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Andreas Schockhoven, Managing Director of innotaste GmbH (C.H. Erbsloh group)

Marcel Joosten, Managing Director of Jobeco B.V.

Francesco Corsi, Managing Director of PRINZ Beverage & Food S.R.L.

Lars Bogs, General Director of KAV America Europe

Judith Faller-Moog, Managing Director of Ölmühle Moog GmbH

Massimo Panagia, Chief Executive Officer of Francia Latticini S.p.A.

Fabio Cussigh, Sales Director at VDS Rail Srl

Andres Kangur, Group Marketing Director at Thermory AS

Tomáš Rottenberg, Sales Director at STROS – Sedlčanské strojírny, a.s.

Waldemar Wasiluk, Vice President of Victoria Dom S.A.
Salty, sweet, bitter, sour and umami – these are the five traditional tastes our taste buds respond to. Each one has a specific function: Some are appetizing, others are aversive, and two great tastes sometimes do not taste great together. innotaste GmbH in Krefeld specializes in natural flavours and is a much sought-after supplier of the food and beverage industry. The company is the food brand of the C.H.Erbslöh group, a family-owned specialties distribution company in the fifth generation. Since the beginning, innotaste has followed a distinct vision: to focus on carefully selected products and partners.

innotaste has found its position in a market that is dominated by large players. “But we don’t really compete with them,” stresses Managing Director Andreas Schockhoven, one of the founders who established the company as a subsidiary of C.H.Erbslöh group in 2004. “We are simply different and act where we see an added value. We were never keen to do many things just fine but instead do a few things extremely well. This is our niche – a niche where we stand out.”

Indeed, innotaste does things very well. The product range features high-quality food ingredients that are constantly being adapted to the needs of clients. Its flavours add a special, natural taste to hot drinks, soft drinks, sports and nutrition items, bakery and dairy products, cereals, desserts, confectionary, snacks, soups, sauces, meat alternatives and ready meals. “Today’s consumers aim for more natural, authentic products, and natural ingredients are increasingly in demand,” emphasizes Mr. Schockhoven. “For this reason, they have become an important part of our portfolio that perfectly reflects this current trend. We’ve also added some more products such as protein alternatives, cheese powder, carotenoids, fillings and glazes.”

Not only its products have changed slightly; innotaste has also made some changes in terms of suppliers. “Since 2016, we have replaced two suppliers,” states Mr. Schockhoven. “It was a strategy-driven decision mirroring our vision to focus on a limited number of suppliers and on authentic natural products. We have never been interested in cooperating with a lot of suppliers but wanted to rely on a limited number sharing our ideas and philosophy.” innotaste’s approach is a successful one. The company has grown constantly in recent years, counts 20 employees at its headquarters in Krefeld and in the Benelux, and generates sales of 16 million EUR. Further growth is expected. “It is difficult to define our market position clearly...”
among the large players,” states Mr. Schockhoven. “Our products are complex and require explanation. As a result, we operate in a niche market where our product solutions have gained an excellent reputation.”

We are not interested in doing a lot of things just fine but instead focus on a few things that we do extremely well.

innotaste’s innovative product range is highly regarded in Germany and abroad. The company’s internationalization is constantly progressing, particularly in Eastern Europe. “Poland has long been a crucial market for the group,” points out Mr. Schockhoven. “Our subsidiary in Warsaw now has seven employees focusing on food ingredients and its own application lab. Regional labs play an important role in launching products that capture the spirit of the times. With one lab in Germany, one in Poland and another in Hallein/Salzburg, Austria, the gateway to Eastern Europe with a team of ten local food-dedicated employees, we have the flexibility to adapt to local market needs. All our international affiliates are subsidiaries of the Erbslöh group.” innotaste is keen to continue growing – in a healthy, organic way. Revenues of 20 million EUR within the next three to four years are within the realm of possibility. Customers, among them more and more innovative start-ups, appreciate the company’s customer-driven philosophy, flexibility, great responsiveness – and its excellent taste.
Quality food is for everyone

While Chinese businesses are slowly but surely invading the African market – a young, dynamic market with growing potential, European companies are in danger of missing their chance. Few of them seem to realize that emerging African countries belong to the markets of the future. Jobeco B.V. in the Netherlands is definitely one of the few that have taken notice. The Dutch enterprise has its eyes on the African market, offering quality food products at affordable prices. Emphasizing their belief in everyone’s right for quality food, they aim to counteract the mass exploitation that is currently taking place throughout the continent.

