

THE LEICHT COMPANY HISTORY

1928

Alois and Josef Leicht started as manufacturing carpenters of furniture and interior fittings. First premises: a workshop on the 1st floor of the former Hahnen-Brewery in Honiggasse, producing kitchen dressers.

Day of registration: 16th April 1928

1930

Eugen Scherr joins the company, adding his positive contribution to the product and manufacture over decades..

1934

Expansion through buying a furniture factory in Waldstetten.

1945

War is over. The village of Waldstetten and the factory experienced no damage during the American occupation. An effort commences to find a civilian use for parts left over from war orders. New cellar shelves are made from mine-boxes and mine transport rings are modified and made into children's' swings.

The first orders after the war: manufacturing bedsteads and lockers as well as tables for the American army and kitchen dressers for the German furniture trade.

1947

The company phase later named as "era Stein" started with Willi Stein joining the company. He built up a clientele since, up to then, production was for only one customer at a time. He also collected the bricks from the brickyard in Lauffen personally so that a new factory could be built.

1949

The monetary reform finally provided the basis for a new start. The first works committee is elected from a work force of 142 employees.

The brothers Leicht buy a building site in the industrial area of “Buch” in Schwäbisch Gmünd and build factory number II with a production area of 9,000 sq.m.

The first ‘fitted’ kitchen is developed in Waldstetten to a then trend-setting dimension and modular-system. At first this innovation was met with rejection by the furniture trade as they wanted to sell “off the peg” products without the necessity of planning and fitting expenditure. As a consequence, Willi Stein, responsible for the factory, acquires the technical trade (e.g. sanitary and electrical specialists) as a new trade channel.

1951

Factory I has another floor added, increasing the production area to 10,000 sq. metres.

1954

Introduction and presentation of the first coloured fitted kitchen COLORA with blue, yellow and red fronts. “Colourful kitchens – happy women” was accordingly the first advertising slogan.

1956

LEICHT introduces the first fitted kitchen with an eye-level oven.

Despite enormous competition from Europe and the USA, Josef Leicht and Willi Stein obtain the order to supply 3,500 kitchen for a Nato-housing estate in France. At this time a new building, the so-called “Nato-Hall” with 1,200 sq. m. floor area is added.

1958

The first laminate-covered kitchen is testimony of the progressive thinking in research and development.

1960

The first kitchen with wood-décor fronts on a PVC base is introduced.

1962

A machine mill with a 4,900 sq.m. production floor is built in three phases at Gmünd Street.

Programme TX 64, an interesting innovation with a new grip rail feature and many new polystyrene interior fittings, made in-house.

INTERSTYLE, a “full-service” fitted kitchen arrives on the market. The fronts: laminate glued chipboard panels in high gloss or satin finish with high gloss chromed bow handles. This programme becomes a favourite for many years.

The furniture house Leicht at the Kalter Markt in Schwäbisch Gmünd opens its doors with a sales area of 4,000 sq metres. In charge is Toni Leicht, wife of Josef Leicht.

1964

From 1964 to 1967 the buildings II and III are added totalling 13,5000 sq. m. area.

1965

The subsidiary company “Kitchen technique Berlin” with a production floor of 9,000 sq. m. is added, targeted on the growing project market: satellite towns, high-rise buildings, housing estates etc.

1966

Introduction of new room-divider-systems

Introduction of COUNTRY: a unique design sets standards.

1967

In the factory at Schwäbisch Gmünd a new and modern administration building is erected and occupied in the Spring of 1967. A new boiler house is started outside the factory grounds. A factory enlargement is planned.

1968

A separate programme for the project market, named "GAMUNDIA" is manufactured. This kitchen was personally developed by Lois Leicht. The building sector is booming. In the Gmünd factory 1,200 units per day are manufactured by 110 employees.

Euralux enters the market: "The luxury class of the laminate fitted kitchens". Laminate faced chipboard panels in high gloss single colours with an alu-grip rail accentuate the front appearance.

The first full laminate kitchen – the "kitchen from the retort" – introduced at the Cologne Furniture Fair creates a trade sensation. A further sensational development of this kitchen are wall units which can be lowered to sit directly above the worktop for easier filling.

LEICHT also introduces the programme FORESTA, their first wood veneer fitted kitchen using Mahogany.

Building again in Waldstetten, the production area grows to 30,000 sq. metres.

Dipl.Ing., Theo Streicher is appointed as the first technical director in March 1968.

1972

LEICHT takes over the highly respected GERO-Works in Kirchheim/Teck, mainly in order to obtain their skilled labour wood working force.

On December 12th Dipl. Kfm., Hubert Herrmann, son-in-law of Alois Leicht, previously a director in the Company, is appointed chairman.

