

## High-end Fabric

# A world of 'better' fabrics

By Jane Dagmi  
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**H**IGH POINT — If color and texture are emotional, and pattern rings familiar and aspirational, then fabric is truly a multi-sensory experience. It makes a personal connection.

Whether we are feeling social or solitary, fabric frames our bodies and supports our need to relax. As a vehicle for self-expression, descriptors like unconventional, avant garde, sophisticated, eclectic, maximal and anything-goes satisfy the ego and convey the current high-energy mood of higher-end fabrics. As a catch-all for the unpredictable flow of everyday life, high-quality, high-tech fabrics can bring comfort, peace of mind and freedom. It's all here.

## Warming colors

While blue remains king and gray relevant, there's a resurgence of warm colors that reflect the Earth's natural beauty.

Hannah Alderson, vice president of design at Robert Allen & Durealee, says natural does not mean neutral and offers Butternut, a shade of orange, as an example.

In the reddish tones, desert shades such as terracotta, rose and adobe are trending. Strong greens like emerald, olive and spruce also dominate. Valdesse Weavers' blues veer toward teal. And organic hues include gold.

Kathy Dotterer, creative director at Brentwood Textiles, sees straw and tumeric advancing, while Cathy Smith of Texpertise sees both clear and mustard yellow playing a role at South Pacific Textiles.

De Leo Creative Director Katie Atwater Williams embraces gender-neutral colors. "Three of our color studies are inspired by a transition in our culture where we are seeing more and more overlap between traditionally feminine and traditionally masculine concepts," she said. "The specific hues are an updated version of mint green, shades of yellow and soft muted coral tones."

While bold, saturated colors may be the showstoppers, neutrals still reign in body cloths. At P/Kaufmann, there are lots of gray and beiges, and more body clothes in white. Milliken believes neutrals and softer tones are everlasting, foundation basics in the home. And although Kravet may offer the spectrum, Chief Creative Director Scott Kravet said, "Most sales you see will be in neutrals and grays." Crypton has much to offer in the gray palette, from silver to charcoal, and continues to be a go-to practical source for white.

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Colors that have previously been geared toward a certain gender are being applied in **more gender-neutral ways**. The genesis of this color transition in part comes from the concept of Millennial pink — which has created a transition across the color spectrum.

Katie Atwater Williams, creative director, De Leo



Crypton's Home's LUSH, shown in a rich Golden colorway, has a velvety finish.



Though neutral-driven, Libeco always has seasonal add-ons inspired by nature.



De Leo sees colors traditionally geared toward a specific gender being applied in more gender-neutral ways.

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'Best' once stood for expensive, but today it can mean loaded with features that were not available before such as enhanced durability, cleanability or other properties. 'Best' can also mean the best fiber offering for those that prefer natural, loom state fabrics. It can also mean which company is aligned with your values for purchasing responsibly or domestically.

Christy Almond  
vice president, product development and marketing, Valdesse Weavers

## What is 'better' fabric?

**H**IGH POINT — The attributes that determine a fabric's value and desirability are evolving. While price point and yarn quality will still play into fabric's ranking as good, better or best, a fabric that delivers ease, durability and peace of mind can be considered luxurious, no matter the price.

Technological innovations are creating better-made products all around.

"Value at the 'better' and 'best' end is the perception that a fabric would carry a higher price than it does, and it is even more in demand from higher-end manufacturers than at the 'good' level," said Cathy Smith of Texpertise, representing South Pacific.

Sean Gibbons, CEO of Revolution Performance Fabrics, concurred. "While our high-end furniture customers do pick many of our best Revolution fabrics — those containing finer yarns and more sophisticated design and typically jacquard construction — they absolutely buy our mid-to-lower priced better options as well."

In the hierarchy of fabrics, domestic manufacturing lends a certain allure as it can enable shorter delivery times, expedited customer service, adaptability, and the capacity to collaborate with customers.

"Best can also mean the company is inline with your values for purchasing responsibly or domestically," added Valdesse's Christy Almond, vice president of product development and marketing. **IT**

— Jane Dagmi,  
Senior Editor, Fashion

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### Dry, dimensional, cozy

Yarn innovations and blending breed new touchy-feely fabrics, with many companies producing their own yarns.

