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TEXT
JOHAN VAN PRAET

Inspiring the textile industry

Jennifer Castoldi, a rising star in the home fashion business

When creative whirlwind Jennifer Castoldi launched Trendease International in 2003 she could hardly have dreamed that this internet magazine would develop so rapidly into the N° 1 online resource for reporting on global trends and key international design events. That says something about the talent, the know-how and above all the guts with which this determined damsel is able to inspire the home fashion, design and lifestyle industries worldwide.

In a highly competitive industry Jennifer stands out for the knowledge that she is able to put at the disposal of clients. While she has an impressive background in the lifestyle industries from retail buying and merchandising through to interior decoration, product development and design, international sourcing and publishing, much of her time is spent in keeping her knowledge up to date through trend observation and research. For the interview she takes me along to the restaurant L'Eclaireur, a spin-off from the trendy Parisian fashion boutique of the same name in Rue Boissy d'Anglas. "The interior just breathes design, all carefully thought out right down to the smallest detail," she enthuses. "But does it fit in with the dominant or upcoming trends?" I wanted to know. "Oh yes, perfectly," Jennifer assures me. "Nowadays we see a lot of colour in general. But purple and yellow in particular are dominant in all sorts of trends, ranging from decorative pillows to fashion items, bedding, wall coverings ... you name it. The thing with trends is that there is usually a reason behind them. Yellow and purple play off each other in their meaning. Since the 19th century yellow ribbons have symbolized hope and positive thinking. The colour is associated with many more sentiments such as warmth, cheerfulness, joy, freedom, openness, self-development and so on. Historically, yellow had a very high status, just like purple. Where purple was once reserved for men of the cloth and royalty, yellow was just as coveted, especially when it was produced from saffron, the world's most expensive spice. Because yellow has such a cheerful effect on people, it's great for places that lack sun, like windowless or north-facing rooms."

The rise of the creative class

At the same time, shades of purple are taking over the home products front. "In her book *Colors for Your Every Mood* Leatrice Eiseman describes the purple person as enigmatic and highly creative, with a quick perception of spiritual ideas. Purple is often preferred by artists or people who like to consider themselves different from the common herd. We have this societal shift going on, referred to as 'the rise of the creative class.' According to Shari Swan of *Streative Branding*, 30% of the population now consider themselves to be part of that creative class. At the same time we are witnessing the rise of individualism. Consumers want products to stand out from the pack and to suit the needs of the individual user. Finally, since the War on Terror and related global tragedies, people are more in touch with their spiritual side."

Along with the new colours, oversized motifs are being introduced. "In 2004 we saw damask become established in a new, contemporary way by being blown out of scale and mixed with metallics or flocking. Damask is still popular, not only as a pattern but also a supersized motif on wall coverings, interior textiles and upholstery showing big flowers, fruits and geometric patterns. Now they are becoming even more abstract, with the design increasingly unrelated to the product itself. Another theme is 'people.' They appear in textile designs all over the place: in cameo or in profile or only a face. Don't forget the erotic trend: erotic imagery on wallpaper, tiles, furniture or bedding. Sometimes when you look at it you don't even realise what it is, until you concentrate on the outline."

Trends are born or created

A trend has a typical life cycle – a bell curve – with different drivers. "A trend generally goes through a series of phases: emerging, incoming, pre-peak, peak, post-peak, outgoing and decline. A trend is started by innovators and is then picked up by early adopters. 'Trend forward' producers come in at the incoming phase when the early adopters begin to follow the innovators. At pre-peak, mainstream awareness is achieved and supply meets demand, the 'early majority' is on board and manufacturers achieve economies of scale. As a trend progresses the numbers of pieces sold increases and the sale price decreases. When a trend has peaked it has its highest level of exposure and sales and it reaches the 'majority'. In a nutshell, after that the trend is dead." "Some trends seem to arise spontaneously. Interestingly, creatives frequently tend to be on the same wavelength. I don't know how it happens but people without any connection come up with similar ideas at the same time, all around the world. Also, trends frequently spread between sectors, as a result of interaction between them. An exclusive trend in a haute couture line will start to influence textile designers who also attend runway shows and look at what is going on in fashion. They go on to inspire the manufacturers, who in turn influence the distribution, and this process continues until the design achieves critical mass." "A lot of fashion brands have expanded into home products because manufacturers get higher profit margins on the home. Before it was usually fashion that influenced home, but that too has changed. Fashion companies regularly ask me: 'Jennifer, what is going on in home that applies to fashion?' My favourite example is the large-scale damask, which was definitely popular in home long before it happened in fashion." "At the same time as the change in the direction of the influence, the lifetime of a trend cycle has changed. Trends have speeded up enormously. "Previously it took five to seven years before a trend in fashion found its way to home," Jennifer explains. "Nowadays, however, home is looked upon as 'home fashion.' People change items in their home almost as often as they change their wardrobe. Right now home and fashion almost share the same season."

