

Made in the U.S.A.:

OFFRAY RIBBONS

Offered by the only remaining American manufacturer of woven ribbons, an endless array of finery.

By Debra Prinzing

When festooned with ribbons, today's bridal bouquets are elevated to an art form. So it's no surprise that designers and florists whose aesthetic is deeply rooted in sourcing local, seasonal and domestic-grown flowers should want to trim and tie their bouquets with fashion-forward ribbons made here.

Fortunately, the floral industry's leading maker of double-face satin ribbon isn't going anywhere. Founded by **Claude Offray** in 1876, the majority of the Offray© brand is American-made under the umbrella of **CSS Industries Inc.** (NYSE: CSS). As of last year, Offray is now the only U.S. maker weaving a significant volume of high-quality ribbon here.

To learn more, I contacted **Marla O'Dell**, vice president of sales and marketing, who explains that CSS Industries supplies the floral community through several brands, including **Lion Ribbon Co.** (acquired by Offray in 1989), **Berwick©** (polyester, acetate and velvet ribbon and bows) and **Hampshire Paper™** (tissue, foil, paper and other floral packaging supplies).

With a rainbow of colors and sizes, Offray's double-face satin is one of the most popular woven ribbon lines for florists and consumers. "From wider sizes that are used for chair ties to narrow ones for tablecloth decor and corsages, the ribbons have a luxurious feel and coordinate well with bridesmaid's dresses," she explains. "There are a lot of brides who come into retail flower shops and ask specifically for Offray double-face satin."

Offray also manufactures a variety of other ribbons and natural cotton tapes, which are ideal for tying garden-inspired bouquets. The company operates a textile-dyeing facility in Hagerstown, Md., and a weaving plant in South Carolina. "We maintain separate facilities because both the skills needed to dye and to weave are truly arts — and we have the right talent at each location," Marla explains.

In addition to the groundswell of consumer desire for anything U.S.A.-made, there



are practical reasons to working with the last domestic ribbon-maker, she says. "Lead time is a big advantage. If we run out of a color or style, we can usually be back in stock within 10 days to two weeks, whereas if you're importing ribbons, you have to allow for the build time, as well as the transit time."

Quick turnaround has its benefits when hot colors sell quickly, Marla points out. "This happened when we introduced six new colors of double-face satin ribbon earlier this year -- they were these dusky colors that are so popular with bridesmaid's dresses as well as prom dresses. We were conservative with what we produced in the January-February timeframe, but by the time June rolled around, we had gone back into production three times to replenish those colors."

New palettes are unveiled twice annually, filling the Offray catalog with more than 20,000 choices. "That's because one weave comes in five or six widths and 30 to 80 different colors," she adds.

Offray also custom-prints ribbon using hot stamping, flexo, raised foil and digital technologies. "Retailers can enhance their brand very inexpensively by adding their logo and store name to ribbon. We have several

customers who put a shoestring bow with their business name on everything that goes out the door -- whether it's an arrangement or a gift."

With as little as a one-roll minimum to custom print, the product appeals to wedding designers who offer clients personalized ribbon with their names and wedding date -- ideal for party favors and decor.

The Christmas holiday season is Offray's busiest, followed by Valentine's Day, two floral dates when ribbons, bows and streamers are essential. With weddings migrating from June to nearly every month of the year, demand for bridal ribbon tones like pink blush, chateau rose, rosewater and others is continual, Marla says.

"The same thing can be said for ribbon that is said for clothing. Americans love to buy American-made products for the feel-good aspect, as well as the trusted quality and relevant design." ■

DETAILS:

Berwick Offray (wholesale); **Lion Ribbon** (retail)

Website: berwickoffraywholesale.com; lionribbon.com

Wholesale: Minimum orders vary from \$35 retail to \$150 wholesale. Visit sites above to request a catalog, samples or connect with your sales representative.