

Tonak: A History in Felt

Janice Charles

Sinamay Rose Tutorial

Mut Zum Hut 2015

and more...



HATalk

the e-magazine for those who make hats

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TONAK.®



The process of making a felt hat doesn't begin when your hood arrives in the post ready for blocking. It begins long before, with the production of the felt itself. Felt manufacturing is an age old industry. In fact, some believe that felt may be the oldest fabric known to man. Today, most felt is manufactured in Eastern Europe and we asked Czech hat designer Alena Balejová-Kobylková to give us an insight into the history and workings of Tonak, one of the world's oldest working felt factories.



By Alena Balejová-Kobylková

Parisian designer Petra Ptáčková, to collaborate on the Tonak collections.

What I found most intriguing when I first came to Tonak was the impression of falling back in time. The factory seemed to be breathing, bringing into our nostrils the same odour as it would have two hundred years ago. Later I understood that the reason for this was that many of the production processes remain almost the same as they did those many years ago. This fact itself speaks of Tonak's long traditions and proven procedures, which today also incorporate innovative modern technologies and machinery. One

of the latest inventions, for instance, is a closed cycle technology which allows the factory to use up former waste as environmentally friendly fertilizer.

As well as the Nový Jičín factory, Tonak also has a facility in Strakonice, Bohemia. Production is based on traditional technologies and expertise and the company insists on using premium raw materials. The two factories are used for making different products, enabling Tonak to create an extensive range of men's and women's felt and knitted hats as well as unblocked capelines and hoods for hat makers.

The original Tonak factory is located in Nový Jičín, a town in northern Moravia (a region of the Czech Republic). Global leaders in the production of 100% fur felt hats and hat bodies, Tonak primarily use raw rabbit skin to make fur felt and also manufacture wool felt in a range of colours. Tonak headwear is currently sold in more than 50 countries and their felt is used by well known manufacturers and hat designers such as Stetson and Philip Treacy. They have also established good working relationships with a number of distinguished fashion designers, including Czech fashion icon Klára Nademlýnská and talented young





In my opinion, the most admirable part of the Tonak manufacturing process is the high proportion of manual work required to create each individual product and this invokes an immeasurable admiration for the value of human labour in me.

"Manufacturing of fur felt hats in Nový Jičín has continued for more than two hundred years," says Lenka Urbánková-Jarešová, Tonak's new General Director and Chairwoman of their Board of Directors, "and up until now it has retained a tremendous

amount of handwork."

"To make just one single hat, it is necessary to use the skills and craftsmanship of our hat makers for more than 100 manufacturing operations."

Hat manufacturing in Nový Jičín goes back as far as the 16th century. Historical documents show evidence of hat making production in Nový Jičín in 1506, when the town hall books mentions a hat maker named Prokop. Later, two other hat makers, Duchek and Prokš, are also listed in the records. There were not enough master hat makers in Nový Jičín to form a guild at that time; this had to wait until the year 1630, when the hat makers asked the Nový Jičín Town Council to set seal upon The Hat Makers' Guild Articles to confirm their rights.

When hat maker Gottfried Hückel left his native town, Bavarian Würzburg, in 1625, he finally settled in Fulnek. Later, his son Johann Gottfried Hückel followed in his father's steps and mastered the craft. In 1779, Johann Nepomuk Hückel was born to the next generation of the Hückel family. He learnt how to make hats from his father, who then sent him to Nový Jičín to serve his time of apprenticeship there. Johann Nepomuk Hückel, whose name is closely connected with Tonak's historical roots, joined the Nový Jičín Hat Makers' Guild in 1799.

the founder of mechanized factory production of fur hats in what was then the whole of Austria.

