



## ***blockouts' potential unlocked***

Blockout fabric brands are broadening their ranges in anticipation of next year's BMAA expo and in response to consumer demand for more specialised product, writes Belinda Smart

### Uniline

Uniline business manager Lian Boyes says the company's offshore manufacturing investment to provide base cloth, coupled with its onshore R&D and value added coating facility in Yatala, Queensland, have combined to create strong growth potential in the blackout market.

**As a result,** Uniline's key 'Dawn' range of blackout fabrics is set for expansion over the next 12 months, with a view to showcasing a broader offering (as well as celebrating the Dawn brand's 21st anniversary in the business) at the BMAA expo next year.

"Significant expansions to the Dawn range include the addition of three metre wide fabric to cater to wider width windows, meaning the Dawn range will be offered in 2.1 metre, 2.4 metre and 3 metre widths across 10 colours by this September, with further colours for the 3 metre range also to come on stream going forward."

"We're also looking at specialty coatings at the moment, including metallic and a variety of different finishes to create certain 'looks'. This is very much in the experimental phase and is really a response to current trends, with consumers increasingly wanting something more than simply plain colours."

The Dawn Mini range, characterised by bold colours and designed to target the kids' market, would also be expanded to include new colours such as bright blue and orange, while the Dawn Studio printed collection would also undergo significant expansion going forward, he said.

"We can do anything in the Dawn Studio range really, including abstracts, vintage looks or florals."

"The last 12 months have really seen the print category take off and we're in a good position to be able to offer something more than a commodity product. This is particularly significant in the current climate; with the strong dollar there is a lot of generic, lesser quality product coming into the market and we're able to set ourselves apart from that."

Boyes confirmed the strategy for the Dawn Studio line was to offer a full catalogue of prints to the market in time for the BMAA event.

While the high dollar continued to present challenges to local fabric players, Uniline's quality offer and differentiated, niche lines were standing the company in good stead, Boyes said.

"We're also benefiting from the fact that manufacturers are beginning to question the value of holding large amounts of stock. They're starting to look to Uniline for their supply. For our contract coating we can do minimums of 500 lineal meters at a turnaround of three to four weeks, while for Dawn Studio you're talking about a two day turnaround."

Uniline's customers were taking a "back to basics" approach to blackout fabric, looking for the right product at the right quality and price and delivered at the right time, Boyes said.

"And they are undoubtedly taking their lead from consumers, who are increasingly educated and savvy about what they want. They're shopping around to ensure they get the best value for their spend in terms of quality, colour fastness and durability."

"There aren't too many brands in the market that are looking forward to their 21st birthday. The Dawn range has always been known for its quality and carries a 10 year warranty. That message of reliability is a key aspect of what we'll be promoting next year at BMAA."

## Wilson Fabrics

According to marketing manager Jennifer Donnelly, Wilson Fabrics block out fabrics continue to sell strongly due to the quality resulting from their Australian Made profile, along with the trademarked Pitchblack coating: a full blackout designed to surpass the Australian standard for blackout.

**“One of the** distinct advantages of being local and Australian Made is that we have tight controls over the quality of the coating and the ingredients used to ensure a high quality and consistent finished product. In addition, the internal textile-testing laboratory is independently accredited by the National Association Testing Authority (NATA) and internal Quality Assurance systems comply with AS/NZS ISO 9001:2000.”

Wilson blockouts feature superior foam coating with flocking, aiding the reduction of water condensation that can occur through the window, which assists in thermal insulation and is softer and more luxurious to handle than the traditional acrylic coating, she says.

“Within the 30 blackout ranges on offer, we have several ranges that are available in both drapery and blind fabrics. They have been designed as direct coordinates which provides consumers with a more comprehensive offering for coordinated window coverings within the home. For example, consumers can have the same texture or design and colour throughout the home in a mixture of drapery and blinds, creating a fully coordinated look.”

Coordinating ranges such as Broome Drapery and Blinds, Boston Blind and Avalon Drapery and the recent addition of Santiago Drapery and Austin Blinds provide a comprehensive mix of styles, designs and colours available in both blackout blinds and drapery. All these ranges are available in blackout drapery, blackout blind fabric and translucent blind fabric, allowing for flexibility in window covering designs and styles.

“Consumers can have the light filtering translucent blind coupled with the matching blackout drapery on the window, or opt for dual rollers and have both translucent and blackout blinds all in matching colours and design. This allows customers to mix these window dressing styles throughout the house using the same fabric.”

Donnelly says Wilson’s blackout blind fabrics traditionally sell more than the translucent blinds, “however, with the introduction of our Studio Collection, the translucent options are increasing in popularity. Consumers are opting for more matching dual roller blinds by using both translucent and blackout blinds on the one window. “

The new Studio blind collection, launched late last year, consists of five new blind ranges; Arizona, Lava, Spencer, Blizzard and Moma; catering specifically for the designer market, with directional designs and colours.

