



Fabric designers Brenda Sewell-Bost (left) and Karen Williams partnered with leading textile manufacturer Shuford Mills to create decorative performance fabrics for its popular Outdura line.

Shuford Mills was honored with a 2007 ADEX Platinum Award for design excellence for its Horizons fabrics collection, created by Karen Williams and Brenda Sewell-Bost.

Designers Who Dare to Be Different

Outdoor-fabric designers Karen Williams and Brenda Sewell-Bost are recognized throughout the industry for their cutting-edge styles.

BY SHARON SANDERS

In any industry, there are major steps that elevate products to the next level. For the casual-furniture industry, one such step has been the evolution of outdoor fabrics. In just over five years, there has been a major turn in their style direction. Outdoor fabrics have gone from stripes of hunter green and white to luxurious, colorful designs that make a piece of furniture shine. Stylish, solution-dyed acrylic fabric (which is stain, mold and fade resistant) provides a perfect blend of fashion and performance. Fabric designers Karen Williams and Brenda Sewell-Bost have been designing solution-dyed acrylic fabrics for Shuford Mills, one of the nation's leading textile manufacturers, for five years; they are creating some of the most beautiful, versatile designs available today.

Williams and Sewell-Bost, co-owners of D2 (a textile design and consulting company), based in Burlington, N.C., are the spunky, go-to girls for fabric design. For 30 years, they have been designing woven fabrics for the residential market. In their six years of existence as D2, they have developed their own signature line of fabrics for companies such as Cone Decorative Fabrics, provided set color direction for yarn producer Kennetex and fabric producers Z-Text and Synergized, revitalized the Orinoka decorative fabric line for Lantal Textiles and designed the debut fabric collection for DuraCord Textiles. This is just a glimpse of their accomplishments. Their most exciting venture has been working with the premier performance-fabric manufacturer, Shuford Mills, based in Hudson, N.C. In 2003, D2 was asked to create the company's first-ever line of decorative fabrics for its Outdura performance-fabric line.

For 125 years, Shuford Mills has been a leader in the textile industry. In 1999, the company successful-

ly launched its Outdura performance-fabric line in the marine industry, producing 100-percent solution-dyed acrylic products for boat tops, canopies and cushions. In 2003, the company extended its offerings into the casual-furniture market, featuring stunning fabric designs by Williams and Sewell-Bost.

"Solution-dyed acrylic fabric is the perfect fit for casual furniture because it's so durable," Williams says. Solution-dyed acrylic yarn, she explains, "is like a carrot; the color goes all the way through, unlike a radish, where the color is just on the outside. You can even clean the fabric with bleach and it won't lose its color." Performance-fabric weavers are doing amazing things with solution-dyed acrylic, incorporating it not only into furniture fabrics, but into decorative trims, accessories and draperies that are being used both outdoors and indoors.

Shuford Mills and D2 have partnered to create fabric lines with style and versatility that appeal to all types of consumers. Williams and Sewell-Bost have taken their merchandising skills from the residential industry and translated them to the outdoors, creating well-correlated collections of stripes, textures and patterns. "The savvy consumer wants fabrics that create an experience that fits his or her personality," Williams explains. "We make selecting fabric easy by creating color stories within the collections that mix and match."

In October 2007, Outdura unveiled four new 8-ounce solid colors: Sandstone, Golden, Fern and Island Blue. They will be used in correlation throughout its 2009 line. According to Williams, neutrals are always best sellers because they are natural and work well outdoors. Williams and Sewell-Bost create their fabric collections with that fact in mind. Colors that made a strong showing at the Casual Pre-Market

show were warm oranges (Pottery and Spice), cool hues (Aquatic and Pesto) and rich browns (Kona and Sepia). "This season, it's all about mixing unexpected colors," Sewell-Bost says. She and Williams have paired light aquas with dark browns and have mixed in interesting color accents. Luxurious texture is a big part of their design story, as well. "Texture makes fabric look and feel more expensive," Sewell-Bost adds.

There is no doubt that fabric translates into sales. Williams explains that fabric is the first thing to catch customers' eyes when they walk into an outdoor-living store. "Initially, they notice the color, followed by the design and then the feel," she says. Solution-dyed acrylic is the softest fabric available, being inherently softer than polyester or olefin. Williams encourages retailers to carry fabrics at different price points that are similar in style and color so that customers will not be limited by what they can afford. When creating their designs, Williams and Sewell-Bost also take into consideration the colors and textures of furniture frames. "Some fabrics look better on teak, while others complement wrought iron. Everything has to work together," Williams says.

Sewell-Bost encourages retailers to stay on top of fabric technology and to educate their sales teams. "When it comes to performance fabrics, we're just seeing the tip of the iceberg right now," she says. A tremendous amount of money is being spent on research and development for smart fabrics that have specific functions (for example, to keep the user cool or warm). Colors and patterns are becoming more sophisticated, and consumers are using performance fabrics indoors as well as outdoors. Williams and Sewell-Bost advise retailers to profit from being knowledgeable about fabrics. That knowledge can be their best sales tool. ■