QUOTE
JENNIFER CASTOLDI

“Outdoor is without question a booming market.”



Who is Jennifer Castoldi?

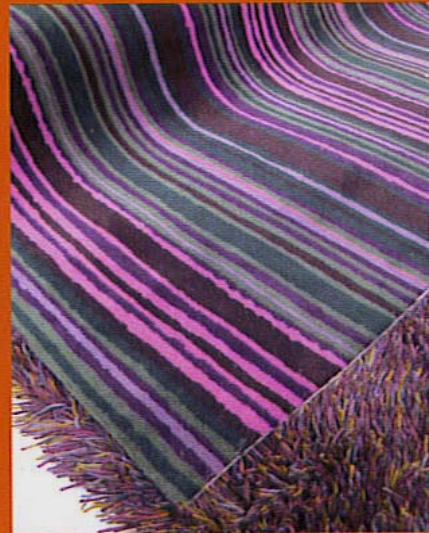
Jennifer Castoldi is the founder of Trendease International, for which she travels extensively to gather visions, digital images and undiscovered gems from shops, showrooms, trade fairs, exhibits and design shows in all the major design capitals. She aims to inspire through the use of these images accompanied by interviews and articles. In addition to Trendease, Jennifer works as an industry consultant and contributes to various local and international publications. She has acted as a consultant in the Philippines, where she was recruited by the government as a design trend expert for the Department of Trade & Industry. Recently she joined the Board of Innovation of the Hershey company, the leading American manufacturer of chocolate and candy products.

Another passion of hers is teaching. She also speaks at various industry events as well as private events. Jennifer holds an MBA from the International School of Management, Paris, a BS in Home Product Development & Marketing, and an AAS in Fashion Merchandise Management from the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, and is currently working towards her PhD. She has been honoured by LDB Interior Textiles, which cited her as the "rising star" in the home fashion business.

jennifer@trendease.com
 + 33.153.16.24.06
 75 rue Caumartin,
 75009, Paris,
 France



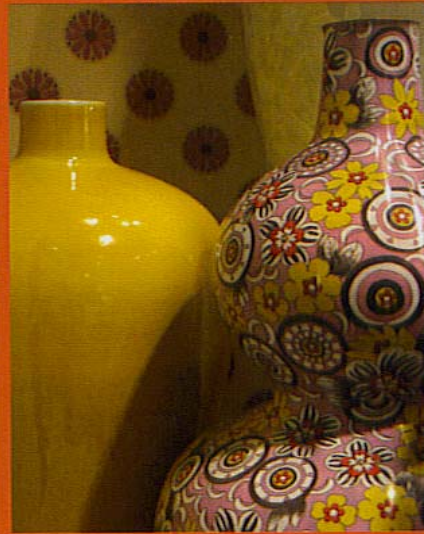
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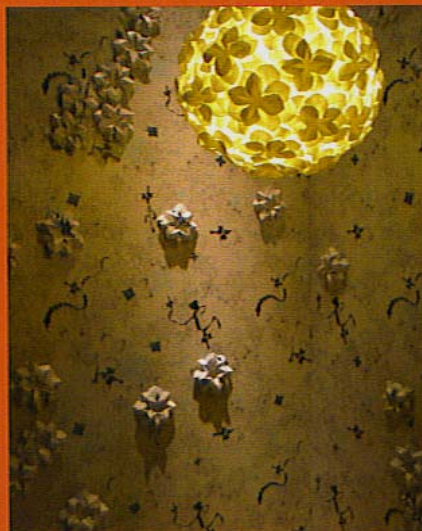
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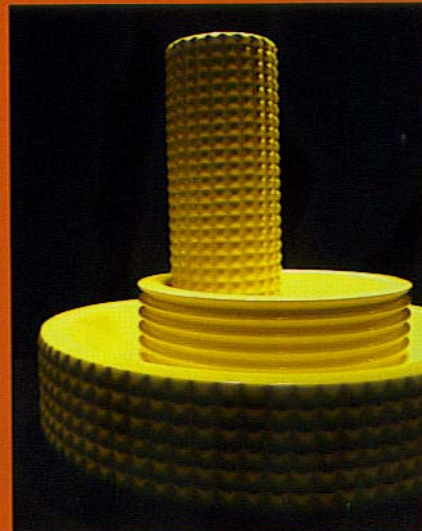
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Cross-fertilisation of ideas

Fashion remains the N° 1 source of inspiration for commercial home design. For creative design on the other hand, technological development is creating new arenas where smart textiles can sense environmental stimuli and react to them, as well as sending and receiving signals. "Glow for example is a flat-knitted textile for interior design applications. Combined with light the texture becomes more distinct and the light appears more pleasant and interesting. The material changes from white to a chosen colour when light passes through it. At the same time light charges the phosphorescent yarn, which then gives out its own greenish light when the room becomes darker. Space technology is also finding its way into furniture textiles. Examples include the memory foam being used in mattresses, temperature-regulating textiles and 3D textiles that create depth."