“These five ranges have been designed to meet consumer demand for style and colour; consisting of bold fashion colours such as a vibrant cherry red, vivid moss green and bold eggplant as well as the ever popular natural tones such as white, milk and taupe,” says Donnelly.

“The new ranges have been extremely well received as there was a gap in the market when it came to colour and design for jacquard blackout blind fabrics. Whenever we showcase our Studio designs we get such an overwhelmingly positive response towards the selection of colours and the actual designs. Our new Studio designs are ideal for both commercial and domestic applications and have been used for all blind styles such as Holland, Roman, Panel and even vertical blinds.”

Wilson Fabrics expects blackout fabrics will continue to be a steady performer in window furnishings due to ongoing demand in the Australian market, Donnelly says. “As more and more consumers become environmentally conscious and now with the increase in array of designs and colours to choose from, the demand for blackout and energy efficient window coverings will continue to grow.”



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## Shaw Australia

Shaw national marketing manager Sarah Harris says a key factor influencing blockout fabrics remains the emergence of demand for wider width fabrics, which has resulted in multiple widths.

**“To be cost** effective, blind manufacturers need the ability to offer the same fabric throughout an installation, particularly in domestic situations, where windows are different sizes. This is driving the trend towards fabrics being manufactured in multiple widths. The blind manufacturer is able to select the most appropriate width of fabric for the job, reducing wastage.”

## Flock coating

Whilst the majority of blockout fabrics available on the Australian market are direct or foam coated, flock fabric is seeing a reemergence, Harris says.

**“This fabric coating** is a difficult manufacturing process and therefore was traditionally steered away from by Asian manufacturers trying to ‘copy’ higher grade products. Discerning customers will see the difference in quality of good and bad flock coating processes, which determine the performance of the finished blind.”

“With Shaw’s long history of manufacturing flock backed fabrics in its New Zealand plant developments at Shaw in 2012 will see this experience being applied to wider width flocked fabrics.”

## Texture & multi tone yarn

Harris says the popularity of textured fabric continues on an upward trend.

**“Recent fabric** developments have seen the combination of pearlescent and matt yarn, presenting the retail market with an interesting alternative to the traditional natural look. With regard to colour, shades of grey are the ‘new’ neutrals, with blue black, muted green and bronze taking the place of traditional chocolate and beige.”

She adds that the key to a successful blockout offering lies in responding to demand for flexibility from designers and consumers.

“There is a need for blockout fabrics to have wide width options, in plain and textured, matt and pearlescent finishes. The fabric must also be durable when subjected to the Australian climate. The need for longevity is leading to longer warranties being offered. Overall the manufacturer is looking for value for money. These elements are already evident in Shaw’s current fabric range and are at the core of their development plan which will be unveiled over the next six months.”

## Bricos Group

Bricos Group national sales manager Mark Wood confirms the company offers an extensive range of block out fabrics, encompassing 48 colours across six ranges and covering a wide spectrum of price points, from quality entry level to highly decorative designer blind fabrics.

**Among the most** sought-after Bricos block-out fabrics is the perennial Sienna, which was released several years ago featuring a subtle texture and high performance and offered in 12 contemporary block-out colours in a 280cm width. Exclusive to Bricos is the Scarborough range, a beautifully textured residential interior blind fabric in a Jacquard weave. With rolls three metres wide, Scarborough allows a seamless flow of colour and texture from one room to the next. Scarborough is also an ideal choice for dual rolling for day/night window coverings.”

“Available in nine block-out colours the Sassari blind fabric is another in demand Bricos range. Italian Sassari yarn is woven into a blind fabric here in Australia using Jacquard looms to create a beautiful finish with pearlescent highlights in warm and earthy tones. It is also available in four translucent colours.”

Bricos showcases their extensive range of block-out fabrics in their Triple Pack Box Set which features three product categories that can be mixed and matched between ranges.



Kiribati Blind now available in blockout

**The Pacific Islands** inspired Kiribati blind fabric range features a textured glossy finish and rich colour range, targeting designers seeking a point of difference, as well as a practical and high performing window treatment.

Wood describes the recent introduction of six block-out colours as the next logical step given the range’s success.

“Kiribati is among our most popular blind fabrics. It is not only a very beautiful and tactile blind fabric but it’s a top performer as well. The addition of the block-out colours provides a complete solution for designers and consumers who are looking for something that is aesthetically out of the ordinary that also performs at a high level.”

“We have taken our time in the development of the Kiribati block-out coating process, which is central to hanging and rolling performance, but of greatest importance in the manufacturing process is the ability to deliver a weave that is absolutely square for the best possible window presentation.”

The six block-out colours complete the Kiribati range, which also includes translucents and privacy coated fabrics. Measuring 280cm wide, Kiribati is 100 per cent Polyester to ensure optimum stability and durability for the life of the window covering. The non-flocked backing is designed to further enhance smooth rolling, while making it easier to clean.

Meanwhile, available in 12 block-out colours with ivory backing and three block-out colours with grey backing, the Bricos Newport and Newport Project fabrics are strong performers, Wood says.

Among the Newport range’s key features is a new 280cm width that responds to a global demand for wider blind fabrics, Wood confirms.

