

# Swiss tie fabrics : highly prized all over the world

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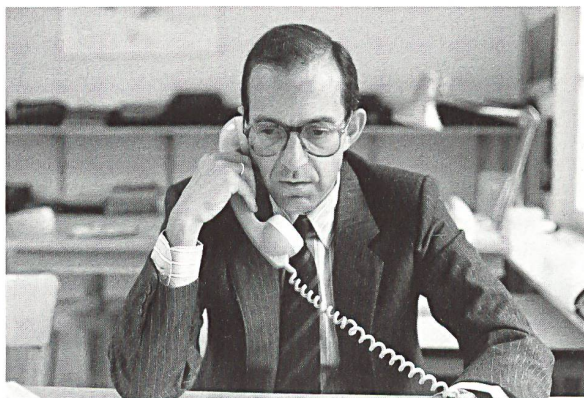


On 20th/21st September 1984, the International Association of the Tie Industry, the forum of European tie-fabric producers and tie manufacturers, held its annual meeting in Geneva. After Zurich and Luzern, it was the turn of this international town on the river Rhône to host this event held in Switzerland for the 3rd time. Reason enough to interview two Swiss tie-fabric producers and hear their opinions and views for the future concerning "modern man's one and only ornament".

## SWISS TIE FABRICS —

### HIGHLY PRIZED ALL OVER THE WORLD

TIE CONGRESS 1984 IN GENEVA:  
PROSPECTS AND OPINIONS



Ruedi Koenig — to whom we spoke at Weisbrod-Zürcher, Hausen a.A. — is now head of the tie-fabrics department.

**Weisbrod-Zürcher Ltd., Hausen a.A.:**

**"Thanks to our many long years of experience as producers, we always have 5000 designs in stock ready for instant use and available in 10 colours."**

At the start of our conversation, Ruedi Koenig outlined the history of Weisbrod-Zürcher and its long-standing traditions. As the oldest silk mills in Switzerland, the firm was already producing tie-fabrics in the last century but it was only after several decades that it was converted into a separate department. The ups and downs of ties in fashion are indicated clearly on this department's progress chart. "I believe it is no secret," said Ruedi Koenig, "that until quite recently ties were going through a rather difficult patch, being spurned by certain circles. To go 'tie-less' was to show one's rejection of the Establishment; it was a sign of

