

11 LABOR OF LOVE

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photos **Chris Payne**

Christopher Payne specializes in architectural photography and the large format documentation of America's industrial heritage. Trained as an architect, he is fascinated by design, assembly, and the built form. Pictured here, Payne's recent *Textile Mills* are a series in progress on the American textile industry, veering away from recording the obsolete, towards a celebration of craftsmanship and small-scale manufacturing that are persevering in the face of global competition and evolutions in industrial processes. They illustrate a positive period in which our industries are returning to the mill...

Textile heritage is at a crossroads since most production has moved abroad, yet a new current of mills in Europe and North America are making waves. Whether producing small runs of creative cloth or honoring age-old knowledge and technical skills, factories are being transformed and regional production is back.

In England, The London Cloth Company is the first mill to open in London in over a century; its young effervescent founder, Daniel Harris, scours the country scavenging for about-to-be discarded industrial loom parts, which not unlike vintage automobiles, can be put back together to reboot contemporary use and weave qualities that were almost forgotten.

In Massachusetts, saviors such as Jacob Long and Catherine Connolly have purchased the American Woolen Company and Merida respectively; just in the knick of time, merging tradition with modernity in competitively-priced fabrics for fashion and interiors. ►





left page: Fall River Knitting Mill, MA (2015), right page: Northwest Woolen Mills, Woonsocket, RI (2015)





left page: Bartlett yarns, Harmony, ME (2015), right page: Dartington Fabrics, Moore Company, Westerly, RI (2015)



In America's South, groups like Mohawk have collected a coterie of diverse mills, uniting them stronger in a quest to sustainably manufacture Made In America. After twenty years producing abroad, even Adidas is returning to Germany to make their footwear locally starting in 2017; back to the company's roots, albeit with the assistance of robots as co-workers. This phenomenon is therefore a fully-fledged industrial movement, currently labeled as re-shore - instead of *off-shore* - production.

Lower local currencies mean that Japanese and Pratesi weavers are filling healthy orders once again, giving the bridge market the more complex textures that new fashions demand. At the high-end, houses such as Chanel are buying up mills in Scotland and France, not to ask them for exclusivity but to fund them, thus allowing them to prosper simultaneously while doing what they do best; Chanel is aware that without these small weavers, their collections' very essence would cease to exist. Then there are the archives, vehemently protected like the last specimens of an endangered species by companies like Ratti, Limonta and Mantero in Como. Those treasure troves contain the priceless fragments of textile history; they may lay dormant now but they're ready to awake, regroup and materialize again.





Left page: Scranton Lace, Scranton, PA (2015), right page: S&D Spinning Mill, Milbury, MA (2015), all photos (c) Chris Payne / Esto

