

Zeitschrift: Swiss textiles [English edition]
Herausgeber: Swiss office for the development of trade
Band: - (1954)
Heft: 3

Artikel: The swiss millinery industry
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-798860>

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The Swiss Millinery Industry

Swiss model hat
Photo Schmutz

The mass-production of finished hats for women developed to a very satisfactory extent in Switzerland. This is an industry that is definitely artisanal in character and which, even if it cannot be compared in size with the traditional big Swiss textile industries, is nevertheless interesting because of the place it has succeeded in occupying in a comparatively short period of time. The twenty concerns counted in the 1953 census employed only a little over half a thousand workers at the time. During recent years however, this branch has developed in a way similar to the women's ready-to-wear clothing industry. In 1953 exports were valued at 2.4 million Swiss francs, which is three times greater than in 1950. The articles exported are mainly in the medium and higher price ranges, that is to say high quality articles, whereas the hats imported although amounting to approximately the same total in value are double the quantity. Switzerland therefore exports finished hats for women of a value which is on the average double that of those it imports. It is the fine finish of its products that has enabled the Swiss millinery industry to export, and it is its exports that have made it possible, owing to the difference in the seasons between the northern and southern hemispheres, for this industry to keep working regularly throughout the year in spite of its seasonal character, which is an advantage from the social and other points of view. The growth of exports that took place in the Swiss millinery industry during 1953 was due to the increase in imports of all buyer countries of any size, Sweden coming first, followed by the United States and South Africa. Let us add that although this industry draws its inspiration from Paris, it adapts the models, which are sometimes rather too exclusive in taste, and puts them within the reach of a clientele that is less blasé but more widespread.



Swiss model hat
Photo Lutz

In the Swiss millinery industry: left, hand shaping felt hoods made malleable by steaming; right, hats being trimmed by millinery workers.

Photographs taken in the workshop of the millinery factory Jules Brunshwig Sons, Zurich, on the occasion of a visit of the press.

Photos Walter Dräyer