Valdese Weavers makes its own multicolored and multi-textured yarn, all about the woven details. “We carefully craft our fabrics to emulate embroideries and quilted looks from around the globe. These constructions, coupled with artisanal drawings create a hand-crafted tactile quality,” said Ann Reynolds, vice president of design.

For many of the performance fabric manufacturers, achieving a soft, dry hand is the goal.

Brentwood Textiles weaves with Revolution’s

polypropylene yarns that yield both fine and bulkier textures, such as chenille and boucle. Crypton Home is incorporating natural fibers along with man-made to create a more dimensional weave. With its performance technology formulated for each distinct fiber grouping, Crypton’s goal is for the finished goods to be as inviting as a non-performance textile.

Even Libeco, with its legacy of linen, is adding “fancy” yarns in construction, blending linen with small amounts of wool, cotton, nylon, viscose, bamboo and others. The company’s proprietary finishing techniques add fullness, heft and softness.

At companies such as Fabricut, P/Kaufmann and Kravet, linen/polyester blends give a more elegant hand and increase durability.

Dramatic textures like super chunky caterpillar chenille, coarse natural fiber warps and slubby velvets are de rigeur at De Leo. “We are making bold statements with our body cloth this season,” said Williams, also calling out dimensional velvets with cut and uncut pile, which are part of the Carousel by Todd Bowles collection.

Texture waves are also felt at Robert Allen and Duralee with chunky blanket constructions, faux fur and sheepskin-like textiles.



ABOVE: For Valdese, maximalism is a layering of patterns from different periods and styles.



South Pacific’s Festive, part of the Edge performance collection, is woven with a specialized textured and multicolored yarn.



LEFT: Stroheim’s raw Tussah Silk comes in 17 colors. President of Design Nina Butkin says, “The way the fabric feels in your hand makes you feel like you’re touching something decadent and luxurious.”

### Tribal to trees

The story a fabric tells can trigger nostalgia or inspire future aspiration.

“Clients value the experience of materiality in textiles,” said Alderson. “That means that each fabric has a story to tell from the origin of the pattern to yarns that were chosen to weave the fabric.”

The global aesthetic remains hot as tribal and muddcloth-like patterns are updated with color. Alderson stressed the desire for

imperfect hand-crafted styling. “The importance of detecting the artist’s hand in the making of patterns is a trend that is going to stay.”

Witnessing the enduring popularity of ethnic designs, Scott Kravet said, “As people travel to more remote parts of the world, it takes new forms. Everyone wants a keepsake from where they’ve been.”

The related bohemian look

may be found in the vintage rug patterns that are translated onto fabrics at Morgan and Revolution. And Brunswick & Fils Lodi Garden fabric, which depicts exotic carpets, is an interpretation of old Indian lore.

At Brentwood, Fabricut and Valdese, foliage, florals of all kinds, and plant-inspired images are rampant.

“Botanicals are hot right now along with abstract florals,” said Paulina Muzekari, vice president of design and merchandising at Morgan.

Valdese sees floral influences from the fashion world working their way into home furnishings. And Duralee’s new Lonni Paul collection plays with elements of classic couture such as a large-scale argyle, while at Kravet, David Phoenix’s Well-Suited collection features classic men’s haberdashery patterns.



Vervain’s lush Secret Garden is printed on cotton.

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The trend that has been around the last few markets is transitional and modern design, but I think there is going to be a trend back toward fresh traditional. Something that’s been popular for a long time is **ethnic designs**. It just takes new forms as people travel to more remote parts of the world. It’s always changing. Everyone wants a keepsake from where they’ve been.

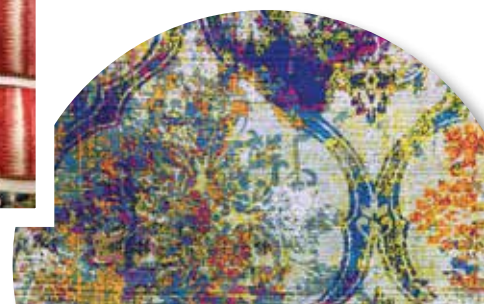
Scott Kravet  
chief creative director, Kravet

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LEFT: From Brunswick & Fils, Lodi Garden upholstered wall and a chair in Bromo Velvet. From the Baret collection.

