

# Home Textiles Today

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## Don't Go Changing ... Yeah, Right

The changing faces and places on the retail landscape promise to make for some big and small differences in the way stores go about their buying business at market this week

BY WARREN SHOULBERG

**NEW YORK** — Change is the nature of business, but even by that standard, there have been some pretty big changes on the home textiles retail landscape.

As the industry gathers in New York this week for its twice-yearly market week, it does so with more than a few significant shifts on the retail side of the business. JCPenney, Bed Bath & Beyond, Macy's, Sears, TJX, Kohl's, Anna's: They have all had important developments in their businesses over the past 12 months that will impact the way they shop market.

For some, it's good news, but for some it's bad. Several retailers are undertaking or are about to undertake important changes in their merchandising strategies. Others are in expansion modes, while still others are contracting.

How all of it will play out remains to be seen, but certainly the approaches for these stores going forward will mean corresponding shifts for many vendors, with resulting tremors felt up and down the marketplace.

Here are some brief snapshots of the ever-changing retail landscape.

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ILLUSTRATION BY BRAD WALKER

From west to east: Alan Gladstone of Anna's Linens getting ready to open the 300th store; Ron Johnson of Penney's orchestrating a radically different merchandising strategy; Edward Lampert of Sears trying to restore profitability; Bed Bath & Beyond consolidating its merchandising and operations offices at its New Jersey headquarters; and Macy's working on a solution to the pending migration of its Martha Stewart brand to Penney.

## The Color of Textiles at Springs Global

**NEW YORK** — Color this week's textiles market at Springs Global USA ... well, colorful.

Just make sure you're using Pantone colors.

Springs Global is debuting its new Pantone Universe program of bed and bath products this week, a wide-ranging program

of solid color sheets, top-of-the-bed, towels and bath accessories all keyed off the well-known color direction and standardization firm that is stepping up its profile with consumers.

The Pantone program is designed to go into multiple

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Tangerine Tango is the Pantone color of the year and the star of the Springs line, here shown in sheeting and coordinated duvet cover with the signature Pantone color label.

## Mary Ella Gabler



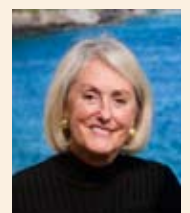
*Home Textiles Today's series Living — & Working — Legends, interviews with executives who have spent their careers in the home textiles industry and continue to manage the companies they own or help run, returns this week. Each interviewee is asked the same eight questions, reflecting both their experiences and their thoughts on the future ... their own and the industry's.*

BY WARREN SHOULBERG

For an industry whose products are overwhelmingly bought by women, the home textiles industry remains one largely run by men. The one exception is the higher-end bedding category, where several women do indeed run the show. And in this area, one woman has been doing it longer than most: Mary Ella Gabler.

Stockbroker turned designer turned entrepreneur, the 70-year-old Gabler has been the face of Dallas-based Peacock Alley since she created it in 1973. And even if her two sons now take care of most of the business, she is still very much the person identified with the brand.

For this latest in our series of Living — & Working — Legends interviews, *HTT* sat down with her at the recent New York International Gift Fair, where Peacock Alley's booth was dominated by a vintage motor boat.



**MARY ELLA GABLER**  
Peacock Alley

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# Nothing to Sneeze At

Hypoallergenic Brand Debuts at [bedbathandbeyond.com](http://bedbathandbeyond.com)

BY JENNIFER WHITE KARP

**NEW YORK** — Most allergy sufferers probably haven't heard of Robin Wilson. But that's likely to change since the March 1 debut of her hypoallergenic bedding line at [bedbathandbeyond.com](http://bedbathandbeyond.com).

The Manhattan-based interior designer, who has a line of eco-friendly cabinetry, is new to mass. Her design projects include the White House Fellows office, President Clinton's Harlem office and Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s private residence.

"It's our debutante year," Wilson said. "We're coming out to the mass consumer. We're doing this at the right time, with the right retail partner and right licensing partners."

