

TEXTILE INSIGHT

HOW TECHNICAL MEETS TREND IN TODAY'S ACTIVE WARDROBE

FUNCTIONALITY FOR LIFE WEAR

Call it co-mingling, or call it corroding barriers, but outdoor is affecting fashion and fashion is affecting outdoor like never before. "The way we live is changing what we mean by performance," stated trend forecaster Haysun Hahn during an event held earlier this year. "Most consumer product must be multi-task, cross-seasonable and sustainability-conscious," she said, adding, "There is no one sitting here that isn't wearing at least two pieces that don't come from an outdoor active sport genesis."



Hahn's observation rings true far beyond the garb worn by her Outdoor Retailer audience that winter afternoon; today's modern wardrobe features functional fabrics in products developed and designed for an urban/outdoor lifestyle. "So, when we talk about

an articulated sleeve in an outdoor jacket," explains Hahn, "it applies to straphangers." Meaning that the same kind of body movement needed to hang on as the #6 subway barrels downtown during rush hour in New York City is similar to the freedom of motion originally constructed to enhance climbers' performance. "The urban-centric idea is a very important idea," Hahn concludes.

The latest textile technologies reflect this critical concept. Rugged is out; comfort is in. Lightweight layers have replaced bulky outerwear. Once pooh-poohed, aesthetics are now prioritized. Drape, texture, print, and hand/feel follow in the footsteps of breathability, moisture management, stretch, odor-control and weather-protection. Sustainability completes this contemporary blend of sport and style as the eco factor now ranks with function and fashion as the trinity of textile development.

The rise of athleisure has played a role in this evolution. "While the industry still caters to technical outdoor there has been a shift," observes David Parkes, founder, Concept III Textiles. "Performance shifted focus to athleisure because it

was something new, and sparked consumer interest." Parkes explains, noting that changing weather patterns, together with today's price-driven market are also key factors driving current trends, and thus giving way to textiles that offer year-round versatility in the form of lightweight yet functional outerwear and stylish performance fleece. Blends that balance performance aesthetics are top of mind. For instance, Concept III is keen on wool blends from merino specialist AMBT. "Business is strong with Tencel/wool, poly/wool and nylon/wool blends," says Parkes.

It's not surprising that fashion has been circling the active/outdoor market in recent years as 7th Avenue brands increasingly recognized the advantages of performance as a differentiator that played well with a growing athleisure trend. Parkes gives as an example that he will meet with execs from Target, at Performance Days in Germany.

Others report similar experiences. "There is a lot of interest from fashion – not high-fashion – but 7th Avenue fashion with athleisure collections," says Colleen Nipkow, global marketing director, Polygiene. "They have been coming to OR for a little while looking for textile tech that stands out." Banana Republic will feature Polygiene in a new line of men's underwear.

Polygiene odor-control technology and messaging that promotes wearability with environmental responsibility connects with today's consumers. The company has built a foundation of partnerships in the outdoor market with its "Wear More, Wash Less" functionality, based on natural silver salt made from 100 percent recycled silver; a product that fits

The same holds true for footwear. States Dan Legor, marketing director, OrthoLite, "The growth in the sport lifestyle category was a direct result of consumers demanding more comfort in their casual brown shoe footwear but wanting a sportier and more technical look that was inline with performance and comfort of their apparel and met the demands of their 24/7 lifestyle."

OrthoLite's proprietary technology of open cell PU foam provides bespoke formulas to customers that help customize the performance and comfort level of the footwear designed to meet consumer expectations. The lightweight, breathable insoles are washable, don't compress over time, and have an antimicrobial treatment to inhibit odor.

"So many of the iconic silhouettes like Adidas Originals and the Chuck Taylor from Converse have contributed to the growth in this category and are now being worn across many generations of consumers. That was not the case in the past," says Legor. "The one thing that has changed with these iconoclasts shoes is that they all share a 'secret inside' that was not always there in years past — they have added OrthoLite to improve the step in comfort and taken OrthoLite beyond the insole into the strobe layer and in some cases deeper into the shoe in to the midsole."