



KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Family Affair

Wörwag is aiming for growth in the US. The driving forces are German technology and premium quality. But it's not just about the recipes—it's also people behind them. The "American Way of Worwag" demonstrates: Knowledge transfer has many faces.

By Michael Thiem; photos by Laurent Burst

Welcome to Lafayette:
Bob Malady heads up
the production of
water-based paints.
And loves his bike.



Tony Roswarski, Mayor



USA





WÖRWAG PLANT IN LAFAYETTE (USA)

Founded in 2000
43 employees
Annual capacity 3,000 metric tons
125 products
Contact: sigurd.tetz@woerwag.de

On the veranda outside her small house on Central Street, Angela Tschierswitz enjoys the last rays of sunshine. Since early 2013, she and her partner Alexander von Au have been working for Wörwag in Lafayette. The two have been living their personal American Dream ever since. Day by day. In Indiana, in America's Midwest. In the middle of nowhere. The view of the pleasant street from the rocking chair on the veranda looks like the set of an American TV series. Manicured lawns, bright wooden façades, American flags flapping in the wind, pick-up trucks in the driveways.

Those who are too young to think of the Waltons might be reminded of Wisteria Lane of *Desperate Housewives* fame. The scenery is so typically American that it almost seems kitschy. For Tschierswitz and von Au, this pleasant vision is their everyday reality. They've made themselves at home. Von Au grabs a couple beers from the refrigerator. Quitting time. The wooden floorboards in the living room creak. There are vents for the air-conditioning system in the floor.

In winter, the air in the vintage 1918 house was extremely dry. As so often, good advice came cheap after all: jars of dill pickles from the German discount grocer's around the corner provided the solution. Filling the jars with water made all the difference, adding a bit of humidity to the air. "German engineering and know-how even outside work," laughs von Au. Cheers!

Home sweet home:
Angela Tschierswitz and Alexander von Au are helping with the knowledge transfer to the US.

German ingenuity is respected in the plant in Lafayette as well. Not improvised—by the book. The transfer of knowledge to other countries is the key to success for the Stuttgart-based company. Mike Grandy, president at Worwag Coatings LLC: "We have strong products. That's an advantage. But we can't rest on our laurels; after all, we're competing with the biggest paint manufacturers in the world." Technical innovations, expansion plans, process optimization, and intensive customer service are intended to help achieve the most important goal in the US as well: the same high quality worldwide. And the decision by Tschierswitz and von Au is helping to ensure that their many years of experience take root at Wörwag in the US as well.

In demand

The drive to work takes Tschierswitz and von Au just under five minutes. Down Central Street to 16th, take a left, then a right on Kossuth. Two-and-a-half kilometers all told. Wörwag is located at number 3420. The buildings sit some 200 meters back from the road.

Tschierswitz's desk is next to the entrance to the development lab. She often dons the white jacket herself, weighs the paints, helps out in quality inspection or production planning. She heads the base coat working group, "but I lend a hand wherever needed." The same applies to von Au, who initially was responsible for acoustic and haptic paints. Now he's the lab's go-to guy for primers, the mixing bench and base coats. →

Location with a future: the Wörwag plant in Lafayette.





→ The US subsidiary in Lafayette has officially been a part of Wörwag since 2000. The branch is strategically well located. The BMW plant in Spartanburg and the Mercedes plant in Tuscaloosa are each within a day's drive. Likewise the actual customers Decostar (Carrollton), Plastic Omnium (Anderson) and Rehau (Cullman), painting companies that work for the largest European carmakers.

Short distances

Chris Rottler practically knows the 800-kilometer drive down Interstate 65 south to Rehau in his sleep. The key account manager spends several days a week at the customer's location. "We're in the run-up phase for series production of the Mercedes C-Class. Everything has to be perfect by the end of the year," says Rottler. That means not only the highest quality, but also state-of-the-art technology—no more organically dissolved paints, but environmentally friendly water-based paints. In the US, Wörwag is among the pioneers in this regard. The company assists customers with the transition. US colleagues like Rottler work closely together with the headquarters in Stuttgart.



"We don't speak of Wörwag USA or Wörwag Germany. We talk about us."

Mike Grandy

For Tschierswitz as well, it's good to keep abreast of what the customer is thinking through Rottler. From him she received some color plates that had been painted at the customer's premises. The samples are sorted into three yellow boxes. Tschierswitz looks at the result of every paint job. After temperature change and vapor jet tests, she meticulously evaluates the results. She works closely together with Sabine Ansoerge in the Stuttgart-based combination lab. The colleagues there are charged with calculating quality statistics. Some parts have even been shipped across the Atlantic for comparison with the findings. Collaboration without borders, without red tape and extremely directly, notwithstanding the 7,000 kilometers between Lafayette and Zuffenhausen. After all, this is a family matter. And family sticks together.

The fruits of close cooperation are evident elsewhere as well. For example the





American business:
as technical director,
Barbara Peterson
plays a leading role.



Premium quality is
the name of the
game in Lafayette
as well.

