

Show Preview - June 2010

Going “Green” Is Getting Vocal

By Emily M. White

To prevent becoming jaded in a market teeming with “green” logos and labels, asking the right questions is crucial when perusing eco-friendly products

The “eco-conscious” market may possibly be the next frontier, but while it’s a land of new opportunities, without any proper standards or labeling system in place, logos and terms such as “organic” and “green” used by companies that are only in the market to bank on a trend may steer consumers in the wrong direction. Here, experts in the field explain how to see “green” clearly, so you get the true eco-friendly products you seek.

Decoding The “Green” Language

Plover Organic manufactures bedding and tabletop products and fabric by the yard constructed out of 100 percent GOTS-certified organic cotton. As Marisa Kula Mercer, co-owner, Plover, explains, “The cotton we use comes from non-genetically engineered seeds grown in soil that is free of pesticides, herbicides or other cytotoxins. The Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) is recognized as the leading processing standard for textiles made from organic fibers worldwide. The fact that we have its certification defines us as a legitimate eco-friendly company.”

According to Mercer, the term “green” is often overused and misleading.

“I think the word ‘green’ is now used as much as it can be by any company who can get away with it,” Mercer says. “And because ‘green’ is different than ‘organic’—which is a tangible thing that a company must be certified as—companies get away with it.”

To Mercer, to be labeled as “green” is just a concept—it does not mean that product has been produced according to global standards.

GOTS certified, LOOP fine organic cotton bed and bath linens use only 100 percent certified organic cotton textiles and low-impact dyes, which are certified as organic. LOOP is also Fair Trade certified, ensuring fair pay and treatment of workers, by such groups as FLO-CERT and the Ethical Trading Initiative.

Carmel Campos, owner, LOOP, agrees that there are a lot of companies that claim its products are “green” without explaining how, since there is no clearly defined labeling system.

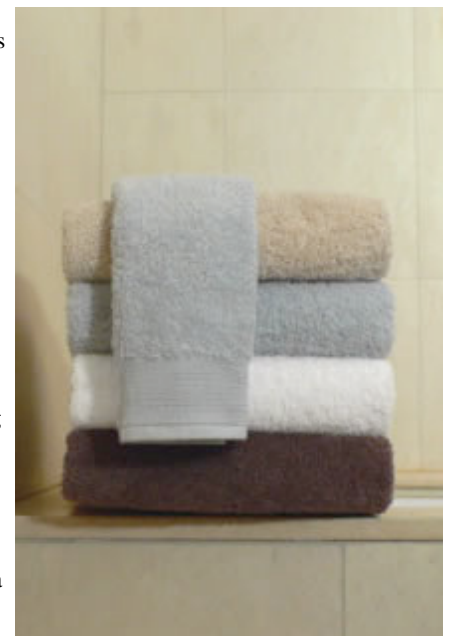
“It’s becoming very confusing for consumers,” says Campos. “With all of this ‘green washing’ going on, we need to have better regulation over these claims.”

For example, Campos says the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has recently cracked down on manufacturers and retailers marketing bamboo fabrics as ‘sustainable’ or ‘eco-friendly.’ “While the bamboo plant is a quickly renewing resource, the processing of bamboo textiles is laden with harsh chemicals resulting in a fabric that is basically like rayon, and generally comes from areas such as China where laws are not enforced to protect the environment or workers,” says Campos. “More regulation like this is definitely needed.”

While GOTS may be one of the more recognizable logos, there are many other certifications floating out in the “green” language, as Carrie Peters, owner, Raksha Bella Organic explains. Raksha’s cotton products are 100 percent GOTS certified organic and the pigments used are azo-free. Azo is a heavy, toxic metal that is



The Baden Towel Collection is Libeco’s new line of towels that are under its Eco-Linen trademark.



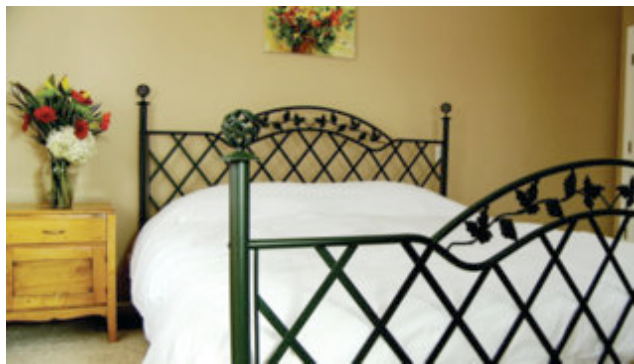
used in most commercial dyes and is found near and around printing facilities.

“There are many labels for organic cotton—GOTS being the highest standard,” Peters says. “This is given through a third party certification system, like controlled union certifications. There are many other kinds of certifications for organic products and fair trade products, like the FTC (mostly for crafts) and the USDA organic label (mostly used for agricultural products). For the design industry, Forest Stewardship Council certified wood, and then again GOTS, are probably the two more prominent certifications.”

Another certification is Cradle-to-Cradle (C2C). Schlossberg’s Sensitive Terry Towels are C2C, certified by the McDonough Braungart Design Chemistry, LLC. (MBDC), which helps companies generate economic, social, and ecological abundance. According to the MBDC, instead of designing cradle-to-grave products, which are products dumped in landfills at the end of their ‘life,’ cradle-to-cradle products are made of materials that are perpetually circulated in closed loops which maximizes material value without damaging ecosystems.

