

Alliance of strong partners



IBA 2006, IN MUNICH HAD BARELY CLOSED ITS DOORS WHEN THIS NEWS MADE ITS ROUNDS: MECATHERM ACQUIRED GOUET AND SMAF. HILDEGARD M. KEIL, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF BAKING+BISCUIT INTERNATIONAL, TALKED TO **BERNARD ZORN**, PRESIDENT OF THE MECATHERM GROUP ABOUT THE REASONS BEHIND THIS AND THE FUTURE OF THIS ALLIANCE.

+ bbi: Mr. Zorn, at the end of last year Mecatherm acquired the oven manufacturer Gouet, Eu and Angers. What were the reasons behind this?

+ Zorn: Mecatherm is known globally for its baking equipment for baguettes, breads and rolls on sheets. This is a limited segment in the market. About 18 months ago we achieved a comeback with our FTM oven for production lines for traditional baked goods. With the acquisition of Gouet and the associated subsidiary SMAF we are able to expand our coverage even more, this time in the field of Viennese products.

Added to that, Gouet brings along a genuine authentic stone baking oven and SMAF provides the entire conveying technology as well as the construction of special machines.

+ bbi: What are Viennese products?

+ Zorn: Viennese products, also called Viennoiserie in French, comprise everything made from dough containing eggs which predominantly also contains fat and sugar. The most important products of this kind are probably croissants, Pain au chocolat, and brioche.

++ figure 1





+ bbi: SMAF builds conveying technology and oven loaders. What do they construct in the special machine field?

+ Zorn: SMAF is a special machine company which designs everything needed: depanner, loader, conveyors, special equipment, for example for specific belt widths, etc. This is a complete supplementation to Mecatherm.

+ bbi: This is different for Gouet. Up to now Gouet has built vertical ovens just like Mecatherm. How do the product ranges overlap and will it stay this way?

+ Zorn: The overlap is very limited. Gouet has built less than one tenth of what Mecatherm has done and sold. For Gouet, other ovens are more important such as the stone baking ovens, ovens for Viennese products, the Turbo Jet oven, a convection oven for cookies, pizza, quiche, and last but not least the double action oven which can bake with high air flow and temperature as well as with radiation, which are all individually set for each baking zone. By the way, such ovens are often also used for pasteurization in the dessert and ready meal industry. The ovens' control is highly sophisticated providing for almost endless application possibilities. There is a lot of scope for further development.

+ bbi: How do you assess the stone baking oven from Gouet, which is different due to the fact that the stone plates are heated externally?

+ Zorn: Gouet has been dealing with industrial baking on stone plates for quite some time now. The company had to learn the hard way but solved the associated problems much earlier than its competitors. Gouet's stone baking oven operates at significantly higher temperatures than most other ovens, with separate top and bottom heat. In a Gouet oven, the stone plates in the infeed section really do have a temperature of 230-240 °C. Gouet also developed their ovens to fulfill HACCP compliancy and state of the art protection against spontaneous ignition. The stone baking oven is really a master piece.

+ bbi: Will Gouet stop producing the vertical oven because of the acquisition?

+ Zorn: No. When a customer wants to have a vertical oven from Gouet, he will get one including service, maintenances and spare parts. Both companies are managed separately. Both enterprises will keep their production sites and also their sales' organization. This will not change. Gouet enters the market with a different aim from Mecatherm. Gouet ovens' are tailor-made, individually manufactured ovens. Mecatherm operates differently. Their goal is to build very good ovens at reasonable prices. For that many preliminary stages are outsourced and it is only the central parts that are produced within the company. These are two worlds which exist side by side.

+ bbi: Where are the synergism effects?

+ Zorn: Synergism will be achieved because both companies will focus on their strengths and cooperate in research and development. We do not need to invent the same things twice but can learn from the knowledge of each company. Here is a practical example that happened just recently. We delivered a croissant line to Great-Britain. The auxiliary parts such as conveying belts, egg wash equipment, unloading of the sheets came from SMAF. This amounts to 15-20% of the costs that still remain in their own group.

+ bbi: Are you planning to combine the service in the medium-term range?

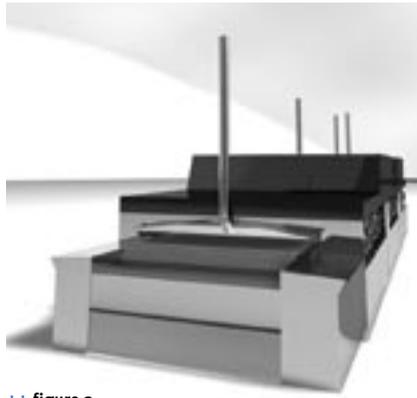
+ Zorn: No. In the service sector in particular, long-term experience is needed. They cannot be combined simply. ▶

++ figure 1
Mecatherm TraDivider

++ figure 2
Mecatherm FTM oven

+ bbi: What will the future organization look like?

+ Zorn: We have one holding. Below that, two companies, one named Mecatherm, the other named Florial which comprises Gouet and SMAF, which becomes GOUET BAKING SYSTEMS with the company still headed by Mr. Olivier Sergeant. I will be the head of Mecatherm. At the same time, I am President of Florial. The entire Group will yield a sales volume of 100m Euro. The staff of 350 will be the same, with 150 working at Gouet/SMAF. We have two parts with different company cultures which have to grow together slowly. We want to keep



++ figure 3
Gouet stone oven

the work philosophy in the companies because this is our most important asset. Of course, there was some anxiety amongst the employees and for sure

problems will arise once in a while. But we are going to grow together and with each other, and the group will strengthen each company in the future.

+ bbi: The Group is set to grow. Are additional acquisitions possible?

+ Zorn: We are interested in more acquisitions and we have the respective means for that. However, the products have to complement each other. This is important to us. We are looking around and we are doing some thinking.

+ bbi: Mr. Zorn, thank you for the interview. **+++**