

The Leather Retailers' and Manufacturers' Journal

Shop Talk!

MARCH 2010

FOOT & SHOE NEWS

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Additional Articles: Laugh Lines | Leather Chat | Maverick
Leather Company | Horween Leather | New Leathers & Leather
Specials | Alai Group News | News, Notes & Queries | Classifieds

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Alal Group News

by Luis Fara, Sales Manager, Alal Group

Over the years Alal Group philosophy has concentrated on continual technological innovation so as to produce high quality vegetable leather while safeguarding the environment.

Vegetable tanning is an artisan tradition and the Company has achieved a consistent standard using both antique recipes and state-of-the-art technology.

The tannery has a direct relationship with beef export oriented slaughterhouses. These slaughterhouse can assure a consistent standard by pulling the hides with pneumatic machines. In addition to this, the heavier steers from the center of Argentina are sent to foreign markets.



Slaughter Control, Emilio Alal, President, and Luis Fara, Sales Manager

The Company is importing chemicals from leading Italian suppliers and receives coaching from Italian technicians that visit the tannery every two months to work along with Alal technicians. The modern tanning industry uses tannin extracts in liquid form and in powders.



Alal Technicians

At the moment, the tannery is working with three extracts:

The quebracho tree extract, a tree indigenous to Argentina. From its bark a characteristically red-colored powder can be obtained that gives the leather an unmistakable warm and brilliant shade together with a compact texture more resistant to water and atmospheric agents.

The second type of extract comes from the chestnut tree which results in a gross weight yield,

LATIGO

The word isn't even in my dictionary which is probably the reason that it's not a very well defined product. In fact, it's pretty much whatever the tanner wants it to be. "Latigo" is about as specific as "stuff".

Can you tell what latigo is by its color? No—you can't. Hermann Oak, for example, makes a burgundy, black, and yellow latigo, and it's all the same tannage. The latigo that Hermann Oak and Wickett & Craig tan is pure veg.

What makes Hermann Oak's and W&C's latigo "latigo" and not bridle or strap leather is the way that they finish it. Specifically, the difference is the ingredients they use when they "hot stuff" the leather. Latigo is stuffed differently than, let's say, bridle. So the difference is not in the tannage but in the finish.

Then there are folks like Triple C Leather and Thoroughbred Leather who sell a retanned latigo. The piece of leather gets

tanned twice, as it were. First it receives a chrome tannage then it gets a second veg tannage on top of that to give the leather a little more body or firmness. Again, retanned gets hot stuffed—it's put in a big revolving drum into which hot waxes and oils are introduced and then centrifugal force pushes or "stuffs" the finishing liquors into the leather.

You can even have a full chrome tanned latigo. Often it's an alum tan. Very strong. Usually it's a more mellow piece of leather than the other two tannages mentioned above. Chrome latigo is also hot stuffed.

So take your pick! Full veg, chrome with a veg retan, or full chrome. It's all latigo! From the Spanish "al lado"—at or to the side. Which is where a lot of latigo is used. On the side of the horse. And it's all different. My advice: ask before you buy!

March 2005

excellent physical and chemical properties, and an attractive greenish color.

The mimosa tree extract produces a light colored leather that camouflages grain defects and improves the selection.

The blend of these extracts are combined in different proportions depending on the type of leather that's being tanned. We produce three major types of veg leather:

- Two different types of sole leather for the shoe industry.
- Vegetable leather for belting and leather goods.
- Skirting leather for the saddlery industry.



◀ **New Golden Skirting**



New Natural Harness ▶

Nearly forty days are actually needed to transform raw hides into unique vegetable tanned leathers. As a result, no leather looks like any other, its peculiar characteristics offer a wide range of possible interpretations in shape and design.

The tannery commercial team attends commercial fairs worldwide and was present during the 2009 Hong Kong Leather Fair in March, Lineapelle in Italy during April, and Expocaipic in Argentina last October. This presence is important to have direct contact with customers and distributors.



◀ **Expocaipic, Argentina**

In current competitive markets, all the links in the supply chain should be coordinated to

provide the right article, at a competitive price, in the time needed.

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You Can't Tan With URINE

For years and years, my Old Boss and I were under the impression that leather from Mexico was tanned with urine. I know—sounds absurd but that's what we thought. We'd get cheap Western saddles in for repair that had been made in Mexico and the leather smelled funny. If you sanded or burnished the leather it produced a terrible odor, like someone peeing on a hot stove. Honest. So we thought that the tanning agent being used was urine.

Years later I spoke with Frank Rutland, then Director of the LIA Laboratory at the University of Cincinnati. A fine gentleman and a good chemist. I asked Frank could you use urine to tan leather and he said, without qualification, "No. Urine will not tan leather." Period.

I was stumped. I had my nose telling me one thing and a knowledgeable leather chemist telling me something else.

So that was one of the things I wanted to investigate during my recent trip south. Everywhere I went, every tanner I visited with, I asked, "Has any tanner that you've ever known used urine as a tanning agent?" And every last one of them told me, "No. Never."

Then I asked, do you know of tannery workers ever urinating into the pits? Again, the answer was, "No. Never." If they had, they would have been fired on the spot. No discussion. Gone. Plus—when you think about it, two cups of urine is going to have zero effect on the smell of the leather given that the pits in which the hides are tanned contain thousands and thousands of gallons of tan liquor. You could pee in the pits day and night and that wouldn't alter the smell.

What I was told by tanners is that there is an indigenous tree in Mexico from which a veg extract is made that's called cascalote. It makes a very poor tanning agent and is only used by the smallest of tanneries. It produces a poorly tanned piece of leather and imparts a most peculiar and unpleasant odor. It makes the leather smell like urine.

Now we know. All the tanners I visited in Mexico use the same veg extracts from Argentina that are used by tanneries in the US.