

Steiner Tools, Bole, Switzerland

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César Steiner 1945/6.

César Steiner founded the company at Les Ponts-de-Martel in 1914. He was already working in the horological tool trade as an employee but was determined to become his own boss as soon as possible. Working at home "after hours", Steiner made tools in the kitchen, aided by his wife. Parts that needed heat treatment were heated in the kitchen range. As this work was carried out late at night, sleep was often minimal and snatched whenever possible in between operations. Looking for a trademark, Mrs. Steiner made a suggestion that was to become famous amongst watchmakers all over the world, "As you often work until the cock crows,

why not have a cock as the trademark?" Thus the symbol *Le Coq* was registered as Steiner's trademark.

After a few years the company moved to Bole and by 1928 it had reached the stage of requiring a purpose-built workshop in which the company continued to produce horological tools until autumn 1992.

On M. Steiner's death in the early 1960's, the business was taken over by M. Y. Thiébaud, Steiner's son-in-law. M. Thiébaud has now just retired after working for the firm for 52 years. He is a man who simply doesn't seem to age. I have known him for over 25 years and he seems to have changed little in that time.



Company Trade Marks.



Yves Thiébaud 1945/6.

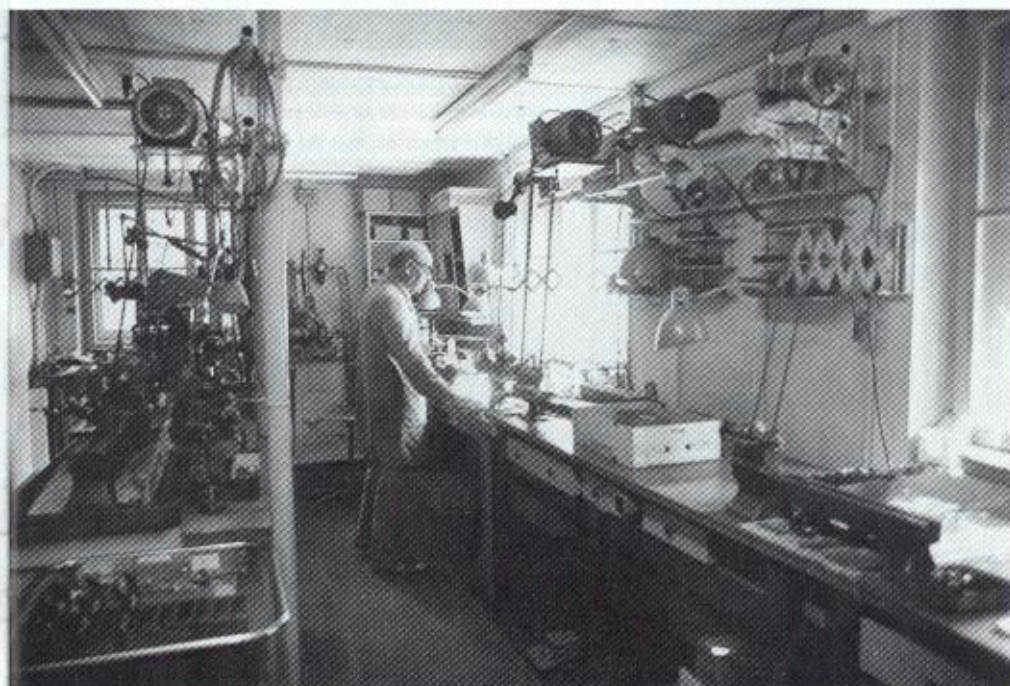
He is a real *Patron* of the old school. He knows the products inside out, personally attended to most operations himself and was finally the chief inspector of all the finished tools.

