, polyester—but as brands see the value in sustainable materials and messaging, we are starting to see many brands adopting sustainable revisions of these styles, whether it be recycled nylon and polyester or recycled polyester blends with lyocell.

Since the onset of the pandemic, outdoor-lifestyle activities are continuing and brands are fulfilling those specific needs. We are seeing growth within segments of active and athleisure such as tennis and golf. Fine-gauge interlock jersey with compression that feel like a second skin is another highly requested fabric for these markets. Brands are also looking to finishes as another element that can make their styles stand out among the rest, whether it be sueding, brushing, antimicrobial, moisture wicking, aloe vera, etc.

Our swim brands stayed strong and grew during the pandemic since this market has now become a year-round business not just for specific seasons of the year as before. Besides our Superfino jerseys, which have incredible four-way stretch to fit into this all-inclusive market, we are also developing many new novelty styles such as mini jacquards and surface textures for this category. Rib jerseys have been strong for us in all market categories. ●

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Heidi Merrick Shows Ranch-Inspired Autumn/Winter '21/'22 Collection

Heidi Merrick is known for her minimalist approach to California coastal-cool style, but the Los Angeles designer recently unveiled a fresh collection that spoke to a different lifestyle common throughout the state. Embedded in Merrick's Autumn/Winter '21/'22 RNCH collection are influences from personal experiences living on her own Carpinteria, Calif., ranch and time spent at **The Alisal Guest Ranch and Resort**, which sits on 10,500 acres in the state's Santa Ynez Valley.

"The Alisal beautifully represents the values this year has impressed on me—family dining, horses, nature, good friends, hard work and all the things ranch life can bring," Merrick said.

Merrick's partnership with Alisal, a luxury resort and dude ranch that opened in 1946, brought together the designer and close friends for a Sept. 16 fashion show on the property's Creekside Lawn. Alisal wranglers and horses were featured during the event while the fashion presentation was followed

by a private dinner executed by the luxury destination's Director of Culinary Operations and Executive Chef Anthony Endy. A selection of pieces from the Autumn/Winter '21/'22 RNCH collection is available at **The Alisal Mercantile**, with additional releases being made in the future at the property and online at heidimerrick.com.

"The passionate spirit, wondrous beauty and timelessness of The Alisal is captured in the textures and colors of Heidi's latest collection," said Kathleen Cochran, general manager of the property. "The Alisal is honored to be a part of this wonderful line and to be the host of the celebration."

The RNCH collection comprises tones of chocolate, cocoa, apricot, deep rose red, shamrock green, red ochre and cadet blue while also incorporating classic black, white, ivory and chambray. A strong presence of bishop sleeves is found within the collection's cozy sweaters and button-up pieces, as a sleeveless mandarin-collar top paired with a long, pleated frontier skirt and a Western hat added touches of ranch ro-

mance.

Merrick also incorporated her signature elements, updated for a ranch feel. The jumpsuit with long-sleeved tuxedo-wrap top featured pants that tucked perfectly into field boots. There was also plenty of sparkle from Merrick's sequined pieces, including a long-sleeved, sparkling black bodysuit with belted-bow waist, strong shoulders and a plunging neckline. Primary textiles within the RNCH collection included moire, denim and wool. In the style of Merrick's previous SRF line of casualwear, the designer also released a collection of RNCH crew necks, hoodies, T-shirts, baseball caps, trucker hats and a tote.

"It's an overwhelming gift to have my show at The Alisal," said Merrick. "The Alisal has been a great inspiration to me ever since my first fly-fishing experience years ago, and I've been fortunate to come back several times with my family. I just love that I get to debut this new collection at the place that inspired it all."—*Dorothy Crouch*



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As we head into the holiday season, what types of investments should apparel companies be making to fortify their businesses and ensure success for 2022?

Finance *Continued from page 1*

While challenges such as supply-chain and shipping delays and staffing shortages remain, and continue to impact the apparel business, there are methods fashion-industry professionals can follow to overcome these roadblocks. *California Apparel News* asked financial-industry experts: *As we head into the holiday season, what types of investments should apparel companies be making to fortify their businesses and ensure success for 2022?*

Darrin Beer Western Regional Manager CIT Commercial Services



Several of our apparel clients are benefiting from an increase in sales during 2021, due in part to a recent shift in consumer spending from services to goods including clothing. In addition, government fiscal policies, including stimulus payments and child tax credits, have improved the discretionary spending power of consumers.

