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By Jana Schiowitz
Photography courtesy of Crypton

In the past 15 years, **Crypton Super Fabrics** has revolutionized the hospitality industry with fabrics that do far more than what one would expect them to do—resist stains, bacteria, and mildew while still looking beautiful. The husband-and-wife team, Craig and Randy Rubin, could have never dreamed that a simple idea from a package of Depends and some experimentation in their kitchen would turn into one of the biggest innovations in the hospitality industry. With 20,000 Crypton options already out there (no, they aren't stopping there), everyone is getting to enjoy Crypton these days, even the dogs. Randy lets us in on their secret to success, the marriage of marketing and invention, and how Superman fits into it all.

HD: Your background is in marketing. How did you get started in the fabric industry?
RR: My background was doing national rollout programs for companies like General Motors, Chevrolet, JCPenney, and Kmart. Everything I did was geared toward the women's market, and after 10 years, truthfully I was tired of doing women's programs. Then, I met Craig and he was in the fabric business.

HD: So it was love at first sight—both you and Craig, and you and fabric.
RR: At the time, Craig was selling fabric where people would put vinyl on them, but the vinyl would crack and peel. It was years before he tried to create a fabric that would do things like a vinylized fabric would do. When he told me about the idea, it was just so logical that he would invent this amazing fabric and I would market it.

HD: Is it true that this all started with a package of Depends?
RR: To understand, Craig is from a family of inventors. His grandfather invented the folding chair, the cot, and the child's raincoat with buckles. When he had this idea he knew that there had to be a way. He was walking through a Walgreens and saw a huge rack of Depends diapers and just at the moment, it was perfectly clear to him. If you could have a product like Depends where someone who is incontinent could urinate and it couldn't go through, then it had to be logically possible to make a fabric do that. So that's really what started it.

HD: When you and Craig started the company, what was your initial plan?
RR: It has always been and always will be to make Crypton a household name. I never think small. I don't know how. For me, Crypton was nirvana because it's like once in a lifetime that you get to work on something that never existed before. It was like I was the medicine man that went town to town and it was unbelievable because everyone was shocked. If you show them what it does, first they smile, but then comes amazement.

HD: So there was nothing else like this out on the market?
RR: Before I got into marketing, I was in the legal field. There were only six patent offices in the country, one in Denver. It happened that we were in Denver and while I was there, I went to the patent office, for two days, I did nothing but look up water-proof fabrics, stain-proof fabrics, microbial fabrics, and fabrics with special strength. I started researching them and what my research showed was that there were pieces of Crypton in different places, but no one bundled it. And I knew after spending the first day in the library that we could get a patent. I was positive.

HD: How did you bring it to market?
RR: We wanted to be a branding and technology company, which is what we really are. We had the first piece of Crypton within eight weeks. Then Craig had lists of people he did business with in healthcare and hospitality. We had 3,000 brochures printed. It had a piece of fabric on the inside and said 'C'mon try and abuse me, wrinkle me, stain me.' I had a 34 percent response to that mailer. It was mind-boggling. It was freedom. [Renowned healthcare interior designer] Kay Trimmer was our first customer and our second big customer was McDonald's. We were showing the fabric at HD Expo and this woman came up. She wanted us to come to the test kitchens at McDonald's that following week. We laid out the samples. They brought out the mayo, ketchup, and mustard. She poured the junk on it and she looked at us and said you guys are going to be rich. Within two months, we had the global McDonald's programs.

HD: So how did you come up with the name?
RR: Craig went down to the Carolinas and there was a party store sign along the highway with Superman on it. He kept looking at the signs [and thought about a play on Superman's home planet, Krypton]. If we take the 'K' off and we make it a 'C' for Craig and 'R' for Randy, we could call it Crypton Super Fabrics.

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hdtalks: the interviews

Jeffrey Beers talks with HD editor in chief Michael Adams about his early years as a designer, the influence of his mentor I.M. Pei, his love for hospitality, the many changes in the industry he's witnessed over the past three decades, and the challenge and satisfactions of working with such

HD: What makes it a super fabric?
RR: Crypton is its own category of fabric. It's not a fabric with a treatment, it is a category just like vinyl or wool or rayon. We work with licensed mills. Crypton has the highest stain resistance and microbial repellency; works within a certain number of double rubs; and has certain strengths.

