

Textile type is the key to spotting fine linens

By Merlisa Lawrence Corbett
Special to *The Washington Examiner*

When it comes to distinguishing standard sheets from luxury linens, forget thread count and pay attention to textile type.

“Quality linens have a lot more to do with fibers than thread count,” said Mia Worrell, co-owner of Timothy Paul Bedding + Home on 14th Street in Washington. “You can have a sheet with a thread count of 1,000 made from short fibers as opposed to a 400-thread-count sheet that would be of better quality.”

Like cars, the quality of bed linens varies. With cars, however, most people understand why a Fiat costs less than a Ferrari. The price tags on luxury bed linens, however, remain a mystery to many.

What’s the difference between the \$50, 300-thread-count Egyptian cotton sheet sets at Walmart and those 300-thread-count Egyptian cotton sheets selling for \$900 in a luxury linens boutique?

It’s the textile, Worrell said. “Pay attention to where the textiles come from and how they were constructed,” she said. “We have people who still ask about thread count. It’s important, but only part of the information they need to make an informed decision. You have to compare apples to apples.”

Thread count is the number of threads in a square inch of fabric. Threads can be single, double or even four-ply. Sometimes the threads are double-ply and twisted to create a longer strand, allowing for 300 threads to be described as



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Thread count, fibers, and the weave of a textile determines how sheets feel. Each weave feels different next to the skin, so it can be more important than thread count.

600-thread-count. Sheets woven with fibers constructed this way are less durable and lose sheen faster.

Speaking of sheen, don’t be fooled by it. Similar to the way meat companies used “pink slime” to make ground beef more appealing, some manufacturers coat sheets with a high sheen that Worrell said is smooth to the touch but disappears

after a few washes.

“Fine linens can look great wash after wash,” said Gina Zang, manager of Emissary, a fine-linens boutique in Chevy Chase. “They can last for years and years.”

Another term tossed about when describing luxury bedding is Egyptian cotton, considered the world’s finest.

The problem is “people label everything that comes out of Egypt Egyptian cotton,” Zang said. Where and how the cotton is woven is the key.

“Most of our linens are made in Europe, in Italy where you have more skilled workers and higher standards,” she said.

True Egyptian cotton is made from long staple cotton fibers produced in the Nile River Valley. The cotton is then shipped to Europe, where it is woven into fine linens. Many types of linen labeled 100 percent Egyptian cotton actually are made from discarded short fibers twisted together and woven in factories in Pakistan or China. This is why so many so-called Egyptian cotton sheets have appeared on the market at low prices.

Besides thread count and fibers, the weave of a textile helps determine how sheets feel to the touch. Percale sheets are produced using a basket-style weave, yielding a smooth, matte finish, almost cold to the touch. Sateen sheets are woven with more fibers on the surface, creating a glossy, satiny look.

Jacquard sheets are produced by a French loom called the Jacquard. This loom can weave floral, paisley or damask patterns. Because these patterns produce texture, jacquard weaves work better on decorative duvet covers.

Each weave feels different next to the skin. Worrell said this should be considered more than thread count.

“Do they like the crisp, cool feel of percale or slick sateen, which runs a little warmer? It’s about personal preference.”

SAVVY SHOPPING

The look for less: Luxury hotel bedding

By Merlisa Lawrence Corbett
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Some of the most beautiful linens are found in upscale hotels such as those owned by Sofitel, the luxury French hotel chain that provides patrons with the finest sheets from Yves Delorme, makers of high-end linens in France since 1845.

Hotel bedding often is simple yet elegant. Wide decorative borders on sheets and comforters create a crisp, tailored look.

Made with superior cottons and finished with exquisite detailing, the Yves Delorme-manufactured sheets at Sofitel hotels can be purchased through the hotel’s SoBoutique.com. A queen sheet set, which includes a pillowcase and fitted and flat sheets, costs about \$950.

You can purchase an even more luxurious Baupre bed linen, a soft paisley pattern in pink and tangerine, from the Yves Delorme store in Georgetown. The Baupre bedding is 100 percent Egyptian cotton sateen with a 360-thread-count. A queen-size set, duvet cover and standard sham total \$1,660.

But this luxury hotel bedding look can be found at department stores for as little as \$100.

Chains such as Macy’s, Sears and J.C. Penney all have lines of “hotel bedding” ranging from \$99 and up.

Target’s Fieldcrest luxury embroidered hotel queen duvet set for \$99 has the signature borders. The Fieldcrest set consists of a duvet and two shams in 300-thread-count Egyptian cotton. With a twill weave, these sheets are finished with embroidered touches that hint at the elegance found on the Baupre linens.

However, the Baupre linens are made in France with the highest-quality Egyptian cotton. The Fieldcrest sheets are made in the United States. Not all Egyptian cotton or thread counts are the same. The textile industry has no uniform standards, so sometimes linens described as 600-thread-count Egyptian cotton, might actually be a poly-cotton blend at 300 thread count, using two-ply threads.

Though not all thread counts and Egyptian cotton are created equal, for the budget conscious, the Target set provides that swanky hotel look for less.

Fine linens can last a lifetime if given the proper care

By Merlisa Lawrence Corbett
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More durable than delicate, luxury bed linens can last lifetimes and become heirlooms if properly maintained.

The term “fine linen” describes quality, instead of durability. Unlike fragile china that is showcased but rarely used, good linens are resilient and actually can become softer and more beautiful over time.

“We truly believe that you can have the beautiful aesthetic of luxury linens, but still have it be usable and approachable,” said Aimee Wedlake, owner of Valerianne in Vienna. “A lot of people get these beautiful things and their bed looks wonderful, but they take it all off, fold it carefully, put it on

a couch and then sleep on something random. We want them to enjoy everything that they put on their beds.”

Instead of storing them away in a cedar chest, fine linens are made to be displayed, slept on and rolled in. Keeping them soft and smooth requires simple, yet specific care.

“We tell clients to not overload the washing machine because that’s how you can damage the long fibers,” said Liah Cooney, manager of the Yves Delorme’s Georgetown store. “Wash them in warm, but never hot water, and use a cool rinse.”

Cooney said after washing, take the linens out immediately “and shake them out, then put them in the dryer on low heat.”

Remove the linens while “dry/

damp,” Cooney said. “Believe it or not, this will actually reduce the chance of wrinkles.”

Most linen boutiques recommend using Le Blanc Linen Wash, which is free of sulfate, phosphate and bleach. The Laundress also makes mild detergents suitable for fine linens, as well as ironing water.

Never use bleach “or those bleach alternatives,” said Mia Worrell, co-owner of Timothy Paul Bedding + Home. “They claim to be OK for colors, but sometimes they turn colors.”

When purchasing detergents from a grocery store, buy those labeled “free” or “free and clear.”

“If you’re going to invest in a beautiful bed; it’s there for you to enjoy,” Wedlake said. “It’s there to give you a better night’s sleep. It’s

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not nice china that you take out at Thanksgiving. It’s something you live in daily.”