Growth and development are important for both businesses and individuals. For Jobeco B.V., growth is only a success when achieved together with its partners and consumers. The opposite – growth at the expense of people or the environment – is exploitation. Sadly exploitation is commonplace in the food industry throughout the continent, due to lenient legislation and high price-sensitivity. By going against this wave of producing and supplying low-quality food products to Africa, Jobeco B.V are saying no to exploitation and yes to growth, by supplying the highest possible quality at the lowest possible cost.

Established in 1981, the Jobeco Group has been supplying FMCG products around the globe for nearly 40 years. However, Jobeco Food, the company’s current focus and ambitious business concept is quite new. “Travelling in Nigeria last year, we discovered that there was a tremendous price difference between low and high-quality food products,” says Marcel Joosten, Managing Director of Jobeco B.V. “Compared to a difference of around 50% in Europe, in Nigeria this price differential goes up to 300%. Bearing in mind the country is far more price sensitive than Europe, only a very low percentage of people have access to quality products. This is where we saw the chance for a new business model.” The idea was to establish joint ventures and develop premium-quality products for the West African market at an affordable price. “We gave up some of our profit margin and based our concept on volume

The team at the top: Jobeco is being led in the right direction by young Managing Directors John Shelley and Marcel Joosten

The entrepreneurs want to make quality food products more accessible and affordable throughout Africa. Jobeco Food are pricing at the low-end of the market while offering a better product, hence their slogan ‘Quality Is For Everyone’.

MJ’s cheese-flavoured crackers and honey and chocolate spreads: Just some examples from a whole range of delicious, premium-quality products at favourable prices
production,” explains Mr. Joosten. “We have six brands today, three of which are already active.”

Jobeco has its headquarters in Dubai, a logistics center in the Netherlands and distribution in a number of countries including Nigeria. The entrepreneurs head a team of 44 employees who contribute their expertise to the company’s successful performance. Production takes place in the framework of different joint ventures, some in Dubai and some in Europe. “Our aim is to establish brands in premium quality, based on intensive market research,” emphasizes Mr. Joosten. “Focusing on the young generation is another important aspect of our distribution strategy. After all, 70% of Nigeria’s population are under 30. We will try to adapt to the needs of young people with modern technology, for example with a QR code you pick up with your mobile for an animation that is both playful and educational.”

The choice of products offered by Jobeco is continuously adapted to market requirements and consumer preferences. “We cooperate closely with our distribution partners,” points out Mr. Joosten. “First we consult market analyses to find out which products are particularly popular. Then we keep adapting them, which may go as far as integrating local spices and developing products specifically for a region or market.” MJ’s is the company’s most important brand at present and represents a whole range of non-perishable and packaged products, for example mayonnaise, vinegar, crackers, sauces, ketchup, jam, baking powder and many more. Armano covers the delightful world of coffee, cappuccino, coffee mixes, hot chocolate, coffee creamers and cookies, while Chocito’s stands for cereals, chocolate spreads, confectionary and instant cocoa. Two other brands are being prepared for market entry at present: Jojo for delicious fruit juices and Jovita for vitamins and food supplements.

Nigeria remains Jobeco’s main market. “It is Africa’s fastest-growing market and it has the largest population,” says Mr. Joosten. “We have operations in a total of ten African and six Middle Eastern countries today.” In the face of growing competition, it is Jobeco’s concept of quality at an affordable price that prevails. Many other foodstuffs shipped to Africa are close to the use-by date. Products imported from China tend to contain many chemical additives or preservatives that impair their quality. Jobeco cooperates with distributors and importers who appreciate its high and dependable quality. At the same time, they need to agree with the company’s concept of reasonable selling prices. “It is important to remember that African markets are different,” adds the Managing Director. “In Nigeria for example, only 20% of all goods are sold in conventional supermarkets, 80% on the open market. We control the cooling chain and regularly check the selling prices.”

Looking ahead, Jobeco is planning to intensify distribution in cooperation with competent partners and spread geographically. “Participation in fairs such as the Food West Africa or the Gulf Food Dubai is an important opportunity to present our successful concept, our premium-quality brands and establish new contacts,” sums up Mr. Joosten. “In 2021 we intend to establish our own filling station for bulk goods, probably in Ghana, to make us more independent from taxes and import duties. In the long run, we are planning to set up our own production facilities in Africa – another step towards securing cost-efficiency, moving more of the value chain to Africa and proving our motto that ‘Quality is for Everyone’.”
Interview with Francesco Corsi, Managing Director of PRINZ Beverage & Food S.R.L.

