

A fine career

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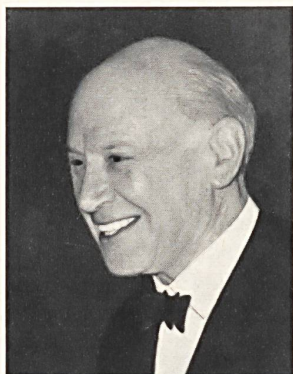
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A Fine Career

In the way of successful careers, few can be more striking than that of Boris Oumansky... And not even the career that he had chosen, since fate snatched him from the Geneva School of Fine Arts, where he was studying to be a painter, to make him a knitwear manufacturer and, in addition, a creative artist in the knitwear and hosiery industry.



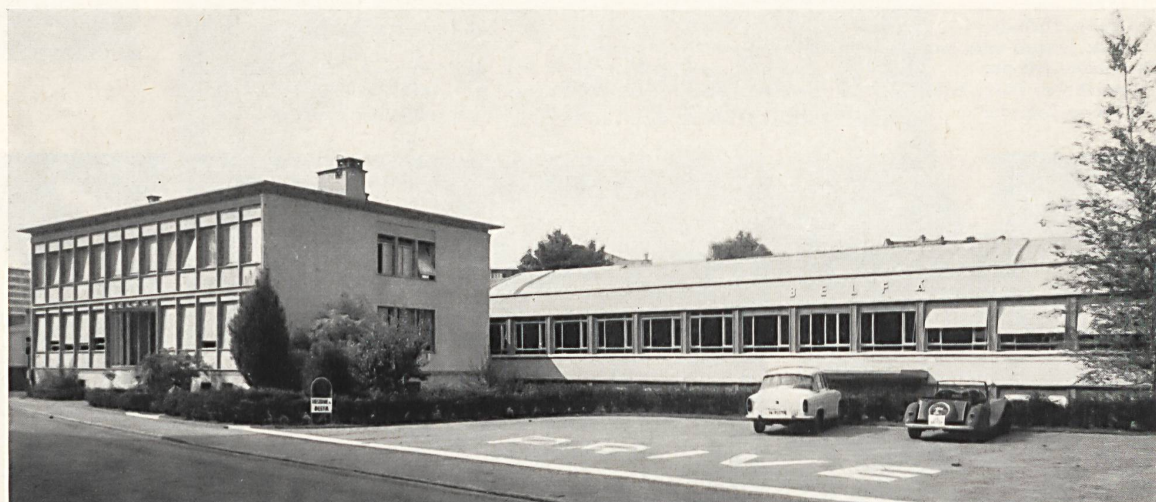
M. Boris Oumansky

Forty years ago, Boris Oumansky — who was 23 at the time — founded the firm of Oumansky & Co., in Geneva, which started by acting as representatives for others. This is not the place to recount how the young Fine Arts student gradually turned to the manufacture of knitted garments. His first ventures were modest, at a time when knitted garments were still strictly utilitarian without any touch of fantasy. But the die had been cast, a start had been made, and that is what counts ! In 1925, his contacts began to grow steadily closer with Dubied & Co. of Neuchâtel, a knitting machine factory to which Oumansky & Co., as we shall see, was to remain steadfastly faithful. To start with, the machines were simple hand-worked models, but they permitted a first, modest success, in particular with the so-called « Intarsia » technique, which made it possible to obtain the most varied effects with

regard to pattern, but was strictly only « craft » in character, since several hours were required to make a single pullover. The firm continued to grow however in spite of difficulties, in spite of the slump of the thirties, in spite of the war, in spite of all obstacles. The manufacture of the first Dubied automatic flat-bed machines, type BAN, in 1932, opened up unexpected new scope to the designer for the use of Jacquard designs in knitting : the industrial use of a variety of motifs in a number of colours, instead of the eternal stripes, small checks, geometric designs, dots, etc. It was now possible to knit more or less stylised floral motifs. With the very relative automatism of these machines production was still slow. It took 60 minutes to produce a metre of Jacquard knitted fabric 80 cm wide, which the latest Wevenit models turn out, in the same degree of fineness but in 150 cm widths, in only 13 minutes. In other words, modern Wevenit machines can produce knitted materials eight to ten times as fast.

About the year 1941 Dubied produced the first Wevenit model, which constituted a great step forward in the application of the Jacquard technique to knitting. As was only to be expected, Oumansky acquired this new machine as soon as it appeared, followed later by others. Boris Oumansky, who has always remained faithful to the Swiss machines produced by the Dubied factory at Neuchâtel, has contributed greatly with his suggestions to the improvement of the Wevenit machine fitted with the large film-box which makes possible the knitting of patterns with large repeats. It took a far-sighted manufacturer with the gifts of a discriminating artist to foresee the artistic possibilities and commercial scope of the Jacquard technique applied to the knitting industry, just as it took an

The Oumansky factory in Geneva





Sewing room with a modern device for the rational division of labour
(no chain production)

enlightened and understanding machinery manufacturer to make an important knitting machine accessory, on which is based the successful application of the Jacquard technique to knitting.

But Boris Oumansky's activity was not restricted to furthering his own interests: it is to his initiative and foresight that we owe the creation of the « Pro Tricot Suisse » association, which groups a certain number of the leading firms in the industry for the purpose of protecting their common interests and pooling their efforts in the field of advertising, while leaving individual members complete industrial and commercial independence. He was also the promoter of the « Swiss Fashion House », which places its luxurious show-rooms and sales premises right in the heart of Zurich at the disposal of the twenty-seven Swiss fashion industrialists.

These then, in broad outline, are the main stages in the development of a go-ahead man and his equally go-ahead firm.

In 1956, Oumansky & Co. moved into new premises, which are considered among the finest of the kind in Switzerland. The factory employs 200 men and women, the only brake on its expansion being the difficulty of recruiting sufficient manpower. It exports 60 % of its output. The United States has become its biggest foreign client, in spite of the fact that the firm employs no export agent. Business is handled either at Geneva, or in the sales offices at Zurich (in the « Fashion House »), which is yet another instance of this firm's originality and claim to distinction. Customers are always prepared to come to Switzerland from all parts of the world to view the collections.

The editors of « Textiles Suisses » are happy to extend their congratulations and best wishes to Boris Oumansky on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of his firm.

Circular Dubied Wevenit machine with large film-box