“Newport enables fabricators to deliver join free blinds for larger windows and minimise waste when making smaller blinds, as two blinds can often be cut from one width. This all adds up to less time, less waste and ultimately a better blind.”

The Newport Project block-out is the latest addition to the range, providing blinds that comply with body corporate requirements for external uniformity while internally offering a neutral block-out partner for decorative dual rollers blinds.

Other benefits include stability, a non-flocked backing that handles well throughout the fabrication and installation process to hang and roll beautifully. Bricos representatives claim that “Roll-off simply won’t be a problem” with this fabric, Wood says.

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## Texstyle

Texstyle's Richard Macalister confirms recent additions to the Texstyle range have been designed to build on the success of the Serengetti jacquard woven blackout, introduced in 2006, while also offer something innovative to the market.

**“With the increasing** number of jacquards coming onto the market including numerous copies of Serengetti, Texstyle realised that to maintain its leadership in this high end market segment, it was important to develop a fabric that was dramatically different to what was currently available.”

In collaboration with local manufacturer; Bekaert Textiles, Texstyle is about to introduce Positano, which it describes as “a highly complex fabric with a beautiful silk-look combination of matte and shine yarns.”

“This jacquard collection is highly engineered to sustain against harsh Australian solar conditions and will maintain its integrity in quality, colour and style.”

Meanwhile the Barbados collection is a coastal inspired blackout jacquard in a fresh and crisp colour palette, available at 2800mm wide and priced to create volume sales. “Barbados evokes images of swaying palms, flawless sandy beaches, beautiful coral reefs and a relaxed lifestyle.”

Finally the soon to be released Metrotech range is designed to meet demand for a flame retardant blackout that meets high standards of performance as well as being eco-friendly.

According to Macalister, “Metrotech not only has outstanding flame retardancy and extremely low volatile organic compound emission rate, it is also a very versatile fabric; available ex-stock in 2800mm width. Texstyle also holds undyed fabric in 2100mm and 3300mm wide ready for processing. In addition, Texstyle offers a custom colour service, where we will match any colour on both the face of the fabric as well as colour coating on the back, for which minimum order quantities at 500 metres apply.”

“Filling a gap in the commercial market for an eco-friendly, high performing fabric with custom made colour options that will meet any project’s needs, Metrotech was recently installed in the new 500 room Grande Centre Point Hotel in Bangkok and has been specified in the soon to be opened Oriental Mandarin Hotel in Guangzhou.”



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mermet

## Mermet

Mermet has introduced enhancements to its blackout fabric ranges across four lines: Lintex blackout, Undara blackout, Kaschgar woven dim-out and Saba Screen.

While Saba is a screen fabric not blackout, the new Saba screen colour palette is designed to match with any colours in the new blackout fabric ranges, confirms product manager

Quynhanh Ngo.

**“Lintex blackout is** available in 10 fashionable colours which complement the existing Lintex transparent fabric range,” says Ngo. “This additional Lintex blackout fabric allows seamless continuation of colours between rooms and comes in 2.9m wide width. Backed with a tonal acrylic foam coating, Lintex blackout fabric eliminates the concern of roller backing not matching the colour of the face fabric.”

Undara blackout is another textured tone-on-tone blackout fabric range from Mermet Australia. “Undara is 100 per cent polyester and it is among our most versatile blind fabrics. It is a durable fabric, extremely stable and is available in 2.8m wide width in nine natural colours, including refresh colour-ways such as Crisp White, Ivory, Martini, Warm Torte, Biscuit, Latte and Contemporary Grey, Dark Grey and Black.”

Meanwhile Kaschgar is a unique fabric with a layer of black colour yarn woven between the two layers of silk-look yarn matching colour front and back. “This woven dim-out technique allows natural light to flow through the blind to illuminate the space. Kaschgar offers a luxurious silk look, 2.95m wide width and it is 100 per cent polyester woven fabric with FR. This fabric range consists of eight colours: Alabaster, Cappuccino, Biscotti, Taupe, Clove, Pitaya, Vine and Caviar.”

Mermet has also updated its Classic Sunscreen with the launch of a new fibreglass PVC coated Saba Screen fabric, available in 11 designer colours, twill weave creates modern texture for those who looks for a point of difference in screen fabric, and offering an average openness factor of three per cent, 2.5m wide width and FR capability.

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Australia’s favourite internal blind fabric since 1992, The Dawn Fabric Collection by Uniline is the choice of interior designers, decorators and industry insiders – and it’s easy to see why. Available in a wide range of fashion-forward shades, Dawn block-out fabrics resist fading, are dust resistant and wipe clean with ease. As practical as they are stylish, Dawn blinds also deliver on privacy, insulation, and smart good looks. There is a Dawn fabric for every space, taste, and purpose.

Decorating the children’s rooms? Check out fun shades like Fairy Dust, Fire Engine, Apple Fizz, Periwinkle and Bubble Gum in the Dawn Mini range, guaranteed to fire little ones’ imaginations.

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