1973

On June 1st Dipl.Ing. Jörge Schleusener, long time employee (since 1963) and managing director of the factory in Schwäbisch Gmünd, is appointed technical director of all LEICHT factories. New production methods are introduced and new departments established, among others the construction division with product development, quality control, Refa (time and motion study)- and installations-division.

Introduction of the bathroom SANOVA INTERNATIONAL with the aim of supplying the complete interior furnishing from one source.

1974

Totally new cupboard dimensions for the fitted kitchen: since the kitchen programmes had grown considerably during the years (new cupboard types, new fronts, new fitted appliances), a rational production was no longer possible and at the suggestion of the then construction manager, Ulrich Fitzel, a new universal height grid, the so-called "13 Raster (grid)" was introduced. It is still valid today.

In the meantime The LEICHT group of companies employs more than 1, 150 people.

1975

On the 23rd of April 1975 the Welle-Group in Paderborn takes over LEICHT GmbH, although the company remains an independent business, this is considered a long term safeguard for the company.

1976

The factory in Kirchheim is completed. Wood veneer and solid wood fronts are manufactured in these highly modern premises. The factory has a production area of 11,000 sq.m.

1977

Karl-Heinz Otte is appointed technical director. The previous technical director, Dipl.Ing. Jörg Schleusener, becomes Managing Director of the LEICHT-Subsidiary "Küchentechnik Berlin".

Eugen Scherr, the former – still active – managing director retires five years after reaching pension age.

The residence of the co-founder, Alois Leicht, is demolished thus enabling an enlargement of the factory Schwäbisch Gmünd with a new high-rack warehouse among other things.

1978

LEICHT introduces a new variable and functional fitted kitchen generation with MULTIFORM on the occasion of its 50th anniversary.

1979

Alois Leicht, one of the two company founders, dies in March. It was his foresight that gave the LEICHT-Collection independence and individuality for decades.

1980

The central dispatch in the industrial area, Gügling in Schwäbisch Gmünd, comes into operation. LEICHT kitchens, much admired all over the world and manufactured in four factories, are sent from here to both home-and international customers.

The central dispatch is the initial building-phase. A highly modern works had been planned on the green meadow site of 16,5 hectares. This never materialised.

Every fourth kitchen goes to another country. A separate export division under the leadership of Manfred Hetzel is established with sales offices in France and England.

As early as at the beginning of the eighties, LEICHT relies on electronic data processing in both technology and sales. This enables single day processing and control of all orders with all data saved and accessible at any time.

1981

Sales Director Willi Stein is appointed as the first chairman of the AMK (Consortium for the Modern Kitchen). More than 120 kitchen manufacturers and several component suppliers are represented here. (1988 Willi Stein is appointed honorary chairman of the AMK).

1982

LEICHT is awarded the Design Prize '82 of the Design Centre, Stuttgart, for the logical development of a concept, practical in handling as well as in appearance. The award went to the two LEICHT kitchens ARAGON and ACHAT from the NOBLESSE-Collection.

The former MAUTE bedroom company in Balingen-Frommern is taken over by the Welle-Group. Now kitchen cupboards are manufactured here.

Moving into the new LEICHT-administration premises in the factory of Waldstetten. Social premises (canteen, works committee, works-doctor) are established.

At the end of November 1982 production is discontinued at the Küchentechnik Berlin.

1983

LEICHT puts all emphasis on the function of the kitchen and stresses the sensible arrangement with preparation-, cooking and wet-centre as well as storage. Workload is eased and ergonomics move into the kitchen.

1984

AMARA, one of the most successful wood veneer programmes, apart from MATURA, ever developed by LEICHT, is introduced at the Furniture Fair in Cologne. From the outset this ash-front in several colour stains and metallic lacquers is a huge success.

1985

The PREPARATION CENTRES (VC 90 and VC 50) are chosen by the Design Centre Stuttgart of the County Trade Office Baden-Württemberg, for display in the Design selection 1985.

1986

CONTEMPI – a kitchen sensation developed by LEICHT that enthuses the experts.

CONTEMPI, a kitchen system with a totally new, modern form language without traditional wall units. It was designed for the demands of a modern, mobile and flexible group of customers. The jury of the French trade press awards to CONTEMPI the “Oscar de la Nouveauté”.

The COMBISET- interior fittings (drawer- and pullout-sides in decorative glass) is chosen by the ‘Haus Industrieform Essen’ for display in the annual design selection of home and foreign products of the consumer and durable goods industry.

At year end the sales director, Willi Stein, leaves the Company and retires. The “Foundation-years” are finally over.

1988

LEICHT introduces its trend-setting diagonal cupboard-concept at the International Furniture Fair in Cologne.

The Company is given the right to display the “Mark of quality for German Furniture”

with effect from 9.9.1988.

LEICHT takes second place at the Zuhause/VKG-Förderpreis 1988 for the theme "Safety in the Kitchen".

