Stake in the future

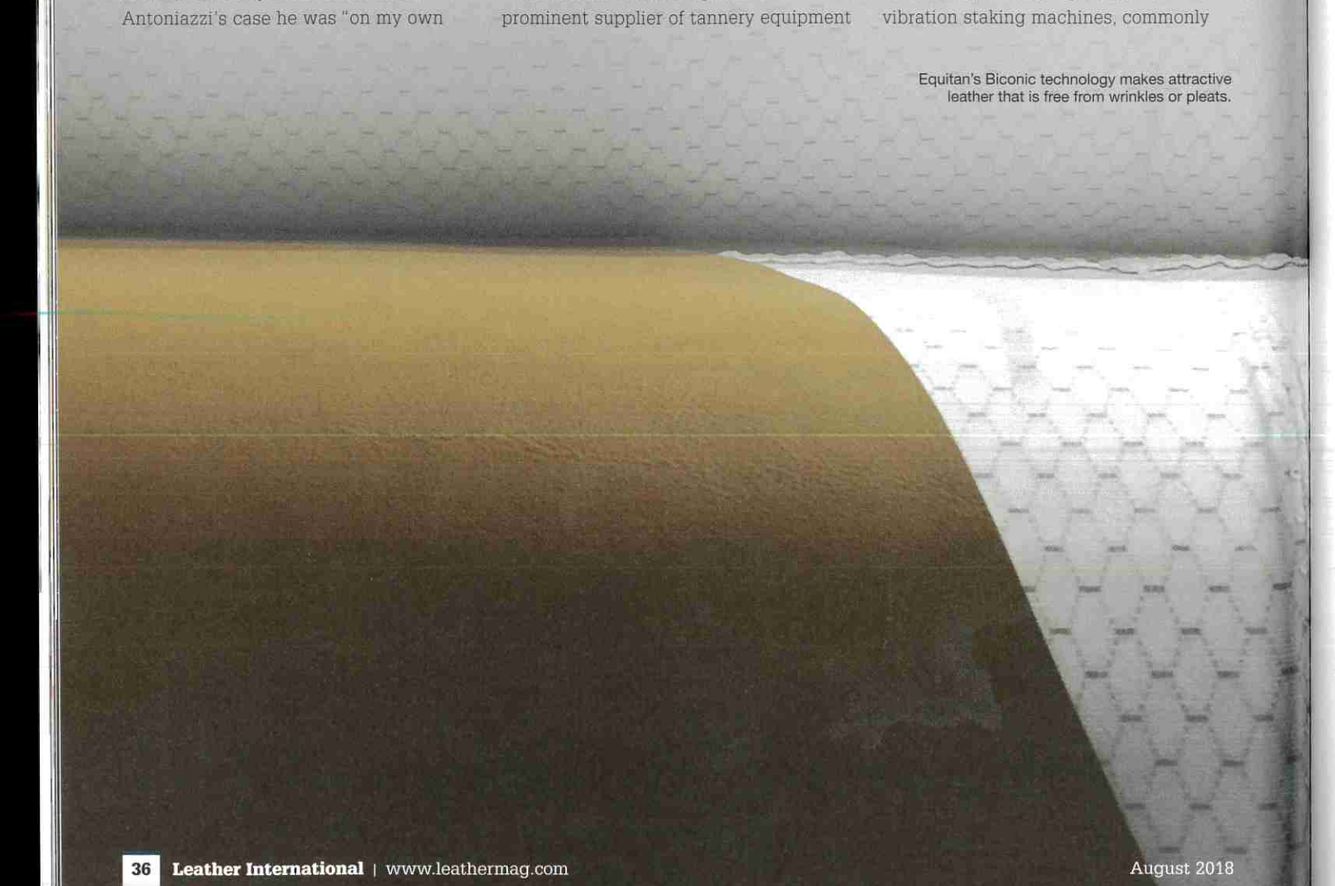
In a fitting way to mark its 20th anniversary, earlier this year Italian tanning machinery company Equitan picked up APLF's New Innovation for Staking Machines Award. General manager and founder **Antonio Antoniazzi** talks through some of the group's new products, including a new heavy-duty stainless steel stamping device.