New generation, new direction

Many family enterprises pride themselves on their long history and their ability to switch seamlessly from one generation to the next, so that customers barely notice the change. Others take the opportunity of a new generation joining the firm to make sweeping changes. PRINZ Beverage & Food S.R.L. in Italy is a perfect example of the latter approach. When Francesco Corsi took over the reigns from his father, he made far-reaching decisions that transformed the company and created a young and go-ahead organization that is well-prepared and ready to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Francesco Corsi spent five years working alongside his father in the firm that Mr. Corsi senior founded in 1979, before taking over as Managing Director in 2006. He immediately adopted three new strategies which would transform the company from a solid, reliable supplier of beer and food to the horeca sector in Tuscany, to a dynamic organization that helps its customers make a real difference in their own businesses. Firstly, he recruited young and enthusiastic employees, and set up a comprehensive internal training programme to generate engagement and a real passion for the work. Secondly, he began developing a new portfolio of exclusive products which would differentiate PRINZ from the competition; and thirdly, he extended the training and education programme to include customers. Today, the staff are mostly aged between 25 and 40 – Mr. Corsi himself is just 38, and the new product range, launched in 2008, has proved a huge success. “There has been a generation change in every aspect of the company, which has created tremendous energy and completely transformed our service and approach,” Mr. Corsi underlines.

While Mr. Corsi’s father focused exclusively on the supply of beer, Francesco Corsi has broadened PRINZ’s drinks range to include wines and spirits, and a much wider selection of beer. He has also extended the range of soft beverages and food; from the beginning of 2019, two new staff members will concentrate solely on the sale of food products. One characteristic is central to the whole product palette. “The horeca sector is increasingly driven by specialization,” explains Mr. Corsi. “When customers go to a restaurant or bistro, they want to experience something new, such as products that they won’t find in a supermarket. Establishment owners must therefore offer their guests something special, that is not an everyday experience. That is how we position our product portfolio.”

PRINZ Beverage & Food is located in Campi Bisenzio in the heart of Tuscany, where it supplies exclusive drink and food products to the region’s horeca sector.

Advanced technology: The company’s warehouse and logistics are fully automated with voice-programme control.

There has been a generation change in every aspect of the company, which has created tremendous energy and completely transformed our service and approach.

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While the exclusivity of the product range has had a very positive impact on PRINZ’s business – in recent years the company has achieved a 15% annual growth rate – it is not the only factor that has contributed to its considerable success. Service is another area where Mr. Corsi has implemented significant change. “PRINZ delivers six days per week, usually within twelve hours of receipt of order,” he says. “We have also introduced customer training relating to wine, beer and menus. In addition, unlike our competitors who generally depend on external suppliers, we have set up an internal technical department which specializes in beer tender systems. Technology and digitalization are very important to us, and we invest heavily in this area. This year, we have introduced an app for customers, which has been very popular and enables us to communicate with them quickly. In 2019, we will be launching a new app for our technical area.”

PRINZ is now the market leader in Tuscany, and Mr. Corsi has ambitions to grow the firm beyond its home region. “We cover the whole of Tuscany, and we now want to extend our activities, initially to neighbouring regions, and then beyond,” he reveals. “To achieve this, we will maintain our strategy of supplying exclusive beer, wines, spirits and food, and will broaden our product portfolio still further. Of course, we will continue to train and develop our staff, and we are always seeking new people who have a passion for this job. Personally, I love working in this sector; it’s fun, and you can create and try out so many new things. The generation change at PRINZ has been successfully completed in every area, and the company is ready and organized for the next 20 years.”
Hitting the sweet spot

Chai is a traditional Indian, sweetly spiced, milky tea that has exploded in popularity amongst western consumers in recent years. Recipes vary, which is part of its appeal, but the instant chai latte powders produced and distributed by KAV America Europe have clearly hit the sweet spot. The company’s Chai Latte East Indian Spice was recently bestowed two gold stars in the Superior Taste Award 2019 from the International Taste Institute in Brussels.

That a drink can convey such pleasure with so little effort amounts almost to heresy in these days of painstakingly crafted, barrista-poured coffee. By contrast, KAV America Europe’s instant chai drinks are made in seconds but guarantee lasting refreshment. Milky, sweet and spicy, there is an immediate sense of relaxation at the first sip of its classic East Indian Spice Chai Latte that doubtless persuaded the jury at the International Taste Institute in Brussels to single it out for particular praise.

“We are very proud to receive this award,” says General Director Lars Bogs. “It is yet further confirmation that our products hit the sweet spot.”

Anyone who would like to get to know KAV America Europe’s chai products and the people behind them is welcome to visit the company’s stand at the upcoming Anuga trade fair for the food and beverage industry in Cologne at the beginning of October. In addition to its award-winning East Indian Spice Chai Latte, the company will be presenting other chai products from a range that includes flavours such as Tahitian Vanilla, Rooibos, Rich Spice, Green Tea and Organic Spice. “We also make instant cocoa drinks, iced coffee and smoothies, but chai drinks seem to have really hit the zeitgeist at the moment,” notes Mr. Bogs. “Issues of sustainability and organic production are on-trend boxes that we also tick.”