The factory Schwäbisch Gmünd, in disuse for two years, is considerably revamped, providing one of the most modern worktop-production facilities in the Federal Republic.

1989

The ERGOMAT, an electrically height adjustable work place, integrated in the cupboard run, received first prize in the competition "Action good kitchen" and was consequently developed into standard production readiness.

1990

LEICHT again attracts attention with another revolutionary design. The aesthetic programme form MODUL with its many functions is introduced.

ERGOMAT is adopted. The preparation centre, electrically height adjustable by 26 cm, adapts to every posture and body height – even with different plinth heights, thus giving LEICHT the decisive impulse towards an ergonomically correct kitchen.

The trapezoidal cupboard-concept is awarded the "SAMI 90" at the "Salon international Professional des Arts Menagers".

At the same time ERGOMAT is distinguished for "uniqueness, innovative technology and aesthetics" by the "Salon du confort menager 1990 – Foire de Paris".

1991

LEICHT introduces a new Collection-line to the market, "Interstar" which is intended for the target group of first-time buyers with a limited budget. It is further developed during the next few years and extended particularly through the addition of the flexible cooking and wet-segments.

The niche between wall units and worktop changes from 'dead' space to function area. LEICHT adapts this previously unused area with practical function-rails, niche panels and work-easing elements.

LEICHT receives the right to display the GS-Gütesiegel (seal of approval) "Proven Safety" from the LGA Country trade institute Bavaria.

1992

The technical director, Karlheinz Otte, leaves the Company on 31.3.1992 and is succeeded by Rudolph Koyer.

At the end of 1992/ beginning of 1993 sales archives are transferred to electronic storage.

1993

The LEICHT Holding GmbH, LEICHT Einbauküchen GmbH and the LEICHT Interstar GmbH are gathered under the umbrella of LEICHT Küchen AG. Chairman is Dipl.Kfm. Hubert Herrmann with Hermann Barth appointed a member of the board. At the same time the registered office is moved from Schwäbisch Gmünd to Waldstetten, the previous head office.

1994

Trend-setting exhibition appearances with target group orientation as guideline for the industry. Outstanding product innovations are the pillar-system and the cylinder unit.

A new production area for the order related laminate front production and relocation of the laminate front production from the factory Balingen-Frommern to Waldstetten. Balingen factory is closed.

Establishment of a storage facility in Waldstetten with around 3,500 places for palettes.

1995

The fitted kitchen MAISON is awarded the “Oscar de la cuisine installée” at the Foire de Paris.

The former house of Josef Leicht, last used by the export department, is demolished. The administration building is again extended.

1996

LEICHT improves the wall unit fixing method decisively and at the same time increases the space in depth. The new floor unit plinth expands the usable space and offers more room for an additional plinth drawer as a fully extendible pullout.

Construction of a chippings silo with a height of 25 metres and a volume of approx. 2,200 cubic metres.

Commissioning of a processing centre for Messrs HOMAG with a laser controlled positioning-facility and the acquisition of an edge automat with automatic re-feed of the parts.

1997

LEICHT take over the brand ALSA of Reichertshofen, a manufacturer of high quality kitchens, thus expanding the programme range by the addition of a country house kitchen. The brands LEICHT and ALSA operate independently under the general umbrella of LEICHT Küchen AG.

In June 1997 LEICHT introduces the new carcass concept to more than 1300 customers who came from all over the world: uniformly constructed in an elegant light grey, with a quality thick edge and with two alternative heights. The increased carcass height now enables the kitchen experts to facilitate the taller customers.

Establishing and starting a format- and edge-processing production line with automatic feeding and edging facility.

1998

At the International Furniture Fair in Cologne LEICHT greets the visitor with a special innovation: the 'Dialogue Centres'. With these work centres extending freely into the room, the focal point for washing-up, preparing or cooking, is projected into the middle of the room, thus also changing the line of vision: away from the wall and into the room. Also introduced for the first time are kitchen innovations from the subsidiary ALSA.

Installation and commissioning of three production-lines each with a portal feed-in facility, drill facility and a carcass press. Dismantling of the old production line and setting up of the new lines was undertaken during the works holidays period of 3 ½ weeks.

1999

Hermann Barth is appointed chairman of LEICHT Küchen AG on 1.1.99, following the retirement of the previous chairman, Hubert Herrmann.

The Dialogue-Centre kitchen concept is awarded with the design prize of the Stuttgart Design Centre by the County Baden-Württemberg.

Expansion for loading and installation of an automatic conveyor belt and sorting facility for direct loading of kitchen carcasses into containers.

Relocation of the dispatch from Gügling to Waldstetten. The central dispatch is closed at the end of 1999. The new logistics partner is BTS.

Establishment of a container parking space with modern suspension facilities and a two-track turn-round.

