

Linda Keppinger Connects the Dots in the Supply Chain with MaterialsMove. By Suzanne Blecher

Material Connection



A

fter 20 years at Nike as Global Materials Director, Linda Keppinger is bringing her knowledge of materials innovation, sustainability and design to the greater apparel community. Her passion for textiles stems from her grandmother; she worked in the millinery trade and taught Keppinger how to sew. “My grandmother’s act of sharing is a reflection of this industry, which is so much about inspiring and learning from each other,” said Keppinger. As CEO and founder of MaterialsMove, Keppinger is currently focusing on enhancing communication between designers/brands and mills. Here Keppinger gives *Textile Insight* a peek into her process.

What types of services do you provide?

“My consulting business focuses on materials research, innovation and concept development sourcing recommendations; as well as partnering with mills on material and trend research, materials merchandising and palettes to provide clear representation of the mills’ capabilities to brands.”

How do you work with mills?

“I work with mills that are based in Asia to present their capabilities the best. I do this through a storytelling approach because I find that the Asian culture is more about doing what’s requested. What I’m doing is sharing their perspective and explaining what they have the capability of doing. I do this in the context of seasonal trend direction. For example, I have a client in Asia that is a woven supplier. I worked with them to put together a presentation for Spring 2019 around the idea of light weight. So I do research on innovation, trend research and biomimicry and come up with a few themes for them. Then they present their fabrics to customers

using storytelling as a background. I really saw that a lot of mills couldn’t explain what they could do. This gives pictures and language without having to talk about it too much. It’s really a lot of fun.”

Why is storytelling so important today?

“Consumers long to hear stories as a way to connect and feel like they’re making a difference through their actions and purchases. Storytelling offers hope and possibilities, and

a way for brands to connect more deeply with consumers. Materials are an avenue to tell this story, and offer a voice for brands to deliver through performance, sustainability or trends components of the material. The partnership between Adidas and Parley to make products made from reclaimed plastic bottles from the ocean is an excellent example of organizations coming together to share their commitment to the environment with storytelling.”

What inspires you?

“Whether traveling abroad or in day-to-day life, I’m always in search of unique colors, textures or ideas from culture, nature or architectural elements as inspiration. I always

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have my camera with me so I can return to my photography, which offers a creative source of inspiration and signifies the curiosity that is at the center of my work. I am very inspired by the work of Nigerian artist El Anatsui. His piece entitled ‘Between Earth and Heaven’ is made from reclaimed aluminum, wire and plastic disks. The piece is constructed in a way that refers to the West African traditions of strip-woven textiles

namely kente cloth. It is a work that honors local traditions and makes reference to the history of the slave trade.”

What are some of your favorite materials right now?

“What I find interesting in materials today are those that perform various uses for consumers – for both performance and lifestyle. Consumers appreciate performance materials and have the desire to wear them beyond just their workout. DuPont’s Sorona knits crossover for both performance and lifestyle use with an amazing aesthetic and bio-based sustainability solution. Some items are single polymer, that also offer a circular economy solution (instead of throwing something away, you take the fibers back and make them into a higher or equal value product). Functional textile supplier Aesthetictex captures market trends and translates them into unique performance solutions including engineered jacquards, printed warps, unique weave constructions, as well as color and finish effects.”

What should brands and designers be focusing on?

“On collaboration and partnerships as a means for driving meaningful change in the industry. We’ve seen tremendous momentum taking place in the outdoor industry with the use of the Higg Index — the self-assessment standard to measure environmental and social sustainability throughout the supply chain, and empowers brands, retailers and suppliers to identify and drive improvement.

For myself, I look to support the revitalization of the textile industry in the U.S. and specifically to promote the Pacific Northwest, and expand my public speaking to inspire young female leaders. I like to offer a story of hope and inspiration and motivating people.” ●



Right: Linda Keppinger.
Left: Aesthetictex Woven Jacquard