The trend for leisure and sports apparel inspired by nature is set to continue for the spring/summer 2008 season and it covers the spectrum of different fabrics from linen for travel wear through intimate apparel to high performance active wear.

Natural flair in fabric trends for spring/summer '08

The general theme running through the latest trends released by well known fabric producers combines a feeling of soothing the soul: either spending lazy days outside in the summer sunshine with a picnic or abseiling down a cliff under a bright blue sky—all produced in the latest high tech materials to optimise comfort and wearability. You can almost smell the freshly cut grass and feel the warmth of the sun on your skin just thinking about it!

Starting from the inside and working out, Israel-based specialty yarn manufacturer Nilit — which produces yarns for varied applications from intimate apparel to activewear—has released its new trend concepts for bodywear for spring/summer 2008, with an expanded portfolio of specialty fibres which now includes Sensil (the company's in-house brand), Tactel, Supplex and Cordura yarns, (Invista brands used under licence) for legwear, seamless, circular knitting and wovens. Its Bodyfashion Trendbook defines three trends for spring/summer: 'Picnic', 'Elegance' and 'Tribal' which range from a picturesque outdoor setting in the English countryside to ethnic, tribal prints inspired by safari-style wear.

'Picnic' evokes the image of a romantic and simple country setting with an uncomplicated and fresh outdoor mood. It conjures up almost nostalgic pictures of a return to the simple pleasures of picnicking, gardening, hiking, and

Nilit has identified three specific 'looks' for spring/summer 2008 – Picnic, Elegance and Tribal.

Nilit

healthy activities through bodywear with hand-crafted touches. This is enhanced with a combination of meadow-flower shades that add freshness to quaint and fancy knits, eyelet embroidery and gingham.

The body is in the spotlight in the 'Elegance' theme which is a contemporary expression of today's new luxury. Minimalist yet curvy and structured silhouettes are created in ultra-smooth fabrics in shiny metallic platinum combined with cool shades of peach, violet and ivory.

Meanwhile 'Tribal' is a neo-ethnic theme that includes lingerie with an ornamental safari spirit, rich in symbolism. Traditional African tribal influences provide rugged inspiration for sensuous bodywear with a luxurious ethnic look. Intense shades and pigment tones from nature accent textured fabrics with both matte and lacquered effects to again produce a look inspired by nature—although a very different landscape than the one created with Picnic.

A taste of things to come

Masters of Linen, the association representing European flax producers, spinners, weavers and knitters, has found inspiration in the senses for its 'Senses and Sensitivity' trends for spring/summer 2008 with its three themes of 'Taste', 'Look' and 'Breathe', all inspired by nature.

'Taste' embraces the sweetness of fruit, honey and nectar in its colours and the lusciousness, and crunch in terms of texture with lightweight linens that are mercerised, devoré, embroidered, and surfaces that are sleek and regular. Glossy treatments, golden and gelatinous metallic coatings add subtle lustre to the heavier fabrics, evoking the idea of oozing honey; whilst dry, crackly, imperceptibly crinkled, fabrics made of pure linen or linen-polyamide introduce faded looks and dry shades to ensure a 'natural' look.

Images reflected in rippling water reveal a range of cool, bluish, greenish, refreshing and shimmering tones under the 'Look' collection. Refracted light, reveals textured, undulated and slightly pleated looks, alternating with the inherent irregular and slubbed yarn of pure linen, linen-cotton, linen-silk and linen-viscose. Transparency also plays an important role to lighten up compact textures. Chenille linen and metallic yarns underscore the water theme through contrasts and reflections of the light, whilst checked, stripey and seersucker fabrics in two-tone colours with relaxed textures and a shimmering effect—created with metallic pigments and shot hues—evoke the image of ripples on the water and waves.

The 'Breathe' theme truly embraces the idyllic summer setting, warding off the effect of our endangered environment, using fabrics which are said to reflect a "new brutality" with heavy canvases, compact weaves, solid and dense textures, and architectural motifs, which gradually soften when washed. Rubbery and tar-like coatings, hard as steel, traditional dyes and treatments contrast with knits and jerseys with fine-gauged effects.

Masters of Linen has taken inspiration from nature for its 'Senses and Sensitivity' trends.

Masters of Linen

Nature in the extreme

Even high tech activewear fabric trends are inspired by nature. Swiss-based textile producer Schoeller has incorporated nature with a twist of adrenalin in its trend collection under the themes 'Adrenalin Outdoor', 'Poetic Design', 'Organic Tech', and 'Fun Addict'.

Very thin and extremely moisture vapour permeable as well as protective fabrics can be found under the theme of 'Adrenalin Outdoor', designed for abseiling, land sailing, kite surfing, canoeing, river rafting and many other extreme sports.

The look reflects the natural backdrop of these activities such as cliffs, mountains, and water with rough and blurred optics, rugged piqués, dry hands or washed-out pigments. In addition, water's fierceness, algae and seaweed influence the surfaces and colours with wet looks for technical satins or flattened rustics. The colours are as diverse as the sports for which the apparel is designed for with a general multi-coloured feeling with spicy, vibrant tones partnered with muddy greens and earthy naturals.

'Adrenalin Outdoor' and 'Fun Addict' themed trend collections from Schoeller.

Schoeller

Another approach to nature is found in 'Poetic Design' which Schoeller describes as "a voyage of discovery into nature and fantasy", and uses modern design and sensual materials to create a feeling of well-being. Developed to offer sporty femininity with ergonomic chic and luxury stretch, it provides a sense of airiness through mesh and perforations combined with ultra smooth surfaces, and lacquered or powdery rubber. It produces a rustic spirit that is refined through medium tints, subdued colours that are inspired by dried flowers and grass which are refreshed with luminous pastels.

The body, soul, mind and the environment: are all embraced in 'Organic Tech'. Visible structures reveal the function, through micro or macro weaves and networks. The company's 'air-wear' for summer 2008 is filled with air and is therefore 'naturally protective', whilst offering 'invisible' performance. Natural materials are also used which are soft and gentle on the skin whilst still providing sophisticated functionality. Colours include eco-friendly off-whites in harmony with faded blues and variations of ecru inspired by corn, flax and paper.

We are all conscious of the importance of being 'eco-aware' nowadays and whilst Schoeller is in harmony with the trend for 'natural' materials—in terms of both product content and style—the company has not forgotten that activewear is designed for people who want to have fun. This concept is highlighted under the theme of 'Fun Addict' which uses inventive design to create unique pieces and limited editions. The trend has been conceived for easy-going leisurewear, that is cutting-edge but also humorous, allowing apparel designers to play with forms with foamy and mouldable materials and terry cloth. It includes high gloss transparency, cool and fluid second-skin stretch and a mix of different weaves. It features soft graphics such as naïve two-tone patterns and braided structures combined with a mix of fresh mid-summer colours, often teamed with black or white.

Mix and match

Combining nature with technology may appear to be an oxymoron, but with ever-more 'eco-conscious' consumers, the trend for 'natural' fabrics in terms of both style and their environmental impact looks set to continue for some time. As Masters of Linen states, the mantra behind its trends is to: "Rediscover ecological values, imagine 'clean' scents, recycle, refresh, and add a natural, organic flavour to the season." Manufacturers have risen to the challenge and have produced trends for spring/summer 2008 that not only meet the demand for 'natural' products with a high level of performance — they have also succeeded in creating fresh new styles and designs which are both attractive and fun.