

Stehli silk mills S.A., Zurich : five-fourths of a century old

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Stehli Silk Mills S.A., Zurich

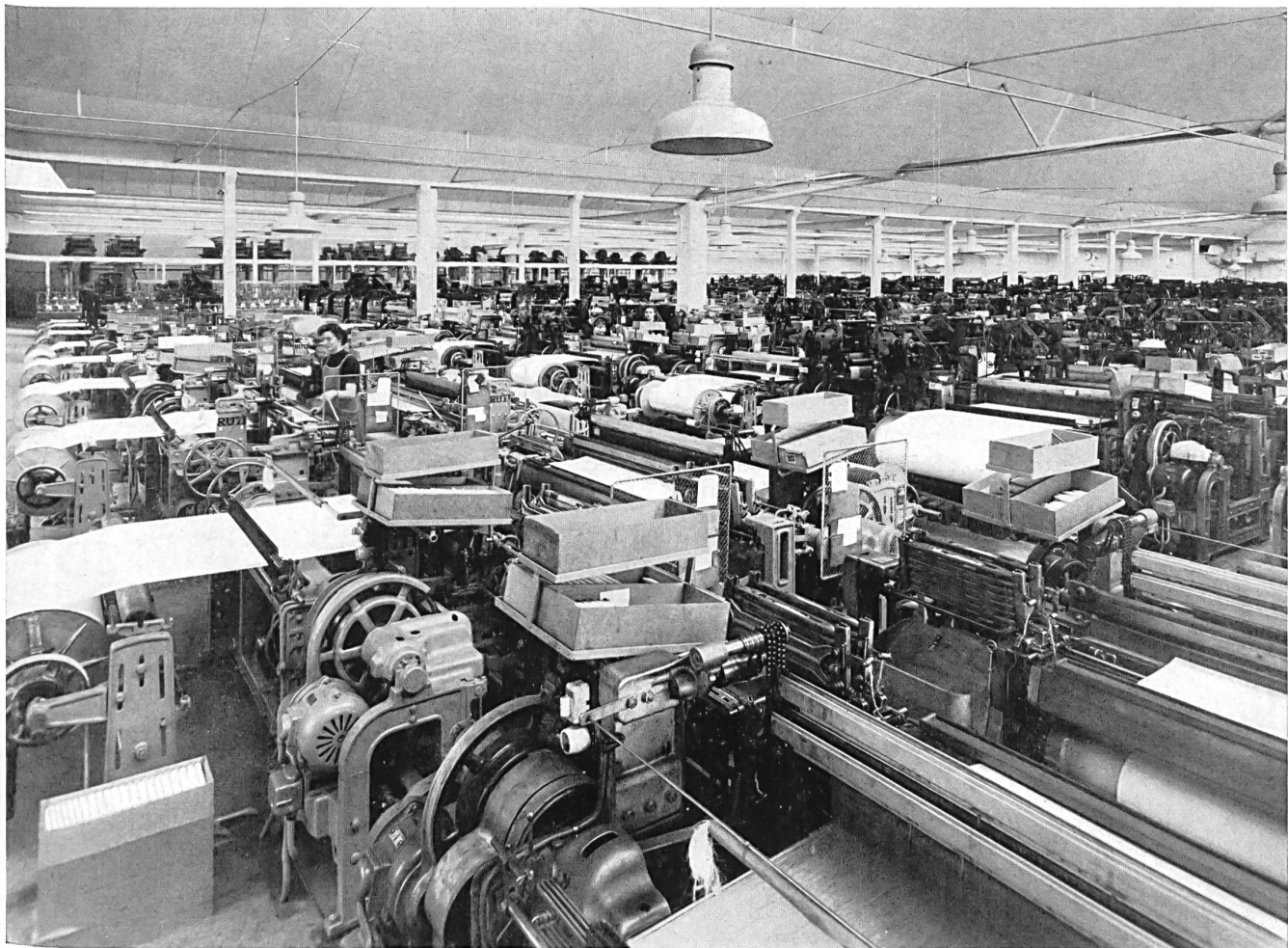
Five-fourths of a century old

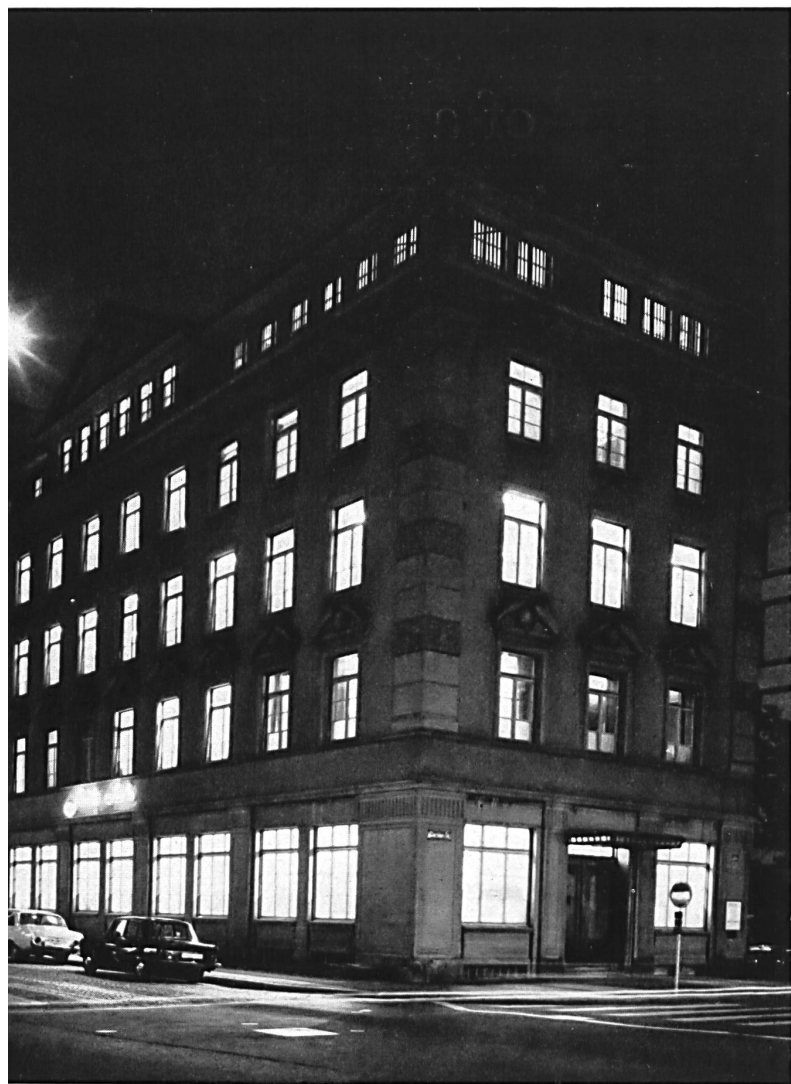
Stehli Silks was founded in 1840 by the national councillor Rudolf Stehli-Hausheer, great-grandfather of the present head of the business, in his native village of Obfelden situated in the Affoltern district near Zurich. He was an industrialist with a forthright manner, as shown when he intervened, despite resistance, in the case of the Gothard railroad line so that it would pass through Affoltern and again when he acted for the founding of a savings bank which was later to become the Cantonal Bank of Zurich. At that time, the main task of manufacturers was to furnish the numerous home weavers at Obfelden and the nearby communities with

the dyed, warp silk thread which they needed for their work. The silk was dyed at Zurich until the opening of the rail line Zurich-Zug-Lucerne in 1865. It was carted, over the Albis range, by truckers who also carried the money destined for the salaries, a task which entailed a certain amount of danger. These conditions were of a strictly local character but sales soon spread to the farthest parts of the world.

The time of the Franco-German war of 1870-1871 marked the beginning of mechanical silk weaving. The Stehli Company then installed the first twenty-four frames driven by a 10 h. p. steam engine. Mechanization

View of a weaving room at Obfelden





Zurich office

increased to the point where it became necessary, in 1884, to buy equipment for silk throwing and twisting made constant progress and rapidly replaced the antiquated cottage weaving. Along with the new frames, Jacquard looms were soon installed in 1879.

Thanks to energetic but prudent management, the business developed steadily. The consumption of raw silk increased to the point where it became necessary, in 1884,

to buy equipment for silk throwing and twisting at Germignaga near Luino in Italy close to the Swiss border. Here the Federal Railways had a station, which facilitated the trans-shipment of merchandise from Genova, thus speeding up deliveries. Later, the firm also established production branches in North America and Germany.

