



“I wasn’t familiar with Wörwag beforehand”

Wörwag started its anniversary year with a new CEO at the helm. After around a hundred days in the job, Georg Saint-Denis answered employees’ questions and, in doing so, formulated a vision for the company that created quite a wave of surprise and delight.

By Michael Thiem Photos by Florian Imberger



Georg Saint-Denis, 52, has been CEO of Wörwag since January 8, 2018. He brings with him more than 20 years of experience in an international working environment, in the automotive industry and as a managing director, among other positions. The 52-year-old from Bad Säckingen studied economics, is married, and has three children.

Saint-Denis: Where does your name come from?

Dell'Orzo: From Portuguese. And yours?

Saint-Denis: From France. That's why it's also pronounced in the French way. It comes from a Nikolas Saint-Denis, who was born in Paris and came to Mainz at the beginning of the 19th century. He fell in love there, and ended up staying.

Weiss: Does that mean that you speak perfect French?

Saint-Denis: Well, no, more school-level French really. I'm from Lörrach, and we would sometimes go shopping in Alsace or enjoy a skiing holiday in the Alps, but I wouldn't say that I speak it perfectly.

Kavanozis: While we're on the subject of names, when did you first hear the name Wörwag?

Saint-Denis: Do you want me to be honest? In fall 2017, when I was asked if I could imagine becoming CEO here. I wasn't familiar with Wörwag beforehand. But it quickly became clear to me that Wörwag was a hidden champion.

Kavanozis: Yes, I agree. When you tell people that you work for Wörwag, they usually just shrug their shoulders.

Dell'Orzo: We're the company in Zuffenhausen, right beside Porsche. People usually nod when you tell them that, at least.

Teidelt: What was the deciding factor in coming to Wörwag?

Saint-Denis: I was in a phase where I was asking myself what the next step in my career should be, so the offer came at the right time. I had been CEO of an automotive supplier for thirteen years, and suddenly I was faced with the question of whether I wanted a new challenge.

Teidelt: And Wörwag was able to convince you?

Saint-Denis: Yes, straight away. I liked the concept. Wörwag's profile is based on technology, quality, and innovation. Our production is based in Germany and we have highly qualified employees.

Kavanozis: You have now been in the job for around a hundred days. Has your first impression been confirmed so far?

Saint-Denis: Yes. It feels like I'm already fully involved in everything.

Kavanozis: How innovative is Wörwag?

Saint-Denis: We're pretty good already, but I do think that we could do more to improve our innovations, such as consistently getting our new ideas over the finishing line. We still have some potential to tap there. And that is why Sales and Development will answer directly to me in the future.

Dell'Orzo: What does that mean in practice?

Saint-Denis: We need to become more densely networked and need to communicate better across department boundaries. We have very good people in all



individual departments, but we need to optimize our networking.

Teidelt: Where do you see Wörwag in ten years?

Saint-Denis: By then, Wörwag will be the most profitable company in the sector. This profitability will give us long-term stability. The stability, in turn, will allow us to keep investing and keep growing.

Dell'Orzo: Can Wörwag remain a family-run company if it does that?

Saint-Denis: Wörwag must remain a family-run company. After all, we want to remain independent. In ten years, we will have managed to turn Wörwag into a global company.

Weiss: What will that mean for the employees?

Saint-Denis: Our profitability will continue to allow us to include our employees in our success, better than our neighbor Porsche currently does.

Dell'Orzo: You do know what kind of special bonuses Porsche pays, don't you?

Saint-Denis: Yes, and it is my personal ambition that we will be able to do something like that at Wörwag too.

Kavanozis: What basic requirements do we need to put in place to achieve this?

Saint-Denis: We will have mastered the digital transformation by then. Working for us will become extremely exciting. We will be one of the most agile companies. Agile means that we have optimistic and loyal employees who have never lost their ability to change. And, because Wörwag is such an attractive employer, young, qualified people will be lining up to work for us.

Teidelt: Nice outlook.

Saint-Denis: Well, it's a vision.