At present, all of the company’s products are imported from America. This is a hang-over from the company’s origins but may change in the future. “At the moment, it is more cost-effective to produce in America,” confirms Mr. Bogs. “However, we are currently targeting significant expansion in the European market so that as sales volumes rise, we may consider setting up a production unit here.” The company’s instant drinks have long been a hit in its native Denmark, but it is now looking to expand into high-potential markets such as Germany, Italy and France. Its presence at this year’s Anuga is as much about finding new distributors in these markets as it is about raising brand awareness. “We are actively looking to recruit new agents and distributors and are looking forward to making some useful contacts at this year’s Anuga,” says Mr. Bogs. “We also have some exciting product developments in the pipeline.” Amongst them are a new matcha chai flavour and vegan cocoa. New packaging forms are also important for the future such as stick sachets for the hospitality sector and other single cup packaging options that meet the current zeitgeist.

We are actively looking to recruit new agents and distributors and are looking to making some useful contacts at the Anuga.
Interview with Judith Faller-Moog, Managing Director
of Ölmühle Moog GmbH

Why passion can make a difference

There are organic farmers who operate their business only half-heartedly to make a quick profit. Others put their whole heart into it to establish organic farming as the only ‘natural’ method of agriculture. The edible oil producer Ölmühle Moog GmbH definitely belongs to the latter group. The company is currently introducing a new brand named after the company’s founder (in 1984).

Ölmühle Moog has been making premium-quality culinary oils under the brand name Bio Planète since 1984. Originally established in southwestern France, near Carcassonne, the company is known as the first organic oil mill in Europe. “I took over the mill from my father, Franz J. Moog, and had been living in France until 2004 when I returned to Germany to set up a branch operation in Saxony,” explains Managing Director Judith Faller-Moog. The first product produced by the medium-sized enterprise 35 years ago was sunflower oil. Today, it offers more than 70 first-class, organic edible oils, ranging from classic oils for everyday cooking to gourmet oils for culinary delicatessen and vitality oils for health-conscious diets through to certified Demeter oils. “Edible oils are relevant for both healthy nutrition and culinary pleasure and should be given more importance in every kitchen,” states Ms. Faller-Moog.

Ölmühle Moog is an oil producing business that is truly concerned about sustainable agriculture and organic farming. “Organic cultivation methods and biodiversity are really important to us,” says Ms. Faller-Moog who is genuinely passionate about the topic. “Organic farming is the only form of agriculture we will be talking about in 20 years’ time.” Ölmühle Moog wants as many people as possible to benefit from naturally grown food. This is why the company is now launching a second brand line, Franz & Co., to address a larger target group. “Oils from Bio Planète are only available in natural food stores,” explains Ms. Faller-Moog. “This will remain like this because it reflects the distribution structure we stand for: long-term partnerships and high-quality, organic produce. Franz & Co. will offer 17 oils in the beginning which will be marketed through quality-conscious, organically oriented supermarkets. More and more people want to know where the products they buy come from and how they have been produced, particularly with respect to food.” Franz & Co.’s new brand portfolio will be introduced this October at Cologne’s ANUGA, the world’s largest trade fair for the food and beverages industry. Another Ölmühle novelty is the Oil bar, a self-service filling unit for supermarkets and retailers specialized in unpacked produce.

“Our vision is to establish ourselves in quality-oriented food retailing. We want to be where nutrition-conscious people are having a pleasurable shopping experience.”

Targeted at nutrition-conscious consumers, the new brand line Franz & Co. will be presented at this year’s ANUGA in October.

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FRANZ & CO.
DIE ÖLMÜLLE

“We are just getting started but in the near future we want to firmly establish ourselves in quality-oriented food retailing. We want to be where nutrition-conscious people are having a pleasurable shopping experience.”
Mozzarella – the mild-mannered superhero amongst cheeses

Soft, creamy and pleasantly acidic, mozzarella may not pack the pungency of a long-matured hard cheese like parmesan, but its versatility has made it a central ingredient in many classic Italian dishes. Its melting elasticity is integral to the texture of pizza while its creamy softness contrasts perfectly with the acidic bite of tomatoes in insalata caprese. The most prized mozzarella is DOP Mozzarella di Bufala Campana made from buffalo milk produced in the province of Latina. One of the biggest producers of buffalo mozzarella is Francia Latticini S.p.A., a family-owned company specializing in a wide range of dairy products, all of which are made with respect for tradition, the environment and social responsibility.

