The Woolmark Company presents The Wool Lab initiative at Milano Unica, Pitti Filati shows

By Laura Galbiati - February 4, 2022

The Woolmark Company, the Australian non-profit association representing 66,000 merino sheep breeders (with a total of approximately 70 million head of sheep) is back at the in-person editions of the Milan Unica 34 and Pitti Filati 90 shows in Italy. The association is exhibiting The Wool Lab, an initiative that aggregates and showcases to fashion brands merino wool fabrics and yarns by some 150 producers worldwide, including a number of Italian companies, especially from the Biella area in Piedmont.
“The Wool Lab, which is 10 years old this year, is an educational and information initiative on the benefits of wool. Each year, it promotes some 450 fabric and yarn products to about 1,000 brands worldwide, with one-to-one meetings,” said Francesco Magri, regional manager central and eastern Europe at The Woolmark Company, speaking to FashionNetwork.com at Milano Unica. “Last year, the pandemic prompted us to create a website which proved very useful, since it enables brands to get an overview of the range of products available online, and then get in direct contact with those they are most interested in. Additionally, thanks to the speed of digital technology, we are moving beyond the classic seasonal rhythm, introducing new features up to four/six times per year,” added Magri.

“Besides products made in 100% merino wool, we promote a variety of blends, notably made with other natural fibres like linen, cotton and silk. They are designed to be used especially for sportswear, but also for the new kind of business wear, which isn’t necessarily formal in the traditional sense of the word, and favours comfortable, supple natural fabrics,” said Magri.

This year’s edition of The Wool Lab features four macro-trends, based on themes that reflect the current market environment and demand. Each theme focuses on the fabric and yarn innovations that are most likely to generate business opportunities for the industry. New habits and lifestyles have been taken into account in developing these themes: consumer demand for less formal and more casual clothes (including workwear), the increasing appeal of the great outdoors, the demand for more vibrant colours, and the importance of the home as a cosy, comfortable place to live in.

The Woolmark Company also presented in Milan the second collection created in partnership with Shima Seiki Italia and its creative director Vittorio Spano, inspired by technical protective modders. The capsule consists
Italia and its creative director Vittorio Branchizio, inspired by technical protective workwear. The capsule consists of four outfits, designed specifically for young consumers and each created in collaboration with a different partner: Loro Piana Yarns, Suedwolle Group, Tollegno 1900 and Zegna Baruffa Lane Borgosesia.

“The capsule collection explores the very powerful contemporary trend inspired by workwear and protection wear, and gives it an urban twist, using high-performance materials for protective purposes. It features a distinctive urban style incorporating high-tech elements, using for example Kevlar, a highly resistant fibre. This is what younger people want nowadays, performance apparel for their city outings,” said Magri.

In terms of market trends, Magri said that “after the initial shock caused by the pandemic, merino wool is one of the few raw materials whose prices have remained stable compared to 2019. [Merino wool] has always been in high demand, notably as knitwear production increased by 15% compared to the pre-Covid era due to increased demand for comfortable clothing, and supply is also buoyant, with a 5% increase in sheared sheep and availability of good-quality wool.”

Currently, the main issue is the cost of shipping, but this has also had a positive effect: many companies are shifting part of their supply chain back to Europe, having realised that producing in China is no longer as convenient as before.

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