BELOW: Morgan Fabrics’ Renato velvet print is boho proud.



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### Focus on benefits

While advances in technology enable performance fabrics to have a more traditional textile look and feel, fabric designers and visionaries understand that performance alone is not enough.

“Design has to be great,” said Alderson, who has recently introduced the newest designer/performance collection, Lonnie Paul for Duralee, featuring Crypton Home performance technology.

“Performance is the key,” said Kravet who likens his family’s namesake company to a “powerhouse of performance,” applying the most up-to-date technology to sought-after designs, colors and qualities, and offering performance product in its own Kravet Armor Technology as well as the largest selection of Crypton Home Fabrics exclusively to the trade.

Repellent to everyday stains and also eco-conscious and sustainable is Breathe by Milliken, a fluorine-free performance upholstery fabric woven with Repreve polyester which is derived from recycled plastic water bottles blended with other polyester fibers. “Milliken believes that people want to feel as good in their spaces as they feel good about their spaces,” said LeAnne Flack, marketing manager, specialty interiors.

In addition to continuing to explore texture and softness with its upcycled PFC-free olefin fiber, Revolution is heading outdoor. “One trend we’re pursuing is the evolution of the modern outdoor upholstery fabric for use inside and outside of the home. We have developed some great new yarns that give us fabulous colors, 3,000-plus hours of light fastness and still have all the cleaning aspects of Revolution Fabrics,” said Gibbons.

Crypton, a fixture in sustainable fabric technology for 25 years, made its foray into the home market five years ago. With performance properties inherent to the fabric, resistance and repellency do not wash or wear off. At Crypton, they say, “Performance means ‘freedom in the form of fabric.’” **TT**

### “The most important direction I see in the textile world is intention. We curate our collections to provide fabrics that allow intentional choices by the manufacturer. The days of allowing a ‘maybe’ fabric to have a place in a manufacturer’s introductions are long gone. Manufacturers are constrained by cost parameters before most other considerations, and yet must always provide fresh style. Intention, to me, represents the need for each fabric to have a unique application in order to deserve a place on the showroom floor. It must stand apart from previous offerings or from fabrics already available.”

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**Cathy Smith**

consultant to South Pacific Textiles,  
principal of TEXpertise

Tilton Fenwick  
for Duralee



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**Prints** continue to be an important part of the room like we have not seen before.

**Hannah Alderson**  
vice president of design,  
Robert Allen & Duralee



“Performance alone is not enough. Design has to be great,” says Hannah Alderson, vice president of design for Robert Allen & Duralee, referencing the new Lonnie Paul collection featuring Crypton Home technology.



Herringbone is one of the polyester wovens in the Breathe by Milliken collection, which provides protection using minimal chemistry.



Revolution’s  
new Rhumba  
performs  
outdoors.

### Trim: Fabric’s trusty-upper-crusty companion



Century Furniture creates an additional pattern-play over printed fabric with tape banding.

RIGHT: Classical Elements presented Modern Bullion recently at Showtime in High Point.



**HIGH POINT** — When it comes to fabric, trim is a wonderful collaborator; able to turn a design up a few notches and into an Instagram beauty.

From The Real (not embellished) State of Trim by Jana Platina Phipps: “Fabric is the headliner when it comes to upholstery and soft goods for the home, but decorative trimmings are stepping into the spotlight as consumer demand rises for customization in both decor and fashion to express personal style. Interior designers are using trimmings as a contemporary tool to evoke their client’s style, and manufacturers are taking note.”

In response to the design trade’s growing demand, Fabricut’s Director of Trimmings Sharon Cash says to keep an eye out for new fabrications in trim design. “Look for embroidered and printed textiles as an emerging trend.”

At Norwalk, COO Dixon Bartlett said, “We add trim and embellishment to pieces we want to call special attention to. They are the ‘jewelry’ that makes the ‘little black dress’ extra special.”

Adds Leyla Gans, creative director of Classical Elements, a trimmings supplier to manufacturers, jobbers and retailers: “Although tapes remain strong, we’ll be seeing added drama with long fringes.” **TT**

— Jane Dagmi, Senior Editor, Fashion