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More than just good partner for 60 years
to the concrete block industry



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MASTERFUL CREATIONS

Things that set benchmarks result from top performance – and from the persistent drive to push boundaries to new levels. Only the perfect combination of ambition, meticulousness and decisiveness can turn visionary ideas into extraordinary results.

Production boards from WASA are also the result of this demanding standard. For more than 60 years. Time and again. Proven a million times over.



Wasa AG, 64293 Darmstadt, Germany

More than just good partner for 60 years to the concrete block industry

Wasa has been the embodiment of high-quality production boards for the concrete block industry since 1960. It was founded by Walter Salje - the Wa-Sa company name is derived from his initials -, who began in 1960 to simply trade in production underlays for concrete block-making machines. Heinz Bechtold joined Salje's trading company in 1978 as a qualified forwarding agent and took over the company from the childless Salje two years later. He changed its name to Wasa Unterlagsplatten GmbH and commenced manufacturing products in-house. Today, sixty years after its foundation, Wasa has developed into an industry leader and has widened the breadth of its product range extensively.

It all began with a 12 m² office in the Mossautal valley in southern Hesse, Germany, a small sawmill three kilometres away and two players: Heinz Bechtold and Sigrid Dingeldein, who started her apprenticeship as an office clerk for Bechtold on 1st August 1980 at the age of 16.

In the beginning, only production boards made from pine-wood were manufactured in the sawmill located near the office, before Bechtold entered into a joint venture five years

later with Kian Guan Ind., a Singaporean wood processing company. From this time onwards, Wasa could also offer hardwood production boards, principally yellow balau and bongossi. These robust, durable boards made of tropical woods were a permanent fixture in the Wasa range until 2012.

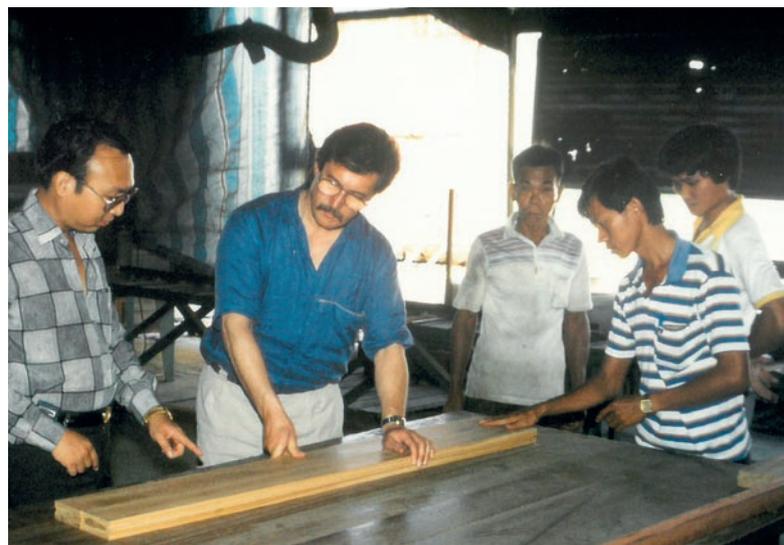
Wasa Woodplast

Wasa developed the Wasa Woodplast® board, which is comparable with a hardwood board in terms of service life and performance values. A solid pinewood core is surrounded with a polyurethane coating, giving the board a closed and jointless surface and thus creating smooth block undersides. Wasa Woodplast has now become well established on the market and is a real alternative to the previously popular hardwood board.

Softwood boards made of pine or larch have remained unchanged in the programme since 1960. They are still selected by many concrete block production facilities, although demand is declining for these relatively inexpensive boards, but with a much shorter service life compared to other types of board.



Three generations united: Walter Salje (left), Heinz Bechtold (third from l.) and Matthias Bechtold (right) at the sawmill in Mossautal in 1985



Heinz Bechtold and Chua Chin Seong during an inspection of raw lumber at the Singapore production facility

Wasa Uniplast

Certainly, the most ground-breaking development in sixty years of company history came at the end of the 1980s, when Heinz Bechtold launched Wasa Uniplast®, the world's first all-plastic board.

Bechtold came across a manufacturer of squared lumber made from recycled plastics through an article in the "impulse" business magazine. It was the time of "Dual System Germany" (DSD), the "Yellow Sack" and the "Blue Angel" environmental badge - a real hype had broken out concerning the topic of collecting and recycling plastics. Good prerequisites for the new all-plastic slab, for which a patent application was filed in 1989, were the excellent availability of recycled plastics as well as the desire of concrete block manufacturers to have the most durable, plane level production board possible that would be undemanding in maintenance and lacking crack formation.

After a long search for a suitable production site, Bechtold finally found it in Thuringia, Germany, where the production of all boards has been located in the small town of Neubrunn since that time. Bechtold's memory of this time was that initiating the production of this new type of board was anything but easy: "We had to find a supplier of plastification systems, which was not so easy because the relevant experience was lacking. Our product did not exist as yet, and normal injection moulding processes did not work." Often systems and system components had to be purchased two or three times until everything worked as it was supposed to. "It was nerve-racking and we burnt through a lot of money," continues Bechtold.

Bechtold, the pioneer, must definitely be called brave, since he had already signed sales contracts with German and US customers, even though at the time the contracts were concluded the product was not yet ready for series production.



from l. to r.: Helmut Walther, Peter Webel and Heinz Bechtold in planning discussions about the expansion of Wasa Uniplast® production in August 2001

"Looking back, it was awkward, almost over the top. We had sold something that we couldn't even produce at that point in time. But in the end everything worked out well," says Bechtold, the founder and inventor.