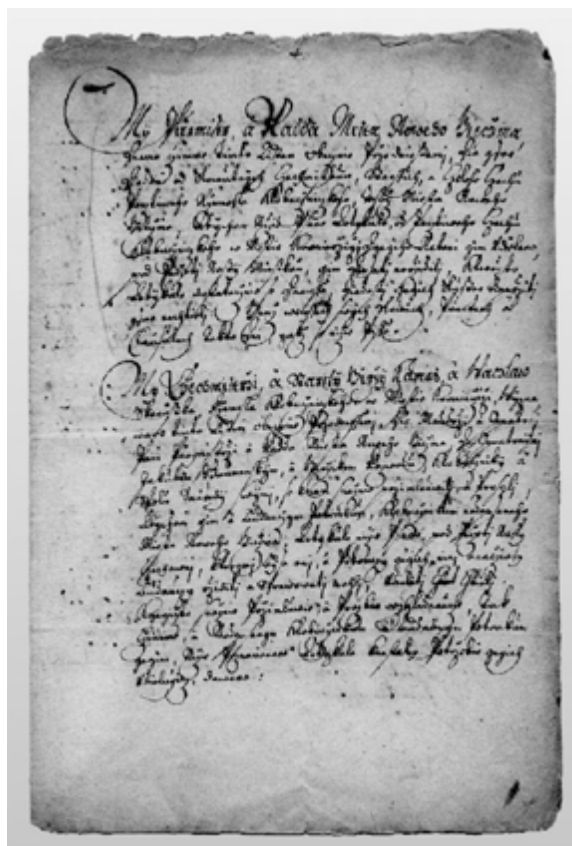
Production evolved successfully and so, two years later, the family was able to build a new factory fitted with the latest technical equipment. Their public company, *Hutfabrik Johann Hückel's Söhne*, was established on January 1, 1868 and functioned under this name until its socialization in 1945.

The flourishing business reached far beyond Austria's borders and the brand received a number of international awards between 1868 and 1914. The boom in production was enormous. In 1910, 16,000 raw rabbit skins were delivered to the factory for processing each day and there were soon 2,000 employees.

The firm contributed to the well-being of its many employees by creating a workers' dependency, building housing for officials and work masters and establishing provisory care for older workers, widows and orphans. The company managed to survive both World Wars and further expand branch operations to Raciborz, Skoczov, and Vienna, employing over 4,000 workers at the beginning of the 1940s.

Johann's brother Augustin, a hatter with his own workshop, passed on his trade to his son Johann Albert. In 1835, Johann Albert took over his uncle's business as well and, in 1848, he merged the two workshops into one firm and set up large-scale manufacturing, thus establishing the rudiments of the outstanding family firm which is today called Tonak.

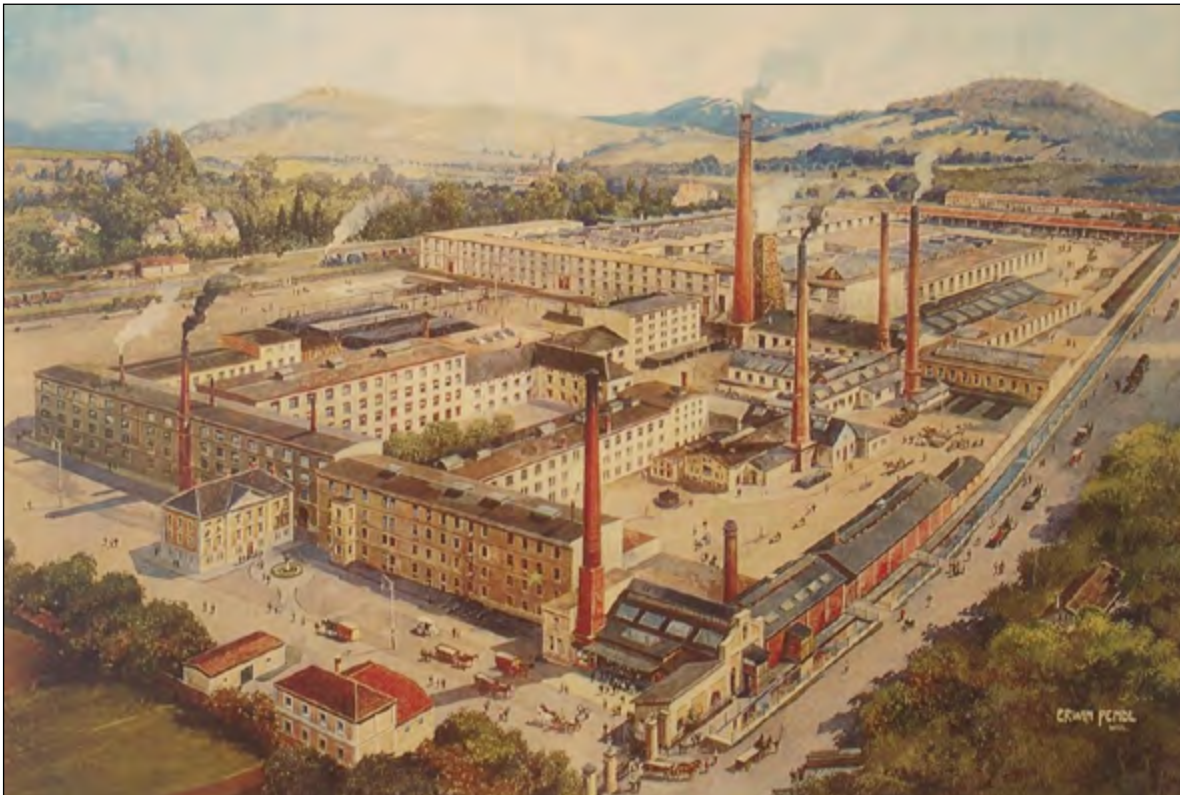
A wise and farsighted man, Johann Albert sent all three of his sons to European countries to gain experience and learn about the advances of the trade. This soon brought fruitful results and, in 1865, supported by his sons, he introduced several new steam machines into the production process and became