Mozzarella di Bufala Campana is a Protected Designation of Origin cheese that may only be produced from the milk of the Italian Mediterranean buffalo in select locations in the regions of Campania, Lazio, Apulia and Molise. “Our Mozzarella di Bufala Campana has a unique taste and flavour and is one of Francia’s most exclusive and delicious products,” says CEO Massimo Panagia. “It is made from just four ingredients – pasteurized buffalo milk, ‘sieroinnesto naturale’ (natural lative cultures), salt and rennet in accordance with traditional production methods.”

Besides buffalo mozzarella, Francia also produces mozzarella made from cow’s milk. For those only familiar with the traditional balls in brine form, the variety inherent in Francia’s range will come as a surprise. “Mozzarella keeps its freshness if it is immersed in brine and is therefore sold in plastic tubs or vacuum-sealed bags with the immersing liquid,” explains Mr. Panagia. “Once opened, the mozzarella should be consumed within a day or two at the most. However, by dehydrating it, the product becomes suitable for grating, for example as a pizza topping, and also has an extended shelf life. Our grated Mozzarella Macinata and Filone di Mozzarella logs are perfect for this purpose.”

Francia packages its different shapes and forms of mozzarella in an equally varied range of packaging sizes and forms to allow customers maximum flexibility. “We are very responsive to customer trends,” notes Mr. Panagia. “Even a traditional product like
mozzarella cheese can move with the times and convenience is a key purchasing driver.” Equally, customer trends such as healthy eating are having an effect. “We have added organic products to the range and even have a lactose-free range of products in response to increased awareness of dietary problems like lactose intolerance,” says Mr. Panagia. “We respect the markets we serve by ensuring our products boast the highest levels of authenticity and quality.”

The focus on quality begins with the arrival of the milk that makes up the core ingredient of the entire product range. “The milk in every tanker is tested at the docking door before it is offloaded,” assures Mr. Panagia. “Only milk that meets our requirements is accepted.” Equally important to Francia is respect for the environment. “We were one of the first companies to build our own biomass power plant to facilitate the disposal of the whey by-product,” says Mr. Panagia. “At present, we generate 70% of our energy requirements from the plant. In the next three years, we want to increase that figure to 100%.”

This innovative spirit threads its way throughout the company history. Founded in 1935, its development is typical for Italian family companies of the time. It started with milk transportation and continued with milk transformation. Later came consolidation and industrialization. Today, the company employs 250 people and generates turnover of 100 million EUR. A year ago, Mr. Panagia was appointed CEO, the first person outside of the Francia family to hold the position. “The company had hit a stage in its evolution in which it needed to bring in help from outside to allow it to grow,” Mr. Panagia explains. “It was clear to me that what was urgently required was a reorganization of the company management structure. With the simultaneous introduction of a new industrial plan, the company is now leaner and better able to face the challenges of the next five years.”

Mr. Panagia’s vision for the company is linked to its ability to respond to the needs of the market. “In all that we do, we must target our activities to what the market needs,” insists Mr. Panagia. “Purchasing habits are changing. There is a trend towards local and regional produce and small, artisanal shops are being rediscovered by consumers. People who shop in these places want high quality, authentic products like our DOP buffalo mozzarella rather than a mass-produced generic cheese.” Reaching this sophisticated audience means supplementing Francia’s traditional mass media advertising channels with an innovative approach that also takes the possibilities offered by digital and social media into account.

These efforts are in part being aimed at increasing export sales. “Our main export market is of course Europe, but we also sell well in markets as far afield as Japan, Australia and the USA,” says Mr. Panagia. “Exports currently account for 15% of sales but could be higher. That is just one of our goals for the future.” This is just part of Mr. Panagia’s ongoing brief to turn Francia Latticini from a family company into an industrial group.”

We respect the markets we serve by ensuring our products boast the highest levels of authenticity and quality.
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Interview with Fabio Cussigh, Sales Director at VDS Rail Srl

Reliable connections

A train communication network is the infrastructure that enables the exchange of information throughout the train. Over time, ethernet bus technology has gained more and more popularity and is increasingly used as an essential part of a train communication network as it provides larger bandwidth and more flexible networks. VDS Rail Srl is a much sought-after partner when it comes to reliable and innovative on-board networking ethernet devices.

VDS Rail has become synonymous with state-of-the-art train ethernet backbone devices for on-board applications that reliably work under harsh conditions and comply with important international standards. The portfolio includes Networking apparatus such as Ethernet Switches and Routers together with LCD monitors and Panel PCs for the main market players.