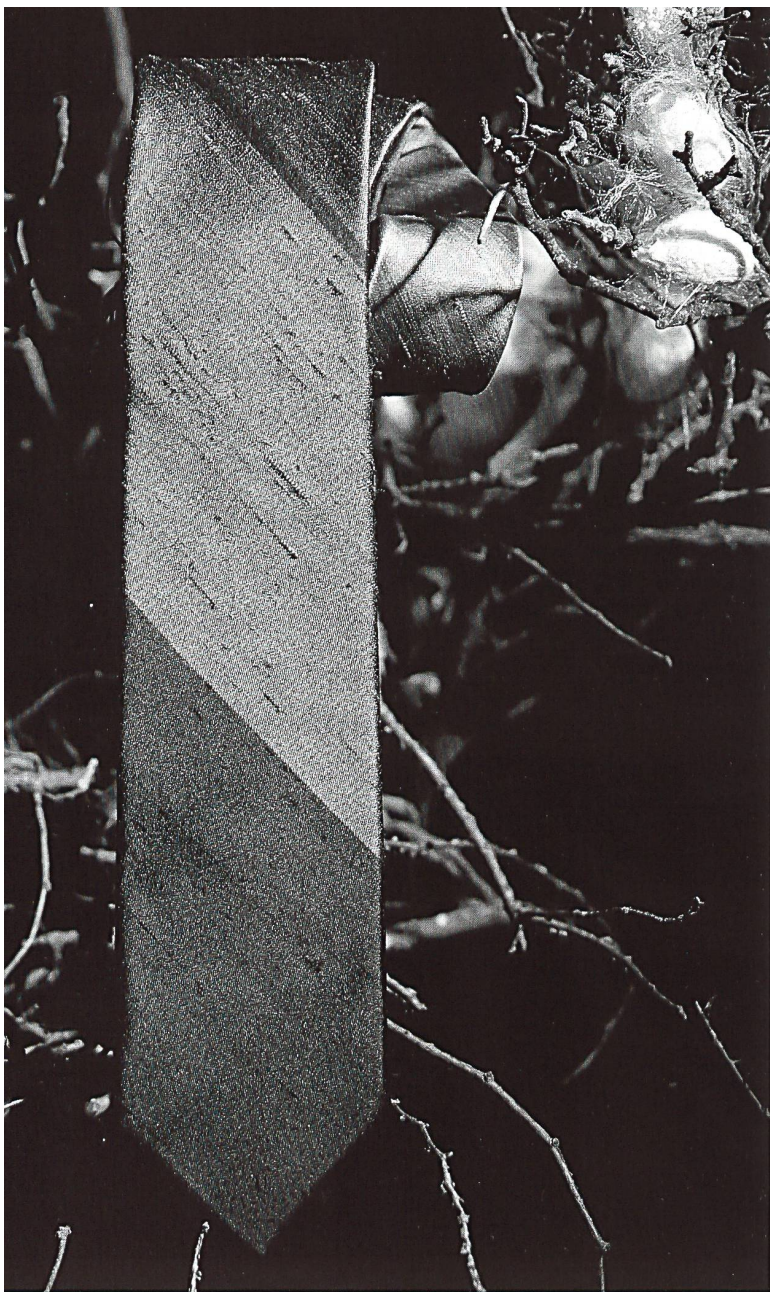


WEISBROD-ZÜRRER AG  
HAUSEN AM ALBIS

Krawattenstoffe aus reiner Seide  
Tissus pure soie pour cravates  
Pure silk tie fabrics







## **A high fashion collection – but who “makes” the fashion?**

Here Ruedi Koenig is in his element. “I am often asked why we always have such a high fashion collection. It is certainly not thought out in some ivory tower, divorced from the world, as so many people seem to think. When I return from a big trip abroad, I know exactly how the collection must look and how it must not look! In this age of mass communication with its fast and reliable flow of information, one simply needs to have one’s antenna out ready to capture whatever is in the air. I am convinced that fashion is no longer made only in Paris but that New York and Tokyo are just as important. A final word on this: today it is only possible to produce a top fashion collection of the very highest quality, if one has good personal contacts with the fashion makers. I am of the opinion that it is my duty to offer the client what he needs. If today you have to buy tie-fabrics and you miss our collection, then an important part of your market information is lacking.”



freedom. It even reached a point when people no longer wore shirts and bow-ties with their dinner jackets but preferred a roll-neck sweater. These were hard times for all tie-fabric manufacturers. But now that leaf has been turned and the branch can once again look with confidence to the future!”

### **Tie-fabrics – a mainstay of the firm’s output**

Until a few years ago, polyester fibres played an important role in tie production. Today 90% of all tie-fabrics are made of pure silk or mixtures of pure silk and other natural fibres. The close relationship between outergarments and ties is best shown by the fact that linen and also cotton are very much in demand today for the manufacture of ties. That Ruedi Koenig has a real flair for trends is shown by the fact that the shortage of the raw material linen presents no problems for Weisbrod-Zürcher. A year and a half ago the firm purchased enough for the next 1–2 years because even then it sensed the coming trend for linen.

The LYON colour card for the year 1930 – a piece of textile history from the rich collection of exhibits belonging to the oldest silk mills in Switzerland.

### **We still have hand workers, real tie specialists ...**

In this profession, specialists are clearly of great importance. 20 years ago nobody had ever heard of shuttle-less automatic looms. In this short period of time, the technical picture has been turned completely upside down. Today Weisbrod-Zürcher works with the most modern, rational and high quality looms. About half of them are dobby-loom, the other half Jacquard looms. From the technical point of view, a tie-fabric is a complicated fabric, one of the most demanding in fact. But this is also what creates its fascination for everybody involved. A good 85% of our output is exported. Our relations extend all over the world. To break down the turnover in our foreign trade: 1/3rd goes to America, 1/3rd to the Far East and 1/3rd to Europe. For many years printed ties were in fashion, now the tendency is all for woven qualities. The present trends all centre round the year 1930. Now all the experience and knowhow of the old-established



tie-fabric manufacturers with their long traditions is coming into its own. It is astonishing to see how the LYON colour card of those days reflects the colour trends of today's designers and innovators. Equally surprising is how designs from that time are exactly right for today's stylistic demands and price is not the only object anymore. "Admittedly, the stimulus comes from outside; we can however draw from our own wealth of experience and great traditions and in this way very quickly produce novelties in a wide variety of colours and structures, which simply reproduce the work done twenty years ago."

