

Handkerchiefs galore...

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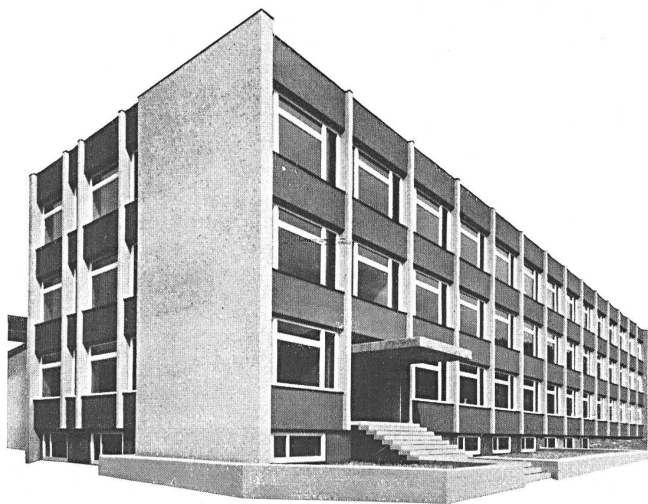
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Handkerchiefs galore...

The administrative premises of Albin Breitenmoser Ltd., Appenzell, built in 1959



One can well imagine that in a concern producing handkerchiefs and nothing but handkerchiefs, both weaving and embroidering them itself, the range must be extremely great for this firm to provide employment for some 350 to 400 workers, not to mention the women doing piece-work in their own homes (whose number is limited, in fact, only by the present shortage of labour). Such is the case of *Albin Breitenmoser Ltd.*, at Appenzell, which can at any time offer its clientele about a thousand different models and which keeps a good six million handkerchiefs of all kinds permanently in stock! This is certainly the biggest output of handkerchiefs in Switzerland since, although bigger firms do in fact exist, they do not concentrate exclusively on this speciality.

It is obvious that such a tremendous output implies very large-scale exports, accounting in this instance for approximately 90 % of the total output.

But let us consider for a moment the actual production. First of all, the articles are all of good or very good quality, that is to say the firm does not go in at all for the mass-production of low-priced goods. The manufacturing programme of women's, men's and children's handkerchiefs includes little handkerchiefs printed on cotton batiste produced elsewhere, handkerchiefs in fancy weaves executed on dobby or Jacquard looms, i.e. handkerchiefs with satin edges and especially handkerchiefs with clipcord designs in white and colours, fancy colour-woven handkerchiefs, embroidered handkerchiefs and models made by a combination of various processes. In fact, for an article like handkerchiefs, with a comparatively low selling price and a very large turnover, manufacturers have to reckon with fairly rapid changes in taste, which compel them to be continually on the lookout for new ideas. It is easy to understand therefore why it was necessary to think up novelties, like the handkerchiefs whose embroidered or printed motifs are positioned very accurately in relation to the fancy woven ground so as to fall exactly on the satin weave edges, for example, or between the clipcord designs. Breitenmoser Ltd. has this precise printing — as well as the ordinary printing — done for it locally by an affiliated firm according to a special patented process.

Almost all the handkerchiefs for export leave the factory in bolts, to be finished, that is to say cut out,

hemmed and packaged at their destination. But the handkerchiefs can of course also be bought finished, with hand-rolled hems and in certain articles with machine-scalloped hems; however the bulk of the firm's present output is supplied with a very fine machine-sewn hem, which is tending more and more on a great many markets to replace the hand-rolled hem, for which the necessary labour is increasingly difficult to find. Depending on the customer's wishes, the handkerchiefs are supplied either with or without the Breitenmoser trade mark «Alba».

Production in the Breitenmoser factory in one way resembles that of a weaving mill and in another that of an embroidery firm, with but few technical differences. Certain articles are moreover embroidered on hand-operated machines, which are still found in some parts of the canton of Appenzell, in homes where embroidery is carried out as an accessory occupation. But this is a type of work that is tending to die out. As a curiosity, let us just mention that we have seen a handkerchief with large embroidered motifs of this kind, on which the pattern required no less than 28,000 stitches — a record!

The organization of such a large-scale manufacturing programme destined for dozens of countries, all with very different tastes in regard to size, patterns, colours, etc. calls for very careful planning. Naturally not all the thousand models of the collection are available for the whole of its clientele. Nevertheless the design department has continually to produce new ideas in order to be able to cope successfully with the keen competition prevailing in this field.

Since the fire which almost completely destroyed the old factory in 1958, the commercial, checking and forwarding departments have been housed in the new premises built in 1959, while the weaving is carried out in what remains of the old building, which has been completely refitted and enlarged, and the embroidery section is accommodated in an adjoining building. While on the subject of construction, let us finally add that the problem of workers' accommodation is becoming increasingly acute and that in a first attempt to remedy the situation the management of the firm has already organized three hostels for its foreign employees.

René Cadet

Lovely floral print produced by the new precise «overprinting» method on a fancy woven handkerchief

