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Beautifully Sustainable Design

Mercato Place Launches New, Sustainably Curated Textile Sampling Platform

A new materials sampling solution has come to the A&D industry. Mercato Place is an online resource and service for specifiers to explore materials and trends, search easy-to-use resource libraries and order free textile samples curated from leading textile manufacturers and distributors from around the world.



See p. 48 for an interview with Mercato Place's Ray Sayers.

The elegant and highly curated platform was created to put the focus on people, relationships and good design. The catalog of industry leading partner brands includes: DesignTex, Mayer Fabrics, Arc-Com, Momentum, Kravet Contract, Valley Forge Fabrics, Fil Doux, Camira, Luna, HBF Textiles, Fabric Innovations and more.

"We're thrilled to unveil Mercato Place—which is designed to be the simplest, most environmentally friendly solution for discovering current, high-quality samples from leading textile brands. Our platform is not just a place to work, it's a community. Here, our partner brands can express their unique personalities with reciprocal links and content. Users will find Mercato Place to be different from existing sampling sources. Designers won't get lost in a clutter of products; instead, they'll be in a curated space created especially for them," Mercato Place Founder and President Ray Sayers said.

Mercato Place was developed for those who make or distribute textiles and those who specify textiles. Users include interior designers, architects, specifiers, procurers, purchasing managers and resource librarians who serve the contract/commercial office, hospitality, healthcare, retail, education, government, sports/entertainment and residential design markets.

The platform is free for interior designers or those looking to specify materials. Upon selection, ordering samples is simple and offers users more choices when it comes to delivery in an effort to reduce environmental impact. For brand partners—manufacturers and distributors of textiles—the cost to be part of Mercato Place is estimated to be 30 to 40% less than other platforms.

"For our partners, our goal is a sampling solution that amplifies their brand and better connects them to designers while costing less. The estimated savings will enable them to invest more into their own new product development," Mercato Place Executive Vice President Alison Goldman said.

Goldman added, "Mercato Place is not a clearinghouse for products from multitudes of manufacturers. While a lot of choices can be great, they also collectively can create a confusing and time-consuming user experience. We created Mercato Place to simplify the user experience."

Environmental stewardship has been embedded into the brand ethos from the very beginning. Mercato Place has been thoughtful about taking steps to reduce their carbon footprint. Overnight shipping is exponentially more damaging to the environment, so more eco-friendly options are also on offer if samples are not needed immediately. The company's sample takeback program includes a prepaid shipping label, making returns simple and free for the customer. Once returned, samples are processed and sorted; those that are in good condition will return to the sample library while others will be recycled

responsibly.

Initially, samples for acoustic materials, coated fabrics, drapery, leather, outdoor materials, panel fabrics, performance fabrics, privacy curtains, sheers, upholstery, velvet and wall coverings will be available on Mercato Place. The company is exploring adding additional materials, including carpet samples. As partner brands launch new materials, Mercato Place will rapidly make the associated samples available on the platform.

Thoroughbred Fulfillment, headquartered in Zeeland, Michigan, created Mercato Place. Founded in 1995, Thoroughbred Fulfillment is a high-performance provider of a broad range of marketing fulfillment services to companies throughout North America and the world. Sayers is president of Thoroughbred Fulfillment, a role he's held since 2004. Mercato Place's fulfillment location is at Thoroughbred's headquarters and 150,000-square-foot warehouse/distribution facility in southwest Michigan, a major hub of the global contract furniture industry.

Mercato Place is honored to be a partner of One Tree Planted, a non-profit organization focused on global reforestation. The company has joined the Million Tree Challenge. With each new registration to the Mercato Place website, they will plant a tree and have committed to planting a minimum of 10,000 trees in the U.S. national forests in 2022. One Tree Planted's efforts contribute to the conservation of wildlife, combatting climate change, restoring wild-fire sites and benefitting local communities.

For more information or to join, visit www.mercatoplace.com.

Smarter Sampling for a More Sustainable Future

Material sampling waste is a big problem, but Mercato Place's Ray Sayers offers a few simple steps that can make samples more sustainable.

One of the unintended consequences of the pandemic lockdowns and work-from-home paradigm shift is the fact that designers and specifiers were suddenly faced with ordering and the challenge of storing material samples in their homes, often piling them up in their garages, hallways or bedrooms. Rather than housing samples in a firm's centralized design library for all to share, designers today are ordering them directly to their doorsteps, in effect multiplying the number of samples ordered exponentially.

Even prior to the pandemic, the amount of material sampling waste was an enormous problem with a significant carbon footprint. Ordering samples from multiple manufacturers directly amounted to thousands of shipments to firms every year. And while online sampling programs have made it easier to bundle samples from more than one manufacturer into a single box, not every specifier is ordering in bulk, and overnight shipping is a questionable practice, at best.