Some headwinds facing the 2021 holiday season and beyond include the continued bottleneck of shipping containers and goods at the ports. Additionally, labor shortages in the apparel sector and other industries will make it challenging to support higher sales driven by strong retail and consumer demand.

Investments in recruitment and retention will likely be necessary to retain a consistent workforce. Also, some apparel companies will use the current environment to concentrate on reducing inventory levels, thus reducing their warehouse footprint. Some apparel companies may want to explore local production in order to improve turnaround time.

In addition, we're seeing some companies seek financing to expand their product lines. Still others see the current climate as an opportunity to acquire other businesses or invest in upgraded enterprise resource planning systems to support overall operations and online fulfillment strategies. Finally, a number of businesses are investing to build their social-media presence or expand their social-advertising strategy.

Mark Bienstock Managing Director Express Trade Capital



Those apparel companies that planned their inventory levels properly for the back-to-school and holiday-shopping periods will be the big winners this holiday season. With the ongoing shipping and port delays, those importers and manufacturers that had the foresight to either bring the merchandise in early on or to have it flown in will be able to hopefully expand their retail footprint as many retailers are looking for at-

once merchandise. However, all of the apparel manufacturers will need to be very cognizant of their inventory levels going forward as the expectation into 2022 is that some of these shipping disruptions will begin to normalize again.

Sydney Breuer Executive Vice President, Western Region Manager Rosenthal & Rosenthal



Apparel companies will face much uncertainty in the coming year, and supply-chain issues, the backlog of containers at the ports and increased transportation costs are only the tip of the iceberg. To position themselves for success, apparel brands need to be aware of and prepared to deal with these challenges as best they can. No company wants to face a last-minute surprise that their goods won't be delivered on time.

Communication is key, both up the supply chain with the factories and down the supply chain to customers. Brands would be prudent to make smart investments now in technology that helps shore up the supply chain so companies can stay on top of their orders, no matter where in the world their product is.

Investing in a strong inventory-management system is also key. This allows management to keep track of both in-transit inventory and warehouse inventory and also helps to identify and track open-order and slow-moving inventories. To stay competitive in this environment, it's critical for apparel companies to have the proper amount and mix of inventory.

As online shopping continues to increase in popularity, additional investment may be needed in e-commerce capabilities and social-media platforms. Brands' direct-to-consumer online channels need to be fresh, user-friendly and state-of-the-art to attract and retain more shoppers in ways that increase their purchases. As always, quality product at value pricing needs to be available for the consumer to purchase whenever and wherever the consumer is.

Gino Clark Executive Vice President and Managing Director of Originations White Oak Commercial Finance, LLC



We at White Oak Commercial Finance believe there are many investments that apparel companies can begin this year to bolster future returns. These commitments will require capital, time and energy to properly integrate within a business's operating model. So, there's no better time to start than now.

First, we're confident that companies with an online offering to its customers will be in a strong position this holiday season and beyond. While there is some debate about how COVID-related safety concerns will affect in-store foot traffic over the coming months, we believe that pent-up demand, historically high levels of savings and rising wages will result in a robust holiday season for most retailers and especially for those who have invested in e-commerce.

Furthermore, we believe there is still a lot of room for companies to benefit from the rising tide of innovative technologies associated with e-commerce. For example, buy-now-pay-later apps such as **Affirm**, **Afterpay** and **Klarna** represent a fast-growing payments subsector that provides shoppers with a quick and easy-to-use alternative to credit cards. Disruptive technologies such as these are becoming universal across digital retail channels and can effectively increase consumer purchasing power and facilitate larger transactions.

Businesses should also invest in infrastructure. This can be done by beefing up internal systems to optimize inventory controls and reporting to help plan and forecast sales following an exceptional 2021. Companies should also stay a step ahead by scheduling their purchases and production earlier to account for supply-chain constraints. We advise allowing for at least eight to 10 weeks for delivery.

Third, we recommend that apparel businesses develop a comprehensive financial plan for 2022. Companies should establish a flexible credit line or financing arrangement with their lender, one that can provide enough leeway for them to manage through unforeseen challenges and be ready for opportunities arising in today's fast-changing marketplace.

Eric Fisch Senior Vice President—National Sector Head for Retail and Apparel HSBC Bank USA N.A.