One can't begrudge Antonio Antoniazzi a moment of proud contemplation as he looks back on the early days of Equitan, the company he founded in 1998.

Italy may have a reputation for traditional family businesses, but in Antoniazzi's case he was "on my own and with no money". What was in his favour, though, was a glaring gap in the tanning market."Machines were becoming more sophisticated," he says, "but there was no high-level for support for the tanneries."

Two decades later, Equitan is a prominent supplier of tannery equipment and service components. Based in Chiampo in the province of Vicenza, Veneto, the group today has around 800 customers covering more than 60 countries.

The group set about making a name for itself by developing components for vibration staking machines, commonly



Equitan's Biconic technology makes attractive leather that is free from wrinkles or pleats.

recognised by tanneries as a means of improving their quality of leather.

In the late 1990s, however, there were still question marks over the durability of such hardware. Antoniazzi soon set to work on constructing a new type of highly stressed elastic transport belt that was able – thanks to antistatic fibres – to discharge static electricity generated during the staking process and provide better leather all round.

> "I visit a lot of tanneries around the world and they are always telling me about the new solutions they need. We listen, and then we go away and start doing lab tests."

"We were one of the first companies to make a patent for these staking belts," he says. "That was our business's start because all the tanneries appreciated it immediately and they started to order many belts from us."

Positive change

As Equitan has gone about directing most of its outlay on R&D, the tannery equipment sector has undergone significant change over the past 20 years. "The sector involves much more technology these days – the information technology space, in particular, has grown," says Antoniazzi, "but we've enjoyed these changes."

Connected thinking

As an example of this, at last year's Simac Tanning Tech fair, held in Milan, the group debuted a new wireless substance gauge, made of carbon fibres with built-in software able to detect the thickness of leathers. "It can also send the data to your PC, as well as being connected to a management software system," explains Antoniazzi.

However, the crowning glory for Equitan arrived in March this year when the group triumphed in the New Innovation for Staking Machines category at the APLF Awards. The plaudits are for a new biconical elastic belt for staking machines, which removes pleating in the central area, while affording homogenous staking. The belt, known as Biconic, is also guided more securely and continuously by cylindrical rollers that run at the same speeds in the centre and sides.

"The idea for a biconical belt came about after we did a few tests here in our workshop," explains Antoniazzi. "After it was patented, we then tested it in the tanneries. The effect on the leather was beautiful, because the leather came out with no wrinkles or pleats."

The group has also come up with an innovative heavy-duty stainless steel stamping device called QSU 3 Plus, which is able to track raw, lime and wet-blue leathers.

Formed of a stainless steel frame, Antoniazzi describes the new product as "basically a pneumatic device with a protection guard".

Digits are made with a special hardened steel, while the device is commonly supplied with one series of numbers running from zero to nine – letters are optional.

Equitan's wireless substance gauge has built-in software to detect the thickness of leathers.

Right balance

The device is also supplied with a specific balancer to compensate the weight during the stamping operation. With extra power, it's particularly applicable to rawhides.

"To stamp rawhides, you need to have very good power, because the leather is never flat," says Antoniazzi. "Tanners also like to be able to track the leather during the process, which you can do here, and see the difference."

For Antoniazzi, the key to success for any tannery equipment supplier is to pay heed to the mood music coming from tanneries. "Every solution starts with a problem or need," he says.

"I visit a lot of tanneries around the world and they are always telling me about the new solutions they need. We listen, and then we go away and start doing lab tests. This is how all of our patents have really come about."

With that, *Leather International* is forced to call time on our interview, as Antoniazzi is off to visit a tannery. ■