

Doing business

Fresh business models and confident designs marked Filo's successful autumn/winter session. The buoyant yarns sector has a clear sense of direction, whether in fancy styles, heightened colour or playing to the classics. The emphasis on tailor-made continues to grow. **Janet Prescott** reports from Milan.

International yarn exhibition Filo in Milan (March, 20-21), offered a host of new designs and qualities for autumn/winter 2014/15. The show presented a positive face, which seemed apt for people to focus on whilst unseasonable weather, economics and politics continue to buffet the prospects for business.

There was a guarded sense of optimism, as expectations are not high.

'Yarns are becoming fancier. Knobby effects and slubs on blends were on trend'

Many exhibitors expressed satisfaction that they were still doing reasonable business. Indeed this sector is relatively buoyant, being quality driven, ingenious and benefitting from close business partnerships built up over years. Regular visitors to the show come from top European mills, with Japanese agents attending every edition.

The opening roundtable conference highlighted the theme 'footprints', which was chosen to symbolise Filo's concern with values, quality of product, raw materials, respect for the environment, people and work. In this case these lofty aspirations are not a cliché, more a statement of investment in encouraging good practice, chiming in with a concentration on quality. This is at the core of the offering from most exhibitors, who keep their place in the market by

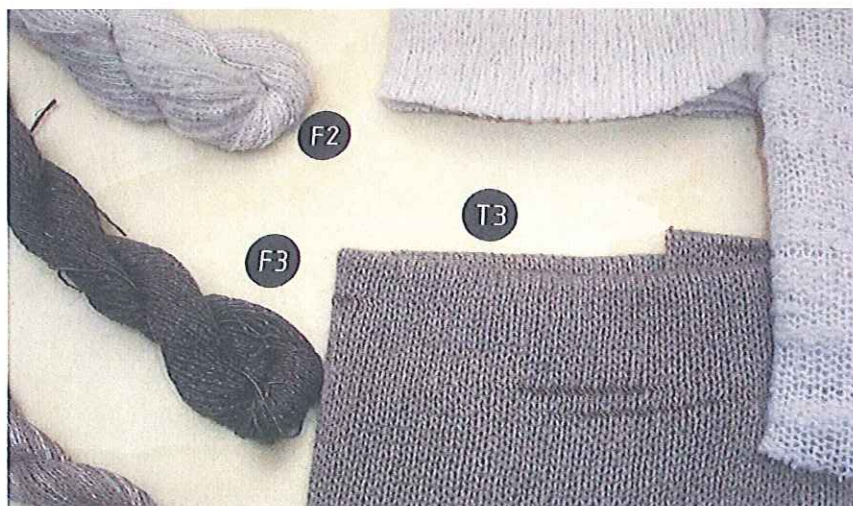
outdoing the competition on attention to detail, spending on research and customer service.

Giorgio Squinzi, president of Confindustria, asserted his confidence in SMEs that have the vitality and ability to innovate. Marilena Bolli, president of Unione Industriale Biellese, said the footprints of the past would be read as the legacy of the industrial knowledge built up in the past. "The strength of Biella is still the vocation of the high end of the market," she asserted.

One of the main conclusions from the show is that companies are ready to provide very small quantities, 20 kilos in some cases, dyed in special colours for specific customers - but at a price. This growth in the bespoke has been mentioned before, but it is gaining momentum in straitened times and ties in with the fact that high quality brands and designers will pay extra for exactly what they want, on exclusive terms.

It's no coincidence that the luxury yarns of the Swiss mills are leading the way on this. Spoerry talked of high and fluctuating prices, but made the point that as a boutique mill they increasingly create tailor-made products for customers. In this way they will offer small amounts and make unusual mixes or colours, 'but at a cost.' In other words, many European mills are making the most of their expertise by selling it to short run companies which are seeking exclusivity and cachet.

Hermann Buhler's high quality offer shows the level of the niche products seen at Filo. Supima cotton and fibres



High quality yarns in grey pales and neutrals were on show.



The trend prevails for fancy yarns.



