



ANTICH
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Visionary weaver prepares to become a major force in garments

John Liddle reports: wool Record May 2006

C & J Antich & Sons Ltd. expects to supply 200,000 garments in the coming 12 months ? a 150% increase compared with the year to last March.

This tremendous surge in making-up orders underlines one of the most remarkable modern success stories in British textiles.

The Huddersfield Company, founded in 1988, is best known as a commission warper, weaver and mender, an essential backbone of the Yorkshire worsted trade, but has expanded to include an international suit operation, supplying retailers and the corporate sector, and a rapidly growing garment-making business in China.

C & J Antich was founded when managing director Mr. Chris Antich, and his wife, Janet, who is financial director, raised £18,500 and persuaded a bank and other institutions to support the purchase of 12 looms. The company now operates 53 Dornier and Sulzer weaving machines, employs 138 people in Huddersfield (150 globally) with a projected group turnover of £18 million this year.

Moving one mile to purpose-built premises (Daropeant Buildings at Bradley Junction) in 1996, Mr. Antich intended the new factory should operate round the clock year after year.

With our commission weaving customers having difficulty filling the plant throughout the whole year and with the demise of the Bradford weaving industry (which accounted for 30-40% of the annual production, the company found it necessary to find additional strategies. Mr. Antich explained: "Supermarkets are no longer offering only food and drink. They now include pharmacies and sell clothes, insurance, mortgages and cars. I thought to myself 'Here we are paddling along as a commission weaver ? shouldn't we be doing more than that, and, if so, what exactly could we also offer?'

"The answer was to move into clothing, and this we have done by developing our own line of formal wear for retail and the corporate sector and, most importantly, by going into garment manufacturing. In effect, we have become a one-stop shop for retailers and corporate customers."

Added to this was the formation of Antich England to supply the UK high street and corporate wear with stock supported fabric from its range. This division also handles the British Airways contract which the company was successful in attaining 2 years ago. The development of Antich England has increased our suit and garment business both in fabrics and design.

Finally, Mr. Antich's policy of buying into successful local companies has ensured the continued growth of the company.

These decisions were not without potential detriment, especially in running the risk of competing with the customers of his own commission-weaving clients. "We had a great deal to do to reassure our commission customers that our downstream activities were not a threat and we were encouraged by the loyalty they showed us," said Mr. Antich.

It is interesting to note that the successful expansion of the Antich business is being built on Chinese foundations. Mr. Antich early on saw China as a huge opportunity rather than a threat. The connection is but one manifestation of Mr. Antich's inexhaustible entrepreneurial flair.

He now has strong links with six vertical mills (mostly from bale to retail) in China, mainly in Shanghai, Wuxi and Dalian, a thriving northerly textile centre. Mr. Antich says these associations give his company a wide choice of supply routes depending on the requirements of customers. For instance, suitings can be woven in Huddersfield and shipped to China for making-up, or Antich can have fabric manufactured and finished on commission and the garment made up in China.



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Most of the company's yarns for own-account weaving are sourced from Italy and Portugal but again China offers another alternative when appropriate.

"We have achieved a tremendous relationship with our Chinese suppliers to the extent that when they are producing fabric for us we can go into the mill and set the looms according to our requirements, and specify the temperatures to be used in the finishing processes," said Mr. Antich.

"We are also involved in the selection of raw materials and at the spinning stage. We receive a dedicated service that is continued into garment-manufacturing ? we are very much in control and therefore can guarantee the quality of our Chinese production.

"In addition, we still have access to European supply routes so that whether we produce in China or nearer home we can offer excellent quality at a wide variety of price points."

Mr. Antich made the significant disclosure that, using "Sirospun" yarns, it is possible to weave cloth in Huddersfield for almost the same price as a conventional two-fold yarn woven in China. "After taking into account shipping costs from China and duties, there may be only a difference of 20 pence a metre between a British fabric and a comparable Chinese product," said Mr. Antich.

At the time of the Wool Record's visit to Daroepant Buildings, Mr. Antich was inspecting ladies' jackets, which had just arrived from China. In 100% wool, these had been designed and tailored to a demanding specification for showing to a major European retailer.

Mr. Antich expressed satisfaction with the quality of the fabric and making-up, which involved fine detailing, intricate engineering and high-tech work on the fusible interlinings. If business is placed, it will involve a significant number of garments. Mr. Antich has been assisted in this project by The Woolmark Company's commercial director, Mr. Malcolm Campbell.

