



## *A Silk Primer*

The word, silk, originated when the Greeks first obtained silk from the East. Seres was the name the Greeks had for the oriental people who first provided them with silk. The Romans borrowed the word and the adjective sericus. The “r” eventually became a “l” as the word traveled across the Baltic region, where it became, shelku, sioloc and the Scottish silike.

The production of silk was first mentioned in Chinese history in 3000 B.C. The secret of silk production was fiercely guarded by the Chinese until about 300 A.D. when silkworm eggs were smuggled out of the country to Japan and India.

Silk is produced by silkmoths bred either in captivity or in the wild. The moth deposits several hundred eggs which in captivity are put into cold storage until early spring when the mulberry tree produces leaves. The eggs are then hatched into small worms which are hand fed hand chopped mulberry leaves. The worms will grow to almost seventy times their original size at which time their glands are filled with a fiber making substance. They are now ready to make their cocoons from their silk glands. The silkworm will move its head from side to side and an opening near its mouth will produce a continuous flow of clear liquid which solidifies into fiber as it hits the air. The silk filament is a continuous, unbroken double thread whose total length can reach anywhere from 500 to 100 yards. After the silkworm has completed its spinning the cocoons are gathered and heated to kill the insect. The cocoons are steeped in hot water to soften the gum holding the filaments together, then several cocoon filaments are reeled together to produce the raw silk thread which is then processed into silk yarn.

Duppioni silk has a nubby raw look to it. This form of silk is produced when two worms join cocoons during in the spinning phase. When the filaments are reeled off they have tangles and knots in them.

Tussah Silk is named for the Tussah moth in India and China which feeds on Oak and other trees. The diet gives the threads and fabric irregular texture and ridges.

Taffeta is the name for the way a silk fabric is woven. The simple weave has one thread up and one thread down, sometimes called plain weave.

Shantung is a lightweight silk cloth that is woven from the double stranded Duppon yarns.

Spun silk comes from silk waste and cocoons which have been broken open by the moth. The waste silk is torn into short filaments and spun similar to cotton.

Treatments made from silk cannot be compared when it comes to beauty. When choosing silk for your window treatments, it's important to keep the following in mind.

- ✓ Sunlight will bleach and break down the fibers of ALL silk fabrics.
- ✓ Silk hanging in a window with any amount of direct sunlight should be lined with blackout lining.
- ✓ When making any silk panels consider putting a contrasting band of another fabric on the edge. This will protect the side hem, from bleaching and disintegrating over time.
- ✓ Silk by itself is very thin, Interlining is often recommended in silk treatments, to give the silk body, luxury and weight.