The apparel industry is synonymous with rapid change. Consumer trends are constantly changing. Companies across all product categories need to be nimble to thrive. This near-constant transformation can lead an entrepreneur to focus attention and resources on short-term needs rather than long-term strategy and investment. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this type of thinking, with

many companies focused on just getting through each season. As we all look toward the holidays and 2022 with a more-optimistic lens, it is important to think beyond the coming year on the investments that will bear fruit for many years to come. I have focused here on three areas to consider as you evaluate building for long-term success.

The largest retail-sector paradigm shift of our generation has been the rise of e-commerce as a third sales channel alongside retail and wholesale. Most of the discussions I hear focus on legacy brands trying to catch up to digital native startups. I think the more holistic way to look at the channel dynamic is that nearly every apparel company that grows beyond a certain level will need to have a presence in all three distribution channels. The right proportions are unique to each individual business. The earlier companies realize and invest in building out their weaker channels, the healthier the business will be for the long run.

Companies who sell through multiple channels have the additional challenge of creating a seamless customer experience across the network. Consumers have come to expect the ability to engage with a brand across all platforms with ease and feel valued, regardless of where they choose to peruse, purchase or return. The back-end systems and infrastructure are integral to creating that smooth customer-service experience, and the longer a company waits to unify its IT, the more expensive and painful it will be.

If e-commerce is the seismic shift of the current generation, sustainable production and consumption are the future disruptors. A few well-publicized industry leaders have made significant advancements, but most of the industry has a long way to go before realizing the green and circular business model that consumers will demand. If surveys are correct, shoppers already skew purchasing to companies with better ESG metrics. This trend will continue, and the expectations will only grow.

Regardless of whether companies look to these areas or others more appropriate to their business, balancing short-term and long-term investments will build a healthier, more stable company.

Rob Greenspan President and Chief Executive Greenspan Consult, Inc.



Apparel companies should and must continue to invest in their personnel. You must hire and retain your best and brightest people. As businesses continue to open and grow, human capital will be a critical resource. Do not let other companies hire away your best people. Figure out ways to make work from home still possible even if it is only a few days a week. Make certain you are paying the market rate for

your best talent.

Continue to invest in sourcing opportunities. Do not be held captive by a major supplier. Invest in and find ways to diversify your production. Supply chain is critical to your business survival. Do not be financially dependent on limited suppliers for your products.

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As we head into the holiday season, what types of investments should apparel companies be making to fortify their businesses and ensure success for 2022?

Finance *Continued from page 10*

Invest in defining new ways of developing revenue streams for e-commerce. We all saw what happened to the companies that solely relied on wholesale business. Expand your revenue lines through e-commerce.

Lastly, continue to invest in innovative technologies. Make sure your operating system is up to date and can supply you with all the information you need to run, manage and grow your business. Accurate, timely and correct information will make you money.

Richard Kwon
Executive Vice President and Portfolio Manager
Finance One, Inc.



2021 holiday retail sales are estimated to increase by at least 7 percent compared to the same period last year. While the forecasts present much-needed optimism toward future economic activity in the United States, the surge in COVID-19 cases caused by the highly contagious Delta variant is continuing to disrupt the global supply chain. The overwhelming increase in freight costs as well as material and labor shortages are

adding stress to a manufacturer's balance sheet. With government stimulus no longer entering the marketplace, discontinued bonus unemployment benefits, and widespread inventory shortages due to production and delivery delays, the pandemic-induced uncertainties will remain as we enter 2022.

During these uncertain times, an apparel company should consider investing their resources to minimize the negative impacts the pandemic has in areas of sourcing, logistics and sales. For companies that had all of their eggs in one basket, this increased their risk of failure when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. However, certain apparel companies were able to take advantage of the spike in demand for apparel as soon as COVID-19 restrictions were lifted last year by having access to diversified sourcing, capable logistics providers and well-informed sales teams.

While China and Vietnam are key countries for outsourcing production of apparel, many companies that also had nearshoring alternatives in Latin America have benefited when China and Vietnam were under COVID-19 lockdowns. Apparel companies should constantly invest in sourcing new suppliers across different countries. Once in-person attendance becomes available, international-sourcing trade shows such as **Sourcing at MAGIC** in Las Vegas, **Texworld** in New York and **Apparel Textile Sourcing** in Miami would be a good place to start.

