

WWD MADE IN ITALY

Stepping Up the Eco-Culture

Sustainability has been a hot topic in the Italian fashion system as brands and their suppliers increase their commitment to green processes and practices. By Emily Backus

SUSTAINABLE CHOICES IN Italian fashion are still hard to spot for end consumers. Glamorous e-commerce sites and eye-catching store displays of Italian designs or products seldom speak of ethical or ecological concerns about people, chemicals, water, forests, energy and air.

With few exceptions, clothing labels don't typically mention the environmental and social impact of the husbandry, processing, handiwork, packaging or transport involved in the complete journey for a dress or handbag to go from raw materials to store shelf.

Nevertheless, industry operators, environmental consultants and activists say major Italian labels and key suppliers in the Italian fashion production chain have been ahead of the curve compared to many on ensuring justice and safety for the people who work for them, and have now initiated a major shift behind the scenes — though still in the early stages for many — to shore up their use of energy, water, paper, raw materials and waste.

"Italy has the highest number of SA8000-certified factories [for socially responsible workplaces]," said Francesca Mangano, head of business development for the Italian and Swiss markets for Made-By, a U.K.-based nonprofit group that helps fashion and textile brands improve the life-cycle impact of their collections. "The sustainable transformation in the fashion and textile sector focuses mostly on [energy] efficiency.

"Although the concept of a sustainable supply chain is growing, few Italian companies have taken a holistic approach with practices that include life-cycle assessments," she added.

Mangano acknowledged, however, "Brands and maisons that are starting to move toward a more sustainable supply chain tend to keep their efforts behind closed doors."

Environmental sustainability is a delicate subject and a work in progress, with many firms still defining their strategies. Gucci, Valentino, Armani and Prada serve on the National Chamber of Italian Fashion, or CNMI, sustainability commission. Gucci leads the group and is known for its consolidated experience in the field.

Across its entire supply chain of roughly 45,000 people, the Florence-based firm claims an international SA8000 certification for full compliance with labor, health, safety and freedom of association laws. Its French parent, Kering, has adopted group-wide targets — affecting 21 top brands from Boucheron to Puma — addressing deforestation, carbon dioxide emissions, waste, water usage, responsible raw materials sourcing, as well as eliminating hazardous chemicals throughout the global supply chain by 2020, according to its Web site.

Micaela Le Divelec, chief corporate operating officer at Gucci, said the company initiated a comprehensive study three years ago to create a system of Environmental Profit & Loss reports, quantifying environmental costs to people and the economy at each stage of the production chain, including water use, waste and air pollution.

"We will be the first brand in this industry to have an environmental P&L. The first report will be published in 2016, based on 2015 real data," said Le Divelec, echoing Kering's commitment to deliver an environmental P&L for its entire group in 2016.

While other major luxury labels are still reticent

to detail their progress, that doesn't mean they have been inactive. For instance, the Valentino Fashion Group topped Greenpeace Italy's Fashion Duel ranking of high-end French and Italian brands for environmentally friendly policies in 2013; it has committed to eliminating hazardous chemicals from its global supply chain by 2020 and is adopting a no-deforestation policy for procuring leather and paper.

The CNMI's sustainability commission is developing a concrete framework of processes and procedures for members to follow. Adherence to this strategy will be optional, but it is expected to set an industry standard among heavyweights at the top of the Italian supply chain.

"This is a management and coordination organ," said a Prada spokesman. "It aims to promote and support the entire Italian fashion production system through the adoption of models of responsible management throughout the value chain."

Gucci, Valentino, Armani and Prada are also among 11 major Italian maisons serving on a CNMI roundtable that hammered out the Manifesto on Sustainability in 2012 — a document defining common values and a sustainability agenda for Made In Italy.

Le Divelec, who chairs the CNMI sustainability commission, explained that the luxury industry is taking environmental and social impact seriously. During a presentation at an apparel innovation conference in London in July, she said efforts are being made to reduce risks regarding reputation and price volatility, while increasing opportunities, such as building brand value, sales and innovation.



