

Sustainability and high value: the issues of the future dominated at Heimtextil 2020

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The 50th edition of Heimtextil provided strong stimulus for the new furnishings season. 63,000 visitors came to get information on the major issues for the international sector from 2,952 exhibitors at the world's leading trade fair for home and contract textiles. And among them, sustainability was the all-pervading major theme, outshining all others.

Sustainability was a central thread that ran through the entire event at Heimtextil 2020. Extensive activities and informative displays demonstrated how material processes are changing all over the world, with a view to improving the environment, and how social responsibility in respect of the people employed in the industry is growing. Even if the figures still do not add up, and preparedness of consumers to spend more money for environmentally friendly textiles is still in its infancy, supply and demand at the world's largest trade fair for home and contract textiles were larger than ever before. Durability and a second life are beginning to manifest themselves in products. "The re-think is really only just beginning," says Martin Auerbach, General Manager of the Association of the German Home Textile Industry (*Verband der Deutschen Heimtextilien-Industrie e.V.*), "because to actually get to the circular economy, we must think and act with the entire value creation chain in mind. And moreover: up to now the product was the most important thing in the development phase. To achieve the transition to the circular economy, we need to formulate things the other way around. So, the questions become: What would the product that is optimised for economic circularity look like? How can we then achieve the required functionalities? And finally: How will manufacturers be able to differentiate themselves from the competition in the marketplace with their products?"

Long-term thinking has a future

As far as the visitors were concerned, the considerable interest in sustainable concepts was also in evidence in the newly instituted 'Future Materials Library' in the 'Trend Space' in Hall 3.0. The Library offered some exciting insights into innovations in sustainably produced textiles. The section on 'Natural Assets' drew attention to some hitherto unused natural treasures in the form of algae and stinging nettles, as did 'Living Materials' to cultured materials from a mesh of growing fungal fibres and 'Biological Byproducts' to agricultural resources in the form of orange peel and agave leaves. Then again 'Remade' demonstrated the potential for re-use inherent in textile waste material.

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All things are possible – the unifying concept is ‘diversity’

The question of trends for 2020 is, it seems, not at all easy to answer. The age of fixed stylistic currents, determined in advance, is over. Mass taste no longer exists. It is all about diversity. This was given impressive and abundant expression in the lavishly staged Trend Space in Hall 3.0, with no fewer than 1,000 exhibits: the giant dome for the ‘Luxury Heritage’ theme, the half-pipe for ‘Active Urban’, the gigantic pouffe in a mix of materials representing ‘Multi Local’, the enfolding shelter of the tent for ‘Pure Spiritual’, the dynamic pole-dance scenario for ‘Maximum Glam’ and the giant blow-up figure as a popular feature for all concerned. The display for the topic ‘Where I belong’ illustrated that identity is formed as a result of many experiences. And these, in turn, have something to do with the way one furnishes one’s environment and what one likes. It is all about inclusion, getting together, chatting. The single main aim: a sense of well-being. And it is about using textiles in interior designs to create a cosy, pleasant atmosphere. And that may well look different for each of us.

Function, diversity and networking in the contract business

Diversity also constituted the overarching theme of the lectures in relation to Interior.Architecture.Hospitality, a range of products and specialist services intended specifically for interior architects and hotel planners. The ‘Interior.Architecture.Hospitality LECTURES’ were offered in collaboration with AIT Dialog and hotelforum. The lecture topics dealt with an extremely broad range of social and cultural challenges: urban living, short-term accommodation, as well as cultural and media landscapes. And the guided tours, too, were very well received by the trade visitors. Partners from the sector, including AIT-Dialog, AHGZ, arcade, architektur international, bdia and World Architects, took the participants of the ‘Interior.Architecture.Hospitality TOURS’ to exhibitors, carefully selected to fit in with the relevant topics. “The tours are very valuable and a great help, because many people are initially overwhelmed by the abundance of products and services at Heimtextil. On top of that, they offer participants something more personal and an individual view,” explains Jutta Werner from the nomad office in Hamburg, who took people through the halls on behalf of World Architects. “It was very clear that interconnection, transparency, innovation and recycling of materials were the major issues that concerned many – both companies and creatives.”

