

Smooth operators

Uncork the wine, unplug the iron and relax while these new fabrics fight off wrinkles and stains

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We may soon be listening to music emitted by the fabric of our clothing or watching our shirts change color as we heat up. But the hottest thing in fabric for the moment is only a little less remarkable, able to fight off dirt and wrinkles like something out of Superman's closet.

That's the view from Eva Snopek, fashion design instructor at the Illinois Institute of Art in Chicago. "There is a lot of new technology out there," she said, citing nanotechnology as the super-star of the day. And Q's own testing backed her up.

Something of a buzzword across many disciplines, nanotechnology in this case refers to a process of treating fabric on a molecular level.

"Because the treatment is built into the fabric on a nano, or submicron, scale during the textile-manufacturing process, the performance features are inherent to the nature of the fabric for the life of the final product," said Renee DeLack Hultin, president of Nano-Tex, a Greensboro, N.C., company whose clients include Dockers, Eddie Bauer, Gap, Nike, Old Navy, Perry Ellis and Tommy Hilfiger.

"We are finding those customers are utilizing our treatments in men's garments far more prevalently than in women's," DeLack Hultin said, suggesting that practicality-minded guys have been driving the category. "Although we are starting to find an upswing in women's garments and even more of an upswing in children's clothes."

Much of the nanotech clothing involves cotton or cotton blends combined with the force field of stain and wrinkle resistance, so performance comes with old-fashioned comfort.

And we can expect even more strides in cotton wrinkle-resistance within coming months, said Bill Rearick, director of textile chemistry research for Cotton Inc., an industry-supported company in Cary, N.C. Too, Rearick said, "the price premium for wrinkle resistance was about \$4 years ago. Now it's about \$1."

So even as the materials improve, the prices stand to fall too.

Michelle Clark, a trend manager for Lee Jeans in Merriam, Kan., seconded that. "We've seen the prices on these innovative finishes get much lower over time. . . . Like all technological advances, the price generally starts out high and then decreases once the market becomes more saturated."

And though fabrics will be lurching into even more fascinating directions, perhaps eliminating the need for deodorant or delivering herbal remedies to the wearer, according to Rearick, plain old low maintenance remains the chief desire of American consumers.

So, fellas, cheers! And feel free to spill that wine all over yourself.

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Nice shirt; now, might this trick work on skin?

Lands' End marketeers tout their new No Iron Pinpoint Oxford as something like God's gift to the male wardrobe. Having little faith, we baptized the test shirt, made with half standard material and half the No Iron version, then prepared to warm up the iron. But miracle of miracles, those marketing people are pretty close to right.

We had washed it in the normal cycle, as suggested, then tumbled dry on low heat as directed. But not cutting any slack, we tossed a bunch of underwear into the dryer with it to simulate real guy conditions. The shirt emerged wrinkle-free on one side, with a sleeve crease as sharp as if it had just come from a professional pressing.

Available in white, blue, dark pink, pale green and French blue, the shirt is--amazingly--100 percent cotton. The company claims it will look as good after 50 washes as the day you paid \$39.50 for it (tall sizes start at \$44.50). Of the three shirt brands tested for this page, the Lands' End No Iron was our favorite texture, nice and silky.

Not in stores, the shirt is available through www.landsend.com or the Lands' End catalog.

-- R.W.

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The claims stick, the dirt and wrinkles don't

Wrinkle and stain resistance are the mantra of the moment among men's clothing manufacturers as low-carb is to food ones. And there's a whole lot of marketing going on, but we wanted to see if the clothing was keeping up with the claims.

So we grabbed an Eddie Bauer Nano-Care long-sleeve (\$49.50) and a Dockers Stain Defender short-sleeve (\$36), ran them through the washer and dryer, then promptly ground them into a pile of dry dirt. Really.

The 100 percent cotton Eddie and the 60 percent cotton/40 percent polyester Dockers shirts both not only barely picked up any dust, the dirt that did stick shook out.

So we zipped into the kitchen and spilled a little cabernet on both. The wine beaded up and wiped off the Dockers version as though it were a rain slicker, as did the ketchup chaser. We were amazed. We thought we had Eddie beat with those stains, because the cloth seemed to absorb both. But on the other side of the laundry cycle, it was as if the stains were just a bad dream--gone.

Now, about those wrinkles.

Each time they emerged from the dryer, the shirts were perky and ready to wear. But we figured we'd try the manly thing and toss them over the back of a chair for a night. The next morning, both had that wrinkly, lived-in look. So we hung them on hangers for the rest of the day, and both straightened out admirably, particularly the Eddie. What's more, that shirt survived a night in a travel bag slung over a desk and still looked as though it was straight from the dry cleaner once given a bit more hanger time.

In both cases, call us freshly impressed.

-- R.W.

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You have to see it, er, see it, to believe it

Haspel is legendary for the wash-and-wear seersucker suit it introduced in the 1950s, when the

company was in its heyday of outfitting Hollywood heavy hitters such as Cary Grant, Gregory Peck and Humphrey Bogart.

So, in 2004, along comes this poplin suit from Haspel that the company insisted could be washed and worn, with a little touchup from an iron.

Though it has the appearance of all cotton, the suit is 55 percent cotton/45 percent polyester and, we have to say, downright handsome.

So the idea of tossing this thing into a washing machine seemed about as foolhardy as, say, throwing our cell phone into a hot tub. But, as instructed, we gently pushed the jacket into a nylon-mesh bag, added a little liquid detergent, pushed the buttons and fled.

At the end of the spin cycle, the jacket emerged fresh and slightly pruney. The pants came out less wrinkled. Hung damp on hangers at night, the jacket and pants were completely dry by morning. The jacket required a touchup with an iron, but in the end, we had a winner.

The suit is available by special order starting at \$250 through Leonard's Fine Men's Clothing, 129 N. York Rd., Elmhurst.

-- R.W.