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Nothing to Sneeze At

Home Textiles Today Staff -- Home Textiles Today, 3/4/2012 2:00:00 AM

NEW YORK - Most allergy sufferers probably haven't heard of Robin Wilson. But that's likely to change since the March 1 debut of her hypoallergenic bedding line at bedbathandbeyond.com.

The Manhattan-based interior designer, who has a line of eco-friendly cabinetry, is new to mass. Her design projects include the White House Fellows office, President Clinton's Harlem office and Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s private residence.

"It's our debutante year," Wilson said. "We're coming out to the mass consumer. We're doing this at the right time, with the right retail partner and right licensing partners."

Her line is on Bed Bath & Beyond's website only and will be placed in stores at a later date per regional manager requests, Wilson said.

Wilson claims to be only the second African-American after B. Smith to launch her own home textiles brand at mass retail. She said her grandmother worked in the kitchen, and so for Wilson, her rapid rise is gratifying. She added that she is equally proud to be a woman, seeing her products enter a market where the big names belong to top male designers like Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein.

One of Wilson's textiles licensing partners is Baltic Linen Company. Beverly Chapman, vp of product development and design, applauded the environmentally friendly attributes of the collection. "We believe in what she stands for, and we feel we are all obligated to do our part. We are very excited to partner with Robin on relaying that message to the consumer."

The initial products include pillows, comforters, fiber beds and mattress pads while fashion bedding will debut later this year.



Towels from Robin Wilson will debut at the market.

nylon, which does not give off gases.

Named in June as an ambassador to the Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America (www.aafa.org), Wilson said she learned that more than 60 million Americans - or one in four people - live restricted lifestyles due to allergies and asthma. One in four children suffers from allergies, and one in six inner-city children suffer from asthma, she said.



Robin Wilson fiber beds on bedbathandbeyond.com have sealed inner seams and diamond quilting with gusset side walls.

Making her line affordable for mass was just one part of her mission. Wilson, who has asthma and allergies, said she suffered "wheezing and sneezing" attacks as a child. She feels strongly about bringing healthy products to the mass consumer, and her launch is timed to coincide with the start of the spring allergy season. Her line features hypoallergenic materials, as well as energy efficient fast drying and weaving technology that prevents allergen triggers like dust mites from penetrating the bedding.

"In this economy, with people's spending power limited, we want to offer the best quality for the best price and the best health," Wilson told HTT.

An additional eight collections inspired by nature will be shown at this month's market, including bath accessories, rugs, towels, robes and shower curtains, which are made of 100% cotton or

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"Allergies can literally bring you to your knees. You can't breathe, you can't think, you can't work. They create major work and life-quality issues," she said. Hypoallergenic bedding is particularly important, considering "we spend a third of our lives in bed," Wilson said.

Her pillows are woven with openings that are less than 10 microns to prevent exposure to dust mites and bed bugs. By way of comparison, Wilson said a flour sifter has openings that are about 45 microns. In addition, her bedding features seams that are sealed at the factory.



Robin Wilson pillows feature fabrics that prevent allergens from penetrating them.

While these processes add manufacturing costs, Wilson said they are offset by the economies of scale afforded by placement at a mass retailer. Her textiles products are made mostly in China, although some are sourced from India, Turkey and Pakistan.

The pillows are 100% cotton with a 300 thread count and will be priced at \$39.99 to \$49.99 in standard and king sizes. Comforters are also 100% cotton with box quilting and will come in twin, queen and king sizes and run \$99.99 to \$149.99. Mattress pads are extra deep at 20 inches, and fit twin, full, queen, king and California king-size mattresses. They will be priced \$79.99 to \$119.99. Fiber beds will fit the same size beds and are priced \$99.99 to \$249.99.

Wilson said her fiber beds are similar to pillow tops and offer 4 to 6 inches of padding.

"For folks who can't afford a new mattress, this will extend the life of a mattress," Wilson said.

She also said she approached the mattress pads from a designer's perspective, insisting on making them oversized so they fit deep mattresses more attractively. "You are getting a little more than you typically would at mass," she said.

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