The autumn 2015 edition of the Intertextile Shanghai Apparel Fabrics exhibition took place in October in the newly completed National Exhibition and Conference Center in Hongqiao. For the first time, organiser Messe Frankfurt included a zone called Performance Lab, a special section for manufacturers to showcase high-performance functional fabrics. More than 60 companies took part and the feature proved popular with visitors to the show.

Performance Lab passes Shanghai test

A new Performance Lab section featured for the first time at the October 2015 Intertextile Shanghai Apparel Fabrics exhibition, showcasing what the organisers called "the latest new-generation functional fabrics for the high-performance activewear market".

One of five special product zones into which organiser Messe Frankfurt placed a total of 4,600 exhibitors (to make it easier for buyers to find what they need at the event), the Performance Lab zone attracted around 60 exhibitors from China, Hong Kong, Israel, Japan, Korea and Spain, including Nilit, Invista, Nylstar, DuPont, Thermore, Toyobo and Unifi.

Something that emerged during discussions with a number of these companies in the course of the event was the importance of China as a market, not just for finished products, but increasingly for ingredient brands, such as the Performance Lab exhibitors, too.

Domestic appeal

As his company's Shanghai-based commercial director for all of northern Asia, Invista's Steve Stewart is witnessing this at first hand. Invista has been supporting China's next generation of textile chemistry engineers since 2014 by awarding scholarships to dozens of students at the school of chemistry and chemical engineering at South China University of Technology. There is a lot going on in China as the domestic market becomes at least as important as exports and people's disposable income and appetite for innovative clothing increase. That more consumers in China are developing an interest in performance apparel is good news for Invista, Mr Stewart says. And the motivation does not have to be sports or outdoor activity.



The autumn 2015 Intertextile Shanghai Apparel Fabrics show took place for the first time in the newly completed National Exhibition and Conference Center in Hongqiao.

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In good shape

Demand for shaping garments is on the increase in all developed markets, he explains, a boost for products of Invista's such as Lycra Beauty, which the company launched in 2010 saying it would help garment manufacturers create a new generation of shapewear. "People connected to that idea right away for intimate apparel," Steve Stewart continues, "and now we are applying the same science to outerwear, including in denim and what we might call commuter wear. Lycra Beauty is helping these garments become shaping garments, but is also helping them remain comfortable for wearers. You can use all kinds of fabrics for shaping, but if it's not comfortable, the consumer is going to wear it once only."

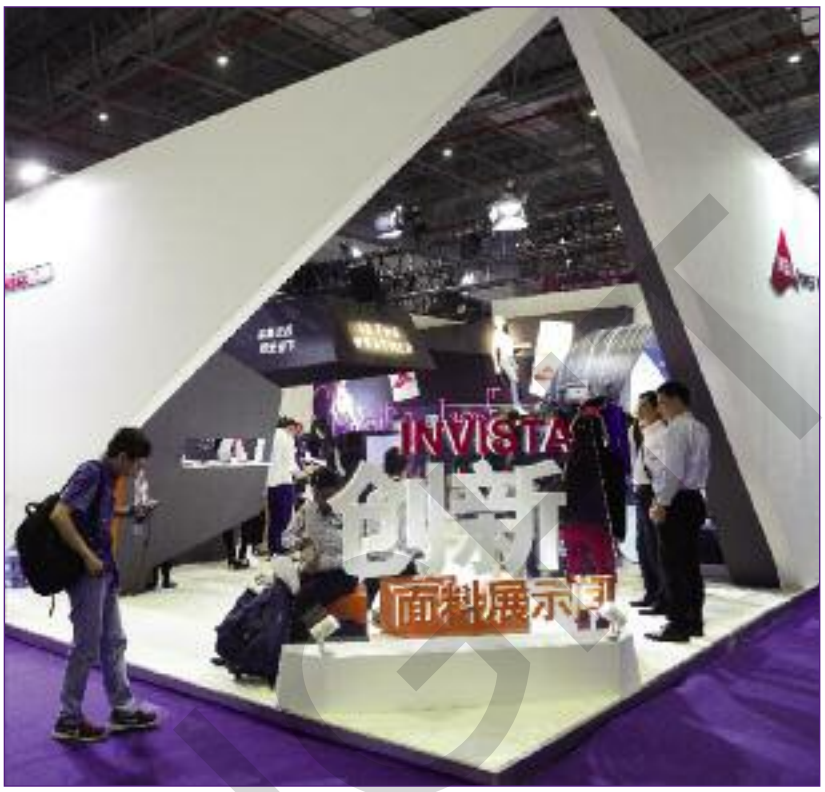
There is more and more going on in China, Mr Stewart says; it's already a big market for clothing with technical enhancements like this and still growing strongly as the numbers of middle-class consumers increase at a rapid rate. "Some consumers want clothes from international brands," he says, "but, because the desire to keep moving up is very high, lots of others are looking for something local that they believe is close to the famous brands in terms of design and quality."

He insists this is great for companies like Invista because technology such as theirs can help local clothing brands fulfil those consumers' wishes. "Among the examples I can give you is the use of Lycra Beauty in denim, which a Chinese denim brand launched before anyone else. This company saw our product, got it and used it really quickly and they have jeans already on the market," he says. He adds that his company's Thermolite insulation fabric, for endowing garments with warmth and comfort without weight, has also proved attractive to ready-to-wear brands in China. "Having an ingredient such as Thermolite in their jackets gives these brands credibility," he says.

Sustainability stories

The Asia-Pacific director for DuPont's Sorona product, Dennis Tsai, is in agreement. In the case of his ingredient brand, which is made from resources that are 37% renewable, the attraction for garment manufacturers in China, as elsewhere (Mr Tsai leads DuPont's efforts globally to convince apparel companies to add Sorona to their material mix) is that Sorona can help enhance brands' sustainability stories while also delivering performance attributes such as stretch and durability. Also popular among carpet manufacturers, he says apparel is the fibre's foremost market in Asia.

"Our business here is growing stronger every year," Mr Tsai says, "and that applies particularly to China. Sorona is derived from nature but designed for performance and more and more people are looking for those qualities. The market is changing and we want to continue to bring environmentally friendly innovation to our customers." His customers are companies that buy Sorona polymer to make fibre for someone else to make into fabric, for someone else again to make into finished garments, but he says that when all companies in the textile and apparel supply chain are drawing up their business strategies these days what they must focus on is the challenges the world is facing. As more and more companies do this, the more attractive Sorona will seem to them, he believes.



Invista is among the companies that are encountering growing interest in textile performance innovation among ready-to-wear garment brands in China.

Messe Frankfurt

"Energy, for example, is always an issue," he continues, "and then there is all the waste that our manufacturing processes generate. Here in China, everyone has enjoyed the benefits of the economic development of the last 20 years, but it has had a big environmental impact. I live in Shanghai and know people who have moved here because they were no longer able to put up with the air pollution in Beijing. The government here will launch its thirteenth five-year plan in 2016 and it's a certainty that environmental issues will feature prominently. Sorona was developed 20 years ago with this type of consideration in mind. DuPont is an old company, 213 years old, and we want still to be around to celebrate our 300th anniversary. We know that a focus on renewable resources will help us get there."

Messe Frankfurt has said it wants to run the Performance Lab zone again at future editions of the Intertextile Shanghai Apparel Fabrics exhibition.

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