"LabPainter," a simulator of the painting process in series production installed in Lafayette is also available in Germany via internet. Colleagues at both locations can jointly modify and refine new recipes. When it comes to advising customers, German colleagues Georg Bussmann and Sigurd Tetz from International Technology Management (ITM) are as important contacts as CEO Dr. Peter Moritz. Grandy: "We don't speak of Wörlag USA or Wörlag Germany. We talk about us. We're all a part of Wörlag and work together to master the challenges we face."

Tschierswitz finds the internal network extremely helpful. She has a bi-weekly telephone conference with head of development Jürgen Ortmeier. She knows the right contact in Germany for any given topic. Ansorge, for example, knows all about water-based paints, Dr. Giannoula Avgenaki the integrated painting process. "The collaboration works perfectly," says Tschierswitz. "I've never felt left alone here."

She also flies to Stuttgart once every three months. E-mail is the medium of choice for most everyday tasks, however. Many times, replies to written requests are in →



Good Morning, America:
Jason Johnson likes
working at Wörwag.
He handles the bead
mills in Lafayette.



“The collaboration with colleagues in Germany works outstandingly. I’ve never felt left alone here.”

Angela Tschierswitz

→ her digital inbox the next morning. The time difference is a benefit in this case.

Another key player at the Lafayette plant is Barbara Peterson. Her office is just to the left of the entrance. Many roads point to the technical director. She is responsible for the quality of all products, raw materials, customer contacts, and knowledge transfer. The mother of two moved from Chicago to Lafayette three years ago for Wörwag. Her husband also works for the company—as a color team supervisor. A family affair—on a small scale as well.

Close cooperation with Germany is of the essence for the scientist. That includes regular trips to Stuttgart. “The formula on the paper is not enough. Know-how is more,” she says, thinking of the people behind the formulas. “They are important. We need a network, we need colleagues who work together between different locations.” Besides, collaborating with the German experts is interesting. And their experience is valuable. “In the US we face major challenges. So we have to continuously enhance our products.”

Wörwag is aiming for growth in the US. Although the market is saturated, many opportunities are arising in North America. The European carmakers are increasingly shifting production to the US or Mexico. And the demand for products from Wörwag is moving with them. A tour of the location makes clear how the plant is preparing. To meet the expected demand, Lafayette has invested heavily, primarily in machinery and infrastructure. For instance, multiple ten-ton stainless steel mixing containers have been installed this year. There is also a new →



DR. PETER MORITZ
has been the managing director and head of the sales organization since 2011. “A lot is happening in our long-established US market at the moment. We are following the German carmakers. The fact that they’re moving their production has had an impact on us,” he says.

Photo: Jos Schmid

Teamwork:
transatlantic
collaboration.





On Tour: Chris Rottler is responsible for Rehau as its customer advisor—and drives there almost every week.

→ bead mill with a high-speed mixer. The mill also has a new colling system, and the plant's electrical supply was also modernized.

Training by German colleagues

"We're preparing for significantly larger quantities," confirms Grandy. The president walks across a field behind the plant and show how large the company grounds are. There is plenty of space to expand. Another warehouse could be in place soon. The plans are hanging on the wall in the meeting room. Peterson looks to the future full of optimism: "With our state-of-the-art technology, we can tap new business fields." That includes the integrated painting process (see info box). Peterson: "We offer base and clear coats for plastic parts from a single source. This could be an ace up our sleeve in our expansion."

Bob Malady is no stranger to the effects of growth. He's been with Wörwag, and its forerunner, Egyptian Lacquer, for a total of 27 years. Malady heads up the production of water-based paints. "It's no more difficult than the production of organic solvent paints," says the passionate biker. "But you have to know the processes and follow the recipe step-by-step." Because of the high quality requirements, production staff like him were grateful for the training from their German colleagues.

"A single false ingredient can ruin the whole mixture."

Bob Malady

"The material has to be thoroughly checked as well. A single false ingredient can ruin the whole mixture," emphasized Malady. At present he's putting a new mixer into operation. The container with the water-based paint is also new. It holds 703 gallons. Wörwag USA currently possesses no larger containers of this sort. Today Palladium Silver is on the agenda. Malady sets the time and turns the mixer on. Everything's running smoothly.

“We offer state-of-the-art technology from a single source.”

Barbara Peterson

Shortly after 11, the cafeteria is abuzz with activity. The production staff is famished. Some begin before 6 am. Quitting time is between 2:30 and 3:30 pm because in the afternoons the humidity can be so high that it interferes with paint production.

A few weeks ago, a lab was converted into a break room. The colleagues sit together at two large oval tables. The employees' snacks range from sandwiches with chips to sausages and noodle salad to pizza or spaghetti from last night's dinner. The kitchen counter

has four microwaves, and in the corner there are two gum dispensers. Malady has brought some oil paintings from his time in the military in Korea and hung them up in the room. He also mixes the lemonade that is provided for free from a large plastic cooler.