The company was founded in 1979 in Florence and has constantly grown with market needs. “Back in our early days, VDS concentrated on Video Display Systems,” sums up Fabio Cussigh. “20 years ago, the focus was shifted towards the rail sector – which is what we concentrate on these days.” Today, with a headcount of 26 employees, VDS develops and produces on-board networking ethernet devices such as backbone routers and train switches that are specifically designed for network applications in rolling-stock environment. “Our products need to be extremely reliable and robust as they operate under harsh environmental conditions,” states Mr. Cussigh. “They must be fire-resistant and able to withstand high temperatures and extreme vibrations. Last but not least, we deal with strict regulations and standards; products need to comply with EU standards such as ISO 9001 and IRIS. However, our success is not only driven by advanced products but by a customer-focused approach. We always try to understand customer needs and work out solutions within a short time. It is crucial to react immediately. At the end of the day, this understanding is what makes us stand out.”

Thanks to its commitment, VDS Rail has become an important international market player. 60% of sales are made up by exports to Spain, Germany, Switzerland and Poland. Now, the company is keen to further strengthen its position – a realistic goal. “The train industry has constantly grown over the last years,” says Mr. Cussigh. “For environmental reasons, rail transports have increased all over Europe. We clearly benefit from this boom and are thrilled to take up new networking challenges.”

VDS Rail – leading supplier of on-board networking ethernet devices based in Sesto Fiorentino

Backbone routers – core products mirroring fundamental technological knowledge

Fairs such as Berlin’s Innotrans and congresses are regularly visited by VDS Rail.

We consider ourselves as a solution-provider and react immediately.
The beauty of durable wood and eco-friendliness

For decades, science has been in awe of woods as vibrant communities, in which trees and other species interact in various ways and older trees nurture younger ones to support their growth. As these insights lead to more responsible forestry and many people recognize wood as a renewable building material, the question arises how sustainable the next step can be. How can we make sure that wood will endure weather conditions for a long time, and how can we do this in an eco-friendly way? Thermory AS from Estonia has the answer and offers strikingly beautiful and durable ash and pine timber that will last for over 20 years.

Thermal modification technology is an eco-friendly way to make wood durable since only heat and steam are used; no chemicals and no plastic composites. “It requires a lot of experience to keep the wood stable in this process,” says Andres Kangur, Group Marketing Director at Thermory AS. “We mastered this technology and secure a high quality wood with a product life of 20 to 25 years; that is without any special treatment, so it is a low-maintenance product.”

Thermory originated in 1997 as a trading company, but its management soon realized the potential inherent in investing in sustainable technology to add more value and durability to their timber. In 2018 it merged with the other major player in the thermowood sector under the brand Thermory to create the leading player in this field. With a turnover of 70 million EUR, Thermory is now the largest company in its market. “On a global scale it is a niche market, but our customers are interested in sustainable technologies and are prepared to pay for performance,” Mr. Kangur adds.

Thermory has 550 employees, three factories and two sawmills located in Estonia and Finland. The largest sales team is located in the US, but the company has clients in over 50 countries around the world. Some 95% of its turnover is realized outside of Estonia. The company sells its products to distributors and directly to clients. It distinguishes three customer segments. The first segment includes architects and designers; those who decide what a building or built area will look like and decide on the choice of materials. The second segment are their clients, including real estate developers. The third segment are the parties who install the Thermory products: the contractors and construction companies. “Developing a well-trained network of licensed installers is our target. For example we have developed an easy press-and-click system (PaCS), that significantly reduces the time it takes to install cladding materials – a much appreciated innovation by construction companies,” notes Mr. Kangur. He adds that Thermory’s aim is to enhance people’s environment, because more and more people are living in urban areas and are separated from nature. Having wood in their living

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Our wood is only treated with heat and steam, without any chemicals applied in the process, and is therefore both ecological and durable, with product life of 20 to 25 years.

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Thermally modified ash makes a stunning decking for this school in Denmark

Thermory Ash decking at the ZEB pilot house in Norway, which won the WAN Sustainable Building Award 2015

Thermory Pine was used at the Taramea Climate House in New Zealand
space is a beautiful way to bring nature closer to them. “We want to support people’s wellbeing with our products.”

Looking at the portfolio of strikingly beautiful projects that have been realized, it seems Thermory has definitely reached that goal. Its thermally modified timber is used for cladding and wall paneling, for both interior and exterior decking, and is perfect for use in saunas. The raw materials like pine and ash are selected very carefully to ensure the highest quality, in long-standing relations with suppliers in Europe, North America and Asia. “We offer many different profiles to match the preferences of markets and customers, as well as customized profiles,” says Mr. Kangur.