2000

The third phase of the SAP-software introduction is concluded, enabling our trade-partner to take full advantage of this future orientated programme. With this development LEICHT leads the industry.

In the middle of the year the decision is taken to amalgamate LEICHT and ALSA at the central production and administration premises in Waldstetten.

The factory in Reichertshofen is closed.

The factory in Schwäbisch Gmünd, which produced all kitchen worktops, is closed in July 2000.

On August 1st, Hermann Josef Pöhls takes over the technical side of LEICHT Küchen AG from Rudolph Koyer who retired at the end of the year.

2001

The LEICHT dealer network now can order small- and additional parts fast and without problem online. With protected access under www.leicht.de Leicht dealers can look into their order confirmation, delivery times and much more.

The introduction of the company software SAP R3 is successfully concluded.

A LEICHT kitchen plays a TV-part in the ZDF-Series "Affair Semmeling".

2002

The parts production of wood and cut-outs are moved to the central production area in Waldstetten.

On December 31st 2002 LEICHT chairman, Hermann Barth, retires and hands over the chairmanship of the company to Stefan Waldenmaier (sales and marketing director), Hermann Josef Pöhls (technical director) and Ralph Glorim (head of finance).

LEICHT chairman, Stefan Waldenmaier is co-opted into the board of the AMK consortium 'Die Moderne Küche e.V.

LEICHT is awarded a prize in New York for the new advertising campaign.

A new logging system (COE) for order and sales processing is introduced.

2003

In the year 2003 LEICHT celebrates its 75th anniversary. As part of the jubilee programme during which the kitchen experts are able to make a particularly attractive offer to their customers: brand quality in the jubilee year at an especially competitive price.

Also undertaken was a major cooperative advertising campaign with three page adverts in the leading German Home Magazines ('Schöner Wohnen, Wohnidee, Zuhause Wohnen, Living at home and Architecture und Wohnen')

At the International Furniture Fair in Cologne, LEICHT again introduces a considerable number of innovations. Highlight of the exhibition stand: the jubilee kitchen "Amara" – a renaissance of the particularly popular ash-front, valuable worktops of lava stone, the sliding door system and the new trend-material oak in a modern style.

All LEICHT kitchens now have automatic retraction dampers on the pullouts and closing dampers on the doors as standard. New are the elegant glass sides and a high back wall on pullouts.

An international jury gives LEICHT the "Interior innovation award Cologne 2003" at the IMM Cuisinale in the category "Best detail" for the aluminium light profile LBLA.

The introduction of COE is concluded. The necessary software projects for implementing the electronic exchange of order- and delivery-dates with the customer are also completed. This makes LEICHT the leader in this area. A decisive basis for an even smoother and faultless communication with the customer.

An investment of 1,7 million Euro was made in the machine and surround field with a new edge-gluing machine with 72 edging strips with direct access. In addition new lacquer bays were installed in the Waldstetten factory.

Together with Siemens and Blanco, LEICHT goes public with a cooperative brand initiative. The aim: to stimulate the kitchen purchaser with strong sales argumentation to buying quality brand products and to give the dealer an attractive range of products.

A market survey of the magazine "Stern" states: all relevant market values from LEICHT have risen in the year 2003 when compared with 2001. High

growth rates are seen in “popularity” and “readiness to buy”, highest growth rates of all kitchen brands in “high profile” and “ownership”.

On the 3rd October, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of LEICHT, an “Open Day” is celebrated in Waldstetten. More than 6,000 visitors come and see the latest works exhibition with the new kitchen models and take the opportunity to see the LEICHT production area, followed by celebration from 10am to 6 pm in a marquee.

LEICHT chairman, Stefan Waldenmaier, is elected to the steering committee of the VDM, Association of the German Furniture Industry.

2004

LEICHT chairman, Stefan Waldenmaier becomes chairman of the VdDK, the Association of the German Kitchen Furniture Industry.

LEICHT exhibits at the Eurocucina 2004 in Milan in April.

This exhibition also sees the introduction of the new LEICHT kitchen book with which the brand LEICHT presents itself in a totally new and unique light. The theme “Simplicity – Individuality – Personality” is at the same time the approach to the brand advertising campaign in 2004.

For the first time in decades, LEICHT appears in a television advertisement. The campaign on Sat1 and parallel on the Memberclub Sat1 Meine Welt (my world) runs in three stages nation-wide throughout the year at prime time and reaches a million strong public.

The kitchen without handles “Avance” is awarded the internationally recognised “reddot” design prize 2004 by the Design Centre North-Rhine Westphalia. The award-winning works from all over the world are exhibited in the red dot design museum in the renowned Essen “Zeche Zollverein”, listed as a World Cultural Heritage Centre by Unesco, from 6th July to 8th August 2004.