Soktas has a global reputation for premium shirting fabrics made from the softest cotton that stems from its deeply rooted history in Turkey. That said, the firm’s storied past hasn’t stopped it looking to the future, with research and development considered as crucial as sunshine and water.

Soktas came into existence. It was in 1971 in the Meander Valley on Anatolia’s southern coast that Soktas came into existence. Since then its mill and cotton plantation in the town of Soke has set about refining some world-class fabrics. The company is the silent giant behind some of the world’s most respected fashion brands, supplying fine cotton and cotton-blended fabrics to major clients – not to mention the firm’s storied past hasn’t stopped it looking to the future, with research and development considered as crucial as sunshine and water.

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The company started in the Meander Valley back in 1971. Was there already an established cotton-manufacturing industry in the region when you arrived? Of course – we are relative newcomers. In the mid-1850s, the Kavals of Egypt, Muhammad Ali Pasha, had cotton farms in southern Turkey and he introduced some of the Egyptian seeds even then. Industrial-scale cultivation started in the area from the 1940s onwards and Turkey became a supplier of raw cotton to Europe for many years. The town of Soke was the biggest sub-region for cotton. Our neighbours have a heritage of producing suki fabrics, silk weaving and Turkish towels.

There are over 80 people in your research and development department. How central is technology to your growth as a company? In order to develop fabrics that are functional and pleasing to the eye you have to go through a long process of product development. We have developed cotton combinations with cashmere, linen and silk. Improving efficiency and productivity is a continuous process but it is not just about technology. Today, anybody can write a cheque and buy the machines – it is the people that are hard to find. That is the part of Soktas that we are really proud of. It’s the commitment, it’s the process. It’s that we view our work not exactly as an art but a craft. It’s that intangibility that makes it what it is.

How is the brand changing? Through digital tools and social media, customers are increasingly aware of us. The customer is not only interested in the garment but who makes it and where the raw materials are coming from.

The development of Meander 71 has been a milestone for the company. Can you tell us the story behind the project? In Turkey we have done experiments since the late 1980s – with seeds from places such as South America – to try and establish a cotton plant with a long staple. As our 40th year approached we said that we had to go through a long process of product development. We have developed cotton combinations with cashmere, linen and silk. Improving efficiency and productivity is a continuous process but it is not just about technology.

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