

Meeting swiss fabric friends

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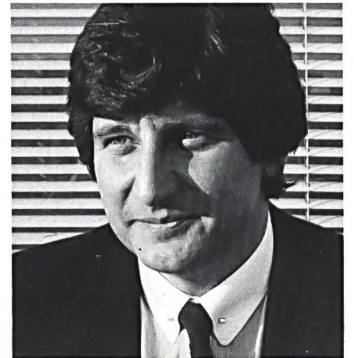
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Albert Fuchs

Bad times are the best times

to start a new business – says Albert Fuchs and he should know. When he founded his making-up business in Munich-Gräfelfing in 1976 Germany's economy had suffered a severe set-back. In the aftermath of the first oil crisis and in a period when many German garment manufacturers were ceasing operations, the young Bavarian set out to capture the market with a clear concept: "To manufacture a first-rate product with a contemporary fabric look for active women with generous clothing allowances."



Matching shirt-stripes in cotton/
linen from R. Müller + Cie AG,
Seon.
Mod. Chamara – Summer 1983.

The Fuchs formula worked. In the six years of its existence his firm Chamara has developed into a concern with an annual turnover of over DM 16 million. Today some 300 people work on the Chamara collections. The annual production now totals about 120,000 units which are produced exclusively in Bavaria, partly in Chamara's own plant, partly by tried and proven contractors.

Export markets absorb 34% of the firm's production. One of Albert Fuchs' most amazing feats is his penetration of the French market which has been accepting his fashion made in Germany to the tune of DM 1.5 million a year. Chamara's Paris-based showroom not only looks after the local market but also serves as export sales office for overseas buyers, especially from the USA and Japan. Japan particularly has been proving an excellent export outlet, so much so that the already legendary Chamara Fashion Show, which traditionally opens the selling season in Munich, will be presented in Tokyo this Autumn for the first time.

Fashion trends are like strawberries

they must be sold while they are ripe – thus speaks a commercially trained manager who turned designer. To Albert Fuchs the time element is of utmost importance. This is one of the reasons why all his fabrics come from reliable European sources. On the subject of fabrics this self-taught creator of beautiful clothes continues:

"In a world of uniform styling trends, fabrics are the only means of distinguishing a collection. Right from the start I have been creating my own fabrics in close co-operation with my weavers. Right from the start too I have been working with Swiss fabric suppliers for three reasons. On the commercial side there is solidity in Switzerland, a soundness in their approach to business – from their price structure, and their delivery times, to their handling of claims. On the textile side the Swiss produce first-class basic

materials and at the same time offer the possibility of varying these basics. On the technical side their standard of technology is very good and when collaborating they deploy a great measure of creativity.

Swiss fabrics now account for approximately 70% of my summer fabrics and about 50% of my winter fabrics. I not only have my cottons created in Switzerland but also pure silks and merino superfine wools. Concentrating on a few fabric houses – my main supplier is Mettler in St. Gall but I also work with Abraham, Müller/Seon and Schubiger – I find that volume business produces reasonable prices, thus invalidating the often proclaimed dearness of Swiss fabrics."

A strong fashion statement

will be the only buying motivation for women's wear in 1983, according to Albert Fuchs. Neither classics nor gags are apt to stimulate sales in a depressed market. Even the upper-end-of-the-market consumer will carefully weigh price against performance. Economically precarious times, however, are a challenge to the dynamic fashion maker from Munich who almost single-handedly runs his multi-million-mark business, combining a great creative talent with a thorough understanding of marketing mechanisms and a fully computerized administration system.

As in the past his Summer 1983 collection carries the inimitable Chamara touch, which is basically a sophisticated sportswear look, valid for both day and evening wear. Separates in versatile colour and fabric combinations provide a basic wardrobe, to which may be added colour-matched supplements later in the season. Colours are clear and reflect the ceramic shades. The deeper pottery tints are reserved for the golfwear range.

*Pure cotton poplin from
Mettler + Co. AG, St-Gall.
Mod. Chamara – Summer 1983.*



MEETING SWISS FABRIC FRIENDS



Geometrical designs printed on
pure cotton poplin from Abraham
AG, Zurich.
Mod. Chamara – Summer 1983.

Prints, always a major part of any Chamara collection, show a preference for geometrics. While the collection consisting of some 50 models is presented in its entirety at all major ready-to-wear fairs, deliveries to the trade are made in three timely relays: the wool and silk range in November/December, the cotton program in January/February, the mid-summer wear in March. This season also sees the launching of a new parallel collection called "Albert Fuchs Design". A full range program, from coats to scarves, it is even more exclusive in fabric and

styling designs and will undoubtedly appeal to the avant-garde connoisseur of high fashion. There are some stunning prints, true works of modern art reproduced on pure silk crêpe de chine, which not only demonstrate the technical skill of their Swiss supplier but also their creator's fascination with prints. It is a fascination of long duration that prompted Albert Fuchs one day to start a collection of old printing blocks – "not for the love of possession but to preserve, record and perhaps write a book about them."

B. Feisst



Tips for fabric manufacturers

Fabric development plays a major role in Albert Fuchs' work and greatly contributes to the success of his collections. In an interview with "Textiles Suisses" he draws from his wealth of experience and offers expert advice.

TS: What should a weaver do to achieve fabric collections which project a fashion message?

AF: In addition to the classic yarn assortment, which of course is a major part of any mill's business, weavers should prepare a small range of novelty yarns that tell a fashion story. With these yarns some designs, distinctly different from classics, should be prepared.

TS: What about colours?

AF: For the European market, mills should prepare colour cards which represent a synthesis of the Italian and French colour forecasts. The selected shades should enhance and reflect the price and quality level of the product. There is such a thing as "cheap" colours and they have absolutely no place in Swiss fabric collections.

TS: How would you describe the ideal collaboration between fabric and garment manufacturers?

AF: The fabric supplier should be more aware of his customers' everyday problems. This is a matter of communication. He should know that makers-up require shorter delivery times, that they cannot accept the slightest deviation in quality. He should keep some stocks of raw materials. I have come across mills that do not even keep a yarn supply, never mind raw wovens.

TS: What about prices?

AF: The keyword today is value for money. The relationship between price and performance must be in balance. Even at the upper end of the market consumers are more critical than in the past. We are forced to work within price limits. However, these limits are not so narrow that we cannot honour a special effort in quality or creativity.

TS: How can a weaver react faster to changes in fashion trends or consumer attitudes?

AF: Such impulses emanate from the market, from the consumers. Weavers should recognize them at an early stage and react. The feedback line from consumers via trade and makers-up to fabric manufacturers is too long for today's fast changing trends. My recommendation to weavers: Establish contacts with the trade in order to obtain the latest information at the base. In practice I could imagine a circle of similarly placed firms, say one or two fabric manufacturers, makers-up and retailers, who would occasionally meet to exchange information and market data. Nothing formal – just a friendly exchange of ideas in the interest and for the benefit of all concerned.

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