Kavanozis: What products do we need to achieve this?

Saint-Denis: Paint is a product that, even in the future, will not go out of style. The visuals, touch and feel, and protective function it offers will remain important. We will, however, have even more functional paints and applications that we can't even imagine today. These ▶





Jennifer Teidelt

At Wörwag since 2012, responsible for the company's suggestion system.



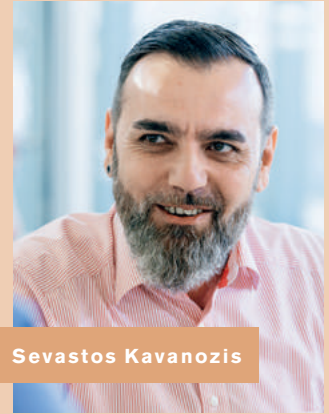
Giuseppe Dell'Orzo

At Wörwag since 1996, works in production in the mixing shop.



Nadine Weiss

Completed an apprenticeship as a laboratory technician for lacquers in 2013. Has worked in color tone definition for powdered paints since 2016.



Sevastos Kavanozis

At Wörwag since 2002, department head for top coats.

could include conductive paints or coatings which will allow devices to be controlled. I am sure that our products will be in demand even outside of the automotive sector.

Teidelt: That sounds good.

Saint-Denis: It will be good!

Weiss: But, to put this into practice, you need qualified employees. Can we cultivate them ourselves?

Saint-Denis: Sure, why not? I have always had good experiences in doing so. One thing we certainly need to do is to boost our employees' motivation. Financial incentives alone, however, will not be enough to do that. We do, for instance, have some catching up to do when it comes to occupational health and safety and the working environment.

Dell'Orzo: I work in the mixing shop, the very heart of our production. We also jokingly call it Alcatraz or "Hell". When I started there 22 years ago, I wanted to leave straight away. But now I love Wörwag. Sometimes, however, I would like to get a bit more recognition.

Saint-Denis: And not without reason. It should go without saying that a supervisor gives his or her employee a pat on the back from time to time and says: "Good job!" But we also need to make sure that the tasks we give our employees are interesting. We are not – and nor will we become – a conglomerate, so it should be possible for every employee to know where his or her work fits into the company's overall success.

Weiss: I did my apprenticeship at Wörwag and I have been in color tone definition for two years. What directions can Wörwag help me to develop in?

Saint-Denis: We have to find a way to help every employee to work outside their own area. They could change departments, take on new responsibilities, look after entirely different products. Despite all of these sensible measures, however, we mustn't forget one

thing: to concentrate on what's important. That means finishing what we have started. Doing so will present new opportunities for everyone involved.

Kavanozis: What exactly are you thinking of?

Saint-Denis: Lacquer foil technology is one example. It offers the potential that, in ten years, we could have twice as many employees at the Zuffenhausen location as we do now. We have been working on this development for the past ten years. Now we are getting ready to exit the start-up phase and really get going. We need to join forces to concentrate on the issues that we are convinced are important to the future of Wörwag. Lacquer foil or, as we call it, paint film is one such issue.

Teidelt: I have a question that concerns me as the person responsible for the suggestion system. What role do tools like this play in your plans?

Saint-Denis: Ideas management is the crux of the whole thing. If we want to be a leading technologies provider, we need to support and promote any and all ideas, even if they seem mundane at first glance. The hurdles to taking part in the company's internal suggestion system and the continuous improvement process must be as low as possible. Everyone needs to be able to participate.

Weiss: One other question, different topic: what do you like to do in your free time? How do you relax?

Saint-Denis: I like to spend time with my children and family. One hobby of mine is that I like to cook. I think I'm pretty good at it, too. Part of cooking is enjoying buying fresh ingredients. During the mushroom season, I frequently go mushroom-picking in the forest.

Dell'Ozzo: So we should soon expect more mushrooms in the company cafeteria?

Saint-Denis: It's definitely a possibility!



Photo gallery for the "Hello, CEO!" question session

www.woerwag.com/en/helloceo