### **Mallard ducks wanted?**

Everyone knows how in gastronomy a client's wishes are carefully looked into and fulfilled. Similarly, in tie-fabrics if an overseas buyer wants a tie with a pattern of small ducks on it, not just any ducks but the typical mallard with green head and grey-brown feathers with dark tips, we will do everything we can to satisfy him. Armed with a bird book, the designer will work on the model and in a very short period of time conjure up the desired mallard duck on a textile ground. The picture is true to life down to the outspread wings. This concern for accuracy could be shown in other examples. This all goes to create confidence which, in its turn, makes for success. Ruedi Koenig favours close contact with the client, as is evident in every sentence which, even though considered, comes fluently and spontaneously in answer to every question. The communicative process with people, but also with the whole environment, culture, and the day and age, is strongly integrated in his creative thinking.

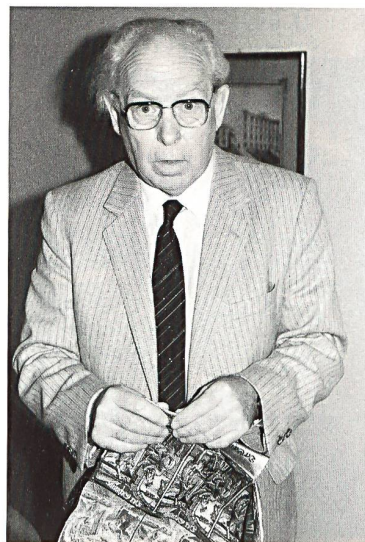
"A life for ties" – thus it could be summed up, for it is astonishing to see how two skilled hands succeed in creating a tie out of a tiny piece of cloth. Suddenly this little piece of cloth acquires a new optical dimension, is given life and meaning. Every design too has its story, as is quickly seen. It is brought to life by the rich experience of Ruedi Koenig and his staff, and is consequently part of the interesting and eventful history of this decorative object tied round men's necks.

### **The big event in Geneva**

"Actually, the term 'Tie Congress' is wrong. It is a congress for Europeans who are connected with ties. Such a definition includes the tie manufacturer, but also the weaver, and the printer. This shows where the interest of this meeting lies: in the human and professional contacts it makes possible. It is an exchange of opinions on the European level. There have also been suggestions that the event should be extended to countries outside Europe. "I believe that would have led to failure" said Ruedi Koenig, "because then the whole framework would have been too big and consequently less concrete for those taking part.

At the same time I see the event as a social occasion with its high points, which certainly deserve being publicised among the general public, in this way focusing attention on ties."

The rising export figures for Switzerland's three tie-fabric manufacturers show that advertisers and journalists are well aware of the importance of fashionable development for this small industry which requires so much knowhow, so much flair for topical trends and for the possibilities of technical change. "What is decisive is that we always deliver perfectly executed fabrics. That alone ensures our good name and the world's readiness to buy our fabrics", said Ruedi Koenig in conclusion.



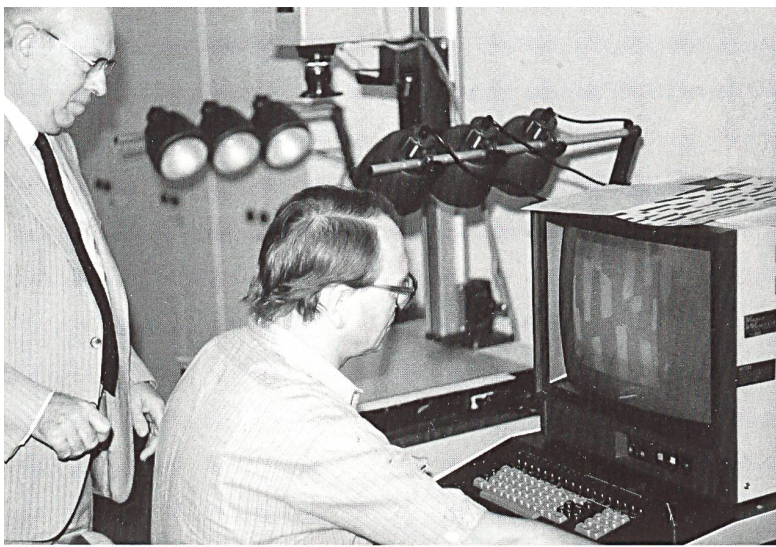
Emil Meier, in charge of Gessner Ltd's tie-fabrics department, Wädenswil.