Her line is on Bed Bath & Beyond's website only and will be placed in stores at a later date per regional manager requests, Wilson said.

Wilson claims to be only the second African-American after B. Smith to launch her own home textiles brand at mass retail. She said her grandmother worked in the kitchen, and so for Wilson, her rapid rise is gratifying. She added that she is equally proud to be a woman, seeing her products enter a market where the big names belong to top male designers like Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein.

One of Wilson's textiles licensing partners is Baltic Linen Company. Beverly Chapman, vp of product development and design, applauded the environmentally friendly attributes of the collection. "We believe in what she stands for, and we feel we are all obligated to do our part. We are very excited to partner with Robin on relaying that message to the consumer."

The initial products include pillows, comforters, fiber beds and mattress pads while fashion bedding will debut later this year.

Making her line affordable for mass was just one part of her mission. Wilson, who has asthma and allergies, said she suffered "wheezing and sneezing" attacks as a child. She feels strongly about bringing healthy products to the mass consumer, and her



**Robin Wilson fiber beds on [bedbathandbeyond.com](http://bedbathandbeyond.com) have sealed inner seams and diamond quilting with gusset side walls.**

launch is timed to coincide with the start of the spring allergy season. Her line features hypoallergenic materials, as well as energy-efficient fast drying and weaving technology that prevents allergen triggers like dust mites from penetrating the bedding.

"In this economy, with people's spending power limited, we want to offer the best quality for the best price and the best health," Wilson told *HTT*.

An additional eight collections inspired by nature will be shown at this month's market, including bath accessories, rugs, towels, robes and shower curtains, which are made of 100% cotton or nylon, which does not give off gases.

Named in June as an ambassador to the Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America ([www.aafa.org](http://www.aafa.org)), Wilson said she learned that more than 60 million Americans — or one in four people — live restricted lifestyles due to allergies and asthma. One in four children suffers from allergies, and one in six inner-city children suffer from asthma, she said.

"Allergies can literally bring you to your knees. You can't breathe, you can't think, you can't work. They create major work and life-quality issues," she said. Hypoallergenic bedding is particularly important, consid-

ering "we spend a third of our lives in bed," Wilson said.

Her pillows are woven with openings that are less than 10 microns to prevent exposure to dust mites and bed bugs. By way of comparison, Wilson said a flour sifter has openings that are about 45 microns. In addition, her bedding features seams that are sealed at the factory.

While these processes add manufacturing costs, Wilson said they are offset by the economies of scale afforded by placement at a mass retailer. Her textiles products are made mostly in China, although some are sourced from India, Turkey and Pakistan.

The pillows are 100% cotton with a 300 thread count and will be priced at \$39.99 to \$49.99 in standard and king sizes. Comforters are also 100% cotton with box quilting and will come in twin, queen and king sizes and run \$99.99 to \$149.99. Mattress pads are extra deep at 20 inches, and fit twin, full, queen, king and California king-size mattresses. They will be priced \$79.99 to \$119.99. Fiber beds will fit the same size beds and are priced \$99.99 to \$249.99.

Wilson said her fiber beds are similar to pillow tops and offer 4 to 6 inches of padding.

"For folks who can't afford a new mattress, this will extend



**Towels from Robin Wilson will debut at the market.**



**Robin Wilson pillows feature fabrics that prevent allergens from penetrating them.**

the life of a mattress," Wilson said.

She also said she approached the mattress pads from a designer's perspective, insisting on

making them oversized so they fit deep mattresses more attractively. "You are getting a little more than you typically would at mass," she said. **HTT**

## Sleep Studio Doubles Showroom Space at 295 Fifth

**NEW YORK** — Memory foam supplier Sleep Studio is relocating to a larger showroom here at 295 Fifth Ave. ahead of the New York Home Fashions Market, which kicks off March 5.

The new space, suite 1121, doubles the size of the company's current showroom to

accommodate its growing line of pillows, toppers and mattresses.

"We're expanding our assortment, adding exciting new innovations and growing our business, so the expansion just made sense," said Michael Rothbard, president. **HTT**