Companies should also invest in choosing capable third-party logistics companies that have advantages through robust online, digital capabilities and accurate traceability of cargo at any given time. Many 3PL companies, who provide outsourcing of warehousing, pick and pack, order fulfillment, shipping and delivery, and freight forwarding, are now adding 4PL enhancements such as consulting, data and analytics, service coordination, transition planning, sourcing, inventory planning, asset management, and overall logistical strategy, which can reduce or eliminate the need for in-house staff for logistics planning.

Lastly, companies should invest in relationships with service vendors such as factors who can provide value-added information that will lead to an increase in sales while reducing customer-default risks. The pandemic caused many bricks-and-mortar retailers to fail; however, many that survived have since recovered and even thrived in this challenging environment. Service vendors can provide unofficial insights as to which companies in the industry are performing well and, therefore, warrant a serious consideration as a sales target.

Robert Meyers
President
Republic Business Credit, LLC



Next year is already feeling more like déjà vu instead of a new year to most of our apparel manufacturers and importers across the country. While each new year can feel like a unique opportunity to refresh your strategy, products or go to market, most companies expect the challenges from 2021 to remain as a central part of the discussion. Those challenges include supply chain, rising material costs, con-

tainer costs, port delays, delayed shipping and fluctuating consumer confidence as the pandemic continues to have an impact around the world.

As apparel companies prepare for 2022, they must invest in the areas they can control while remaining agile and adaptable to what new challenges next year will bring. The trends toward e-commerce continue and provide better margins, greater flexibility and a focus on the inventory already located on-site.

Beyond additional investments in e-commerce, the next plan must be around the supply side of your business. I believe 2022 should be a year with some supply-chain experimentation to help reduce the reliance on many of the importing issues in 2020/2021. That investment might be with new suppliers, new cargo importers or shipping lanes, or exploring a U.S.-based manufacturing strategy. While manufacturing in the U.S. won't solve the raw-material challenges, it will allow the apparel company to take more control over their supply chain. Several clients are starting to look into Mexico for their warehousing and/or logistics support where product retail values are below the customs duty amount depending on your product.

So, in summary, 2022 needs to be an investment year, but I would challenge it should also contain at least some limited supply-chain experimentation to regain control of your production and ability to service your customers.

David M. Reza
Senior Vice President Western Region
Milberg Factors, Inc.



As has been highlighted frequently in the pages of *California Apparel News* and other industry media, ensuring ongoing viability let alone success in the apparel industry requires continuous refinement of infrastructure, product, marketing, distribution and sourcing. Whether it is management's focus or actual investment of capital, companies need to:

- Ensure that they have a safe, healthy, and socially fair environment for employees, customers, suppliers and stakeholders.

This includes compelling regulatory compliance in all jurisdictions where the company operates.

- Continually evolve and upgrade digital capabilities. Consumers want a multi-channel buying experience that is seamless and consistent across all sales and marketing media. Apparel importers and manufacturers should be sure that they are up to date on how their retail customers are evolving their digital footprint in response to consumer behavior. In addition, as the pandemic has so forcefully demonstrated, apparel companies need to continually improve their own websites, customer analytics and online experience.

- Sourcing, logistics and production delays are currently the biggest challenges in, not just the apparel industry, but across all consumer products and manufacturing sectors. Every company is dealing with skyrocketing freight costs, container shortages, delivery pushbacks and more. Ongoing shortages of vaccines and emerging COVID variants are causing manufacturing slowdowns and port closures in Asia. These problems will not abate anytime soon.

This is the time to study and retain expertise to analyze sourcing, production, and inbound shipping methods and routes used in your supply or production chain. Identify alternative production sources or regions with favorable health and political risks. At the same time, you may find ways to take costs out of the process.

Kevin M. Sullivan
Executive Vice President at Wells Fargo Commercial Services
Wells Fargo



With 2022 just around the corner, most of our clients remain focused on issues of supply-chain management. The companies who have been best able to navigate through the current logistics issues have a diversity within their vendor bases that enables them to shift production in a way that allows them to achieve relatively timely deliveries of product, despite the continued port issues on both sides of the supply chain.

Negotiating appropriate terms with vendors has also been a sizable advantage as those buying on LDP or DDP terms haven't had to bear the costs of the increases in freight charges.

Diversifying customer bases also remains a high priority as it helps to shield apparel companies from the inherent risk of a major customer who represents a significant concentration running into credit issues. On this front, it makes more sense now than ever for companies to utilize the services of a factor to make sure that major credit exposures are insured. While many retailers have weathered the COVID situation reasonably well, some remain relatively challenged. It's important to be able to pivot to customers who will remain long-term players and with whom apparel companies can continue to grow their businesses.