### **Gessner Ltd., Wädenswil:**

#### **"The most sensational Jacquard development of the last few years"**

Emil Meier, for many years now head of Gessner's tie-fabric department, considers the Tie Congress held every year in a European country a wonderful opportunity for exchanging ideas on ties. At this meeting, ideas are coordinated and discussed, strategies developed for promoting the sale of ties, PR campaigns planned and carried out, and even the award for the "tie man" of the year presented on the spot. It is also an increasingly ideal opportunity of focusing the attention of the mass media on this branch of industry. Tie and tie-fabric manufacturers see themselves as quite a small industry, because obviously only a few square inches of fabric and a few stitches are required to make a tie. And yet, in many cases, ties represent the dot on the "i", in actual fact the only ornament men ever wear. "We feel we make up a small universe of our own, we all know each other because our numbers remain of manageable size, we all have the same troubles and the same problems. This all helps to bind us together and make our federation what it is", reflected Emil Meier.





By means of computers, a picture is converted into a perfect Jacquard fabric in a matter of hours only.

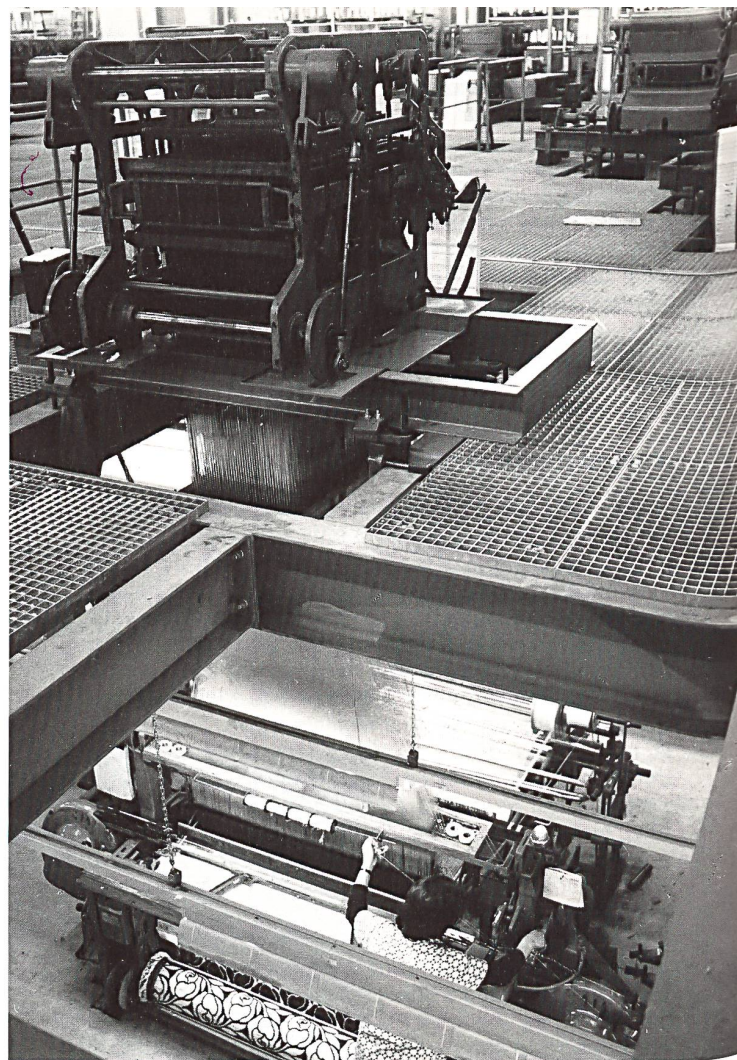
The Jacquard stage built in Gessner Ltd's new weaving premises at Wädenswil is the first of its kind in the world. The card-index containing the perforated cards for the designs is placed along the walls.



### **The tie fabric department at Gessner's**

This long-established Wädenswil silk manufacturer produces two collections every year. Both are offered quite separately: the original Gessner Collection and the "Naef Fashion" Collection the firm has taken over. Since the production of the two lines takes place in the same firm, one could in fact say there are only 3 big producers in Switzerland. A few years ago there were still 16. A clean sweep has been made. Anyone still left on the market must be pretty good because the weeding out process was a ruthless one. Gessner must be first in Switzerland for the number of yards produced and also one of the leading firms in the branch on the European level.

Between 95 and 99% of the total output is exported. The firm has connections on all continents. For many years the emphasis was on polyester ties but with the trend towards natural fibres, there has been a return to the typical tie-fabric – silk. Of particular interest is the firm's concentration in the technical field. Thus, for example, the weaving mills consist exclusively of the very latest Jacquard looms controlled by computer produced cards.



With every loom (bottom of picture), there is a Jacquard machine (top of picture). For the weaving process, it reads the information required for the individual designs from perforated cards and passes it on to the loom.

