

outdoor opulence

By Kelly Sweeney

Lee Menichella fully believes that nothing is beyond the realm of possibility. It is with this belief and his desire to bring luxury fabrics outdoors that he founded Chella Textiles in 1999. Menichella was no stranger to the luxury fabric industry, having worked as the head of hospitality sales for Cowtan & Tout in Las Angeles and Las Vegas, as well as with other luxury furniture companies before branching out on his own. When he met Scott Bodenner, a fabric designer who had designed for Clarence House, Larsen and Zimmer + Rohde, his vision for a luxury outdoor fabric company was crystallized and the two set about designing these luxury fabrics.

Together Menichella and Bodenner have created some of the most innovative and unexpected outdoor fabrics, including the first luxury solution-dyed acrylic fabrics, a performance matelasse and the first outdoor chenille. All of Chella's more than 200 patterns and designs meet the company's highest standards for performance fabrics, including being lightfast, stain resistant, mold and mildew resistant and machine washable. It is these qualities along with the luxurious fabrics and trims that Chella is known for that have propelled the company to become the go-to resource for luxury performance textiles.

Marcy Graham, Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Chella, recently spoke with *DTM* regarding the company's ground-breaking products.

Chella was the first company to provide luxury outdoor fabrics to the design trade. Has Chella been first to introduce anything else?

Chella has a lot of firsts. We were the first to provide a luxurious solution-dyed acrylic fabric — one that felt good, draped beautifully and had a nice hand. We are known for



Marcy Graham
Vice President of Sales and Marketing

having weaves, construction and fibers that you don't see typically see in solution-dyed acrylics, such as chenille, boucles, jacquard weaves, damasks and tapestries.

Is Chella currently experimenting with any new techniques, materials or weave types? Can you tell our readers a little bit about these new products?

What we're really excited about right now is our new spring collection, which features a metallic-type yarn. The fabric is made of a solution-dyed polyolefin, which gives it a shiny finish. The solution-dyed polyolefin has the same properties as all of Chella's textiles — it's lightfast, fade resistant, does not have dye lot variations and is machine washable with bleach. We are always researching new yarns, fibers and techniques that can enhance our collection and push it in a new direction while meeting the rigorous constraints required for fabric and trim to be used outdoors.



Are Chella’s textiles specified more in commercial and hospitality installations or residential installations?

It’s really close actually. The two industries are pretty much even with about 60 percent of our product specified in hospitality installations and 40 percent specified for residences, although these numbers do shift slightly depending on the season. February through May and August through September are the busier seasons for outdoor fabrics for residential projects, while hospitality projects are specified year-round.

Are all of Chella’s fabrics suitable for hospitality applications?

About 90 percent of Chella’s products are suitable for hospitality use. Whatever the issues are that make the other 10 percent of our products not suitable for hospitality we can work with. For example, we can provide quantity discounts to meet budget requirements or we can re-engineer a fabric to meet a specific budget point. We can also enhance performance characteristics in terms of durability, moisture barrier, etc. to make the fabric suitable for hospitality use.

Who comes up with new patterns and designs? Where do they look for inspiration?

Inspiration comes from a variety of different places. Chella’s designer, Scott Bodenner, designs our fabrics and is inspired by fashion and art, among other things. He has

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distinct sensibilities in terms of how things impress him. We often get requests from interior designers who are looking for something specific, whether it's color, design or style. Chella often develops custom pieces for designers that are then rolled into our collections because we feel that the fabric will enhance our collection. Often we find pieces in natural fibers, such as silk, wool or linen, that we think would be beautiful in solution-dyed acrylics, so we reinterpret these designs in acrylic for use outdoors.


In your opinion, what is the most innovative product Chella has created to date?

Chella comes up with innovative fabrics approximately once a year. With so many innovative products, it's hard to say which is the most innovative. Possibly the outdoor chenille because it was such a shocker at the time. That's really the fabric that launched the brand. Some of our other firsts include the first acrylic tweed, matelasse, embossed velvet, embroidered acrylic and sheer fabrics, all of which are suitable for both outdoor and indoor applications.

Does Chella have any new collections or patterns in the works?

Chella is launching the Radiance collection this spring, which offers four new designs, including a sheer. We're also working on a new large-scale statement design and a couple of textured fabrics with some interesting twists in terms of fibers.

What does the future hold for Chella?

More interesting trims and new fibers to enhance the luxuriousness of our designs without losing sight of the performance characteristics. We are continually evolving and innovating at Chella. 

Page 21: Aretha, pictured in the Caribe/kiwi colorway, is a tactile jacquard with chenille floral accents and is available in seven colorways; Pages 22-23 Left: Chella's Sketchbook Floral pattern, shown in the ink colorway, is available in six colorways and is ideal for upholstery, drapery and pillows both indoors and out; Right: (From left to right) Aretha in lichen/mulberry, Click Track in mulberry, Palazzo Stripe in mulberry, Montecatini in mulberry, Click Track in plum, Paris Ottoman in plum, Canvas Sateen in plum, Harlequin Matelasse in mulberry and Palazzo Stripe in plum; Left top: A collection of fabrics in the complementary colorways, from left to right: Quicksilver in Passione, Medallion in Passione and Circuit in Carnelian; Bottom: Facet, one of Chella's newest fabrics, is constructed from 100 percent polyolefin with a shiny finish and comes in eight rich colorways.