However, Wasa suffered a major setback in 1996 when a fire broke out on the top floor in one of the production halls causing millions in damage. Production was at a standstill for weeks. Bechtold still today remembers the phone call from the local fire brigade who jolted him from his sleep at 3 o'clock in the morning. Thanks to the active support of the entire Thuringian workforce, it was possible to resume production after three months.

Wasa Uniplast development was advanced still further in 2007. Wasa's research and development department under the leadership of Peter Webel, a managing director and co-partner from Thuringia, added glass fibres to the plastics, thus achieving a stability and load-bearing capacity that now



Condition of the property at the time of purchase in 1991. The halls had been previously utilised for agricultural purposes and required complete renovation



During the 6th SLG factory manager conference in 2012, participants were given a guided tour through the current hall, which houses the production of Wasa Softwood and Wasa Woodplast



Sold throughout the world - one of about six million Wasa Uniplast Ultra boards in daily use

made it possible to dispense with the steel profiles previously required on the outside. Wasa Uniplast® Ultra was born. Almost six million Wasa Uniplast and Wasa Uniplast Ultra have been sold throughout the world up to the present time. The board is the best-selling in the range, accounting for over 80 percent of total sales.

Wasa Wetcast and Precast

Also in 2007, Wasa Wetcast started producing cast-resin moulds made from polyurethane. Initially, the moulds were poured by hand but in recent years mould production has developed into a technically sophisticated system, whose process technology enables bubble-free casting - with real benefits for customers, because the fewer bubbles and air inclusions a PU mould displays, the lower the risk is of the mould cracking.



View of the Wetcast and Precast mould production line in 2020



High demands as regards quality management: each individual Wasa Woodplast is measured for compliance with dimensional tolerances before dispatch

Wasa has opened up new markets and customer groups with this new business field within the group of companies. In the early years, only small-format moulds were cast for classic wetcast applications. Now, Wasa manufactures even very large moulds for the precast element sector with Wasa Precast. The biggest mould up to now measured an impressive 11 m in length.

Rebranding as Wasa AG

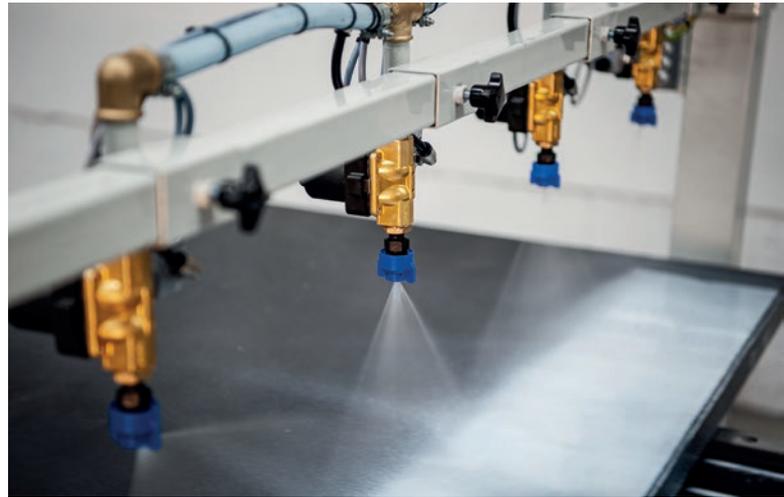
On 31st December 2011, Heinz Bechtold took his well-deserved retirement and handed over the baton to his son Matthias, who has been a member of the group management board since January 2012 and has worked for the company since 2007. Under the new leadership of Peter Webel and Matthias Bechtold, Wasa took over Tecboard, a competitor, in 2014 and rebranded itself as Wasa AG in the same year. Since



Preparation of a 2,000 kg Wasa Precast mould for the outer façade of the Puskás Aréna in Budapest



View of the Wasa AG reception area at the Europaplatz in Darmstadt



The Wasa Atomizer, pre-assembled and therefore ready for immediate use, enables Wasa Protect to be applied uniformly without overspray

then the distribution centre has been conveniently located at the Europaplatz in Darmstadt, Germany.

As the wetcast and precast mould sector has been recording double-digit growth rates for years, Peter Webel and Matthias Bechtold decided to further expand this sector in terms of personnel. In 2016, Dr.-Eng. Arno Schimpf joined the management board and has since been responsible - together with the authorised signatory David Werning - for the Wasa Construct umbrella brand under which the Wetcast and Precast moulds are offered.

Changeover to providing extensive services

Wasa has transformed itself from a pure manufacturer of production boards to a provider of extensive services and other product groups. For example, the Wasa Accessories umbrella brand also includes fully bio-degradable granulates which are utilised as a separating layer for sensitive fresh concrete blocks. With Wasa Protect, the company now additionally offers its own release agent, which can be applied precisely and extremely finely to production boards with a Wasa Atomizer spray bar - also available - to prevent concrete from adhering to all types of production boards.

In its 2020 anniversary year, Wasa AG was able to attract a highly regarded specialist from the industry to its headquarters in Darmstadt. Since July last year, Tobias Hess has complemented the board with Matthias Bechtold and Peter Webel and has been responsible for marketing production boards worldwide since then. Hess was formerly engaged as managing director for the Hess Group in Burbach and brings wide-ranging expertise from the field of mechanical engineering. But the succession is also secured at the site in Neubrunn (Thuringia). Jannik Webel, eldest son of co-partner Peter Webel, also started working for the Wasa Group last year, after his brother Eike had joined the company three years ago.

Company history does not just live from the past, but above all looks to the future as well. In terms of personnel and product range, Wasa is very well positioned for both. ■



60 Years - Vision. Transformation. Innovation

Wasa has stood for consistent quality in the concrete and construction industries for six decades.

The "concrete20 compact" company magazine looks back in detail on its eventful success story.

FURTHER INFORMATION



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