



ON A ROLL

It's not surprising that many of today's chic outdoor fabrics are migrating into the house. BY CHERYL DANGEL BARTOLINI

Business is looking good for makers of outdoor fabrics (and indoor fabrics, too). Asked to sum up the state of their industry in one word, however, its representatives couldn't quite agree. It seems that there is too much happening to pin it down with just one word. Instead, there are five: growing, vibrant, colorful, diverse, and dynamic.

Growing is the word that Hugo Benitez, national market manager, Designed Fabrics, for Phifer Inc. (Tuscaloosa, Alabama), chose. "More emphasis is still being placed on improving the outdoor areas," he says. "The economy continues to improve, and we see people spend-



ing even more on their homes—particularly the outdoor areas. Sales have continued strong, even though we had one of the coldest winters on record. That just goes to show how many people value even their limited time outdoors."

In fact, the market is bursting from its outdoor seams and doing more and more business indoors. This is so much the case that some manufacturers, such as Bella-Dura® (New York, New York), don't differentiate between outdoor and indoor performance fabrics.

Sarah Keelen, senior stylist for Bella-Dura, says, "Our first priority is creating a beautiful fabric; we don't have to distinguish outdoor from indoor because the performance attributes are built into the fiber. We first create fabrics with interesting texture and graphics, a soft hand, and fresh colors; then, we let designers choose the application. They aren't limited at all because all Bella-Dura fabrics are all-around performance fabrics, ideal for indoor or outdoor use."

Every textile with the Bella-Dura name shares the same inherent attributes, according

to Susan Lobel, vice president of marketing and brand development for Bella-Dura. Each fabric is 100% solution dyed for durability; is antimicrobial; and resists stains, fading, and pilling.

"With attributes such as those, it's truly the ideal fabric for any design environment—from living room to pool deck and beyond," she says.

Stuart Schneider, director of sales for Bella-Dura, says, "Our outdoor market has been traditionally strong for us and is growing at present." He credits new partnerships at the upper end of the market, while the company is expanding its presence outside.

"This design philosophy has led to the creation of new collections that have created many new opportunities for us inside. We had great placements at a recent market—the most in our history. We have also been very active (given our unique combination of overall performance and superior aesthetics) in the hospitality and health-care markets," he adds.

Greg Voorhis, design director for Glen Raven Custom Fabrics (Glen Raven, North

Carolina), agrees that the lines have blurred between indoor and outdoor applications—and that this has grown the market. "We don't think of them as indoor or outdoor, but rather, as fabrics for your whole home. To make our homes bigger, we move outside. Patios, decks, and porches are extensions of our homes. With Sunbrella® high-performance fabrics, you have the ability to use the same fabrics throughout the home—inside and outside," he says.

Jim Jimison, national sales manager for Parà Tempotest® USA (Carrollton, Texas), says, "Parà Tempotest is split about 50–50 between indoor and outdoor fabrics, if we're talking about the mix between our cottons/linens and our solution-dyed acrylics. If we're talking about the mix within our outdoor business in solution-dyed acrylics, I'd say we're 75% outdoor and 25% a crossover (to indoor companies looking for performance). It's a significant segment for us."

The idea that outdoor-fabric manufacturers make a product that is limited to outdoor use, however, still prevails. Natalie Scott, vice president



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1. Bella-Dura by the yard, series 3; from top: Alameda, Halsey, Wave Hill, and Morada

2. Outdura fabrics (clockwise, from top right): Fenway, Beau, Hot Shot, Avila, Timbre, Caspian, and Hot Shot

3. Phifer's Geobella® fabrics: at top, Morocco mineral blue; from left, Zoe navy, Lexington frost, Rock Solid Mercer blue, and Enlace sky blue

4. The Sunbrella® Regatta collection from Glen Raven

5. Parà Tempotest's Regatta with DuPont™ Teflon®

6. The Molto Bene collection from Parà Tempotest

7. Bella-Dura's Fall 2015 collection; from top: Armani, Samba, Puebla, and Sacchi

8. Richloom patterns, from top: Lara julep, Bocachia seaspray, and Manhattan breeze

9. Twitchell™ Textilene® metallics



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of sales and marketing, Casual Furniture Fabrics, for Outdura/Sattler Corp. (Hudson, North Carolina), says, "It is indeed limiting to speak of our product line as the single category of outdoor fabrics. Since last year, we've even gone beyond the indoors, to a variety of new market segments."

She adds, "With that, we find ourselves speaking of performance fabrics (no longer outdoor fabrics)—and we are selling to many different audiences. While we are focusing on indoor applications as well as outdoor uses, the bulk of our business is still in fabrics used in the traditional outdoor applications."

Nancy Egge, designer for Twitchell™ Technical Products LLC (Dothan, Alabama),

says, "Our Textilene® products are great for high-traffic areas, which makes our fabrics ideal for commercial applications—both indoor and outdoor." She explains that Twitchell's business is split into approximately 65% outdoor and 35% indoor applications. "Some of our customers come to us with unique indoor-application ideas, and we try to match the perfect fabric to that need. We are observing this more and more," she adds.

Likewise, Phifer's sales are growing, but the company doesn't need to seek additional business; instead, customers are finding the company. "For years, those of us in the outdoor segment have tried to increase sales by offering products to the interior trade, but the success of the outdoor segment now has the interior segment asking for more and more products for different applications," Benitez says. He notes that most of Phifer's business is in outdoor products, but the company is making positive strides with its Geobella® fabrics for interior applications.

