

# The Perfect Fabric, Outdoors and In...

By Linda Long

In early 2002, the management group at Wearbest Sil-Tex Mills sat down to talk about the future. Always known for high-end silk and cotton jacquard upholstery fabrics for the residential, contract and hospitality markets, the company had been approached by American Fibers and Yarns about developing and introducing an outdoor fabric that used AF&Y technology.

The team felt very strongly that if they were to enter into a new market, they would not be satisfied to produce another "me, too" performance fabric; it would have to be superior in every measurable category. The Wearbest group researched available outdoor fabrics, industry standards for those fabrics, and more importantly, asked customers what they wanted in a performance fabric.

The answer became clear; an outdoor fabric was needed that bundled the desired features into ONE fabric. The customer base wanted one fabric that possessed fashion colors, great styling, soft hand, bleach cleanability, ease of care and superior durability. Convinced that the goal could be achieved by combining the design strength of Wearbest with the new technology from AF&Y, the product development teams at both companies went to work. After three years of research, development and testing, the Bella-Dura™ brand was born, and introduced into the marketplace in 2005 by Wearbest.

A proprietary fiber provided by American Fibers and Yarns, Bella-Dura™ fabrics exceed all contract industry standards as defined by the Association for Contract Textiles. Bella-Dura™ fabrics have a minimum of 1500 hours lightfastness, exceed 50,000 double rubs for durability, are bleach cleanable, inherently stain resistant and anti-microbial and are exceptionally easy to clean. AF&Y also partners with Wearbest to provide a warranty to the end user to guarantee the performance characteristics of Bella-Dura™.

Bella-Dura™ fabrics are also friendly to the environment; the most environmentally friendly of all synthetic fibers, because the origin of the fiber is a by-product of post-industrial waste. Harmful coatings and stain resistant finishes are not necessary in the fabric processing, since the inert fiber has inherent stain resistant and anti-microbial properties. The fact that the fabrics can be recycled (the fiber can be re-extruded up to ten times) also lessens the environmental impact of fiber, yarn and fabric production.

Irwin Gasner, president and CEO of Wearbest Sil-Tex Mills, could not be happier about the reaction to the brand, and the future outlook for Bella-Dura™ fabrics. "When we originally conceived the idea for Bella-Dura™, we defined "performance" and set out to produce an outdoor fabric that would exceed all industry standards in every category. It became clear, very quickly, that Bella-Dura™ was not just another outdoor fabric;



the inherent features of stain resistance, microbial resistance, and exceptional durability made it the perfect solution for indoor applications. And since the features exceed contract standards, it's a perfect choice for contract and hospitality projects, for both outdoor and interior spaces."

Through a specialized solution dyeing fiber process, the fashion colors that can be achieved with Bella-Dura™ were not previously available in other outdoor fabrics; brilliant turquoise, fuchsia, lime greens and a true white (that does not yellow with age) were just a few of the hundreds of fresh colors that the design studio had to work with. The soft hand (also previously unavailable in outdoor fabrics) and this fresh color palette, combined with the award winning design team at the company's offices in New York, created such a unique textile that customers began lining up to work with the design team for their own collections.

The first collection was introduced to the trade by The Robert Allen Group in January of 2006 called al fresco. "The marriage of Robert Allen's unparalleled design capabilities and Bella-Dura's groundbreaking performance technology resulted in the two very successful al fresco collections of indoor/outdoor fabrics we introduced last year," said Andy Pacuk, Senior Vice President, Product Design & Merchandising, The Robert Allen Group. "More than 100 exclusive new designs in a fabulous spectrum of vibrant colors captured the attention of designers with such success that we continued the series this year. The two new al fresco collections we just introduced offer light and fresh hues as well as rich and vibrant earth tones with over 100 new exclusive designs created for use in kitchens, family rooms and other interiors where Bella-Dura's performance characteristics are desirable."

To strengthen the commitment to outdoor furniture manufacturers with facilities in Asia, Bella-Dura™ partnered with one of the largest weaving mills in China, as the Bella-Dura™ Asian licensee in the spring of 2006. Gasner said that the overwhelming response to Bella-Dura™ from the outdoor furniture manufacturers prompted his investigation into producing the fabrics where the manufacturers had ease of accessibility. "There are many American

manufacturers of both indoor and outdoor furniture producing fully upholstered, deep seating sets in China." Knowing that these manufacturers required good design, superior performance fabrics and a dependable resource, spurred Gasner to begin the search for a licensee.

An added perk to the partnership is the growing Asian hospitality market. With the 2008 Summer Olympics being held in Beijing, many hotel properties are being rebuilt or refurbished. "The Asian hospitality market is looking for quality fabrics that can transcend indoors to outdoors. Bella-Dura™ is the perfect solution", said Gasner. "since the fabrics exceed all contract performance standards and have our beautiful jacquard designs in brilliant colors with a soft, drapeable hand. With the exceptional lightfastness and mildew resistant properties, the Asian hospitality market can select fabrics for indoor furniture, draperies and shower curtains, and coordinate those settings with their outdoor furniture selections."

Continuing to work with AF&Y to develop more products, the company introduced Bella-Dura Plush™ at Decosit in the fall of 2006. "The overwhelming response that we received from the design community to Bella-Dura™ fabrics convinced us that we needed to expand our product offering," Gasner said. "A chenille novelty yarn was the next logical step. The incredible softness allows the customer to have a beautiful, plush fabric in their home or office with unmatched performance characteristics." The Bella-Dura Plush™ fabrics tend to have a more muted color palette than the traditional Bella-Dura™ patterns, but provide the same superior performance features of lightfastness, durability, ease of care and bleach cleanability.

Wearbest continues the innovative development with American Fibers and yarns, working jointly on new yarns and constructions to introduce within the Bella-Dura™ brand in 2007 and beyond. "This is the model for the future explosive growth of our business," Gasner said. "We are market leaders and the future potential is boundless. All departments in our company are charged with excitement; the future is bright; and we are growing exponentially, enjoying the best year in our history."