Now, after a long search, he has at last found a suitable successor. This autumn the present owners of Horia S.A., well known for producing small assembly presses which are so important to the watch industry and repairer alike, have taken over the business. They have spent many weeks learning all the processes and little tricks necessary to produce very high precision products with relatively simple machines. The team from Horia, led by one of their directors, M. Jean-Claude Beauchat, who is a master mechanic, have been producing the traditional Steiner turns, watchmaker's lathes, Jacot tools and staking sets under the ever-watchful eye of M. Thiébaud. They will soon have completed their task and will then continue to produce the tools to the same high standard at their own workshops in Courfaivre, Switzerland. The trademark *Le Coq* will thus live on and the decades of unbroken tradition and quality will continue.

The Steiner turns and the Jacot tool are probably the best known of the firm's products. All the Swiss schools of horology use them and many of the top-class manufacturers, too. The turns were developed in close co-operation with the

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**'Skill close
to magic'**



Part of the Steiner workshops.

schools, in particular the Solothurn school. From my own experience I would say that they are the finest that anyone could wish for and I can hardly imagine working without them.

Entering the workshops where these tools were produced until now was like stepping back into the past. Overhead transmission shafts with long flat belt drives abounded. Most of the machines have worked for decades and were either made or adapted for a special purpose by M. Thiébaud. They have served him well during all that time.

The methods used to make all the parts and accessories, usually in small batches, were developed and refined over the years by *Le Patron* and were generally very simple but highly ingenious, enabling the work to be carried out to very close limits.

The all important bores to take the runners of the turns and Jacot tools are very carefully produced. After drilling and reaming they are finally honed to size and gauged with that marvellous system, the **Mercer Air Gauge**. The divisions on the dial make microns look like centimetres and in the able hands of *Le Patron* unbelievable fits were the norm.

I recently had another tailstock fitted to my Steiner watchmaker's lathe by M. Thiébaud and watched him hone and gauge the bore, exactly to my liking. The runner now slides at the touch of a finger but without the slightest trace of play and is a joy to use. I was a little worried about the line-up with the headstock, which had been made 20 years before. However, I left it and the bed with M. Thiébaud for final fitting and when it was returned to me I soon found that my fears were unfounded and the line-up was perfect. A test hole was drilled dead on centre and to size. The proof of the pudding! Skill like that is close to magic.

The Steiner catalogues were unique and the introduction to the lathes and turns was written in the first person and Steiner described them throughout as "my lathes....." This highly personal attachment and immense pride in the products started by Steiner and carried on by Thiébaud has been the hallmark of quality since the inception of the company 78 years ago.

Over the years there have been fluctuations in the need for these traditional watchmaker's tools, but with the present massive revival of mechanical watches the situation looks promising today. J-C Beuchat told me that Horia are planning to add screw head polishing tools to their product range. Welcome news indeed for these tools, essential for quality work, have long been out of production.

In conclusion one can only wish M. Thiébaud a long and happy retirement and all possible success to Horia S.A. in their new venture with *Le Coq*.