“Or factories are built modularly, so our production is very flexible.”

As some people just want the beauty of natural wood, and others prefer a creative design, Thermory also developed special finishes to suit market trends. Examples are “Ignite”, a reproduction of aesthetically burnt wood used in a Japanese tradition, and “Drift”, that recalls the old and exposed wood of an old farmhouse.

As for marketing, Thermory has a strong sales team and distributor network, and will invest more in digital strategies as well to support the export of its products. Thermory is the market leader in sauna materials in Finland, in a large market with a long tradition, as Finland is the birthplace of sauna tradition. The company also developed the innovative concept-sauna brand Auroom, a modular concept that can easily be adapted to private homes, spas, and fitness or wellness areas. “In the wellness and sauna sector, the Scandinavian countries are important markets for us, and we want to expand our activities in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and France; we see a lot of potential in hotels and spa facilities,” Mr. Kangur explains.

“As for cladding and decking, the US market is our main focus now; we just opened a third office and a second warehouse there. We try to learn from our operations in the US and extend those outcomes in other continents.” Thermory products are also suited to the high temperatures in areas like the Middle East and Africa. He concludes: “This beautiful company is growing fast and has global ambitions. I have worked for multinationals before and lived abroad for 20 years, and it is great to apply this experience here. We are building a strong brand to accelerate our growth and increase our client base.”

Eco-retreat in Austin, Texas: Thermory Drift cladding fit the bill for this Yoki Treehouse perfectly

Thermory guarantees a high quality end result: an Auroom sauna installed in a spa in Stuttgart, Germany

Thermory Ash cladding was used in Shanghai for the largest Disney flagship store in the world

As more people are living separated from nature in urban environments, having wood in their interior and exterior living space is a beautiful way to bring nature closer

Thermory Benchmark Pine cladding, decking and roofing contribute to sheer beauty at The Waterfront in Stavanger, Norway

Thermory Ash cladding was used in Shanghai for the largest Disney flagship store in the world
Rising to the top in a vertical world

The world is growing tall. As suitably sized building plots become scarce, skyscrapers are springing up around the globe to meet the housing needs of the growing population and the space requirements of expanding businesses. Their construction, however, presents major challenges. How do you lift heavy building materials to the top of a 300 m building? Czech company STROS – Sedlčanské strojírny, a.s. has the answer. The company specializes in temporary and permanent external lifting solutions to suit a multitude of situations.

Founded in 1960 and a subsidiary of PNP in Prague, STROS has accumulated almost 60 years of experience and know-how in the manufacture of elevators, construction hoists and other solutions for a wide variety of applications. The company’s elevators are designed as permanent installations and are used to transport people and materials on the outside of a building. The range of lifts includes industrial elevators, some of which are developed for use in harsh environments, where abrasive, hazardous and corrosive materials are transported, as well as special and atypical elevators such as mobile lifts, elevators with particularly large cabins or designed to function on a curved wall, explosion-proof lifts, battery and inverted elevators for use in underground shafts. The company’s elevators are installed on power and cement plants, refineries and in mines – anywhere where it is necessary to transport people and equipment upwards or even downwards over long distances – sometimes over 300 m in height or depth.

STROS’s construction hoists are used during building works. Its solutions include models which can lift up to 3,200 kg, and offer a safe and highly efficient means of transporting people and materials on a construction site. Standard as well as customized models are available to ensure the hoist meets the exact needs of each particular situation.

In addition to elevators and construction hoists, STROS also produces single material hoists with load capacities of up to 3,275 kg and lifting heights of over 350 m, twinmast single hoist (recently supplied with a 6,700 kg load capacity) as well as suspended platforms in lengths of up to 12 m which can bear loads of up to 1,140 kg and are used in building maintenance and repair work, and electrically driven mobile work platforms and mast climbers.

“All our products are robust, rigid and stable, and boast an extensive lifespan,” underlines Sales Director Tomáš Rottenberg. “They are designed specifically for heavy-duty use, and in particular, for the
transportation of heavy materials. There is a lot of competition in the market for hoists which lift up to 2,000 kg, but for those with load capacities of over 2,000 kg, we are one of the top players in the world.”

Indeed, the company is active around the globe, with customers – rental companies, construction concerns, and industrial plants – in Europe, Russia, Australia, and North America where the North American Space Agency (NASA) numbers among its clients. “Sales of hoists and elevators for heavy-duty use are growing exponentially,” notes Mr. Rottenberg. “The population is growing, resulting in a prolific number of building projects. In big cities, which are already very concentrated, the only way to meet the demand for residential properties is to build upwards. Wealthy countries, in particular in Asia, are investing in high-rises, and that is where our products are really in demand. The city of Hanoi is currently planning a huge project – a mega smart city. We are hoping to be a part of this, and we are also targeting regions and countries which have an open economy and are willing to invest.

