Natural dyes in fashion!

Interview with/avec
Betty de Paris, a specialist in time-honoured, Japanese methods of printing fabrics and well-known expert in indigo dyeing and natural dyeing with vegetable dyes/spécialiste des techniques ancestrales japonaises de l'impression sur tissu et experte reconnue de la teinture à l'indigo et des teintures naturelles en couleurs végétales.

Betty de Paris talks to us about the potential of vegetable dyes for the textile industry.

Texworld: As a specialist in vegetable dyeing and a consultant, how do you intercede with weavers or manufacturers?

Betty de Paris: For some years we have noticed a growing interest in vegetable dyeing on the part of the public-at-large, industry and the press as a result of concerns about the state of our planet and the numerous debates on the impact of new products that put public health at risk (dressings, endocrine disrupters...). At the same time, we are witnessing an increase in research and development regarding use of natural dyes for textiles as well as for food and cosmetics colourings.
As far as our activity is concerned, it is either upon request or we approach firms ourselves. We offer them colour ranges for vegetable dyeing and discuss initiating a sustainable design approach. We are currently on the threshold of far-reaching changes to society with one fundamental question: how do we plan to manage renewable natural resources and make use of them without having a negative impact on our planet?

TW: Is it possible to reconcile industrial production and vegetable dyeing? What are the constraints?

BP: Yes, it is possible to reconcile the two! Currently, refining natural dyes for industry is well under way! Furthermore, recent analyses of vegetable pigments have uncovered countless properties and a profusion of colours that will meet the expectations of manufacturers. Companies exploiting these new channels are making sustainable development part of their philosophy.
The constraining factors are expense and the time required for research and development.
Let us not forget that the transition from natural dyes to chemical dyes at the end of the 19th century did not happen overnight. Manufacturers always made use of what was available in terms of natural or chemical dyes at the time when they needed them until cultivation of plants for dyes ceased due to an insufficient number of economic outlets.
The question of pollution caused by chemical products was not raised one century ago!

TW: What new products have been introduced recently where vegetable dyeing is concerned?

BP: 2012 saw the launch of a new ECOCERT label specifically for vegetable dyeing. It will allow the value of products (fabrics and clothing) to be enhanced and to give them improved visibility for consumers. At the present time, there are a few industrial firms which are setting up "vegetable dyeing" departments in Europe. Brand names are going for it as well. Incidentally, Bohemeria, a young French company specialising in organically sourced household linen, which is dyed with vegetable dyes, has won the 2012 Prix Entreprise Environnement (Business Environment Award) at the Pollutex exhibition, which was held in Lyon in November 2012.

TW: You presented an exhibition of vegetable dyes and held a lecture at Texworld last September. What was the reaction from visitors and exhibitors?

BP: I was pleasantly surprised by the very positive reaction from people attending the lecture and the curiosity shown by exhibitors about my "Couleurs Nature" installation, where all the fabric samples had been dyed using vegetable dyes and were presented with raw plant materials for dyeing. This provoked a lot of questions about the origin of "conventional" dyes. The audience was surprised at the quality and the great variety of the colours obtained with this method. I established contacts both with trade visitors and exhibitors at the show who were interested in setting up a project with industrial targets for a part of their production. You can detect a genuine interest in vegetable dyeing.