HD: And the process?
RR: When a fabric comes in, depending on the construction and fibers, it's routed into the appropriate stream so that everything gets organized and batched. Fabrics [then] go into a bath of chemical formulation. And this formulation has been third-party certified green. The research people in the campus have developed the formulas and we formulate everything in our own plant. It is then 100 percent wet and goes into an oven where the formulation encapsulates every single fiber of that fabric and so now it comes out dry; but every thread is like dental floss and has a permanent ionic barrier to stains and germs that is forever linked to each fiber. Then it goes through another process where we have an integrated backing into the fabric so we're not taking a backing and laminating it. We have a formula that gets integrated into the back of the fabric and nothing will ever penetrate that backing. Crypton is one unit; it's not a fabric with a backing. The integrated barrier sets us apart in the world; we are the only fabric that can make a claim that we are disinfectable because the barrier is one and we are considered actually a solid surface. The EPA proved that nothing will penetrate the fabric. So if you use our disinfectant and deodorizer in conjunction with the Crypton you have the first disinfectable fabric system in the world, which took us four years.

HD: And this barrier protection against germs is so important to hospitality.
RR: The traveler does not want to come into a room and see stains. Living clean—I think that my market research and instinctively I know, we are going to move from the word green to the word clean. We have a registered trademark for the phrase Live Clean. As people are talking about living green, really what you are doing is living clean.

HD: Why did you decide to offer cleaning products along with your fabric?
RR: We always said clean with soap and water and then detergent and water. What would happen is they would use soap and water and they would not get all of the soap off the material and soap is a magnet for dirt. Then we said, 'this soap and water is really problematic so let's get the best upholstery cleaner that doesn't hurt our fabric and let's endorse it.' So now you look for an upholstery cleaner; guess what, it doesn't exist. So we had our fiber people and cleaning chemists, and developed our own line of cleaning products. My biggest fear of having our own cleaning products is that people are going to think that the only thing you could clean Crypton with are our cleaners and that is not true. It's just that no one makes great upholstery cleaner so we made one. You need a special protein cleaner for blood and urine and an ink remover. This cleaner tests better than any cleaner in the world. Also, they say you can't use bleach to sanitize Crypton, but that is another mistake. You can for almost every piece of Crypton unless it has rayon in it.

HD: You're very proud of your North Carolina-based facility. Tell us about it.
RR: The American textile industry is hanging on by a thread, it is the most tragic thing. We are only making American-made fabrics because we want to support the American mill. The other thing is that you are not shipping fabric across the ocean—saving fuel. Our plant is about 30,000 square feet and it's on a 30-acre campus. We contribute to renewable energy sources. We put nothing into the environment. We also have a way where any chemical that isn't used goes into vapor and then we change the vapor back into the chemical again; a packaging system that uses only the exact amount of packaging material; and we recycle all of our tubes. And Crypton is recyclable and we've been recycling it for the past four years.

HD: And you've taken other steps to make your product more environmentally responsible in the past few years too, right?
RR: We are very involved in working on the Act Green standard guidelines. We work with Sterling Planet on energy credits. We are certified by SCS, MBDC, Okitex. The Crypton Care line is third-party certified and has the EPA approval on the disinfectant. The whole reformulation of our chemicals was a major step. Today we use silver ion protection for our biocides for the bacterial resistance and it has non-leaching chemicals. We feel really great about what we've done.

