

Winning ways with wool, the Gill story

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THE year is 2001 and the Gill family – relative newcomers to the Australian superfine wool industry – have just produced the world's finest bale of wool.

It measures 12.9 micron, and as a consequence of achieving such a standard the Gills are invited to meet the unequivocal god of wool manufacturing, Lora Piana, in Rome.

It is, Ian and Phyllis Gill agree, the moment their eyes are opened to how different and rare their ultrafine wool is.

But not everything is going smoothly at home for the Gills, where the returns they are getting through the wool auction system scarcely make their hard work worthwhile.

Recognising the need to value-add to their product, on their return the determined pair make the blind step into the complex world of vertical integration – taking their wool from paddock to retail rack.

And thus is born the “Jemala the Golden Fibre” brand.

As it turns out, the Gills are no fools when it comes to negotiating the temperamental textile and fashion world.

Throw a name up – Count Paolo Zegna, Prada, Stefano Ricci – and the Gills have a story to tell.

Such is the high quality of their Jemala range that it is these circles that the couple have had to penetrate to secure some impressive shelf space in stores such as Kiton of Napoli (New York), Joanna Johnson (Sydney), Uomo Collezioni (Moscow), Christine's and Harrolds (Melbourne) and Wako (Japan).



Ian and Phyllis Gill at home in Benalla.

Add to this orders from Queen Elizabeth (a twin set in pastel colours, thank you) and Nicole Kidman (who bought Jemala shawls for her baby daughter Sunday Rose).

At the 2008 Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) summit all world leaders in attendance and their wives were given a Jemala sweater.

The ability to not be phased by the “big players” of the wool industry has stood the Gills in good stead in the past decade.

*Extract full report, Stock & Land, February 11.