

Hatton-Jones Co supplies major hotels as well as retail customers with fine, hypoallergenic and fair trade beddings made from luxurious organic fabrics

The comfort factor

Hotels have various options when choosing bed linens, with longevity and environmental impact high on the list of priorities, writes *Jane Ram*

Looks, luxury, laundering and long life are the major considerations when picking bed linens. Looks speak for themselves as nothing beats the eye-appeal of crisp looking pillowcases, immaculate sheets and duvet covers. Luxury, however, is more subjective. Laundering seems to depend on how green the hotel's management is, while long life has obvious financial implications.

Guests are well aware of quality, says Norman Brown, director, Beaumont & Brown, a major supplier of bed linens to hotels worldwide. "Most guests spend most of their time in the room sleeping: 100% cotton bed linen has been the expectation of most five-star hotels for a long time now. Soft-combed cotton in 300 thread count is the industry standard for our five-star hotel clients."

Many leading hotel groups have their own iconic bed. However, mattresses, pillow menus and other details tend to be given more prominence than the quality of the linens, which on close scrutiny are sometimes cotton-polyester mix in the ratio 80:20, even 50:50 in some cases. According to Brown, mixed fabric is not significantly cheaper than 100% cotton, "but it does tend to launder easier, with slightly reduced drying time."

Tarynn Hatton-Jones, managing director of Hatton-Jones Co, a company that supplies major hotels as well as retail customers with, hypoallergenic and fair trade beddings made from organic fabrics, questions whether natural fabrics are always the best way to go. It's not just the up-front costs, she points out – a small percentage of polyester can strengthen the material as well as make the washing and drying process easier.

"We urge clients to consider the overall sustainability factor. If a large hotel is using all organic fabrics, this will impact their water and electricity usage because of the additional time it takes to launder bedding."



Marika offers linens hand-embroidered in Vietnam



Beaumont & Brown: offering soft-combed cotton with a 300 thread count as standard to its five-star hotel clients

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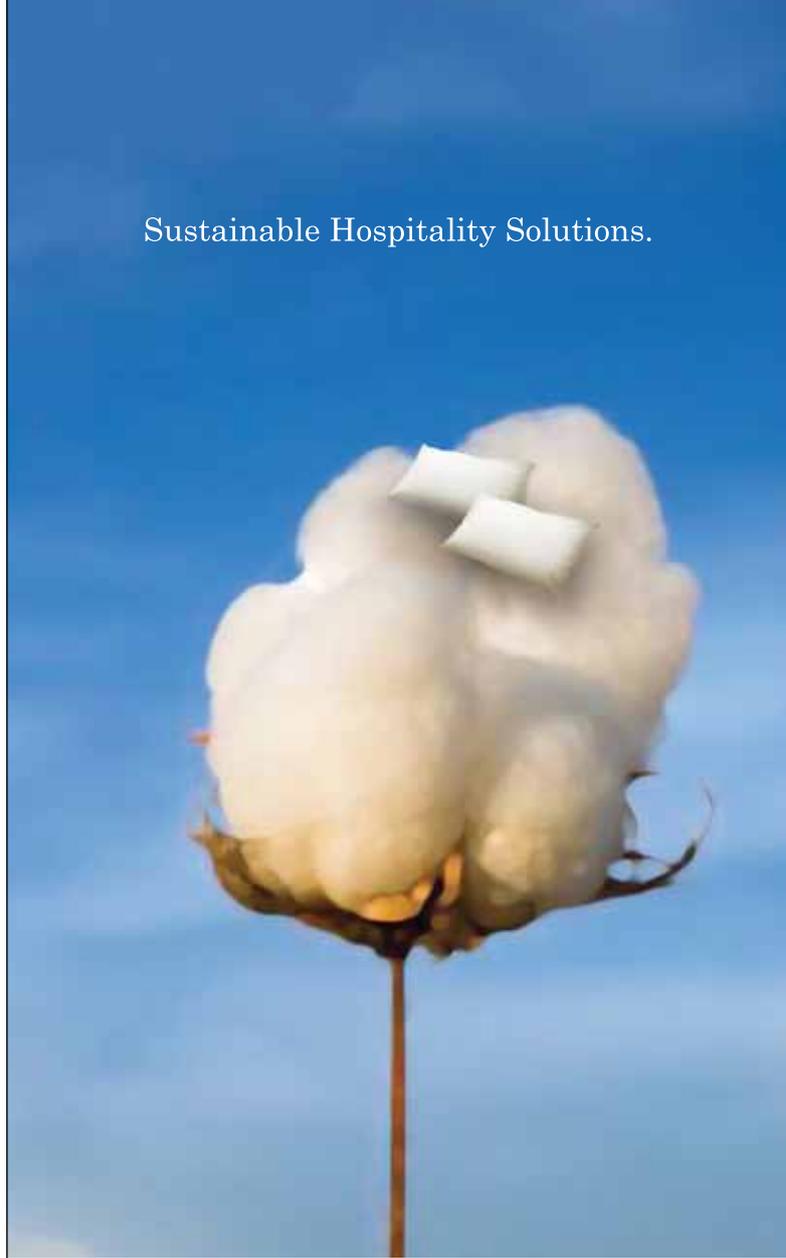
Tarynn Hatton-Jones, Hatton-Jones Co

Hermans Lee, executive housekeeper of Hong Kong's Hotel Icon, says that although synthetic bed linens are more durable, after a few washes they can discolour. Meanwhile, Patrick Lau, director of housekeeping at Kowloon Shangri-La, says that synthetic materials attract more static electricity. This is a serious issue in northern China, where many of the Shangri-La group's properties are located, hence the brand specification of 100% cotton bed linens to ensure guest comfort.