HD: Let's get into some of the products including the mattress fabric and wallcoverings.
RR: We started making mattress protectors and then we started talking to Simmons and they asked is it possible to just have a Crypton mattress? That took us a while because of flammability codes and more stretch than our traditional fabric. But if you think about it, if you could choose a hotel that had a bed that could be literally disinfected and you knew it was clean, how would you not want to sleep there? Then in the consumer area we are doing a mattress with Kolcraft, a baby mattress. It is made out of bamboo. It is the first green mattress that is offered for babies. Then we looked at the wall. If you ask us to do something, we'll do it. Their big problem is staining and mold on the back of the wallcovering. We are always a solution to a problem or a challenge.

challenge and satisfactions of working with such legendary figures as Daniel Boulud, Sol Kerzner, and Wing Chao. Click here to play

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HD: What is your relationship with Hilton Hotels and its dog bed program?
RR: We've had this great line with William Wegman. We've had this great association with Bill Wegman for years and Hilton is a great Crypton fan and they came to us to do a global pet program. And is it possible that we could integrate your Wegman program and we've had lots of opportunities to do things with the pet program and we've turned down almost everything we've been offered but the Hilton program, the way they were going to do it is so cool. We now have the global program for Hilton welcome pet program in every Hilton hotel there is a William Wegman dog bed in the room with a feeding mat for under the dog bowls and Hilton dog bowls and when the dog comes in the hotel they get an amenity kit. You zip it open and it has a stain remover, disinfectant, dog cookies, Hilton dog tag, and poop bags. It's just a really, really cute program. And we make so many amenity kits. We provide them with thousands of amenity kits. It is like we are the amenity kit heaven.

HD: And now there's new carpet technology?
RR: Carpet has been the bane of our existence for the last 10 years. About six months ago, someone came to us with a nylon fabric and they said could you get it so that if bleach touches it, it won't take the color out? Our chemist came up with this whole thing to treat fiber. In the process of doing that we found a very unique way of getting nylon to be virtually stain-resistant. And then we thought okay, we have these fibers that have this unbelievable stain repellency that could also now resist bleach. And if you integrate a barrier into the carpet you have a Crypton-like carpet. With Crypton, nothing will go through the pad. With Signature Carpets [who we are working with], they have been a long established name in hospitality. It's remarkable. And now we also have Leather Powered by Crypton available through Edelman Leather.

HD: And where do you see everything headed—new technology, anti-microbial, stain repellency as far as hospitality?
RR: I think that people talk about fluorinated chemicals and the effects of the chemicals if you really take it apart, it's not ...It's a minute amount of fluorite we use. The microbial protection is definitely headed in the silver ion direction. In terms of stain repellency I just do not see that as going away in areas of high traffic. People don't want to look at dirty things. We came up with a stain resistant product called INCASE for areas where there is no barrier required. In areas like drapery, pillows, there are all kinds of places where you might not need a barrier. They still want a protection; they are still adding INCASE. I do think that microbial protection is going to be something that people want. Look at the Swine Flu. In a hotel room, it's a small, scary place, but all this is so imperative that it is clean. When you are sitting on a sofa that someone was sitting on before you that had the flue or something, at least with Crypton, the germs are growing, they are not multiplying. Crypton and INCASE are made with formulations that are free of PFOS and have no detectable levels of PFOA, molecules that could be found at low levels in pasts stain resistant chemistries. We have also developed fabrics that meet a wide range of flammability specifications without the use of halogenated flame retardants.

The other thing we are doing with our technology is for the military. We are doing many diverse things. We have research people in our facilities. We really know what we are doing at this point. There isn't a day we don't that we don't concentrate on our core business. This is the lifeblood of our company. The other reason is that we are a strong company today is that we thought about how to diversify. It is really helping us in this economy that we have gone into the consumer area, into wall and carpet. It really makes a difference and makes us financially sound so we could do more.

HD: What's the secret to your success?
RR: We always send out perfect product, we always send it out on time, we always make it better, and we market. We stay very connected to our distributors and design community and we listen. Designers trust the brand; it's been used for 15 years now. Millions of yards are out there everyday. There isn't a day that we don't concentrate on our core business. This is the lifeblood of our company. The other reason that we are a strong company is that we thought about how to diversify. It is really helping us in this economy that we have gone into the consumer area, into wall and carpet. It really makes a difference and makes us financially sound so we could do more. We are a success story. Craig and I, we work together, we live together, we're still madly in love with each other, and we work really hard.

HD: What's next for you?
RR: We are experimenting a lot with military fabrics and getting into consumer products. As consumers get to know us there are companies now that are asking us to do fabrics for their products so that has been really fun. Wherever there is a soft surface, don't be surprised to see us.