Ken Wengrod
Finance Committee Chair
District Export Council of Southern California



Restructure and make investments in ways that matter for your future. Environmental, social and governance are critical investments that embrace practices that are fair to our planet and each other. Apparel companies need to be scrutinized for their ESG practices these days, specifically environmental needs, the company's energy use, waste, pollution, natural-resource conservation and treatment of animals.

Social needs include a company's attitude toward working conditions for its employees and the employees in its supply chain as well as ghost workers.

Take action with respect to diversity, equity and inclusiveness. Having staff diversity will also bring fresh thinking and openness to innovation. Governance is the company's leadership, executive pay, transparent accounting methods and shareholder rights for all shareholders including minority shareholders. As President Biden recently stated, there is a growing disparity between top executives' compensation and the workers. Today, smart companies are not being run with the command-post mentality as we can see with the efficiencies of remote locations.

Consumers, especially younger generations, are using ESG criteria when deciding on the item they are selecting to purchase. ESG has become a significant influencer in determining which item to purchase by the consumer. According to a recent **Nielsen** survey "48 percent said they would definitely or probably change their consumption habits to reduce their impact on the environment." The survey also found that the values were reflected in actual spending with \$128.5 billion spent on sustainable, fast-moving consumer goods. This trend will continue to grow as it is driven by younger generations such as Millennials, of whom 83 percent say environmental sustainability is extremely important to them.

Startup and more-mature apparel companies, generally, have a vision to power brand their merchandise and will need to attract equity from the investment community to support these plans. Investors are also taking these ESG criteria very seriously when conducting their due diligence and evaluations to determine if they want to invest. Companies that use these practices may have a lower probability of getting into unforeseen legal issues that could negatively impact their operations, such as labor issues and conflicts of interest.

ESG practices is another significant measure of success. When ESG practices are followed, costs are lowered by employing techniques to reduce waste, including water and power, and revenues are increased.

People want apparel manufacturers to walk their talk by developing stylish merchandise, treating their people throughout the supply chain with fairness, dignity and respect, as well as saving our planet. ●

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SFI *Continued from page 1*

seller because it would be a sure thing, and I wanted to do it in the most sustainable way possible.”

Reaching out to denim-sustainability advocate and consultant Ani Wells of **Simply Suzette**, Bonvicini admitted that, while her expertise in upcycling jeans was unmatched, manufacturing new denim pieces was not a strong suit. After discussing Bonvicini’s vision of re-creating EB Denim upcycled styles into a sustainably manufactured collection, Wells contacted SFI’s vice president of design, Alaina Miller.

“We decided that we wanted everything made in L.A. or as local as possible staying true to the roots of EB Denim, where everything started with only upcycled made-in-America Levi’s 501s,” Wells said. “We really wanted to drive that home and continue to bring that through to the new line and keep those sustainability standards in place. For fabric, I knew [SFI parent company] **Artistic Milliners** very well and their expertise, and I am a fan of what they do.”

Working together, the perfectly paired trio of EB Denim, Simply Suzette and SFI examined the best approaches to fabrics, dye processes and washes to create a jean that would reflect an elevated, more ecologically sound product. The result was EB Denim’s Unraveled Two collection—a reimagined version of the brand’s Vintage Unraveled Jeans that had been created by reconstructing secondhand denim. This fresh version affords a premium denim from Artistic Milliners that is washed in Los Angeles by SFI, and cut and sewn by a local partner, yet is rooted in Bonvicini’s ethos of blending sustainability with an exquisitely crafted jean.

“Elena sent over some of the Unraveled jeans. We were able to start making fabric recommendations based on the jeans that she sent with qualities that would be an appropriate



In celebration of its partnership with EB Denim, denim-development company SFI hosted an event to afford insight into how it adhered to its new partner’s sustainable mission when creating the Unraveled Two collection. Wearing pieces from the Unraveled Two collection, standing from left, EB Denim’s Elena Bonvicini and Simply Suzette’s Ani Wells join SFI’s Vice President of Design Alaina Miller in celebrating the collection’s launch.

weight and an appropriate shade to re-create that style,” said Miller. “Our global wash team is constantly researching the most innovative chemicals, so we perfected our Clear Fade technology, which allows us to use less water, less chemicals, less energy to create that beautiful vintage wash.”