A Bogner ski jacket using Thermore insulation.

"To distinguish oneself from the competition is an element, but the main issue is to guarantee a sustainable, long life to the business," she said.

Mangano, however, credits the pressure from increasingly eco-conscious international markets, new transparency standards by global reporting mechanisms and European regulations.

A number of high-end suppliers told WWD they invested in sustainability as a means of competing on the global luxury market, to boost exports especially to northern European and North American clients.

Whatever the combination of reasons may be, activity around sustainability among Italian labels and suppliers is growing.

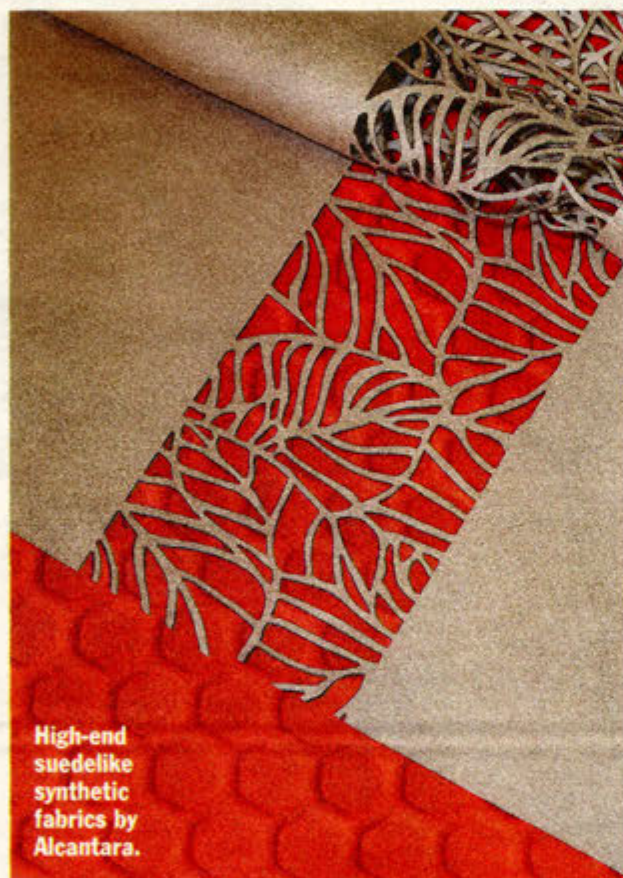
"All of the big designers are extremely interested in developments regarding responsible fashion, as long as it is beautiful and refined," said Giusy Bettoni, chief executive officer and cofounder of Creativity, Lifestyle and Sustainable Synergy, an Italian marketing and product development service specialized in sustainable luxury textiles. She says interest has picked up steam, especially in the last year.

In the CLASS showroom in Milan, samples of textiles and garments hang, including fluid bordeaux silk with swirling color patterns, wool, cashmere and lace. Bettoni indicated a stiff organzalin-like textile, intricately embroidered, made from Manila hemp and pineapple leaves in the Philippines. She noted she put the textile producers in contact with Gucci and Valentino.

"Everyone was open-mouthed" at the luxury labels, she said.

Bettoni reported Gucci will be including recycled, engineered cashmere from Re.Verso in men's, women's and children's collections for fall 2015, made from selected pre-consumer textile waste — scraps from Italian mills of premium, mostly wool materials — which are then resorted, mechanically converted

(Continued on page 18)



High-end suedelike synthetic fabrics by Alcantara.



Canepa participates in Greenpeace's Fashion Detox commitment to eliminate hazardous chemicals by 2020.

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(Continued from page 16)

to fiber and retransformed into yarn for wovens, jerseys and knits. Re.Verso was developed by Italian wool mills Green Line, Nuova Fratelli Boretti and Lanificio Stelloni.

Max Mara presented a set of pieces in its spring Weekend collection made from Newlife, a premium polyester made by Saluzzo Yarns spun from 100 percent recycled plastic bottles sourced and mechanically pulverized in Italy.

Cochis added.