'Trends took definite directions with bright colours, as well as dark and rare metallics'

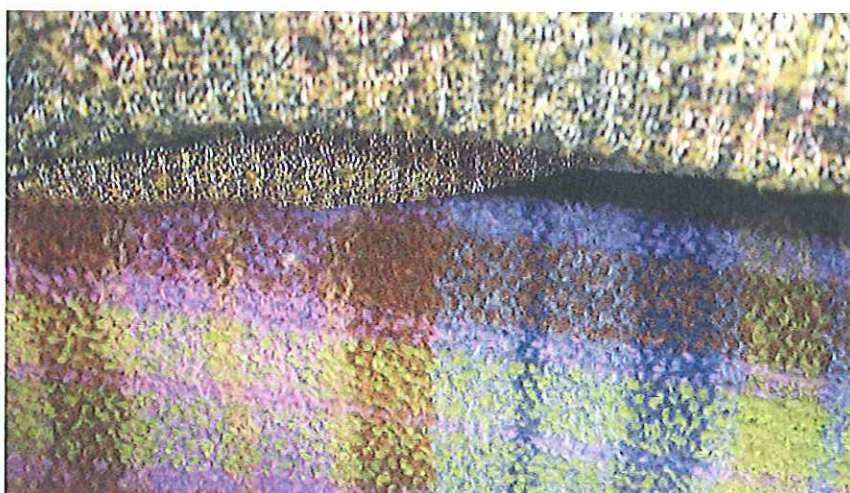
from Lenzing's portfolio, such as the eco-friendly Edelweiss and Micro Tencel, were high profile in the new collection.

Camenzind showed blended silk with warm fibres such as wool, baby camel and kid mohair, as well as SeaCell and linen. The company states that its neutral CO₂ status, including self-contained electricity generation, has increasing value with customers.

Specialist in fancy yarns, Ilaria put its continuing success down to heavy investment in quality control and the colours in stock. "What is important to companies who come to drink our water is they can get themselves out of trouble," said Jacopo Bruni of Ilaria with confidence. "The situation is getting better as manufacturing has become global. For high end fancy yarns people are thirsty for business. A profitable price is the consequence of many factors - quality control, creative capacity and realism."

Botto Poala showed exquisitely top of the range pure woollen and worsted yarns in various combinations of wool, cashmere and silk, the result of continuing investment in development. These came in raw white and top dyed stock-supported shades.

The 'footprints' theme ran through the trend area, cunningly contrived by Gianni Bologna. Garlanded with flowers, the designs mixed old and new, where tradition was blended with sophisticated



Colour and texture were bang on trend.

super-modern techno materials. Trends took definite directions with bright colours, as well as dark and rare metallics, shades of vitreous plastics, mother of pearl, enamel and iridescence.

Grey nuances, pales and neutrals were based on air and earth. Black and darker tones featured sunrise and sunset. Psychedelic rainbows and space looks were interpreted in yellows, orange and blue, balanced with deep enamel shades. Yarns are becoming fancier. Knobby effects and slubs on blends were on trend, as well as printed yarns, melanges and space dyed effects. Many thicker winter yarns for hand knitting were present, with marl colours and metallic details.

Lurex always has practical examples of their latest colourful transparent or metallic offerings, woven into spectacular fabrics. This time an inspiring range of flamboyant colours from the Holographic range, in shades of framboise, menthe, cerise and bronze, were directed at fashionably exclusive lines.

Textural black MCM 5087 yarns combined with solid colours of the enamel range producing black, ruby, chestnut and yellow shades with added depth. MDM

Lurex yarns featured aged metal or red and gold shades designed to warm up winter collections. By contrast in colder colours, like violet or blue, they produce what is described as an 'assertive look.' Pink mother of pearl and bright greys in the iridescent and mineral ranges gave a light effect for embellishment.

Ultra fashionable variations on classic themes came on Knoll's stand, with a collection of stock supported woollens in the traditionally British looks for which they are renowned. This time they featured rich winter colours including tweedy looks, for both knitting and weaving, alongside the only Donegal yarn in the world spun in Ireland.

"We are not all things to all men but our customers love a story, especially our Japanese clients, and they know our yarns come from the UK and Ireland," Knoll emphasised.

This is the story of the current situation: localisation, stock back up, bespoke quantities and continuous novelty which, when combined with long-standing and reliable business practices, is seeing this sector through the crisis with a strong sense of future direction. 