The suit business and the garment-manufacturing operation are run by a team of three directly-employed expert technicians and six others who are hired on a consultancy basis. The group has a Computer Aided Design office in Shanghai

Fully-computerised networks keep Huddersfield constantly in touch with China. The overseas activities are managed by Mr. Antich's oldest son, Mr. David Antich.

"Our USP (unique selling point) is that we are a one-stop shop: we offer a bespoke service in the medium to high-end area and we are a garment-maker who is also a world-class weaver," Mr. Antich commented. "We use advanced technology throughout our factories to help us get the price we are looking for and to make money out of textiles. If a project doesn't look like making money, we are not interested. We want people to have nice cloth on their back and everything we do is geared towards making fabric, suits and jackets of high quality for the given price points.

"We have a business that makes a decent return and is in profit every month, not just seasonally. We have reorganised the group internally in order to achieve maximum efficiency and cost effectiveness, and we have customers who are following our business very closely and supporting us."

A further development was announced in April. Starting next season, in a five-year deal, C. & J. Antich will sponsor the main stand at the Galpharm Stadium, which is the home of the Huddersfield Giants Rugby League Club and Huddersfield Town soccer club. "We want to put something back into the community which is our home and this contract gives us superb opportunities both for showcasing local textiles and promoting what we do," said Mr. Antich.

The sponsorship ties in with a new Antich offer in corporate-wear. After 12 months' development, the company is manufacturing "personalised" suits with the customer's name or a message woven into the fabric in a discreet stripe. The first client is the local Rugby League club, for whom suits in a 2/64's quality have been made with the word "Giants" repeated in a stripe alternating with another stripe that proclaims "Huddersfield, the birthplace of rugby league" (the game started there in 1895). The suits retail at around £300.





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Mr. Antich's extraordinary capacity to defy the doubters and maintain a strong Yorkshire manufacturing facility advanced again last year when he bought a 50% stake in Huddersfield Fine Worsteds (HFW), a manufacturer of luxurious cloths, which was in administration. He shares ownership with Mr. Alan Lewis.

With HFW came great names of the British trade, such as Broadhead & Graves, Josiah France, Martin Sons & Co. and Learoyd Brothers, and the merchanting business Hunt and Winterbotham, which Mr. Antich is preparing to relaunch. "I see Hunt and Winterbotham as a shrinking violet," he said. "It has two Royal Appointment marks and offers some of the world's most exclusive cloths but it has suffered from under-investment. We plan to change this situation and to make much more of a show of the merchanting business, which will be clearly separated from the HFW manufacturing arm." Mr. Antich revealed that soon Hunt and Winterbotham will be selling its illustrious cloths on the Internet. All the merchant's patterns will be displayed on a new Website, which will be updated every 30 minutes so customers will have real-time access to relevant information, such as when stock will be replenished. The bunches are being refreshed, jacketings in new colours are being added to the range on a regular basis and a new bunch of 2/72's and super 100's with cashmere containing 60 designs is going to be introduced to its range in September 2006.

C. & J. Antich also has a 25% share of Bradford manufacturer John Foster, which as reported on page ?? has won a Queen's Award for Enterprise. Mr. Antich pointed out that the commission-weaving business at Daropeant Buildings was handling a "colossal" amount of high-value, short-run work, nearly all of it on behalf of Yorkshire firms. Production totals around 4.5 million linear metres a year. The finest cloth woven by the company came from wool of 12 microns. Weaving of two-fold 140's qualities is regularly accomplished.

"One of our key strengths is our workforce," Mr. Antich noted. "They are absolutely top-drawer and along with the best machinery enable us to be totally flexible with the accent always on quality." Mr. Antich espouses with missionary zeal the merits of training and developing staff. Leading the group at a fast pace, Mr. Antich also overflows with enthusiasm about possibilities and progress. One of his favourite words is "dynamic". He told the Wool Record: "There are a lot of opportunities in textiles. You have to be entrepreneurial. You can't just sit and watch. I think people look at interest rates and exchange rates and hesitate to invest in their businesses. We have always invested in our business. There are always going to be risks but you have to be brave and dynamic."

"You can't blame the government and complain that it doesn't help industry. You can't change government policy. You have to concentrate on what you are going to do and do it well. I liken the business of textiles to holding a sack of rats. It's moving about all over the place and it's a major challenge to keep it under control and avoid being bitten. "Success is all about having the right people and the right contacts, about seeing your cup as being half full and not half empty and about being honest."

Caption:

Mr. Chris Antich, managing director of the Antich group. He studied design and colour at Huddersfield Polytechnic, trained in the design and manufacture of fine worsteds in local mills and gained management qualifications at Huddersfield University before launching the C & J Antich commission-weaving business.