After two-and-half years, Tschierswitz and von Au are slated to return to Stuttgart in winter 2015. Though they brought a lot of experience with them to the states, they'll return home with even more. “We've learned from our colleagues here too. Ideas from →

Integrated Paint Process

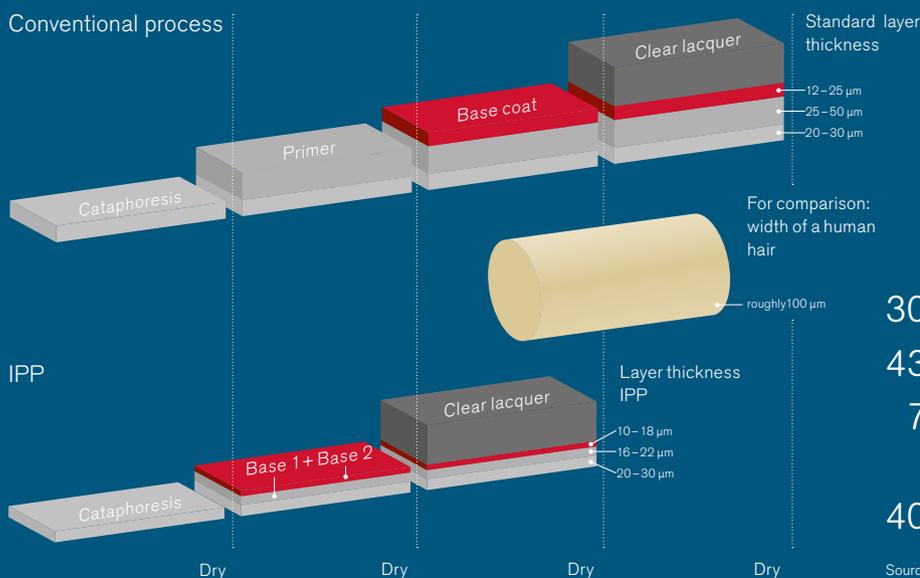
The future belongs to primerless painting. More and more carmakers are opting for the Integrated Paint Process, or IPP. In the process, the functions of the primer coat are taken over by an innovative base coat system. The water-based paints referred to as “base 1” and “base 2” are applied wet-in-wet with interim drying periods of up to five minutes. In contrast to the conventional process, the drying of the primer in the oven at 160 °C is completely omitted. The advantage: shorter painting time, significantly lower energy consumption, lower emissions and higher productivity. However,

qualification as an IPP series supplier for the major manufacturers requires significant developments outlays. Adequate protection against UV light, rocks, and corrosion must be proven in technology testing. In addition, for lab approval various technical application requirements for the required layer thicknesses are checked. Initial operational trials on the user's paint line demonstrated the performance of this base coat technology. At BMW in Tiexi (China), Wörwag received validation for its “Valencia Orange” paint. Five more paints are to follow by 2015.



DR. GIANNOULA AVGENAKI

has headed up projects related to the Integrated Paint Process (IPP) for Wörwag since January 2013. The chemist loves doing pioneering work. “No question: If you want to still be in the game tomorrow, you have to master IPP,” she says. “I really enjoy working on groundbreaking products.”



30% lower energy consumption
 43% lower CO₂ emissions
 7% lower volatile organic compounds
 40% productivity increase

Source: www.jot-oberflaeche.de



“I don’t know of any other company in the US where the president’s door is always open and I am always welcome there.” Stephen Love



→ within are always welcome; after all, we want to continuously improve our processes and products,” says von Au.

They’ve never regretted their decision to seize the opportunity. “The fact that Wörwag allowed us to work here while we were settling in made the transition much easier,” says von Au. But it wasn’t always easy. “People are more laid back about many things here. People often asked us why we have to make everything so complicated?” reports Tschierswitz. “Many things can’t be transferred one-to-one from Germany. Mixing

machines or bead mills sometimes look different here. You have to adapt the recipes to the local manner of production. Sometimes that means changing a raw material or process.”

Lasting impression

Aside from their professional experiences, Tschierswitz and von Au also associate a lot of personal experiences with Lafayette. After a storm warning, they spent half the night in the cellar; in winter they shivered through days without heat at 11 below zero due to a power outage. Trips to Chicago, to watch basketball and concerts in Indianapolis, vacations to the West Coast and Alaska are unforgettable memories. Not to mention an appearance in Lederhosen at the “German Fest” in Lafayette and evenings in the “Checkerboard,” a sports bar less than five minutes by foot from their house.

Last March they barbecued and made mulled wine on the veranda with colleagues. Kevin Goad from product development and his wife were on hand as well. The two couples have become friends. In spite of the icy temperatures, they partied so wantonly that afterwards the wooden ceiling was charred and had to be repainted. When Tschierswitz and von Au pack their suitcases in a few months, the traces of their party will be long gone. A “For Rent” sign will be in the front yard. But the impression they’ve left at Wörwag Coatings through their work will benefit the company long into the future. ■

Power: in the lab, Stephen Love adapts primer—for priming large earth-moving and construction machinery.

Meeting point: conference (left) and after work.