Is there a more sustainable way to approach material sampling? Will digital samples ever replace physical? Are there things designers can do to minimize their impact on the environment with their sampling practices?

i+s recently sat down with Ray Sayers, founder and president of Mercato Place—a new online sampling solution for the A&D community that boasts a highly curated platform with a paperless fulfillment center, shipping and packaging materials made of recycled materials and eco-friendly shipping options, as well as a return and recycling program available for all of its material samples—to answer these questions and more.

i+s: What role does material sampling play in the sustainability conversation for the interior design industry?



Ray Sayers: The thing with sampling is that it's never going away. Designers need to see and touch and feel these products, and so they have to have an ability to get their hands on these things in order

to present to their customers, ultimately. At the end of the day, it's not the sample itself, but then how they get the sample, the urgency of the sample—"I have my meeting tomorrow. I need it tomorrow"—there's all these things that go into it.

And so it's this big monster of, how do we source it? How do we make the samples? How do we get the samples to the designer? How do we get the samples back once they're used? It's just this whole big thing that, as sampling has gotten more sophisticated, and now there is the ability to order samples essentially in real time and get things overnight. It's a different deal than in the past. It would be a library in a showroom that the designer would have something messengered to them locally, and they'd get it in a day or in three days. And so, as everything is just ramped up, there's more of an impact from an environment and sustainability side.

i+s: How big of an issue is waste as far as material samples are concerned?

RS: The volume of it is significant. Hopefully, designers will be able to keep these things for future projects and continue to reuse [them]. You can talk about sampling, but it's really just an overall question of, how are we going to live our lives in a sustainable way? Sampling is one portion of it, but how are we going to order other things? Does everything have to be Amazon Prime? Can we ship things ground? Can we do things to make some smarter decisions? Sampling is no different from that.

i+s: Material samples are an important part of the design process, but what's preventing designers from relying on digital samples?

RS: There's a lot of manufacturers and textile suppliers that have tried to provide more of a digital option and really go almost exclusively digital. And every time they tried, there's pushback. And part of the reason is a sustainability story, but also there's a cost story from the manufacturer and distributor side. If you ask any of them, I would say that other than people, other than labor, sampling is their



second largest operational cost to run the business. It is a hugely significant dollar amount that they spend to support their business. A lot of times it's their first and maybe only impression that they have with the designer or with the client, so they have to be able to make a statement.

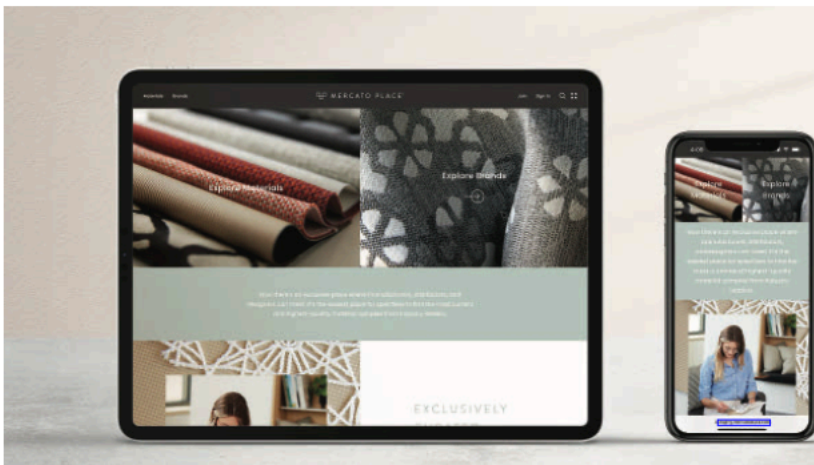
They have tried to go digital, but at the end of the day, again, it's a very tactile experience. And one of the reasons I think we'll always be in business forever is that designers need to see and touch [the products]. It might be, how does a drapery fabric drape properly and is the finish on it going to make a difference with the color? And what is the pile on a velvet and mohair like? As good as digital samples are, it's just not the same. Ultimately, they're specifying product that could be, literally, hundreds of thousands of dollars of product. But if it doesn't really work, then it's a bigger issue of waste than just a sample.

i+s: What practical steps can interior designers take to help reduce the environmental footprint of their samples?

RS: Whether it's sampling or just overall in how they lead their lives, it's the same thing when I go to order something on Amazon. It is hard to do,

but you can plan ahead. Hopefully, you can order for multiple projects at the same time. You can order in essentially bulk, so more things come at once. Or you can make choices as far as shipment, so you can choose to get things ground vs. next day. Then, you can treat these samples as if they're borrowed and not owned. So, assume they're going to go back or assume you're going to keep them for another job at a later time. Maybe don't cut a piece out of it. Don't write on the tag, don't rip off the tag and put it up on a board. If you treat them like gold and they're able to be reused and repurposed, and you can extend the life of that sample, it just aids in the whole sustainability story.

So, I think as far as what they can do is, we want to make sure to get these things back, but I think in a smart way. You could argue that just taking a single memo and sending it back in an envelope truly isn't sustainable, when you look at what the carbon footprint is to send one memo back on a truck and then a plane and then on a truck. Bundle these things up, send things back in significant quantities so that it truly makes sense from the sustainability side. ■



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