Natural may be best, but Brown maintains that organic cotton is not more comfortable than normal cotton. "Most hotels wouldn't use organic cotton, as true organic cotton is significantly more expensive than normal cotton and it's also difficult to trust a lot of organic cotton suppliers to provide true organic cotton. As a supplier of luxury bed linens we would always try to steer our customers away from organic cotton due to the price."

Indra Budman, newly appointed CEO of Hansar Hotels Group (which operates two luxury boutique properties in Thailand, shortly

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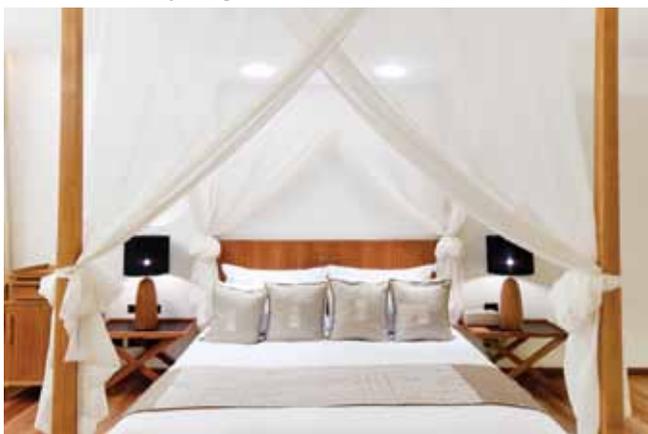


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Hansar Koh Samui super king bed



Pic: Hansar Hotels

to be joined by a third), has had two decades of experience in the luxury hospitality sector in his native Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia. He is a passionate advocate of organic food, even setting up vegetable and herb plots to supply Hansar Koh Samui, but is sceptical about claims that organic cotton bedding is the right choice, especially in view of the approximately 50% higher cost.

“Hansar hotels are very particular about our linens, especially bed sheets, it took lots of energy, money and surveys to determine our current set. In terms of production and durability, cotton is still much less expensive if we compare it to other materials such as silk.”

Most hotels opt for white bed linen as it does not clash with colour schemes and it is easy to launder without risk of colour fading if strong chemicals are used, says Brown.

“White gives a clean perception to guests. And it’s easier to launder as we can bleach it,” says Lau.

Style is all-important at The Mira Hong Kong. Ricky Chan, director of housekeeping, says guest perception of the bedding helps to identify the hotel level. “The majority of hotels prefer white, but some may use white on regular floors and other colours such as light grey or beige for executive floors to make them stand out. Quality and durability is our prime concern. Currently at The Mira we use

all natural 100% Pakistan cotton linens with thread count of 400 per square inch.”

The trend worldwide is good quality no-frills bed linen, says Roger Mair, general manager and VP operations, Swiss International Hotel Xiamen. “The ultimate luxury in bed linen would be 400 thread count pure Egyptian cotton, which has shorter lifespan than a mixed fabric with synthetic fibre. In one of my last hotels I opened for Accor, we used the best available brand for the bed base and mattress, complemented with 400 thread count linen, it was all worth it as it made THAT perfect bed for the best sleep. It earned us a Best Bedroom Award for 2010 in China. Other five-star hotels suffice with 220–300 thread count linen, which is certainly already a respectable quality. Feel it and try it out before deciding.”

When an extra touch of luxury is required, there are no limits on what can be done, says Monika Mauriello, director at Marika Linen, based in Hong Kong. “We can do sophisticated to simple. We sell beautifully embroidered designs in pure linen, all hand-embroidered in Vietnam, but it’s a dying trade. Hotels order huge quantities in fine fabrics but classical design: they rarely order anything special except occasionally for suites.

“We order all our materials in China where they weave according to our requirements. We use all natural materials, no synthetic fibres – I can’t sell things that I don’t like! Hotels are bombarded with special offers, it’s very competitive. But we offer special service and we are known for keeping to our deadlines. We supply some of Hong Kong’s top hotels with high quality classical, soft and luxurious percale. Sometimes they request broad or narrow stripes, but that’s as far as they venture. I’m trying to encourage them to move into pure linen, but I’m still working on it.”

Two decades ago, Mauriello found traditional embroiderers in Vietnam and taught workers how to stitch a hem and the colours that should be used for flowers. “Occasionally hotels feel they want to do something special: the InterContinental wanted pure linen sheets, pillowcases and duvet covers for all their suites. Unfortunately the required size was wider than standard and it would have taken six months to source the material, but they couldn’t wait.” **AHCT**