### **The emphasis on "Fashion"**

For a long time tie-fabric stuck to stripes in the way of designs, using every conceivable variation on this theme. "We are pleased to see that this trend is gradually disappearing and now, thanks to the armada of Jacquard looms, our speciality is once again gaining prominence. The good thing about our industry is that there is really no one general fashion trend and direction. In the field of ties, there is in fact an endless number of fashion trends. However there is also the question of the angle from which a tie-fabric manufacturer approaches his task. But this results in the desired diversity in the products offered and the individual touch that is quite unmistakable with any producer worthy of the name. I am particularly glad that there are now quite different ties for summer and winter; for a very long time there was no difference at all."

There is also no disputing the fact that ties are enjoying a new popularity, as is proved by the number of orders on the books. The younger generation, who for many years were very much against ties, are now all



in favour of leather and knitted neckties and are taking pleasure once again in these narrow strips of cloth that have lost their restrictive properties in their eyes and are once again an attractive ornament.

Asked about bow-ties, Emil Meier stated that in his experience this attribute of elegance is almost entirely limited to wear with dinner jackets and has almost completely disappeared from everyday use – except when worn by a few “eccentrics”. “But this situation will only last until someone has the idea of making bow-ties popular once again for wear with suits in the daytime.”

### The technical revolution has already begun

At the words, “flexibility with small lengths”, Emil Meier’s eyes lit up with enthusiasm. And he led us from the sales room directly to the technical department. Whereas before textile designs were painted and drawn on patterns, today the unmistakable profile of a computer immediately looms into view. With understandable pride Emil Meier pointed to this pioneering step on the part of Gessner which succeeded after long and intensive development in producing a system that completely revolutionised the previous structure. A highly sensitive wonder camera photographs a pattern, a design, a picture – which serves as model – and passes this print on to the computer. This then converts it into a design suitable for reproduction on a Jacquard loom, so that the designer can ring the changes ad infinitum with x programmes in the computer and see them continually reproduced on the screen, and all this in a matter of seconds. Thanks to this new technique, the whole process from a photograph to a woven Jacquard design, barely distinguishable from the original and open to a thousand and one variations, now takes only a few hours. Earlier it would have taken weeks.

The future has already begun... and against this background a promising new chapter for this Swiss tie-fabric manufacturer.

Siegfried P. Stich

### Upward trend in the Swiss tie industry

Since 1982, the Swiss tie industry has been following a strong upward trend. After the drop of the 70’s and the stabilisation at a comparatively low level in 1980 and 1981, there is now a definite trend upwards. In 1982 the increase in turnover amounted to 4% and in 1983 to 10%. The growth in the first half of 1984 allows us to predict another 10% rise in 1984. The tendency of clients, influenced by fashion, to buy more ties is also evident in other statistics. Thus, for example, in the retail trade in Switzerland, sales of ties rose from approximately S.Fr. 44 million to S.Fr. 50 million. The increase in imports amounted in the same year to 12.8% and the increase in exports in the first half of 1984 to 19.0%.

Swiss tie manufacturers sell approximately 62% of their output on the home market. Half the country’s imports come from Italy, the remainder from West Germany and France. The biggest export markets are West Germany with over 40%, France with 13% and Great Britain with 11%. If one compares the mean values of imported and exported ties, it is obvious that the 8 Swiss tie manufacturers with their just under 200 employees specialise in the production of high quality ties, since export prices are roughly 50% higher than import prices.

The Swiss tie industry looks confidently to the future therefore. In 1982 the average Swiss male of over 15 years of age bought only 0.8 ties, in 1983 the figure had risen to 1.1 and for the present year it is expected to be even higher.

It is felt likely that the increased fashion consciousness will further affect the demand for ties, particularly among the younger generation.

### The Swiss tie-fabric industry in figures

| Production<br>(in 1,000’s of m) |       | Turnover<br>(in 1,000’s of francs) |
|---------------------------------|-------|------------------------------------|
| 1979                            | 1,253 | 8,296                              |
| 1980                            | 1,300 | 9,185                              |
| 1981                            | 1,292 | 10,930                             |
| 1982                            | 1,212 | 10,299                             |
| 1983                            | 1,206 | 11,367                             |



### Zino Davidoff – Tie-Man of the year

At the 1984 General Meeting of the International Association of the Tie Industry in Geneva, Zino Davidoff was elected Tie-Man of the year.

Zino Davidoff was chosen Tie-Man of the year because of his natural elegance and his distinguished appearance, two qualities that enable him always to look the part, to personify the Tie-Man of the year. His outstanding qualities, his natural charm, his conversational gifts, his extraordinary competence in the field of tobacco, his all-embracing knowledge of wine and gastronomy, are all qualities that have made him a man with a rare flair for the aesthetics of international elegance.