While Bonvicini notes that the experience has afforded an invaluable education thanks to the SFI team, these denim veterans are also grateful for the partnership.

“When I bought this company last year, incubation was a huge part of it,” said Murtaza Ahmed, SFI’s co-founder and executive director. “Elena is not from the denim industry,

which is amazing. It’s nice to have outsiders come in. The dream here is what happened today—people from all walks of life coming into a facility and just seeing how things are done and promoting made in America.”

Blending the design vision of EB Denim with the expertise of SFI, which relies on a staff comprising denim experts—many of whom have decades of industry experience—this partnership reaches further than simply creating a lust-worthy pair of premium jeans. The product is great denim that connects the customer mission, such as Bonvicini’s sustainability focus with SFI’s expertise, to build a new denim story.

“Rather than making this sterile and clean, we are focusing on the human component of what this place has to offer from every angle,” said Lizzie Kroeze, vice president of product design and development at SFI. “Our relationship with the mill team in Pakistan is super strong, and they come out regularly to share knowledge with us and to meet with customers that come in on the design side and development side.”

Available in an indigo comprising 95 percent organic cotton and 5 percent recycled cotton and a black that relies on 100 percent **Better Cotton Initiative** cotton, Unraveled Two is detailed using laser technology that lends a vintage appearance without potentially harmful chemicals. Buttons are eco finished, bypassing electroplating, and leather patches are sourced from reclaimed materials. The collection is available in sizes 22–34 and is priced at \$325 at ebdenim.com.

“Working with new materials has really opened up a world of opportunities. There are so many limitations and production barriers when working with vintage,” said Bonvicini. “Now I truly feel that this is the next chapter for the brand. We are already in the works of developing several styles, and will have a whole assortment of new denim for Spring/Summer 2022, which we’re really looking forward to.” ●



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FASHION

Dresses Are Back

By Melissa Moylan Vice President of Womenswear at Fashion Snoops

It's official. Dresses are back as the newest recovery classification as consumers look to embrace celebratory dressing. In the midst of the Spring/Summer 2022 fashion weeks, it's become clear that designers are ramping up dress assortments in a major way, providing both optimism and a new sense of expression that's in stark contrast to pandemic-era sweats. No matter what the occasion, there's a dress for it and more often than not it's sexy. Together, we'll explore how we got here, what the trending styles are and how social media is driving newness.

From casual to occasion



PatBO Spring '22

We've come a long way since sweatpants. Over the last 18 months, consumers have grown accustomed to "pandemic-proof" wardrobes, which consist of everyday lounge-wear and basics. The comeback of social gatherings will continue to give consumers a reason to buy, whether it's for special occasions, travel or more-formal events. And

while many of us are eager to dress up again, it doesn't mean the end of casual dressing entirely. It simply signals the demand for consumers to tap into the joy of dressing up more. In fact, one of the best examples to bridge the gap from casual to occasion wear is with knit column dresses that cling to the body—a noteworthy shift away from oversized sweats.

All the party dresses



London Street Style

What makes the dress classification so appealing right now is the comeback of occasions that provide opportunities to dress up. In fact, the tendency to "go all out" is something that's fully embraced because for such a long time there really wasn't a reason to wear a dress. In the height of the pandemic, retailers canceled dress orders, but now they're heavily investing back in the category and, in particular, party dresses.

Party dresses are undoubtedly most exciting, fueled predominantly by mini hemlines and a variety of new, sexy details. The major shift comes in fitted bodycon silhouettes—think Dua Lipa, not the bandage styles of the past. At



David Koma Spring '22



Victor Glemaud Spring '22

which draws attention to new erogenous zones. Cutouts placed around the clavicle, torso or back add that extra flash of skin that defines sexiness in this moment. In addition, halter necklines also make for a flattering comeback.

But what's a party dress without a little sparkle? Designers turn up the glamour for Spring, ranging from sequins and jewel-encrusted looks to feathers and fringe. Whether full-on embellishment or in solid hues, party dresses encompass many style varieties, intended to be worn by any and everyone. And while there's a lot of exposed skin involved, this new brand of sexy is all about empowering the wearer to feel confident in her own skin.

TikTok dresses



Fendi Spring '22

While notoriously known for its video challenges, **TikTok** has become a place to discover fashion and the next "it" items. For example, the #napdress emerged on the social-media platform in 2020 amid pandemic lockdowns, tapping into #regencycore and offering a nightgown-like style appropriate for home. Needless to say, things shifted this summer

with a number of TikTok dresses going viral with the Gen Z crowd. The younger market is especially set on dressing up again, with recent favorites including the **Skims** slip dress and Y2K bodycon dresses. With more reasons to dress up, TikTok will be important for keeping a pulse on new dress styles.