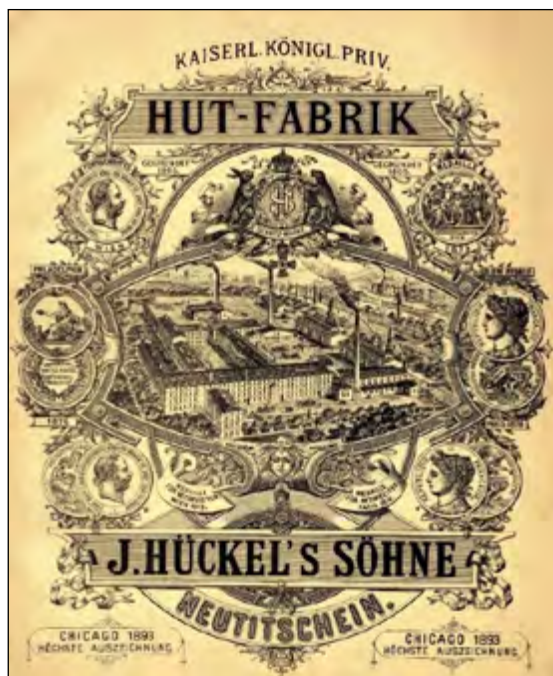
The Hat Makers' Guild Articles, Nový Jičín, 1630



The Hat Masters and apprentices of The Hat Makers' Guild, Nový Jičín, second half of 19th Century



Johann Hückel and Sons, aerial view of the factory, around 1910

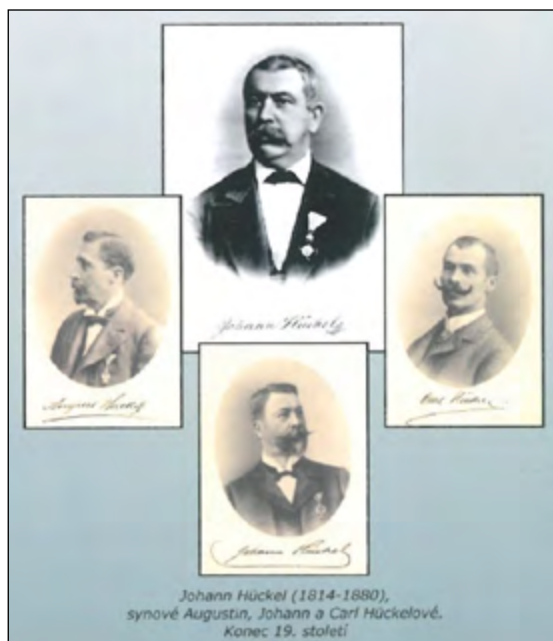


In 1941, the Hückels bought Böhm's Hat Factory, formerly a Jewish business, from the State and widened their production capacity even further. Their success was not to last much longer, however. The fateful year of 1945 brought presidential decrees of nationalization and on April 4, 1946, the firm was erased from the Commercial Register. The business was amalgamated with local trade rivals to create the A. Peschl and Janyška factory, part of a new national enterprise which began to use the name TONAK in 1947. 'TO' stands for *továrna*, which is translated *factory*, 'NA' means *for* in English and 'K' stands for *klobouky*, or *hats*, so the name, quite literally, means Hat Factory.

most of the company's factories.