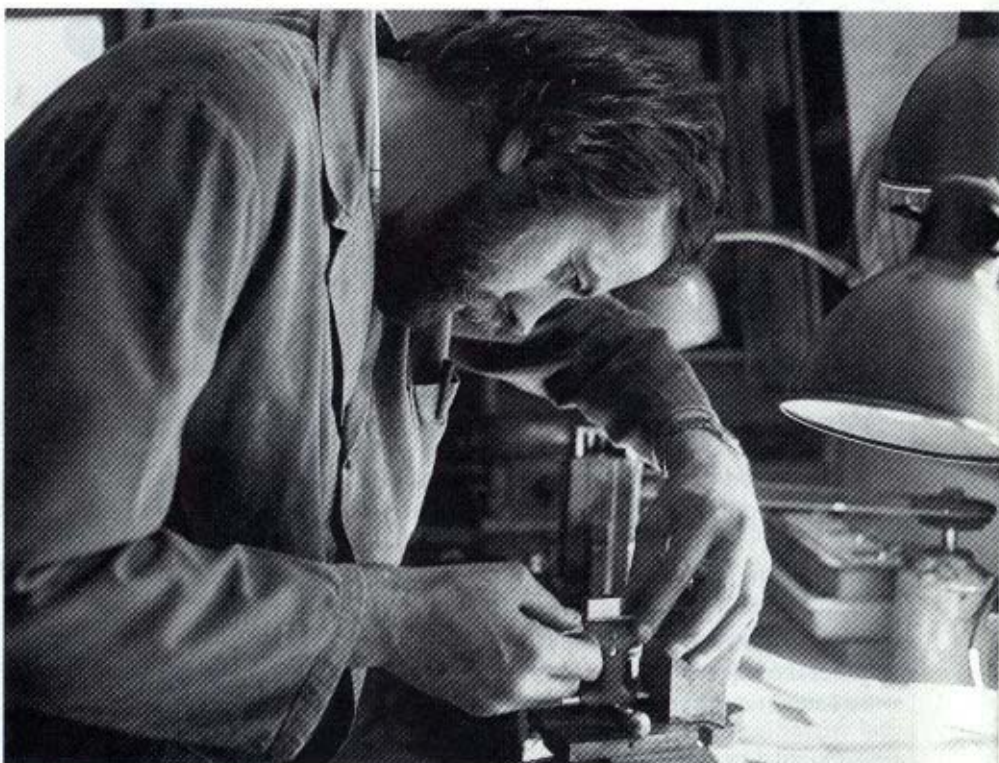


Gauging the bores of a Jacot tool. Note the Mercer Air Gauge.