Chuck Zaberto, vice president of the Solarium® Division, Richloom Fabrics Group (New York, New York), reports that it is hard to quantify which sales are for the indoor and outdoor segments. He says, "We have quite a few programs being sold to indoor-furniture manufacturers as a performance story, but the real unknown, for us, is how much of our fabric is being used in products—sold as outdoor items—that are actually being used for indoor applications."

He adds, "High performance, easy care, and great design are values the consumer embraces. The demands of today's active lifestyles allow us to tell a great story, regardless of the application."



VIBRANT

"The word vibrant captures the state of the category at retail and also puts exclamation points around the design and color trends driving the business," Zaberto says. He is right, as evidenced by the latest design trends in the industry, one of which involves developing new yarns and special finishes.

"Texture is one of the biggest trends we see in the marketplace," Scott states. "The customer appreciates bulkier fabrics with a soft hand. In this category are the patterns Cocoon, Avila, Rumor, and Beau. Grasscloth-inspired patterns are also trending now."

Manufacturers such as Outdura are focused on developing fiber into unique yarns that differ in hand, weight, and look, according to Scott. "This is evident in our novelty bouclé yarns and textured yarns, as well as marl yarns," she says.

M.J. Ramos, senior merchandiser at Bella-Dura, says, "Organics, handwovens, subtle textures, black and white, truffle, mink, heathered shades, and bouclé are big. We are still looking toward Midcentury Modern—and historically, those furniture pieces were covered in wool. Performance is still a very hot area, and we have been able to recreate that look in an eco-friendly, high-performance fabric."

Monica Thornton, senior designer for Phifer, says, "Texture remains important, with inspirations from nature, artistry, and technology. The newest styles are highly textural or layered designs that draw on painterly techniques such as fresco painting."

Voorhis says, "Fabric performance and durability are the new luxuries in interior design. Homeowners can enjoy luxurious design without the fear of spills and stains from kids, pets, and everyday living."

Finishes that improve durability are another trend that Scott sees. In fact, Outdura "just cobranded a new offering in partnership with Crypton® (Bloomfield Hills, Michigan), which is branded under the name WeatherTexPlus," she says.

"WeatherTexPlus uses the Crypton finish on our 100% solution-dyed acrylic fabrics, making them waterproof and antimicrobial," she continues. "These properties—coupled with our high abrasion ratings, strength in lightfastness, resistance to rot and mildew, and ease in cleanability—allow our customer the best in a performance fabric."

Egge states, "Individuality in design is big with our customers. Higher definition in patterns and textures allows us to offer intricately detailed fabrics. To take it a step further, you can mix and match colors and textures, creating a truly personal style." Textures are trending, but these are not ordinary textures. Textures you can see and feel are hot, according to Egge.

Bella-Dura is designing new yarns and looking at softer textures. They "aren't necessarily obvious. Some are more sculptural and some more subtle," Schneider says.



1. Parà Tempotest's canvas cream

2. The Sunbrella® Emerald collection by Glen Raven

3. Outdura's ikat medallion, Caspian, complemented by Cocoon, Beau, and Calypso plain-weave stripe

4. Richloom's Flamingo Capri (left) and Aspidoras coral

5. Variations on blue in the Twitchell™ Textilene® stock line

6. Phifer's PVC geometric fabrics; from left, top row: Terrace mineral and Victoria mineral; bottom row: Tribal steel blue and Shelby cadet

COLORFUL

Colorful is the word that Alexis Maklakoff, business manager, Decorative Fabrics, for Glen Raven Custom Fabrics, chose to sum up the industry. "Homeowners are ready to be more adventurous with their outdoor spaces by incorporating lots of different colors. Bright colors and vegetable-dye colors are being paired with neutrals to brighten patios, decks, and porches," she says.

"The state of the industry is also colorful, in the sense that companies are more optimistic. The future is bright, with the potential for good business conditions and increased sales," she adds.

Voorhis predicts, "Outdoor spaces will continue to feature natural looks and textures, but bright colors will serve as accents in a more pronounced way. These colors pop when paired with neutrals and are perfect for decorative pillows, throws, accent chairs, and other accessories. Mixing and matching for an eclectic look is very popular in outdoor settings."

Deep, saturated, inky blues and true indigo (which is a bit more yellow and less saturated) will continue to be popular. Ramos says, "Gray morphs into cooler shades—such as a true silver, bordering on metallic. I also see gray getting cooler, with undertones of purple: a real dove gray."

He continues, "In darker shades, charcoal will stay pure and also will go ganache, which is a color we are using a lot. It's sort of a powdery driftwood with a little dark chocolate mixed in; it's a midtone neutral that looks great with lighter and darker frames and works very well with woven frames."

Jimison also sees people migrating to grays, from light gray to heathered grays to darker tones of charcoal (along with blues, cream, and beige). "I would also add white: the whiter, the better," he says.

"For instance, we have skins that aren't so literal, plus handwoven, organic, and textural looks—plus soft graphics in black and white or gray," he adds. "We also have been using our very popular pleat warps in new ways, thinking out of the box to develop new qualities that will be quite dimensional and unexpected. Sophisticated, interesting textures in clear, fashionable colors have been our area of greatest success."