To raise awareness of its products, STROS exhibits at numerous trade fairs; this year it attended the BAUMA in Munich, and in 2020 the company will attend a building exhibition in Las Vegas.

Mr. Rottenberg joined STROS in 2017 after working in the petrochemical industry for a number of years. “This is a very dynamic sector,” he says. “Sales volumes are constantly increasing, which is incredibly motivating. Stability across the company as a whole is now our immediate aim. This entails a continued growth in sales while improving our products to ensure they are competitive and comfortable to use.”
Real estate with a vision

Developing houses that are welcomed by their owners is relatively easy in the higher end of the market. Achieving this for the average citizen by developing well-designed apartments that allow for several functions and increase in value over time is an art in itself. Victoria Dom S.A. is a Polish family-owned project developer with a clear vision of residential development. The company is currently active in Warsaw and Berlin. With sales exceeding 1,000 apartments per year, the future is looking bright for this lean and profitable organisation. Victoria Dom S.A is headquartered in Warsaw.

“Our mission is to improve our clients’ quality of life,” states Waldemar Wasiluk, Vice President of Victoria Dom S.A. since 2013. The company was founded by the Jasiński family in 1998. “We still have the same shareholders, and we have been active quite successfully in the development of residential real estate for over 20 years now.” With several projects in Warsaw, Victoria Dom soon became one of the largest developers in single-family houses. Eleven years ago, the company expanded into multiresident developments as well, which gained a lot of momentum. The financial crisis of 2008 affected the company up to and including 2011, but by 2013, business had picked up again. At the time, Victoria Dom was restructured to allow further growth in Poland and expansion abroad as well. In the last six to seven years, the firm has grown constantly. From 2015 on, it added bigger projects with 600 to 700 apartments to its portfolio. One year later, the company also opened a branch office in Germany, and it has several residential projects in Berlin now. A true milestone was reached in 2018: the year that saw the 20th anniversary of Victoria Dom, but also the first year in which the number of properties sold in one year exceeded 1,000. In 2019, the company expects to sell 1,600 to 1,700 apartments.

“We are specialists in affordable real estate that the average Polish or German customer can buy,” Mr. Wasiluk observes. “Our primary goal is to enable people to buy a property of their own. This means we build in an affordable way and sell good value for money.” Most people buy a smaller apartment as their first home, to move to a larger one later on. Clients of Victoria Dom are investors who buy...
apartment buildings and first-time buyers who will actually live in the apartment they buy, including people from younger generations – the average Polish or German consumer who can afford a modest mortgage. Victoria Dom is famous for its well-designed solutions, offering many living functions even in a small apartment. This means the apartments are made to live in for a long time, which is great since moving house is quite expensive in this day and age. At the same time, their value increases over the years. “Real estate is becoming ever-more expensive, and most people cannot afford a large apartment,” Mr. Wasiluk adds. “So we envisioned extremely efficient floor plans.” He also observes that although large windows can be quite nice, they also allow others to look inside your home. As people value privacy, the exterior designs of the residential properties are rather traditional.

Victoria Dom current has five projects in Berlin: one in Prenzlauer Berg, which is already completely sold out, three in Weissensee and one in Lichtenberg. “As we are relatively new in the Berlin market, our projects there are smaller in size than the projects we complete in Poland,” the Vice President notes. “In Poland we rank among the top five developers, and we are the second-largest company in our sector in Warsaw.” The company’s main focus is still on Poland. Aside from the capital, the company would like to expand into other major Polish cities as well. Even so, the projects in Berlin are quite promising, and expansion in Germany is definitely another goal for the near future. As a newcomer in the market, this requires strong determination because it can be extra difficult to secure the right locations. As Mr. Wasiluk observes, company growth in real estate is always about developing the right projects. The company has a lean structure with just 70 people, with another few thousand people involved in the construction of its residential buildings. Victoria Dom has sales offices at the properties and uses online portals and Google as the dominating marketing platform to lead traffic to its website, which offers extensive information about its current and past projects.

The Vice President indicates that the company is closely following how the economy will perform in the coming years. Residential real estate is all about good jobs and good payment since people need security to invest a lot of money and take out a mortgage. Victoria Dom has been investing millions in buying quality land for new projects. Mr. Wasiluk concludes: “Our vision is to continue delivering good value for money. We are a family business with a long-term strategy. We aim to expand, as well as keep our friendly, transparent organization and culture.”

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