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Collections

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The Dandy Man

A romantic breeze is wafting through men's wear, fanned by Alessandro Michele at Gucci.

M Agenda p.35

HAUTE HEAT

No economic blues for Paris couture houses, as they prep for their biggest spenders.

Feature p. 52

RICCARDO'S DONATELLA

Donatella Versace models for Riccardo Tisci and Givenchy.

Fashion p. 15

BUBBLE, BUBBLE

How much is too much? Finding the true value of fashion's tech set.

Feature p. 58



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Italian Spinners Banking on Exports

By COURTNEY SMITH

Fiber spinners showing fall 2016 collections were boosted by an improved environment for exports at the Pitti Filati yarn fair held at the Fortezza da Basso in Florence.

Attendance held steady from last summer's edition at 5,200, with about 2,400 from Italy and visitors from France, China, Hong Kong, Belgium, Sweden, Eastern Europe, the Baltic states, and emerging South American markets. The top five foreign market attendees were led by Germany, followed by the U.K., France, the U.S. and Japan.

Raffaello Napoleone, chief executive officer of fair organizer Pitti Immagine, said, "If you want to be on the high end of the market, you need to use Italian yarns."

Napoleone cited advances in yarn technology, innovation and research, such as the new H2Dry technique rolled out by Zegna Baruffa Lane Borgosesia. Aligned to sportswear, activewear and performance trends, the Biella-based mill applied the H2Dry process to pure-wool yarns Re-Active and K-Wool that are naturally elastic, machine washable, crease resistant and moisture wicking.

For many Italian mills, the strengthening of the dollar against the euro has bolstered sales abroad. Last year, while Italian yarn exports dropped 0.3 percent to 1.98 billion euros, or \$2.18 billion, Italian knitwear exports rose 5.9 percent to 6.38 billion euros, or \$7.01 billion, according to Sistema Moda Italia.

Fourth-generation, family-run spinner Lanificio Botto Giuseppe & Figli S.p.A. reported that 2014 exports accounted for 60 percent of its turnover at almost 60 million euros, or \$65.9 million.

"This year has gone better than 2014 thanks to the change of the dollar in respect to the euro, which has helped in exports," said Silvio Botto Poala, managing director. "But the market in general is difficult – movement in Europe isn't very clear, Russia's stopped, China's slowed and Greece has difficulties."

The premium mill signed a partnership with luxury brand Maiyet to produce environmentally certified, pure-white cashmere yarn sourced from Outer Mongolia's goats under Cradle-to-Cradle certification.

Botto Poala noted a return to softer palettes from the "shocking, acidic colors" of previous seasons — "sophisticated colors, but not too strong, like pastels with soft, burnished tints," he said, noting the classic palettes of its best-selling Ontario superfine 140s wool.

Despite strong exports, vacillating wool prices have been challenging. At Tollegno 1900, ceo Lincoln Germanetti said the first half ended with about 6 percent growth thanks to the recovery of the U.S. market. Among its fall 2016 collection introductions were two new knits of extra-fine merino wools — Racing and Wooltech — woven for high-performance sportswear.

Germanetti unveiled a new partnership with Beaufront, a fourth-generation merino sheep-grazing estate in Tasmania, to produce its superfine merino wools at its Piedmont mill under transparent initiatives that guarantee the tractability of fibers during the supply process.

Numerous mills were seeking similar partnerships based on ethical and sustainable models that address responsible resource management along transparent supply chains.

Many presented collections as exhibitions, such as Ilaria Taddeucci and Chiara Taddeucci Sassolini, owners of Lanificio dell'Olivo, which showed its new yarn collection as knitted kimonos made from mixed yarns in irregular and gathered surfaces, contrasted with smooth linen and metallic blends. Based in Campi Bisenzio, the sisters noted positive upticks in January to June sales, thanks to growth in Spain, France, Germany and Turkey.

In recognition of its 40th anniversary, Capalle-based yarn spinner Lineapiù Italia S.p.A. exhibited knitwear bolts referencing its recent book launch, "Lineapiù Italia, 40 Years of Emotion," which celebrates its 40 best archival yarns.

Cariaggi Lanificio organized "Tintoria: The Culture of Color," detailing the history and evolution of plant-based, natural yarn dyes, at Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. Its Systema Naturae collection of cashmere yarn is dyed with herbs, berries and roots such as the blue-indigo tones of the woad plant from the spinners' native Cagli territory, where the family-owned manufacturer of cashmere yarns in the Marche Region has been weaving carded and combed yarns since 1958.

Board member Cristiana Cariaggi noted that 2015 exports were growing and the company was meeting its budget predictions. Its new Atelier collection typifies the weightless trend of superlight carded yarns in delicate, soft knits.

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