Creative designers find inspiration everywhere. Make-up for example. "Just like fashion, make-up goes through seasonal trends. Once a colour dies, the remaining stock of pigment is used by an eco-chic designer to make finishing for furniture. If you think that's surprising, what about war as a source of creativity: old army tents being used to make pillows or bags for laptops. Or the automobile industry, which inspired a furniture designer to make an armchair that resembles a car."

A thin line between indoor and outdoor

Jennifer is in no doubt: "The outdoor segment is a booming market. The line between interior and exterior spaces is becoming blurred. Patios, green roofs and garden terraces are now the favoured places to relax and escape from the hectic pace of life. And home product development is following, with for example textiles that are sun resistant, waterproof, mosquito repellent or whatever. Photovoltaic fabric converts solar power in the same way as hard solar panels. The Interactive Institute in Sweden has created an 'energy curtain' that absorbs sunlight during the day and releases it at night. Morphotex takes 1980s hyper-colour fabrics to the next level using nanotechnology to change the colour of the fabric so it reflects changes in the weather. And of course furniture designers are getting in on the game. The BeHive for example is a piece of outdoor furniture that is ideal for the fickle Belgian climate. It offers space for twelve people, and you can close it up completely with curtains. The forward thinking designers of outdoor furniture and upholstery are turning away from boring old stripes and dull colours, instead using patterns you normally find in the living room. I'm sure we going to see the outdoor area become more trend-influenced. It's an emerging market that offers a lot of opportunities."

Better for the environment and for health

The search for environment-friendly materials that are also better for health has resulted in a whole range of alternative design materials. The prevalent alternative lies in the creation of new fibres that offer a healthier and cleaner option than petroleum-based materials such as polyester or nylon. "The environment plays a huge role in everything, from material to end product. I like to think it's more than a trend, because it's going to be a necessity. The number of environment-friendly alternatives for synthetic fibres is growing steadily. Materials you wouldn't necessarily think of, such as beetroot, bamboo, crabs, silver ... are being combined with new technologies to yield a cornucopia of textiles. Mainstream companies – including those that supply clothing, bedding or bathroom materials – have begun to focus on the benefits of bamboo. Its breathable, anti-bacterial properties make it an ideal choice for sheets and towels. Similarly, beetroot, soya and wood fibres are being transformed into biodegradable polymers with practical and aesthetic uses. And although it's not strictly a vegetable material, Crabyon is an amazing fibre made from cellulose and crab shells. The resulting textile is surprisingly soft and has bactericidal properties. That makes it very useful in a medical setting. Marianne Kemp makes hand-woven horsehair pieces. She has devised new techniques and structures within the conventional weaving process. Her horsehair weaves are used in wall panels, hangings, installations and lighting fixtures." Jennifer is able to offer dozens of other examples. "The success of environment-friendly alternatives is being boosted by 'emotional consumption.' Consumers are becoming more environment-conscious, and are prepared to pay more if it helps to save the planet."

Globalisation making itself felt

According to Jennifer the increasing globalisation is also clearly visible in current trends. "The cityscape trend ties in nicely with globalisation. It uses different architectural influences and images of cities from around the world. For instance, wallpaper where the border forms silhouettes of different cityscapes around the world, or textile designs using architectural elements from different cultures. For manufacturers it's important to follow international trends even these will never sell in their own country. Purple will never be chosen for decoration in certain countries because of particular cultural associations. But the manufacturer nevertheless has to include it in his range because it shows that he knows what is going on in the market. That's very important if you are aiming at an international customer base."

Trendease International

Since April 2004, this online design and style publication has acted as a resource for the home fashion, design and lifestyle industries, providing cutting-edge, competitive information to readers in more than 135 countries and 3,450 cities worldwide. Trendease International has as its mission to help leading-edge people gain a definite competitive and strategic advantage through a combination of fast-breaking information, breakthrough thinking and applied creativity. "People are coming under pressure in their jobs and budgets have been cut, but still it takes time to find inspiration and to study the market. These professionals don't necessarily have that time any more. Trendease tries to fill that gap. Every first of the month we publish new research articles and hundreds of images. Being an online tool gives us the benefit of unlimited space. Currently we offer over 28,000 carefully selected images and over 1,000 reports on approximately 4,000 featured companies. Every image or topic is tagged with keywords, so visitors can quickly and easily find what they're looking for in our database."

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"A lot of fashion trends have extended into home."