The Future of Textiles Technology

Retail shelves to see what could be headed to stores tomorrow

BY JENNIFER MARKS

When it comes to incorporating technology into consumer products, the other guys seem to have all the fun.

The home wearables world has barbeque thermometers that buzz your smartphone when the steak has reached one’s desired degree of doneness. Wi-Fi tea kettles with remote temperature control and pre-warm settings, and toothbrushes that record cleaning habits and recommend improvements in technique.

In soft furnishings, fabrics and finishes related to their physical functions. In the space of just four months, the market for a Wearable Cooling Technology, Dodge, and Black Diamond bowled a line of ski pants outfitted with the latest goodies from CoreTex, Schoeller and Windstopper.

And at last month's big CES show in Las Vegas, there were plenty of consumer electronics introductions on hand addressing what has long been considered home furnishings turf — creating a better night's sleep.

Not that home textiles manufacturers aren't always looking for the next thing. The Textile Park trend pavilion at Heimtextil last month included an exhibit of interactive shirts and t-shirts created by students at the University of Technology in Kaiserslautern, Germany. Informed with start-up capital, the ultimate goal is to create fabrics that can monitor well-being, prevent illness or ease pain. Tech textiles also included LED-infused fabrics from Swiss company Fiberstar, Rohner Textile Innovation. Beta Textiles demonstrated a pillow with integrated vibrating elements that respond to a variety of rubbing, stroking or pushing — intended as a device that would allow caregivers to communicate with dementia sufferers.

Home textiles products bound for volume retail have adopted technologies where they can, the trade-off between a traditional item and a higher price tag on products enhanced with solutions-oriented fiber, fills and finishes always being a key issue.

Although technical textiles account for only 25% of global textiles production, according to Coonshank trend analyst Jürgen Czebe, the market is set to grow from roughly $30 billion to $60 billion by 2018, Frost & Sullivan, a company that works with clients to leverage innovation, projects the market for microencapsulated phase change materials in textiles and mattress will expand from $445.1 million in 2013 at a compound annual growth rate of 17% by 2018.

Which means there are plenty of new tech products being developed in textiles. Some might even be worth incorporating into home goods.