In 2011, Tonak was able to expand its operations again by acquiring the former Fezko Strakonice. Tonak Strakonice is located in the South of Bohemia and is specially known for its knitted fezzes. Small scale textile making has been going on in the town for at least five hundred years and the industrial production of their famous fezzes dates back to 1812, when the Fürth brothers opened the Fezko factory. In 1873 alone, the firm of Wolf Fürth produced a staggering 1.2 million fezzes.

Having navigated through a very tumultuous period of modern history, the increased global market for both hat and felt products, along with the Czech Republic's strong trading position as a member state of the European Union, means that Tonak's future is again looking bright. The firm currently employs 310 workers in Nový Jičín and 300 in Strakonice and recently opened a new Flagship Store near Pařížská Street, one of Prague's most prestigious shopping destinations, allowing Tonak to maintain a very positive outlook for both the retail and wholesale branches of its business.



Johann Hückel (1814–1880), and his sons Augustin, Johann and Carl at the end of 19th century.

The long standing Eastern European tradition of hat wearing by both genders was drastically interrupted by the new political regime. Socialist women comrades wore scarves and men were required to wear berets while marching in the national May 1st celebrations but other hats and headwear were considered bourgeois, old fashioned and unsuitable for a true Communist comrade. It is a miracle that Tonak somehow managed to survive this dark period of the Socialist era. Production figures clearly show a massive decrease in trade followed by the liquidation of

To find out more about Tonak, go to www.tonak.cz.

Hat of the Month

by Janice Charles



Image: Steven Harrison Brown Model: Sophie East

Janice Charles, a former architect, says her love of design and creativity became apparent as early as five years old. "I subjected my poor dolls to hours of torture by wrapping fabric around them," she told us, "desperately trying to make them look like they were wearing fabulous creations. In 2010, I entered the 'Who Wants to be a Millin-aire' competition at Royal Ascot and was shocked, amazed and excited to be in the final 12 out of 2500 entries. Completely self-taught, I really did not expect to be able to compete against professional milliners and was honoured to have been chosen. As a result, my design was sold in John Lewis' flagship store in Oxford Street, London. This made me realize that millinery could be more than just a hobby."

You can read more about the British hat maker's journey into the world of hats and the growth of her label - [House of Charles](#) - in [Issue 76](#). This month, we're focusing in on this red laser-cut felt statement piece from her latest collection...



"My Inspiration for this hat comes from the fabric itself," says Janice. "While on my travels I stumbled across this amazing fabric and couldn't resist buying it. I could already see in my mind's eye what I was going to turn it into. I had a fashion show coming up, which I thought would be the perfect opportunity to showcase my new design. A few days later, I purchased a red felt capeline to match. I spliced the capeline and set about blocking it. Once dry, I formed the structure of the brim, wired it and incorporated the laser-cut fabric to complete the design."



Janice can recreate this asymmetrical felt design in a range of colours and sizes to suit her customer's needs. She sees this piece as "a modern twist on 50s glamour" and feels that it would work well for winter weddings, race meetings or any other occasion at which a fashionable lady would like to stand out from the crowd.

Janice Charles has recently opened a new studio in Liverpool city centre and also sells her work online at www.houseofcharles.co.uk.



Make Rolled Sinamay Roses *with Bridget Bailey*

Part 1: Preparing & Dyeing the Sinamay

You will need:

- Sinamay
- A spray bottle of clean water
- Scissors
- Glass-headed pins
- Red Procion MX dye
- 3 small glass or plastic containers for mixing dye
- A plastic spoon for mixing dye
- An old towel

Bridget Bailey (right), of [Bailey Tomlin](#), is a milliner and textile artist based in London. Her work is easily recognizable for its exquisite detail and superb craftsmanship. Often inspired by nature, Bridget is well known for creating lifelike plants, flowers and insects out of sinamay, straw, silk and other materials. Having been in the industry for over 25 years, she is a true expert who is incredibly generous in passing on her knowledge and techniques. Bridget has shared a number of millinery projects with us over the years, which you can find in [past issues of HATalk](#). This month, she begins a new series teaching you how to make her special sinamay roses...

1) Spray a piece of sinamay with clean water until it is dripping wet. This will help to remove any kinks and wrinkles before you begin, giving the sinamay a “fresh start” so that it behaves as you want it to. You can use any colour of sinamay except black. The lighter the colour, the more dye it will take, but you can also get some really interesting results by over-dyeing darker colours.