Christophe Kull, president, Schlossberg, sees that consumers are being deceived by an overuse of terms that aren’t truly explained.

“‘Green’ and ‘organic’ are not properly certified descriptions,” says Kull. “For instance, a product labeled as organic cotton doesn’t tell the whole truth. The cotton may be organic, but all the other steps involved, from harvesting to finishing, may include processes that are not organic. However, C2C inspects and certifies the entire process, from seed to finishing of the product and consequently helps create an ecologically correct product taking into consideration not only the ingredients but also the processes.”



Chez Duvet, manufactured by Ogallala, uses only 100 percent certified organic cotton for its duvets.



Amenity Home offers a wide array of eco-friendly products for thoughtful modern living, like its Fern Collection.

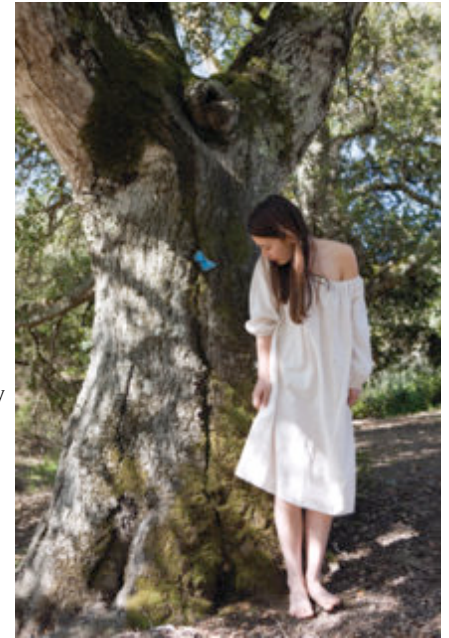
Kull feels that perhaps people should pay less attention to labels and ask about the processes used during manufacturing and what can be done with the products at the end of life.

“Purchasing C2C certified products forces you to recycle before it becomes waste,” says Kull. “For example, dyes have to be returned to the dye manufacturer for recycling. C2C also applies to other industries and is a holistic approach to manufacturing.”

What To Look For

While educating clients, be they buyers or consumers, taking time to explain what makes a product truly “eco-conscious” should

The new line of organic Turkish Towels from LOOP, which makes fine organic cotton bed and bath linens. Top



Raksha Bella Organic’s Noa nightgown is made of 100 percent certified organic cotton voile.

perhaps include what makes a product not as “green” as it is advertised.

Mercer advises putting the information in context. “There are a lot of large companies that now have ‘green’ divisions, but that’s just about cashing in on a trend,” she says. “If the entire corporation isn’t adopting more eco-friendly practices in manufacturing, packaging, in the way the business is run, then vote differently with your dollar.”

Campos says look for the literature.

“Companies leading the way in producing green products are accustomed to educating consumers and will often explain in depth how their products are eco-friendly, either in marketing materials or on packaging,” says Campos. “A claim with no explanatory information may not be legitimate.”

Emi Deguchi, is the creator/president of Chez Duvet, a collection of duvets that come with Corner Keepers, her patented technology that keeps the corners of the duvet and duvet cover securely and seamlessly attached during bed making. With the help of Ogallala, Chez Duvet is manufactured using only 100 percent certified organic cotton for its duvet covers, which are all GOTS certified.

Deguchi says that a lack of details is not a good sign. “If a company is saying they are ‘green,’ they would most likely be thrilled to answer any questions their customers may have,” she explains.

Kull advises you ask: Where does the fiber come from? Is it certified organic? Was the fiber harvested by hand or using chemicals and machines? Are the spinning and weaving factory following eco-friendly practices? What kind of dyes are used? Is the dyer and finisher using closed circuits in manufacturing? Are any petroleum-based fibers involved in the finishing?

Melissa Cox, designer, Balanced Design, focuses on making products with eco-friendly ideals in mind, such as reduce, reuse and recycle. Some pillows are wool felt appliquéd on organic cotton flannel and all are stuffed with inserts made in part of recycled soda pop bottles.

“There are no truly pure products from a sustainable perspective, so from day one we made striking the balance of sustainability our mission for the company,” she says.

Cox says even if the language is confusing, at least a dialogue about sustainability issues is building.

“Consumers need to continue to ask, to learn and to care about these important issues,” she says.

Bottom line: look for companies that have information to back-up how their products are eco-friendly. Without an exact labeling system in place, be informed and aware of “green washing,” so ambiguous “green” claims don’t have a chance in the market.

Resources

- Amy Butler for Welspun, 740-587-2841, amybutlerdesign.com/welspun
- Amenity Home, 888-410-1629, amenityhome.com
- Andrew Morgan, 914-668-9400, morgancollection.com
- Balanced Design, 401-486-3589, balanced-design.com
- Chez Duvet for Ogallala, chezduvet.com
- Heather Lins Home, 608-219-4892, heatherlinshome.com
- Libeco Home, 212-764-6644, libeco.com
- LOOP, 718-610-0065, looporganic.com
- Matouk, Inc., 508-997-3444, matouk.com
- Plover Organic, 866-540-8377, ploverorganic.com
- Raksha Bella Organic Textiles, 510-847-4616, rakshabellaorganic.com
- Schlossberg, 908-238-0006, bonswit.com
- Soft-Tex, 518-268-1273, soft-tex.com

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