The appeal for visitors of the commercial and contract textiles in the new ‘Interior.Architecture.Hospitality LIBRARY’ lay, above all, in their functional qualities. The textile materials library, which was on display for the first time, demonstrated the spectrum of modern functional textiles by means of a carefully curated selection of Heimtextil exhibits. These included ‘Sensation’, a flame-retardant velvet (Edmund Bell), as well as Solarflex, a twill with sound-absorbing properties (A House of Happiness – Royal Vriesco), ‘Vogue’, a water-repellent, textured wallpaper (Omexco) and ‘Soft Basic’, a hard-wearing velvet, (Gebr. Munzert). Altogether, the library contained 64 textiles grouped in four functional categories (hard-wearing, sound-absorbing, flame-retardant, and water-repellent). The library can be accessed online throughout the year

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(www.textile-library.com) and offers a valuable tool when selecting contract and commercial textiles.

The trend towards a sustainable value creation chain also impacts significantly on contract business. That was clear from the exhibitors in the 'Interior.Architecture.Hospitality EXPO'. The Expo, held in Hall 4.2, showcased a selection of textile products and furnishing solutions for commercial and contract situations. Exhibiting there, too, were Féline, a start-up from the Netherlands with sustainable and highly flexible acoustic solutions made from wool felt. With their product, which goes by the name of 'minimal art collection', this newcomer to the market promptly won the coveted 'Heimtextil Trendscouting by AIT' award: "Many customers are unaware of just how damaging to the environment traditional felt manufacture is," explains Renske Vogel, Founder and Managing Partner of Féline. "We did a lot of research before we started and took our time over the development. Now, with our Féline Fresco Collection, we can offer a genuinely sustainable and very modern alternative." Initially, some 50 interior architects, planners and hotel specialists nominated the leading trend setters from amongst the exhibits at Heimtextil for the 'Heimtextil Trendscouting by AIT' award. On the second day of the trade fair, a distinguished jury of experts finally chose the 'Heimtextil Trendscouting by AIT' winner and three special mentions (the flax-based wallpaper by Norafin Industries / Extra Organic, the OceanSafe principle and the Square LED from Marburger Tapetenfabrik).

The new consumers are what make the difference

Companies are increasingly coming to see the sustainability issue as an opportunity. Even the number of the companies attending Heimtextil 2020 with sustainable operations was, at 259, higher than ever before. All these exhibitors had signed up for the Green Directory and its certification. Sustainable production and sustainable company behaviours are becoming a constant and reveal themselves in numerous areas at Heimtextil: self-adhesive decorative and functional films, designed to give furniture and walls a 'second life' (Konrad Hornschuch), the use of compostable materials (Alonso Mercader), traditional wovens from upcycled yarn (The Aviary Studio), one hundred percent recyclable wallcoverings, coupled with decorative and FSC-certificated ones with gleaming digital prints (Komar Products). The Spanish firm of Antex launched its sustainable products as long ago as 2007, but demand has increased in the last two to three years: "The new consumer is what is making the difference."

Ecological production

The future of the textile industry, which has a huge impact on the environment, was also abundantly in evidence in the 'Textile Technology' section. That sustainability can be combined with further development is clear in the early, technical stages. Alongside automation, it is digitalisation, above all, that offers so many new possibilities. That includes printing machines, which not only reduce consumption of energy and water, but are also quicker and work with water-based inks containing eco-certified pigments (KIIAN Digital/JK Group). Super-soluble, intensely pigmented dyes for digital printing save up to

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35 percent energy per kilo of fabric and up to 30 litres of water, because washing and steaming processes are omitted (Itaca Textile). A new paper for transfer printing that, because of a special coating, requires no preparation or secondary treatment, makes for both speed and improved print quality (Neenah Coldenhove).

Individuality through flexibility

There has never been such variety on offer as there is today. Most collections are designed to be sufficiently adaptable to realise individual furnishing wishes. Lampshades can be covered in fabric of all sorts and kinds (Dannells), the colour of Wetcare products can be changed to create any and every desired effect (Pintail International), wallcoverings metamorphose into unique one-off designs for the walls (Feathr Oy and Welter Manufaktur für Wandunikate), the choice of prints and jacquards for upholstered furniture is growing (B&B Fabrics). The trend for flexibility was to be seen in both smaller and larger scale items, and as a cultural mix, with motifs from India, Japan and Africa (S. Gramage Hogar). The open interpretations that collections were susceptible of, the mixture of colours, fabrics, prints and embroidery, open a new pathway to lighter-hearted and more opulent interior furnishings (Sanderson – Caspian/Style Library).