2) Pull the wet sinamay, stretching hard along the bias (diagonal to the grain of the fabric). Thoroughly preparing the material in this way is extremely important. Taking the time to stretch the sinamay as much as you possibly can at the beginning of the process will make all the difference to your success later on.



3) If the sinamay has a selvedge, cut it off - it is a different tension to the rest of the sinamay and will make the piece harder to manipulate.



4) Lay the stretched sinamay down on a flat surface, with the bias edge facing you.



5) Give the sinamay another hard pull and then make an 6cm (2½") fold along the bias edge (below). Make a good crease where you fold so that it stays in place as this will become the edge of your rose.



6) Pull the sinamay again, making sure that it's still fully stretched along the bias.



7) Pin the fold in place.



8) Cut along the length of sinamay just below the pins.



9) Give the folded strip a stretch and then lay it back down on your work surface. Make two straight cuts approximately 33cm (13") apart to create a rectangular length of the folded sinamay bias strip.



10) Soak the folded sinamay strip under a cold tap. The material will accept dye more evenly if it is completely wet.



11) Loosely roll the wet sinamay strip.



12) Keep the folded edges together and even as this will be the part of the rose that is seen.



13) Stick a pin through the roll to hold it in place.



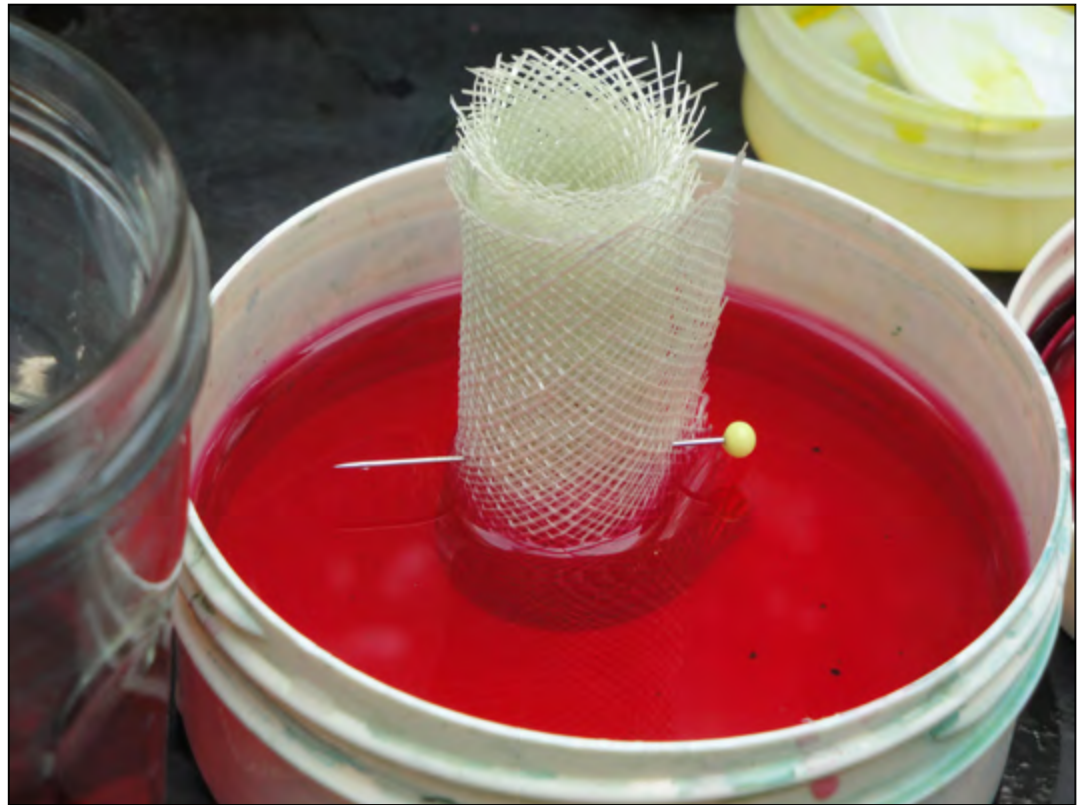
14) Make up three different shades of red Procion dye in three separate containers, going from lighter to darker in colour by using a slightly larger dye to water ratio each time. Make enough of the palest shade to cover half of the sinamay roll, with the darker shades getting shallower respectively. If you are not sure how to mix the dye, refer to the manufacturer's instructions or check out Bridget's article on this subject in [Issue 66](#).



