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On the horizon: Consumer products

## Simmons remakes bed with nano-enhanced fabric

BY DAVID FORMAN

In June, Nano-Tex Chief Executive Donn Tice said his firm would pursue new markets like home furnishings. He recently made good on the promise with the unveiling of Simmons Bedding Co.'s new HealthSmart bed.

The bed, which features a zip-off mattress top, is intended to appeal to consumers who want a cleaner mattress. The mattress top is made of two layers of fabric. On top are DuPont Coolmax fibers designed to wick away sweat and moisture. Under that is a semi-impervious layer of Nano-Tex enhanced fabric that traps fluids and particles so they can be washed out. The mattress frame has a terry cloth top treated with Teflon for an extra layer of protection.

While it sounds simple enough, Simmons' vice president of innovation said consumer habits made such a product very difficult to engineer. "The idea was always that you were going to create a trapping layer," said Kurt Ling. But consumer research showed that people "wanted to wash it in hot water, use bleach and put it in the dryer."

Ling said the company spent a year and a half researching how to meet those performance criteria, ultimately settling on preshrunk fabric with durable coatings.

"HealthSmart is a product that is clearly tied into a consumer movement toward products that clean more thoroughly," said David Perry, who as the executive editor of the trade publication Furniture Today tracks the bedding industry.

Perry says Simmons is the mattress industry's leading innovator. In 2000, the company set a trend by offering the first mattresses that don't need to be periodically turned. The rest of the industry, Perry said, quickly followed suit. Now the company may be setting a similar trend with HealthSmart.

The zip-off mattress top is available on all Simmons Beautyrest and BackCare mattress-

es slated to price at \$1,399 and above. It also will be available for some children's mattresses. Although Simmons says mattresses have been consistently moving up in price, Perry maintains the average price for a Queen-size bed is around \$600 and that Simmons would be more likely to set a trend if it rolled out HealthSmart throughout its entire line of brands. Only about 20 percent of mattresses, he says, sell for more than \$1,000.

Manufacturers sometimes introduce an innovation at high-price ranges, only to move the feature into lower-priced models later. Ling said Simmons would unveil HealthSmart throughout the rest of its lineup as soon as the company is sure that the materials are available to handle higher volumes. ●



Photo courtesy of Simmons Bedding Co.

Simmons' HealthSmart bed features a removable mattress top that can be washed to rid the mattress of bacteria, germs, dust mites and fungal spores.