



01

SHINY HAPPY PEOPLE —Paris

- 01 Stickers for Famaco packaging
- 02 Worker next to a small assembly line for stickers
- 03 Buckets of shoe cream
- 04 The Pffirter: Bruno (left), Audrey and their father Thierry



02

Preface

A family-run shoe-polish manufacturer on the outskirts of Paris with over eight decades of experience has big global plans, in spite of its diminutive size.

WRITER

Tom Burges Watson

PHOTOGRAPHER

Philippe Servent

03



04

La rentrée is a time of year when everybody in France seems to be in high spirits. With the summer holidays over, people are well rested, tanned and bursting with fresh ideas. A new school year begins, politicians get back into action and company employees are at their most productive. This certainly seems to be the case at Famaco, a family-owned shoe-polish manufacturer in the Paris suburb of Châtillon that is abuzz with *rentrée* enthusiasm.

As MONOCLE arrives, a forklift truck darts back and forth down the aisles of the company's depot, loading up a long line of waiting lorries with shoe creams, polishes and leather treatments. Made and packaged on the premises, Famaco's products are delivered to clients right across France – and increasingly much further afield. Over the course of eight decades, the company has built up a reputation as an expert in shoe and leather care and today has a client base that includes shoe shops, cobblers, the French army and the fire brigade.

Famaco's CEO and president Audrey Pffirter begins by giving a potted history of the company, picking up a bottle of Raviv Cuir. "This is one of our best-selling products," she says. "We have been making it since the 1970s and people love it."

Her brother Bruno explains how Famaco came to be. "My grandfather had a friend who told him about a great formula for creating the perfect shine for leather," he says. "So he decided to set up a business and for the name he just took the Latin word *fama*, meaning 'repute', and added 'co' at the end."



REPORT
Famaco



01



In keeping with the French spirit of *égalité*, the siblings have decided to swap roles every 18 months

When they took the reins from their father in 2014, the brother-and-sister team became Famaco's third generation of family managers. Both Audrey and Bruno have plenty of experience to draw on from their previous careers (in property and banking respectively). In keeping with the French spirit of *égalité*, the siblings have decided to swap roles every 18 months, sharing the responsibility of being CEO of the company.

"We complement each other in terms of character and expertise," says Bruno. "I look after the commercial side of the business and Audrey takes care of much of the day-to-day management."

A powerful but perfectly agreeable smell of beeswax mixed with a low dose of solvents lingers in the air throughout the factory and warehouse. Famaco's head of development, Vlassis Emmanouil, joins the discussion and gives a detailed explanation of what makes a good shoe polish. Pointing to a large slab of beeswax, bags of carnauba wax from Brazil and various other raw materials used in the process, he explains why he thinks Famaco's products are so effective: "Our polishes contain between eight and 10 different types of wax. This is what gives leather a really incredible shine."

He then demonstrates how these various ingredients are carefully measured and placed in a machine that looks like it could be used for making a giant cake. The mixture is then heated, stirred and cooled before it is transferred to the production line for packaging.

Bruno points to a chart on the wall showing a kaleidoscope of more than 100 different shades of Famaco shoe



02



03



04

Ho
yo

"Lo
ool
say
Pfir
you
app

Top
01

02

03

04

01

02

03

04

05

06

07

08

09

How to buff up your brogues

"Looking after shoes is like looking after your face," says Famaco's CEO Audrey Pfrirer. "First you clean, then you moisturise, then you apply colour and finish."

Top tips

- 01 Use a brush to remove any dust.
- 02 Use a small quantity of polish then shine shoes with a cloth.
- 03 Spend 25 minutes polishing with the cloth, using a circular movement.
- 04 For exotic leathers, use the appropriate product for the type of material.



06



07



08



09

- 01 Famaco worker overalls
- 02 Entrance to Famaco
- 03 Drawers containing different Famaco product colours
- 04 Wax used as the base element for shoe cream and polish
- 05 Some of the team working in the packaging area of the factory
- 06 Worker in front of an assembly line for shoe cream
- 07 Different colours of dye cream
- 08 Wax used as the base element for shoe cream and polish
- 09 Checking products by hand

creams and sprays. "We offer a greater variety of colour than any other company in the world," he says. "Although trends change, we never remove a shade from our range, even if demand is really limited." Interest in navy blue and coral shoe creams has increased in recent years, while mango and apple green have become rather less sought-after.

In keeping with the times, glitter polishes have been added to the product range and are selling well. In fact, it is difficult to establish if anything is not going well at Famaco. The company, thanks to Audrey and Bruno aggressively tackling new markets, generated close to €9m in revenue during the course of 2014 and in the first half of 2015, turnover was up by 20 per cent year on year.

Audrey and Bruno, however, have much grander ambitions for Famaco and are increasingly eyeing markets far beyond France. Exports currently account for about 13 per cent of total sales but they want to see that figure double during the next few years. With this in mind, the management team has

been on various roadshows, most recently to Japan, where they are hoping to raise awareness for their products.

Listening to staff on the factory floor, it quickly becomes clear that Famaco has a paternalistic approach to its 40-odd employees, many of whom have fond memories of working with Audrey and Bruno's grandparents. Their father, Alain, who grew the business considerably during the 1980s and 1990s, has officially retired, although he still likes to stay involved and when consulted offers his opinion on strategy.

"I think he trusts us and so far he seems to approve of our new initiatives," says Audrey. She points to some examples of their latest project: various boxes, tubes and pots bearing the company's new-look branding. "We decided to reverse the logo," says Bruno; the emblem is two men wearing top hats standing side by side. "We wanted them to look to the right, not the left, to give the impression they are looking forward, not backwards."

The future of Famaco looks bright. The company was recently awarded a certificate of artisanal excellence by the French government, recognition that gives it kudos and raises its profile. Although Famaco is experiencing healthy growth in terms of revenue and market share, the company is still small enough to give clients a sense that they are being given a highly personalised service, an example of which is their willingness to accept low-volume orders. "People like working with us; we are a small family company," says Bruno. "We are adaptable and we are in this business for the long term." — (A)