

the  
**resident**

january 2008

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**Green  
fingers**

Down on the farm with  
Sheherazade Goldsmith

BRUTON STREET W1  
City of Westminster

HALCYON  GALLERY

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24

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**Happy New Year**  
*The Resident welcomes 2008*



# the great indoors

...with **Patty Grossman**  
of **O Ecotextiles**

Interview by Judith Wilson

Anyone with half an eye on trends can't have failed to notice that in the interiors world, there has been a remarkable sea change. When once all things eco were considered ever so slightly unglamorous, now there are desirable organic home products and accessories popping up everywhere. And, when the green-minded American furnishing fabric company O Ecotextiles launched its debut organic textiles range, the Emily Todhunter collection, at Decorex this autumn, there was a remarkable buzz. The fabrics even won the *House & Garden* magazine Best Merchandise trophy. Suddenly, beautiful organic home furnishings were highly covetable and a strong design choice in their own right.

For Patty Grossman, co-founder of the Seattle-based O Ecotextiles, the business of creating environmentally-friendly furnishing fabrics has become a passion, a business and a crusade. She and her sister, Leigh Anne Van Dusen, started the company together four years ago and their decision to launch first in the UK, with Emily Todhunter's collection, was a deliberate choice. 'When Leigh Anne and I did our research into the availability of environmentally-friendly textiles in the States, there was very little available – this was before Al Gore's manifesto came out,' Grossman says. 'It seemed to us that the UK was way ahead of America with environmental issues.'

It was also a very deliberate decision to launch a designer-label collection first. 'We wanted to target customers in search of high-end design,' says Grossman. She and Leigh Anne set about making a list of the 'successful, hot designers' who had already made a name in the UK as an established luxury brand. Emily Todhunter was the top choice. 'Luckily she immediately fell in love with the idea!' says Grossman. The new range comprises three fabrics – floppy linen, ideal upholstery, and organic hemp – and uses a mix of 100 per cent organic cotton, hemp and linen fibres. Todhunter had major involvement in choosing the luscious ice-creamy shades. 'She took great pains to come up with a sophisticated colour palette,' says Grossman. The colours are soft and pretty, inspired by nature, and very easy to use.



For Grossman and her sister, founding and developing O Ecotextiles has taken four intensive years. Neither of them has a textile background, but with formidable credentials – Leigh Anne, a banker and community activist and Grossman, a former high-flying finance director. Once they had both had families, they went in search of an entrepreneurial opportunity. 'Leigh Anne wanted to find 'green' furnishing fabrics for her home, and couldn't find any,' says Grossman. They seized the gap in the market, and started to travel. 'We had to search to find small, high-quality producers dedicated to the industry, so there were stops and starts at the beginning.' They have now found eco-minded mills, including a linen mill in Italy, and a bamboo-processing mill in Japan. 'A quarter of the world's pesticides are used in cotton production,' she says. After agriculture, the textile industry is the second worst culprit of polluting clean water with toxic chemicals and uses masses of water in the dyeing process.

At O Ecotextiles, fabrics are dyed using low-impact reactive dyes and bleaches like chlorine are avoided. They use aloe vera and beeswax rather than petroleum-based softeners, and, although not all the natural fibres are organic, this is an ultimate goal. But O Ecotextiles is much more than just a green-minded textile company, as their website strap-line *Indulgent Yet Responsible* suggests. The sisters wish to produce really beautiful, lush and luxurious fabrics. 'We want customers to choose our fabrics as a green option, but also as a design choice,' says Grossman. 'We offer durability, but also lustre and softness.' This month, hot on the heels of the Emily Todhunter collection, there's a global launch of 13 O Ecotextiles fabrics in many colourways, plains and jacquards.

'The little things really turn into a big thing,' she says. 'In five years' time, we would like to be a multi-million pound company, helping customers to create healthy homes and offices with no compromise on performance, look or design,' she says. Now there speaks a committed individual, whose example we might all do well to follow.

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