While revealing silhouettes encompass a newer direction in dresses that isn't to say that fluid styles will go away. Rather, when we take a step back and look at what's happening culturally, it just makes sense that we're embarking on a new era of showing off with statement party dresses. After all, a flash of skin has the potential to be incredibly empowering, and that's exactly what makes fashion so thrilling.

About Fashion Snoops: FS is a global trend forecasting agency helping consumer-facing brands around the world unlock innovation and propel growth. Through a combination of human and artificial intelligence, we analyze cultural shifts and interpret detected patterns in order to surface trend-driven business opportunities. Learn more at www.fashionsnoops.com.



Financing in the Age of e-Commerce

By **Martin Efron** *Executive Vice President, Managing Director of Originations, New York*
and **Mike Earnhart** *Senior Vice President, Managing Director of Originations, Los Angeles*

The apparel industry was an early adopter of e-commerce. Even before COVID-19 struck, online retail accounted for 27 percent of U.S. apparel sales in 2018 and 30 percent in 2019. In 2020, that number leaped to 46 percent as consumers largely avoided stores due to health and safety concerns, according to the research firm Digital Commerce 360. It is not an exaggeration to say e-commerce kept the fashion industry afloat last year and this year. But e-commerce is a very different business model from bricks-and-mortar. Instead of selling to big retailers like Walmart or Macy's, many apparel firms sell either through platforms like Amazon and Shopify or directly to the public through their own websites. The direct approach is appealing because it cuts out the intermediary and offers the promise of bigger margins. However, it also requires a significant commitment from and involves increased risks to apparel businesses, who may feel it is the equivalent of operating without a net. Apparel makers who once received orders and, with them, a measurable degree of certainty from the retailers, now must gauge and make their own real-time decisions about demand. Will they make enough product? Will they get stuck with unsold inventory? Both the risks and rewards are higher.

The same holds true on the finance side. Because there are no receivables, lenders like White Oak have had to shift to a model in which they do more asset-based lending against inventory and other forms of collateral. That requires a deep understanding of a client's business and management team and getting comfortable with the risks that are being shouldered. White Oak is also able to provide advice on the digital transformation based on its know-how and commitment to this area.

Additionally, White Oak has had to get creative about the types of collateral it evaluates in making lending decisions. Successful websites can have value as collateral, as well as brand names—even the brand names of companies that have gone out of business. You can't run your hands over these assets the way you could with a sweater—they are in the realm of intellectual property, but in the digital era, intellectual property is a critical piece of the value equation. Lending against so-called intangible assets is a relatively recent phenomenon, but

as these assets become a bigger part of a company's valuations, this type of financing may become more important. In all cases, and with all types of collateral, White Oak's goal is the same: to optimize the amount of available working capital that clients can use to run their operations.

Online retailing has had one more important impact: It has made everything go



Mike Earnhart



Martin Efron

faster. Gone are the days when the fashion world had predictable seasons. Today, if a pop star or influencer on Instagram is photographed wearing a distinctive fashion item, it can become an overnight sensation, forcing the apparel manufacturer to crank up production. Similarly, the new work-from-home fashion trends to accommodate the remote-yet-professional crowd have required quick pivots. The shorter the fashion cycle, the greater the risk that an apparel maker will get stuck with unsold inventory. The end result: Both manufacturers and their lenders need to be very flexible.

It is worth pointing out that even as e-commerce expands, traditional in-store retailing remains an enormous business. In August, apparel sales climbed 43 percent from a year earlier, driven by big increases in both online and in-store sales, according to Retail Dive. For in-store sales, factoring remains a common form of finance for the same reasons it has historically benefitted the apparel industry: It provides a quick source of cash, it can be easily scaled for businesses of all sizes, it helps companies deal with seasonal swings and it outsources the jobs of credit checking and debt collection to those with the expertise to handle it. Our customers still ship product to stores, and we still do a considerable amount of factoring to finance those transactions. Factoring and receivable financing remains a reliable form of working capital that can help businesses across many distribution models, and it continues to keep pace with a fast-evolving marketplace.

