

jhane barnes exclusive interview

Fall sportswear collection showcases the designer's ability to appreciate the unexpected

Jhane Barnes had the wisdom to let chance have its way in the creation of fabrics for her fall 2005 sportswear collection. Serendipity resulted in an array of rich colors, bold patterns, playful textures, and elegant detailing, all hallmarks of her collections.

Incorporating the results of chance might not seem like a logical choice for a designer more often associated with carefully structured and mathematically inspired fabrics. After all, Barnes is a stickler for the details. Where other designers buy their fabrics from a mill, she is one of the few menswear designers who controls everything from the weave structure to the yarn and the garment's silhouette or cut. It is one reason you won't find anything like the fabrics in her suits, shirts, pants, sweaters, socks, and neckties anywhere else.

"I design each piece right down to the fabric. I dye the colors, create my own warps and wefts, and develop my weave structures with the help of custom-made computer software,"

says Barnes. "This sets my collections apart and makes everything truly original. But it also means I need to be flexible when the finished fabrics don't turn out like the samples."

Three fabrics in the fall 2005 collection are the direct result of variations that were not part of Barnes' original designs. Known to weavers as happy accidents, such errors can be real disasters for high-volume commercial weavers. But the fabrics used in *Flower Power*, *Graffiti*, and *Serpent* are actually better than what Barnes envisioned.

"This year's fabrics could all be described as over-constructed," says Barnes. "There are too many threads for a standard weave structure, which causes the yarns to wiggle beautifully, but could make for heavy or stiff fabrics."

In *Flower Power*, the color-saturated stripes are more vibrant because of changes in density between areas of single and double weave. (See Glossary for definitions of weaving terms.) Because the mill used 120 threads per inch instead of the standard 70-80 threads per inch, the double weave became stressed, yielding the delightful unplanned wiggle.

To compensate for the extra bulk, the mill in Japan suggested using a compact cotton, where the finishing process has removed some hairiness from the yarn, leaving it compact or thin. By using this yarn instead of regular cotton, the finished fabric feels more comfortable despite the thicker than normal weave.

Graffiti is a variant of a classic Jhane Barnes double weave, a weave structure she's featured in her collections for twenty years. Double weaves allow the designer to create different designs and reverse colors inside and outside the garment. Barnes wove this year's design sample using a thin, drapery cotton yarn known as a 50-weight single-ply, but the mill samples came back bolder than expected because Katsu, her husband and business partner, ordered an 80-weight 2-ply yarn by mistake.

"The colors were vivid and clear, and the design looked great though the fabric is slightly heavier than expected," says Barnes. "The extra weight isn't a problem for fall garments. Basically, I liked the results of the 80/2 cotton better than my original design, but I wouldn't have thought to try it."



Serpent is another example of Barnes letting serendipity into the design process with its mix of fibers, complexity of design and the digital printing involved. This cotton fabric is woven with an extra (supplemental) polyester yarn across the cross-wise (weft) surface. In this case, the weft stripes run from shoulder to hem because the garment is cut on the sideways grain of the fabric.

Serpent incorporates heat-transfer digital print designs inspired by Indian henna body painting and biker tattoos. The 100-percent cotton ground warp and

weft doesn't take the print in dark colors, so the printing shows up only on the polyester supplemental weft. *Psychedelic* uses a similar technique, but the supplemental threads are chenille.

"The fabrics in this year's collection are a little heavier than usual, but thanks to things like compact cotton, they are still quite soft—almost cuddly," she says. "For example, the flocking—that's rayon basically glued in patterns on the fabric, which you will see used in some blazers and shirts—feels good without making the fabric significantly stiffer."

After thirty years in the business, Barnes takes great delight in pioneering new techniques—as she did when she adapted a digital printing process developed for automotive fabrics to ready-to-wear—and offering unusual fabrics, enjoying the happy accidents that sometimes result from her experiments.

glossary

chenille: A fuzzy yarn whose pile resembles a caterpillar.

double weave: A combination of two cloths woven on the loom together, where one fabric forms the face of the goods while the other forms the back. Essentially, two warps and wefts are woven simultaneously.

ply: Two or more yarns that have been twisted together.

single weave: Standard fabric, with a single warp and weft. See double weave for comparison.

supplemental warp or weft: Addition of a secondary yarn in warp or weft that is left to float above the ground warp and weft during the weaving process.

warp: The yarns that run vertically or lengthwise in woven goods. Sometimes called the woof.

weft: The crosswise or filling pick yarns in a woven cloth.

Source: A Dictionary of Textile Terms, by Dan River, Inc.