15) Use a sinamay scrap to test the dye colours. When you are happy with them, drop your pinned roll into the container of the palest dye and leave it there for about 10 minutes while the sinamay fibres soak up the pigment. Remember that the folded edge is the top of your rose.



16) Move the sinamay to the next container, which should be slightly shallower and a slightly darker shade of red. Leave it to soak in this dye for a few minutes and then lift it out.



17) Blot any drips on an old towel and then place the sinamay in the shallowest, most concentrated, container of red dye.



18) Remove from the dye, place on an old towel and leave to dry completely.



Here's a look at the finished rose. As you can see, soaking the sinamay in dye is a very effective way of colour grading, incorporating subtle shades of the same colour in a natural way. Next month, Bridget will show you how to roll your sinamay into a rose shape. In the meantime, have a go at experimenting with this dyeing technique.

To find out more about Bridget Bailey, click on the links below. To book private millinery tuition with her, email studio@baileytomlin.com.

Website: www.baileytomlin.com

Facebook: [Bailey Tomlin](#)

Twitter: [@BridgetBailey3](#)

Instagram: [@bridgetbailey.baileytomlin](#)





Mut zum Hut 2015



For the past 17 years, German hat festival Mut Zum Hut has been held in the Renaissance castle of Neuburg an der Donau, an idyllic town on the banks of the Danube River. Just 85 kilometres from Munich, this historic location is the perfect venue for a hatty weekend away and the event attracts visitors from across Germany and neighbouring countries.

Always held on the last weekend in September, this year's festival included indoor and outdoor catwalk shows, live music from Bavarian brass band Neuburger Stadtkapelle and lots of great food and drink offerings. As usual, the main attraction was the numerous trade stalls where visitors could browse and buy quality handmade hats and other craft items to take home. 112 exhibitors participated this year, including 62 milliners, 22 jewellery designers and 28 other designers and artists.

"My main purpose of this hat event was to make hats socially acceptable and welcome," says founder Ute Patel-Missfeldt, "so that the milliners can make their livelihood financially possible. Every passing year has shown that we are coming nearer and nearer to this goal. This year three milliners sold everything that they brought with them for the exhibition! And everybody else was happy too with the sale."

The event kicked off on Friday, September 25th with a speech from Mrs Patel-Missfeldt (right), who was joined by her husband Prof. Dr. V. J. Patel, the mayor of Neuburg Dr. Bernhard Gmehling and Germany's 'Hutkönig 2015' ('King of Hats') Horst Winter. The crowd was then treated to an Indian dancing and Sari Show from the Monalisa Gosh Ensemble.

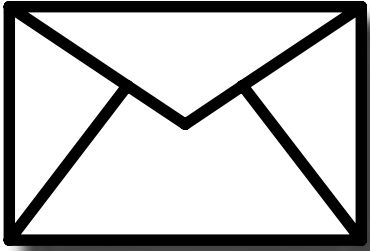
As well as being an active supporter and ambassador of the art of millinery, Mrs Patel-Missfeldt is also an internationally known artist and author. Later this month, she will be travelling to Beijing to serve as a member of the Chinese Jury for Franis Chen's porcelain painting competition.

Mut Zum Hut 2016 will take place from 23-25 September. To find out more, go to www.mutzumhut.de.



“My main purpose of this hat event was to make hats socially acceptable and welcome, so that the milliners can make their livelihood financially possible.”

-Ute Patel-Missfeldt



Letters to the Editor...

Send us your questions and comments! Do you have a problem needing a solution? Or information that you'd like to share?

