

Case study: how Safilin use their story to open new markets

Safilin first joined Yarn Expo in 2018 to test their premium linen in China. Their experience was so successful that they joined again for Yarn Expo Spring 2019. The French company combines 200 years of tradition with innovation to create a unique story, which has provided Safilin with a competitive edge in the China market. We spoke to Mr Hervé Denoyelle, Business Development Manager of Safilin, to talk about the company's story, sustainability and new sourcing trends.



Messe Frankfurt: Mr Denoyelle, it's good to see Safilin again at Yarn Expo! To start off, can we begin with a brief outline of Safilin's history and products on offer at the fair?

Mr Hervé Denoyelle: Safilin is a pure linen spinner. We've been in existence since 1778; we are probably one of the oldest textile companies on the planet. Traditionally our main market was Europe, but then around 5-10 years ago we decided to expand further afield. We work in a different way to other linen spinners. We are not addressing the mass market, we are addressing the premium market. The quality of Safilin products is very special – recognised as amongst the best in the world. We target the high-end premium markets, and we also work with customers who have special technical requirements. There are some more difficult fabric constructions that cannot be achieved with normal linen. It can only be done with Safilin.

MF: It's great to see what can be achieved with a traditional, natural product. Could you tell us a little more about Safilin's Flax Lab innovations?

HD: Safilin's most notable innovation in recent years is stretch linen. This was very difficult to achieve in the past – of course, linen does not stretch, that is why it

creases. Then Safilin's Flax Lab joined forces with Elasten in Italy, and through our collaboration we achieved stretch linen. Now, thanks to this yarn, we have opened up new markets for linen – for example, the denim market, and also home furnishings.

MF: So now that you are able to access a wider market, what kind of potential do you anticipate for linen products?

HD: Well, recently of course we've been focusing on our development in Asia. Safilin is huge in Japan, and we are now sending our products to India and Pakistan, and we are very interested in China. Here in China, the approach from customers is very different. A lot of people are now asking for a product that is different, a product with a story, a product that is completely traceable. If you buy a yarn from Safilin, we can take you to the very field where the fibres were grown. We are unique for this.

The market is really asking for natural products, and there is nothing more natural than linen. No pesticides, no chemicals and no irrigation – the water comes free from the sky in our region! It's a totally natural product, processed without chemicals, and spun only with water. This is the best product for the planet today, and demand is excellent – even despite our premium price. In China, we are very surprised – three years ago, there was very little demand for the premium market. Now we get enquiries every day. Companies want a different product with a natural approach, and we feel Safilin fits perfectly in this picture.

MF: And as you're offering sustainable yarn, do you find brands sourcing directly from you?

HD: Yes – Safilin has been meeting with very large well-known Western brands. Usually, when you are a spinner, your customers are weavers. Today that is changing. We are getting enquiries directly from brands who want to learn more about improving their carbon footprint. It's very interesting. We are meeting a variety of trade buyers at Yarn Expo, it's very diverse here.

MF: What kind of response are you experiencing at Yarn Expo Spring?

HD: We are meeting a lot of Chinese buyers, which is our targeted audience – it's ongoing, we haven't stopped! Maybe we'll get 50 visitors today, which is huge for us and a better response than other trade events. Yarn Expo is quite exceptional – it's

fun to be here, we love it. It's a fresh new market for Safilin's story. We meet a lot of promising new connections here, and the quality of visitors is very good. Most visitors don't come to our booth out of the blue – they are more professional and serious, and already thinking about how they can use French linen to support their business strategies and brand. In a few years, China could be one of our biggest markets. We are very happy to be here.

MF: Lastly, do you have any advice to other brands entering the China market?

HD: Believe in your product, differentiation is important – don't copy from other companies. Safilin is lucky because we are unique in what we offer, and this is part of what makes us successful. Use your brand to make a difference, and tell your story.

MF: Thank you for your time Mr Denoyelle, and we hope that Safilin continues to find success at the fair!

Yarn Expo overview

Yarn Expo Spring 2019 was held concurrently with Intertextile Shanghai Apparel Fabrics – Spring Edition, Intertextile Shanghai Home Textiles – Spring Edition, PH Value and the China International Fashion Fair (CHIC) from 12 – 14 March 2019, and featured 468 exhibitors and 28,302 trade buyers. The fair is organised by Messe Frankfurt (HK) Ltd and the Sub-Council of Textile Industry, CCPIT.

The next edition of Yarn Expo Autumn will take place from 25 – 27 September 2019, once again at the National Exhibition and Convention Center (Shanghai).