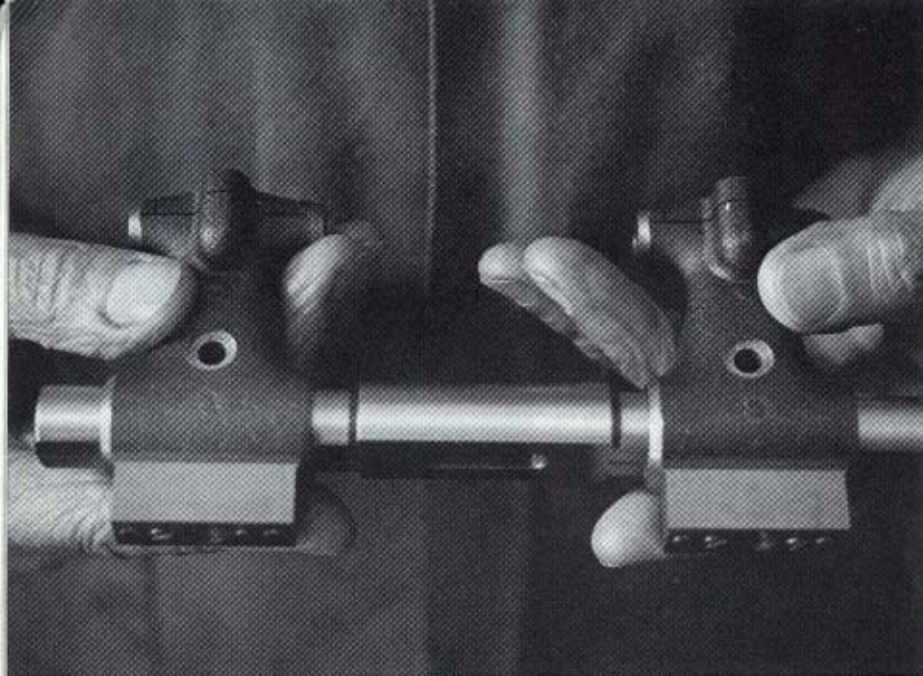
'One of their Directors



**is a master
mechanic'**



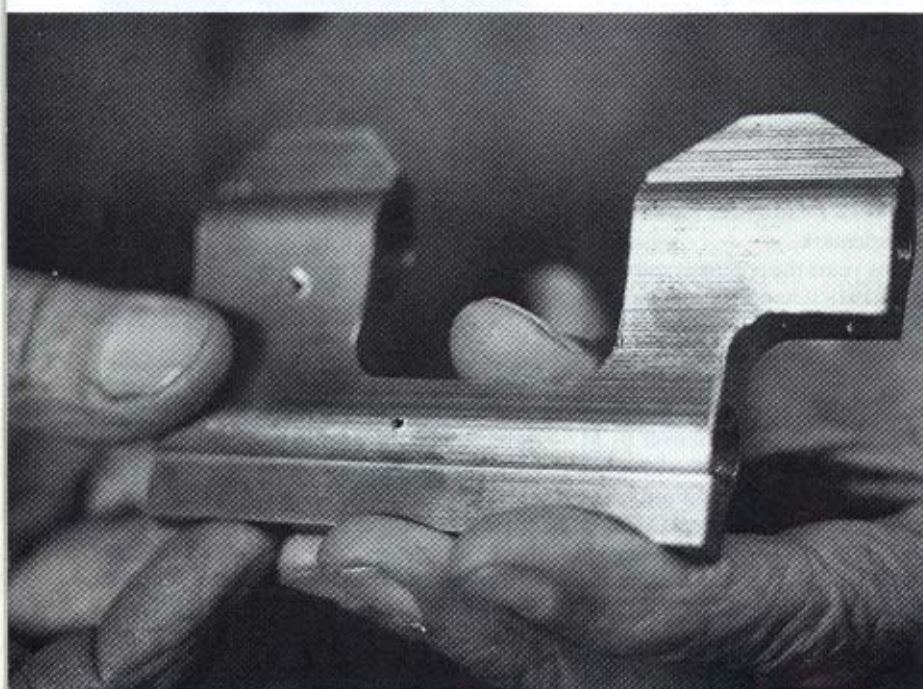
M. J-C Beuchat of Horia.



The very rigid basis of the Steiner turns.



M. Yves Thiébaud, September 1992. Reaming the bores for the runners on a Jacot tool.

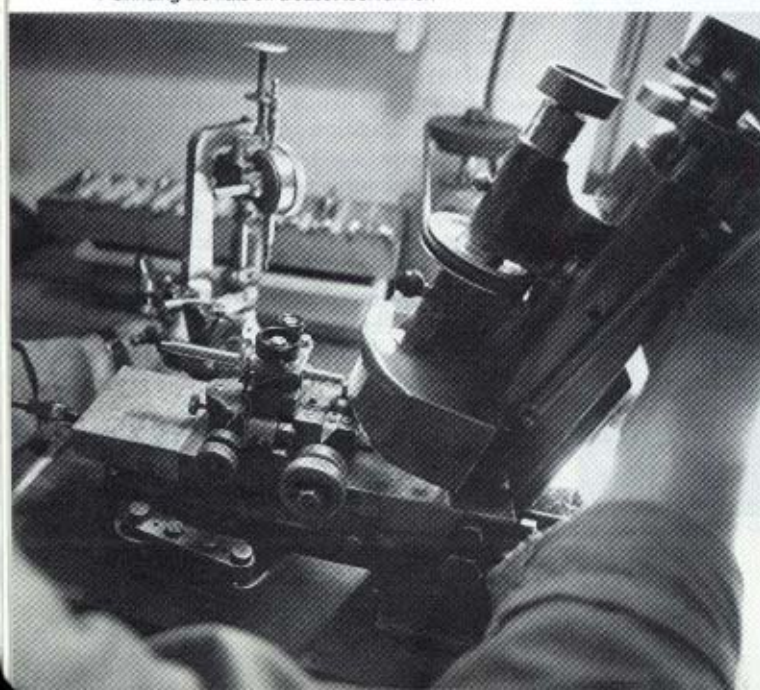


▲ The Jacot tool body is a brass hot-pressed component, shown here partially machined. The large bore at the bottom of the tool is to take the spring for the Steiner bow-less drive introduced in 1952.



▲ A batch of Jacot tool runners. The notched disc is fitted at an early stage and used to index the notches and flats during manufacture as well as in use for pivot burnishing.

▼ Grinding the flats on a Jacot tool runner.



▼ Close-up of the flat grinding operation shown left. Note the notched disc used to index for each flat.