Since that time, the Stehli Company has become an international business with its own offices and representatives in almost all the countries of the world. It is a real family affair run today by Stehlis of the fourth generation. Under the clear-sighted management of the son and the grandson of the founder, Emile Stehli-Hirt and Robert Stehli-Zweifel, and the children of the later, Robert Stehli-Pestalozzi and Alfred Stehli-Kaufmann, who are the present proprietors, the business enjoys a considerable reputation not only in Switzerland but throughout the world.

Robert Stehli-Zweifel is one of the co-founders of the Swiss Association of Silk Manufacturers and has presided for many years on the Board of the Silk drying Institute at Zurich. It is due to him that the firm's pension scheme was created as early as 1917 in order to provide for the old age of the workers with a fund to which he has continually made generous donations.

In addition to silk and rayon the firm now also uses synthetic fibers such as nylon and Terylene which constantly raise new technical problems. Mechanical frames have gradually had to be replaced with automatic machines. As a result of the building up of a more important market, such as the Common Market, weaving — still today partially a handicraft — will become an industrial production, the quality of which must remain at a high level. Only continual adaptation to market conditions combined with great flexibility has enabled the Stehli Mills to offer its clients in Europe and overseas fabrics that are always new and always entirely in fashion. The manufacturing program is large and varied. Twice a year, the firm's various factories offer customers all over the world their collections of novelties — printed, plain, Jacquard and little fantasies in pure silk, artificial silk and synthetics. A tie division supplies fabrics for the making of ties to meet most exacting tastes.

Customers requirements force the manufacturer to renew his efforts each season to succeed in view of the keen competition in Switzerland and abroad.

Printed pure silk dress and leather shantung (pure silk) coat

