

What You Should Know About Linen Fabrics:



Linen, produced from flax, is the oldest textile material in the world and is known for its strength and sophistication. As with all natural fibers, environmental variables with weather and soil will result in variations. Because of its absorbency it is easy to dye and print, but lack of elasticity can cause wrinkles. It is to be expected that a quality linen fabric will contain some variances which add to its beauty and charm.

It is these very characteristics that are commonly misconstrued as flaws or deficiencies. More often than not, it is a lack of knowledge about vast-fiber product that causes designers and specifiers to run into problems. For example, linen fabrics are often replete with "slubs," which are extreme manifestations of swollen fibers. Although inherent to the yarn, they are frequently perceived as misweaves. It is essential that a client be informed of their prevalence during the specification process — not after the fabric has been installed.

Secondly, flax is subject to several processes from harvesting to finishing; prevailing conditions (including Mother Nature) will dictate quality and appearance. It is important to understand that every lot will vary; additionally, dyed linen should be treated with the same degree of circumspection. Always insist upon a cutting from the reserved piece to match with the original sample.

Spots and stains are easier to remove from linen than from other natural fibers and linen is also more resistant to bacterial action and mildew. The general rule is to pre-treat all stains immediately in preparation for the dry cleaner. Never use chlorine bleach because it will weaken the fiber.

Linen, like other natural fibers such as cotton, is hydro-sensitive and will respond to environmental fluctuations in temperature and humidity. Many different factors contribute to the hydro-sensitivity of linen, including the soil quality and irrigation conditions during the life of the plant; linen is comprised of living fiber. Changes in the length of draperies may be evident within the first few days of an installation as the fabric becomes acclimated to its new environment. One might observe noticeable shrinking of draperies during the cold, dry months of winter, and a subsequent lengthening in the warm humidity of summer. The same linen installed in two separate homes may perform in a completely different manner due to humidity, temperature and light exposure differences between the two environments, regardless of whether the linen originated from the same lot or even the same piece. It is better to discuss these issues with a client before the fabric hits the workroom.