Italian fabric trade fair Milano Unica has been issuing a growing catalogue of exhibitors' eco-sustainable offerings since 2012.

Premium wool-maker Reda claims to be the only wool mill in the world to be certified EMAS, the European Eco-management and Audit Scheme.

"It certifies that you are really green. They come back every year to inspect," said Reda spokesman Fabrizio



Reda's wools are certified green by the European Eco-management and Audit Scheme.

The first garments were a coat, jacket, skirt and blouse in a black-and-white oversize houndstooth pattern with a taffeta consistency. They sold with a tag boasting 94 percent savings in water usage, 60 percent savings in energy and 32 percent lower carbon dioxide emissions compared to virgin polyester.

Max Mara increased its Newlife order by about 50 percent for the winter Weekend collection, to a few hundred thousand meters of fabric, or enough for tens of thousands of garments, said Saluzzo Yarns director Stefano Cochis.

"There's a beautiful technical trenchcoat," said Cochis. "The fabric could seem printed with its shading. It's fantastic."

Newlife is also finding its way into large eco-conscious collections abroad, with negotiations ongoing with Eileen Fisher, Burberry and Turkish fabric maker Çalik Denim,

Alessandro Goggi. "The air inside the mill is completely purified 70 times a day. Air inside is healthier than the air outside the mill itself."

Italian high-end silk specialist Canepa, with partner Tessitura del Salento, has developed a way to process silk using chitin, a protein from the exoskeleton of crustaceans, that reduces water consumption by 12 times, energy by 90 percent and completely eliminates polluting emissions, Canepa said.

Canepa has also joined the ranks of fashion labels and suppliers making Greenpeace's Fashion Detox commitment to eliminate hazardous chemicals by 2020 and other environmental measures.

Alcantara, which makes high-end suedelike synthetic fabrics, has been certified carbon neutral since 2011.

Cariaggi, which spins premium cashmere and other precious yarns, has been ISO 14001-certified for environmental standards since 2006, and OHSAS 18001-approved for occupational health and safety since 2011. It has also developed a line of ecological yarns, Systema Natvrae, colored exclusively with vegetable dyes.

"We have always sought to adopt, in every aspect of our work, eco-compatible behavior and attitudes, limiting as much as possible the impact of our production on the environment," said Cristiana Cariaggi, executive board member of Cariaggi Fine Yarns Collection.

Italian outerwear insulation maker Thermore is



Hugo Boss' Orange line and a Colmar parka, below, use Bluesign-approved Thermore fibers.

Bluesign-approved for reduced environmental impact and two of its three main product lines are also certified for recycled fibers.

Eurojersey, specialist in a proprietary polyamide microfiber and Lycra knit for underwear, swimwear and other stretch clothing, says it has used energy only from renewable sources since 2008. It also recycles the water, textile waste and tens of thousands of pounds of celophane used in production.

Premium yarn maker Lanificio Dell'Olivo boasts a very short raw material supply chain with direct contact to their suppliers of fibers like alpaca, mohair and silk.

The Miroglio Group, which has 18 brands including Motivi and Elena Miro, said it is putting its entirely traceable, vertically integrated, eco-certified supply chain at the service of clients.

Greenpeace Italy's Chiara Campione, who heads up Fashion Duel Project — an initiative that has been

a gadfly in recent years, challenging fashion labels to communicate their practices and lobbying them to commit to purging environmentally unsound ones, said she believed the Italian fashion system had reached the tipping point.

"We see behind the scenes the movements of very big luxury groups reorganizing processes. They are pushing their suppliers. At this point, all the others will have to follow as [major players] completely change the rules of the production of garments, textiles and the handling of raw materials. The sector is really undergoing deep change and some brands — those who don't see it as an opportunity — will be left behind," said Campione.

After signing up 20 global fashion leaders to its Fashion Detox campaign — including Benetton, H&M, Burberry and Zara — Greenpeace expects to reveal the commitment of another large Italian group on Monday, Campione said.



Zero-deforestation Amazonian leather bag from Gucci.