Email us! mail@hataalk.com



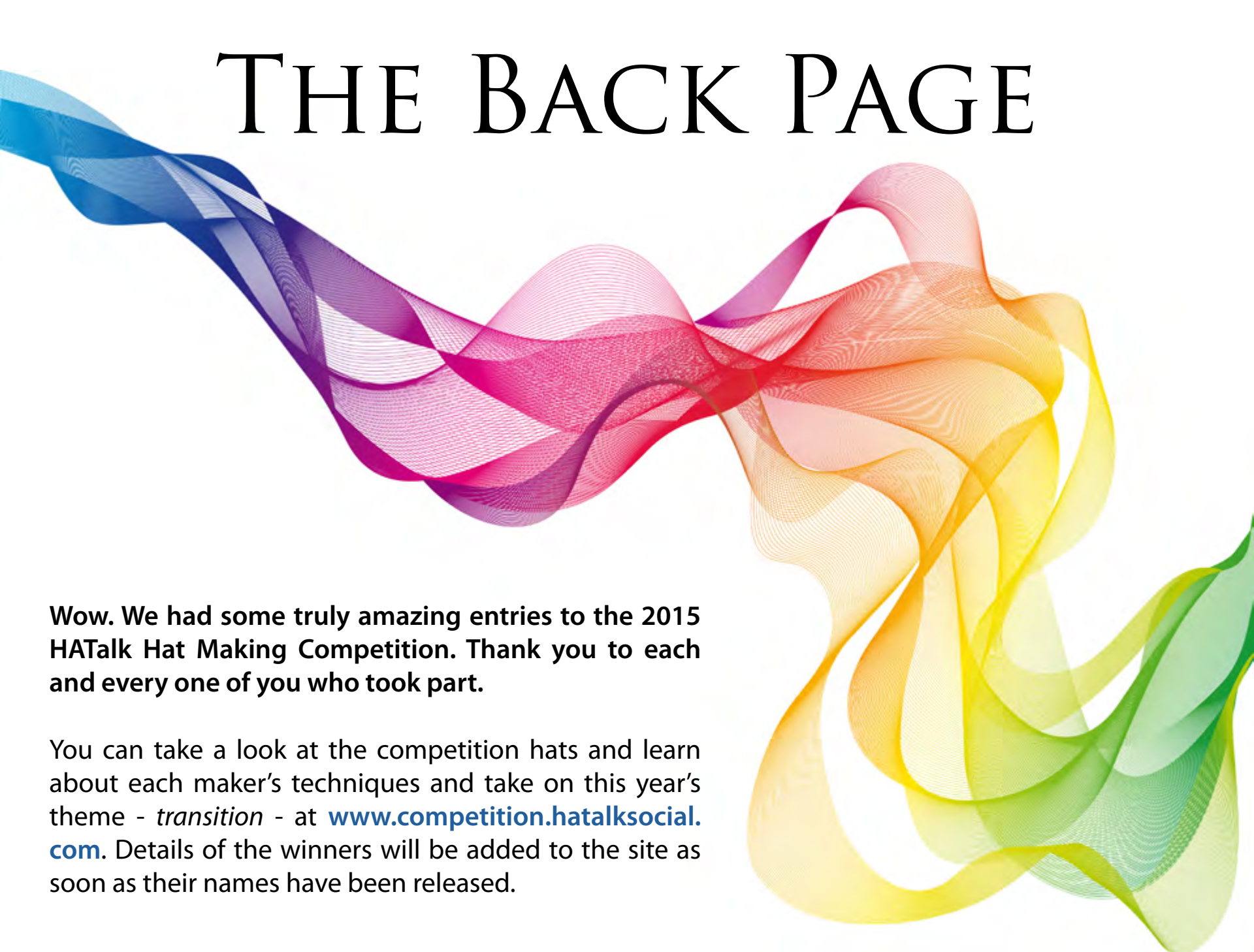
Question:

I really enjoyed last month's [Wonderflex fascinator tutorial](#) (left) by [Carrie Jenkinson](#) and am definitely planning on experimenting with this material. Before I begin, I was just wondering if Wonderflex is waterproof or whether it would lose its shape in the rain?

Answer:

Cold water has no effect on Wonderflex so it is a very interesting option for those of us who live in countries where the sun doesn't always shine at the race track! Since Wonderflex is a heat activated thermoplastic, it is heat, rather than, moisture, that you need be mindful of. Wonderflex will soften when exposed to temperatures of 70°- 80° Celsius (150°-170° Fahrenheit), so be careful where you store your headpieces if you live a hot climate. It is not advisable, for instance, to leave Wonderflex creations inside a parked car during hot weather.

THE BACK PAGE



Wow. We had some truly amazing entries to the 2015 HATalk Hat Making Competition. Thank you to each and every one of you who took part.

You can take a look at the competition hats and learn about each maker's techniques and take on this year's theme - *transition* - at www.competition.hatalksocial.com. Details of the winners will be added to the site as soon as their names have been released.

Contact Us!

Questions? Comments? Email us at mail@hataalk.com or post on our [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) or [HATalk Social](#) pages and we'll be sure to get back to you.



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