

## **Buyer Be Informed**

With the new big box fabric store due to open in Bend in August, I thought it was a good time to talk about fabric manufacturing. All cotton fabric comes off the loom in a rough, unfinished stage- known as greige (say gray) goods. Next, the fabric goes through various finishing processes that result in one of several qualities or grades. The same print or style of fabric could be manufactured in several grades for marketing at different types of stores or purposes.

Simply put, the greige goods go through some combination of these basic steps:

1. Cleaning and Preparation: passed rapidly over gas-fired jets or heated copper plates; and/or scouring and bleaching; and/or mercerizing
2. Dyeing or Printing
3. Finishing: some finishes change the look & feel, while others add durable press, water repellency, flame resistance, shrinkage control, and so on.

If shortcuts are taken, the fabric is rated a lesser quality or grade. The highest grades of fabric have everything done to it to make it the best quality it can be. Check out this website for more information than you probably want to know:

[www.cotton.org/pubs/cottoncounts/fieldtofabric/fabric.cfm](http://www.cotton.org/pubs/cottoncounts/fieldtofabric/fabric.cfm)

But what does this have to do with fabric stores? Some fabric manufacturers make the same style of print or dyed fabric in multiple grades—VIP, for example. Other manufacturers make only one grade of fabric for each style or pattern—such as Hoffman International.

Independently owned fabric stores usually carry only fabrics made in one grade, for several reasons. These shops depend on their reputation for their success- they want to carry fabrics they know are well made. Also, it can be confusing for the customer to see what appears to be the “same” fabric for twice the price at the independently owned shop as in a big box store- since the customer may not know the cheaper look-alike fabric is not the same quality.

So, buyer be informed and know what you are buying. Your time and skill spent in making quilts and projects are usually worth the cost of buying top notch materials.