

Meeting swiss fabric friends

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dejac

There is a nip in the air on this sunny November day in Paris. The clothes-rack pullers step forth briskly, weaving in and out of the milling crowd. The shop-windows in Rue d'Aboukir are dressed in black and white with an occasional touch of brilliant red or blue. An unloading lorry blocks the narrow street. Traffic piles up. Clanking horns fall in tune with the roar from the nearby boulevards. A policeman waves his stick. Colleagues tuck tickets on cars parked bumper to bumper on the sidewalks. Yes, the Sentier is very much alive and open for business as I pass through the Porte Cochère of No. 25 Rue de Cléry on into a sunlit courtyard, past the empty Concierge's lodge, and up the stuccoed staircase.

There are no traces of "la Belle-Epoque" in Dejac's white painted showroom on the top floor. Contemporary are the garments which line the walls, contemporary the computer-sheets and many buttoned phones on Monsieur Michel's desk. He had just flown in from San Francisco that morning but neither jet lag nor a sleepless night on the plane slow down his rapid speech and quick movements. Quickly he runs through the history of the family business. Founded by his parents just after the war, it gradually developed from a small manufacturing shop producing raincoats and other classics into today's internationally renowned ready-to-wear enterprise. Daily some 600 garments leave the various production plants in the northern provinces of France, from which Dejac rents production capacity and in which, in some instances, he has a financial interest. An efficient technical service crew watches continually over the quality and conformity of production, from the launching of a new series through every stage of manufacture.



The key to the U.S. market

is the department store, says Michel Dejac. "There is a large potential in the United States. It is, however, almost entirely taken up by local production which is highly competitive. This is one of the reasons why U.S. buyers in Europe usually limit their buying to famous names and brands: couture and stylists, French and Italian. I am proud that we are among the very few ready-to-wear houses that have been doing business in the States for a long time and with such prestigious stores as Bloomingdale's, Saks and Neimann Marcus.

Export markets account for 50% of the firm's annual turnover which amounted to 48 million French Francs in 1981 (the royalty turnover with Japan not included). Most important among the European markets are Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Great Britain and Spain; overseas, the USA, Canada and Japan – with which Dejac has been working on a licensing agreement basis for the past 14 years. As an interesting aside, in their books Switzerland tops the list when it comes to volume per capita.

Creation takes supremacy

says the young managing director who topped his commercial studies with thorough training at various manufacturing plants where he learned all about the making of garments. At Dejac's, creation rests in the small hands of petite Madame Dejac. Assisted by some ten "toilists", pattern-makers and stylists – two Italian and one French – she succeeds in creating homogeneous collections that tell a fashion story. There is nothing skimpy about Madame's creations. They are always generous in cut and designed for tallish women who know how to wear clothes with an elegant flair. Where she gets her inspiration? "When you have been 35 years in the business, you have a notion of what the market wants." In defining market requirements the commercial service headed by Christina Zeller, a young woman of excellent taste and great efficiency, contributes valuable information from the retail front. As a result of this close collaboration between the commercial and the design departments, the Winter 83/84 collection will focus on structured coats in supple cashmere and alpaca fabrics, on daytime and cocktail dresses in wool and silky jerseys and on new skirt styles.

*Pure cotton poplin from Christian Fischbacher Co. Ltd., St. Gall.
Dejac Mod. – Summer 1983*

MEETING SWISS FABRIC FRIENDS





Talking shop: Christina Zeller and Michel Dejac.

To each his own

"Although we examine many fabric ranges, we find that fabric business in Europe today revolves around a few houses in France, Italy and Switzerland, which offer creativity backed up by a sound industrial, commercial and financial structure." Among these houses Michel Dejac counts their current Swiss suppliers: Fischbacher, Wetuwa, Jaquenoud, and in the past also Mettler, Reichenbach and Taco. About 15% of their annual fabric requirements emanate from Switzerland. Usually the cottons "because they work up well thanks to their supple quality and silky finish". The house of Dejac has never undertaken fabric design ("to each his own") but they do develop themes with their fabric suppliers, introducing their own colours. One such theme executed in pottery coloured cotton poplin from Fischbacher proved the bestseller of their Summer 83 collection.

Fashion is all the fashions

since it is literally available to everybody. The energetic president of the Salon Boutique and active member of the Fédération Française du Prêt-à-Porter continues: "For a ready-to-wear house manufacturing in France creativity and originality of design are of vital importance. Although France has been sharing its creative influence with Italy, to a lesser degree with Germany and lately with Japan, I believe our new generation of creative talents, backed by a receptive national industry, will reverse this. We must not forget that even when buyers were looking for new incentives in Italy, grey matter from France was heavily involved in that country's fashion innovation. Similarly, the success of New York stylists with the international fashion trade is not so much due to their originality of design but the result of their acceptance by the home market, which causes the usual 'whatever America accepts, Europe adopts'-phenomenon."

The time element in fashion

is not a determining factor. "It is not a question of being first, but of being better", says Michel Dejac with regard to next year's dates of the French ready-to-wear fairs. He regrets that no consensus could be reached on dates such as the first week in March and the first week in October for both Salons. While he agrees that consumers look for fashion early in the season, retail buyers must peruse a whole series of collections before they can decide on the fashion look of their store assortments. In his opinion, trendsetter collections will never be shown early in the season for two reasons: fabric manufacturers, couturiers and stylists cannot perform out of context with an inspirational climate and they must take precautions against copies. Furthermore, retail buyers, particularly from overseas, will be more selective in future about attending fairs. They will more than likely choose a Salon with a strong fashion statement than one offering conven-



The long and short of Dejac

Pure cotton poplin from Christian Fischbacher Co. Ltd., St. Gall.



tional merchandise which they can buy all year round. Neither does the argument relative to the early placing of fabric orders bear out in practice. "It is not the Salon that determines our fabric orders. No serious ready-to-wear house today can afford to wait until it knows its requirements. Regardless of the date of the Salon at Dejac's we will have bought a great part of our fabrics prior to February 12th."

Free trade means survival

of the fittest. Michel Dejac firmly believes that the moment has come to open all markets to international competition. "There is no protection for non-performance. To close the borders against neighbours in the Common Market and more remote countries is not an economic solution, neither for us nor for any other country. When you live in autarky and when you seek to protect yourself against competition, you age quickly. You no longer make an effort, you do not see what happens next door and eventually your product has no validity at all. Let us stay young and dynamic – and everybody will be much the better for it!"

B. Feisst

*Pure cotton voile with jacquard clipcords from
Wetuwa Ltd., Münchwilen.
Dejac Mod. – Summer 1983*

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