

Bedding advice: Thread count isn't final word

By FRAN GOLDEN
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January is white sale time. But as you head out to buy new sheets and towels, throw your misconceptions away. Sheets don't have to have the highest thread count to be soft, and towels don't have to be fluffy to be absorbent.

And of course, not everything sold in a white sale is white. But it once was. Philadelphia's John Wanamaker department store is credited with conducting the first white sales in January 1878. At that time and for years thereafter, the sales featured only white bed linens, the only kind then available, at highly discounted prices.

The push for sheets in colors and prints came in the late 1950s and early 1960s, according to Diane Fagan Affleck, director of interpretation for the American Textile History Museum in Lowell, Mass.

"I remember personally when sheets were white, and so a white sale made sense in terms of the language of it," Affleck said.

White sales now include not only sheets but towels and bath accessories, blankets and more. But the concept of big bargains during the sales has continued.

Here are some tips to help you get the most out of the white sales.

Thread counts

If you think a thread count is all that matters when it comes to choosing the best sheet, you're wrong, according to the experts. A high thread count (500 or 600 being most desirable) may mean your sheets are sturdier but doesn't necessarily mean they'll be soft.

"For so long, we have been educating the consumer about the importance of thread count, and while thread count is



"Indigo" bed linens from Yves Delorme use special dyes that allow the printed pattern to remain strong while giving the fabric a fine feel.

important, it is more important to look at the type of cotton and the kind of weave," said Cynthia White, vice president of design for Macy's Home.

There is controversy as to whether thread counts may be deceiving to consumers. In a staff opinion, the Federal Trade Commission has agreed with the National Textile Association that con-

sumers could be misled by some manufacturers who count plied (or twisted) yarns in the thread count number which is supposed to indicate how many individual threads run lengthwise and widthwise in a square inch.

Virginia Peale, director of marketing for fine French linen firm Yves Delorme, said she wished Americans would

approach sheet-buying like Europeans do.

"What they care about is how sheets feel and what they call the 'hand.' And really that's the most important thing," Peale said.

Softness depends on the quality of the fiber, Peale added. Best are sheets made with extra-long staple cotton (meaning that the fibers are longer than 37 mil-

limeters) such as the most desirable Egyptian cottons, supima and pima.

Weave is also important, whether you choose a classic linen weave, silky sateen (which White said was most in vogue currently) or crispy percale. Since feeling the sheet is the best way to decide what you like best, you should do some in-person shopping (or touching) even if you plan to buy online.

Bedding design trends

The best-selling color of sheets?

White, according to Macy's. Peale said for Yves Delorme, white is also the top seller, despite the fact the firm is known for its prints (a new collection is introduced each year).

Still, for those who like colors, it's perfectly OK to use different colors on upper and lower sheets to reflect other colors in your bedroom.

The Macy's Hotel Collection features contemporary, gender-neutral colors. But the retailer has also introduced Style & co., a new brand with a younger, urban vibe as exemplified in geometric patterns and florals.

Towels

When purchasing towels, thickness should not be your only determining factor. New fibers hitting the market are both lighter and more absorbent than traditional cotton. Some are made of natural fibers.

"There is a movement, people looking at new fibers, interested in them," White said. "And when it comes to big fluffy towels, people are having a downsizing mentality."

The new technologies include Modal, a natural fiber made from beech wood, that when blended with cotton creates a lightweight, highly absorbent towel, Peale said.

• Writing

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1)

Her answer ended my tough interview, "Nope, he tucks the laces into his shoes."

I couldn't help but add, "Madison, did you know that coach Brad got disqualified last night in one of his pentathlon races?"

That's when her eyes got big, her face lit up, and she asked, "Really?" I suddenly felt it was my job to model how to dish out the dirt.

"Yes. He won all five of his age-class events but was disqualified in one because he was swimming in the wrong lane."

I must say I've never seen a 10-year-old girl beam with such satisfaction on her face.

Later, I ran into Indian Creek swimmers and student coaches Catie Reese, a sophomore, and Kailee Harlow, a junior. Kailee fondly recalled that the first time she met Brad was in junior high school at the Indianapolis Natatorium.

"We were all sitting around talking, and Brad started to sit down on top of the cooler, at the exact same moment that I opened the cooler to get a drink. He actually fell into the cooler of ice and had to walk around with wet pants," she said and smiled.

Then she added, "You know he's going to kill us for telling these stories."

I encouraged her by stating that I'm sure Brad would just consider this a nice senior parting gift.

Feeling a bit guilty, I asked them to assuage their guilty consciences by telling me one good thing about Brad.

Kailee said, "He is a great coach. He connects with the kids, and they really

love him and listen to him."

Catie agreed and but quickly added, "I don't know why."

We almost ended our conversation when Catie perkily remembered, "Hey, did you know that Brad was disqualified last night? It was great. One of our 6-year-old swimmers was crying today because he got disqualified, so I told him 'coach Brad got disqualified yesterday, and he's almost 18.' The little boy stopped crying immediately and smiled."

After Brad finished awarding the medals to the winners and storing all the timing pads, I began asking him the usual writer-to-writer hang-out questions:

Janet: "What are your plans for next year?"

Brad: "I am undecided about going to Wabash College. But I plan on studying math or physics and going to grad school for engineering."

Janet's hip question: "What's bumping on your pod?" That's slang for: What music are you currently listening to?

Brad responds after looking at me kind of weird: "I listen to everything. People always laugh at me because I listen to stuff from rap to country."

When I asked him what he does when he gets writer's block, he asked, "What's that?"

I began to feel like maybe we didn't have much in common. When I explained that it was when you have a deadline looming and you don't have a creative idea, he laughed and quickly quipped: "I don't get writer's block. I'm a much better writer than that."

That's when I brought up the swimming-block issue.

"So you won all your races Friday, but you didn't actually get the pentathlon medal," I inquired bluntly.

"Yeah," he laughed, "I swam this

meet for fun, but I don't think I've been DQed since fifth grade."

Brand had an excuse though.

"Friday, coach (Indian Creek's Brad Smith) reminded us of muscle memory: If you swim slow in practice, you'll swim slow in meets; but if you swim fast in practice, you'll swim fast in meets. I'm going to have to blame this on my muscle memory. I always practice in lane six, so when that lane was open, I'm sure it was my muscle memory that told me to go there."

Yeah it's great hanging out with fellow writers. I think it's my brain's muscle memory that keeps giving me writer's block.

Janet Hommel Mangas, the third of seven children, grew up on the east side of Greenwood. She now resides in the Center Grove area with her husband and three daughters.

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