Maximalism increases in popularity

From a new upsurge in grandeur, luxury and splendour, there emerge a number of highly expressive images, that have spread across wallcoverings and upholstery fabrics. Jungle motifs are eye-catchers in every respect (Parato, Safeco); so too are modern representations of flora and fauna (Clarke & Clarke, Gardisette), exotic animals (Nooteboom Textiel, Pintail International), animal prints (Castilla Textil), insects (Safeco), peonies and parrots (Alfred Apelt). Maximalism also dominated the 'Window & Interior Decoration' section, with a bold, electric mix of designs. More textiles, more decoration, more wallcoverings, more humour – anything and everything seems possible. DecoTeam deliberately set out to achieve a real sensation with an extraordinarily striking flowered wallpaper, creating a quite different look. The showy effect of the enlarged design in the design for the wall, with its Middle Eastern allusions, was a planned contrast to the more modest tranquillity of the plain fabrics from Castilla Textil.

The greatly enlarged floral wallcoverings from B&B Fabrics provide a real statement for a hotel lounge setting. Huge floral patterns on sound-absorbing textured wallpaper (Adawall Wallpaper Factory) were just as impressive as the extensive views of gardens in bloom, displayed on the wall hangings from Nooteboom Textiel. Textiles Joyper caught people's attention with their tiger motif, enlarged by 300 percent. Then again, the life-size bull-fight scenes, realised as digital prints, was the flagship product for Artica Textile (4.1). Above all, the extremely large, floral printed patterns on curtain fabrics, (Comersan), on wallpapers (Ohpopsi) and rugs (Essenza Home) made it clear that strong motifs and statement colours have a future.

Tired of grey furniture

Beyond the large patterns, colour returns to the landscape of the living

room. "Colour is back" was also DecoTeam's motto, who, with their 'Colourful' theme, promulgated some intense colours. With gold, copper, ruby, amethyst and intense, dark greens and blues, such as petrol, an elegant world of colour emerged – in stark contrast to the minimalistic colour palette of Scandinavian mood boards in light or muted wood tones, natural shades and earthy colours. An imaginatively papered wall, cushions and pouffes in contrasting colours, all daringly arranged – colour brings movement into living rooms and has, perhaps, even got the potential to challenge the supremacy of the grey-in-grey of upholstered accessories and seating (SIC Global Textile). Greys are softened with pink, light blue and turquoise. Above all, saturated shades of yellow form a bridge from natural or neutral tones to a greater use of colour. The sources of inspiration for the second decade are reminiscent of the golden 20s, a hundred years ago. Magnificent wallpapers with Jugendstil designs (Morris & Co/Style Library) or peacock-eye motifs (Nooteboom Textiel, Sanderson – Caspian/Style Library), the elegant resplendence of metal (Komar Products) or elegant textured patterns (Grandeco Wallfashion Group), fabrics with glittering sequins (Verhees Textiles) and cords with a matt sheen (Tassel & Trim) tempt us to indulge ourselves and enthuse over times gone by. A golden yellow adds a touch of luxury. Key to the impression of luxury, however, are velvet fabrics, on which the new colours really come into their own. (Ashley Wilde Group).

Taken from the world of fashion – decorative and artistic

The recourse to glamorous ages past also brings to interiors patterns for curtains and furniture that range from the bold to the playful and are taken from the world of fashion (Pala Suni Deri). Patterns and motifs emerge, that also find application in the fashion, furnishing and lifestyle markets (Pattern Hive, Studio Bodhi). Rooms are dressed in the manner of haute couture (Karin Sajo/Grandeco Wallfashion Group). Original artwork (Sooshichacha) or sophisticated, woven fabric images are used for cushions and curtains (Woven Art Company). The patterning's artistic side comes to the fore. Cushions with abstract faces in the style of Picasso (Alfred Apelt, Gardisette) are also part of this current and convey a touch of artistic sophistication. In addition, we find prints for wallpaper that use water colour techniques (Eijffinger) and are even created as unique pieces in cooperation with artists (Feathr Oy).

The next Heimtextil will take place from 12 to 15 January 2021.

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* preliminary figures 2019