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Dallas Market Center

www.dallasmarketcenter.com
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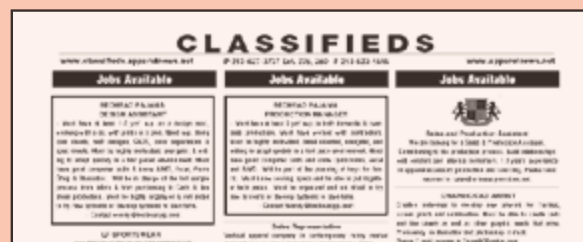
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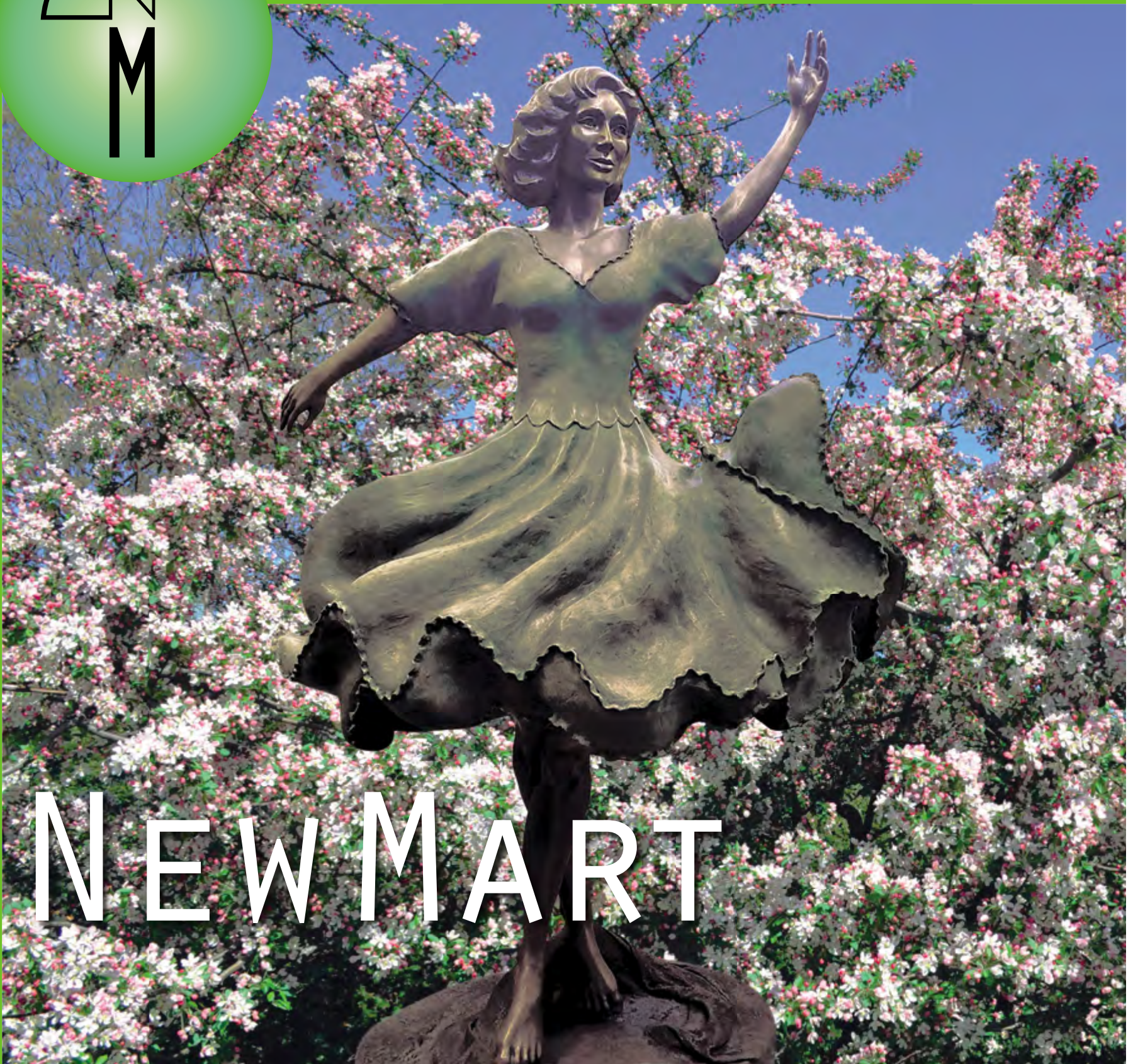
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