

## FEATURE

# SMALL WONDERS

**Despite shrinking orders, the trims market is under pressure to deliver verifiably sustainable product that wows—at increasingly competitive prices**

BY  
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**D**enim garment details in the trims and hardware category, including buttons, rivets, zippers and patches, are small, yet important components of creating garments with appeal—and they play a key role in helping the industry advance its sustainability and circularity agendas. As the denim industry moves into 2024, trim makers are steadfastly fighting headwinds to create ecologically sound processes, adhere to sustainability certifications and reduce costs. It's a challenge, for sure, but one they're meeting head on.

“For 2024, the trend is to try to match the request of price decrease by a little bit but keep improving the sustainability part,” said Thibault Greuzat, CEO at Meaux, France-based Dorlet, which his great grandfather started more than 90 years ago. “If you want to improve the sustainability, you need to improve the investments and change some rules and ways of making the product. This is in opposition with the request of the brand to lower the price.”

While sustainability and cost cutting top the agenda, there is also the trend toward wanting to know the story behind the product. Trim companies are answering the call for transparency by sharing the origin and inspiration surrounding trim and hardware goods with customers.

“The main focus now is giving a clear picture of what is the product and behind the scenes as well,” according to Matteo Vivolo, chief sales officer at Vivolo in Bologna, Italy, who noted the importance of this approach in the luxury market, which he expects to reach 1.3 euro trillion—approximately \$1.5 trillion—in just over a year. “Offering a journey through the product and giving more than just product and price is the focus for sure.”

### **Spearheading Sustainability**

New sustainability regulations, including the European Union's Eco-Design



**Dorlet's Diabolo screw button and rivet**

for Sustainable Products Regulation [ESPR] and the legislation's Digital Product Passports [DPPs], which aim to yield a more transparent supply chain, are expected to go into force within the next few years. And trims manufacturers are determined to be prepared, with many well on their way due to their adoption of their own ecological and ethics guidelines.

At YKK Türkiye, Suat Odabasi, sustainability coordinator for the Tokyo-headquartered fastening products manufacturer, noted the company is ready for upcoming regulations, pointing to certifications such as ISO, Oeko-Tex, RCS and GOTS for the materials used in its organic cotton zippers as an example. Additionally, Odabasi revealed YKK goes above and beyond the certification requirements.

“We follow our headquarters' guidance such as [reducing our] CO2 footprint, and other environmental impact calculations but we also follow local issues such as using the electricity and water from the proper renewable energy

sources and also because we have [our company's] regulations for our raw materials supply, we are able to supply materials locally," Odabasi noted.

Similarly leather products manufacturer Vivolo works to lessen its impact throughout the production process, which starts with adhering to CQY, GRS, FSC and Oeko-Tex certifications. The company's headquarters relies on many sustainable features that support renewable energy and water independence, which allows Vivolo to be less reliant on municipal sources.

"It is a 10,000-square-meter building and we have all of our energy from solar panels," said Vivolo, whose parents launched the company that bears the family name in 1977. "We have our water source, all the finishes are sustainable in terms of water based and color of the materials. This is just one of the sustainability aspects."

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To avoid greenwashing and inauthenticity, Odabasi said YKK holds its suppliers to an equally high standard. The company digs deep into its raw materials suppliers, such as the Sri Lanka-based companies that provide the goods that will be recycled to manufacture the zipper-maker's Natulon Plus products.

"Every single raw material supplier has to be tested and also certified in terms of sustainable products. We don't use any uncertified sustainable raw materials for our sustainable products," said Odabasi. "Sometimes it's a minus because it's not that easy to find really certified raw materials suppliers. So, no matter what is their claim, we always have to double check at the end."

### Managing Smaller Quantities

While trims manufacturers are committed to leveling up their environmental governance, doing so requires investment, which is challenging in a time when demand is low. These companies are having to become increasingly resourceful as order quantities shrink and expectations from their customers increase, according to Nishi Vora, director of sales and business development with Mumbai, India-headquartered Fashion Accessories India [RCBC].

"Because they're trying to bring down fabric and garment-washing cost, all of that money is going into making garments look appealing via trims," Vora said, adding brands want fewer pieces of the colorful designs her business is known for. "Where brands would ask us for 10,000 pieces, 20,000, or 30,000 pieces, now 5,000 is the norm."

Not only are shrinking order sizes eating into profits, they're also having a negative impact on the planet as well. At first glance, smaller quantities seem to speak to the "reduce" mandate inherent in climate action but in this case it's having the opposite effect, according to Vora.

"We're constantly having to shut down machines and change molds. Something that would be sustainable or would bring environmental impact down is when you have larger quantities running on your machines. [Reducing the number of pieces] creates a lot of loss of energy and electricity," explained Vora. "For instance, with electroplating, you have these large



drums. You can't make them smaller to accommodate a smaller quantity."

### Advancing Circularity

One approach to balancing ecological interests and offering lower costs is through the development of trims, accessories and hardware that promote a circular economy. By creating trims, accessories and hardware that can be removed intact—and allow most of the original garment to be upcycled—manufacturers can remain active players in a business that is transforming.

When considering his company's role in creating a circular denim ecosystem, Greuzat happily discusses Dorlet's Diabolo, an easily removable, interchangeable button intended for reuse in the denim business.

"It is the same as a cufflink on a shirt. You can use one Diabolo for one, two, three, or ten pairs of jeans," Greuzat said.

To remain relevant Greuzat encourages his peers to invest in the research and development of making fewer items but approaching the process with an open mind. His perspective is remaining open to possibilities and working together with clients to build innovative products are the keys to longevity.

"Let's sit together and make the product even if it was not made before," Greuzat explained. "Even if it's completely new. Even if three, four or five suppliers already told you it's impossible—let's do it. This is one of the characteristics of our DNA. We are innovative." 🙌



credit: Fashion Accessories India (here and top)