

HORN BACH
S U S T A I N A B I L I T Y M A G A Z I N E
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IT'S THAT SIMPLE

R E S P O N S I B L E B U I L D I N G
A N D D E S I G N

HORN BACH.
Holding

DEAR READERS,

The past year brought a flood of news about climate change on our planet: torrential rain, gales, unrelenting heat, resultant droughts, and devastating fires. Broad swathes of society took part in global climate strikes, with millions taking to the streets – united not so much by a desire to do good, but rather to protect their own future and quality of life.

Protecting our quality of life – in our private lives, as a society, and in the economic arena. At base, the dominant topic of 2020 presents us with the same challenge: How can we live well, protect our health, and maintain our sense of community in these times when the coronavirus has suddenly had such a massive impact on our lives? How companies act in these weeks and how they deal with their customers, employees, and business partners – that makes all the difference. If the reality at a company does not match what it claims, then its reputation will take a knock. That means it is no longer just the company's approach to the environment which determines how it is seen, but also the way it is managed and addresses its employees' interests. So the virus may even have a positive impact in terms of bringing sustainability out of the "Greta fan club" niche.

The debates surrounding climate change and the environment are currently less visible but no less important. We can be in no doubt that climate change, the loss of biodiversity, and the harm we are doing to both people and the natural world will present the greatest problem in the long run, and far outstrip the impact of the coronavirus. People are increasingly only consuming what they actually



need and buying more of this on a regional basis. The pandemic has boosted this trend and consumer awareness is evolving.

Awareness is the key to sustainability.
It's that simple.

In this spirit, have an enjoyable read!

Anna Krall
CSR Spokeswoman
and Editor in Chief

*In this Sustainability Magazine, terms such as "employees", and "customers" refer equally to people of all genders.

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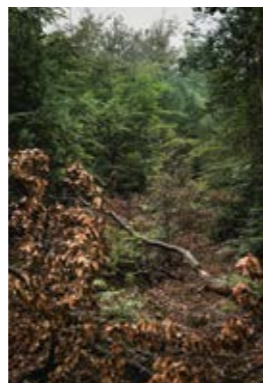
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TEAR DOWN – REBUILD

THE GARDEN SHED

There comes a time when even the most durable product has to be replaced. For us this spring, that was the garden shed. The new version took a great deal of planning and no less material. The whole project gave me the chance to try out a few of the possibilities offered by HORNBACH myself.

Anna Krall

The old tin shed in the garden was already there when we bought the house a few years ago. It was large enough to store all the usual gardening equipment. And the neighbor's Virginia creeper had already covered it to such an extent that we could only see the doors. I could have lived with all that, but my husband saw things differently. Not only did the shed spoil the overall view, no, he also had to stoop to get in and his head was black and blue from the countless times he forgot. All in all, a new garden shed was on the agenda for 2020. My husband spent every spare minute of his Christmas vacation planning the new project, or at least that was my impression. We agreed on the "Cubo 2 shed with floor and overhanging roof 359 x 234 cm natural coloring". After that, he began drawing, watched product videos, and let "HORNBACH Meisterschmiede" jog his memory for everything he already knew from our two previous terrace construction projects. The excitement grew by the day!

HORNBACH DRIVE-IN FOR STARTER MATERIALS

March came and, armed with our smartphones and trailer, we set off to HORNBACH's store in Bornheim. Once there, we head for the drive-in facility, as HORNBACH's app

shows everything we need for the first steps is available. We put it all on our shopping list at home. What we need today is curbstones and cement. We load these onto the trailer, pack by pack, stone by stone. Then we scan them, nip into the store to pay and, after a quick check, return home. "Why didn't you use reserve and collect?" ask my astonished colleagues. A fair objection, but one easily clarified. I already used that service for projects when I needed to track down numerous individual parts, all products with which I was not so familiar. It saved a lot of time, and that is the whole point of the service. But creating extra work for my colleagues just for a few packs of cement and curbstones? You see what I mean.

TEARING DOWN THE OLD TIN SHED

Once the more irksome tasks were done and all tools safely stored in the cellar, the fun part could begin. The screws were so rusty and tight that we grinningly took turns with the sledgehammer. If you have never done that, then you must! The therapeutic effect is not to be underestimated,

Opposite: A few final adjustments and the trims nicely cover the roofing paper. Done!





although I am not sure our neighbors were equally appreciative... Either way, our local scrap merchant was very grateful for the manageable bits and pieces. A quick call is normally all it takes for the pile of metal to disappear from the yard the next day.

GRAVEL AND GRIT FROM HBU

Dig, measure, tie strings, measure again, lay the curb-stones, one by one. We do all that in parallel, sometimes before, sometimes after work. Nobody is pressuring us to finish as soon as possible. While my husband is laying the final stone, I am already on the phone to a colleague at the Billigheim outlet of HORNBACH Baustoff Union. The next things we need are gravel and grit. "Mrs. Krall, we would normally use ten percent more than you have calculated. You need that for compressing", explains my colleague Omid Ostad. He then looks for a delivery time and checks both materials can be brought round at the same time. HORNBACH Baustoff Union only has outlets in southern Germany and nearby Alsace-Lorraine. The

"little sister" of HORNBACH Baumarkt AG focuses on tradespeople, but is also available to private customers like us. We were already very pleased with them for our two previous terrace projects. Having said that, the "big sister" – the DIY store chain - could also have delivered both products. The online shop shows they are available in big bags or loose, and that throughout Germany. Unlike at HBU, though, you have to place an order, rather than just making a quick call.

SHOVEL, DUMP, COMPRESS

The truck appears at the yard entrance bang on eleven on Monday. The crane deposits the big bag with the grit. The truck then tips the loose gravel onto the yard and walkway. Now it is our job to move the material to the cavity. No small task - nearly five tonnes of material has to be transported by wheelbarrow to the garden. A few hours later, that too is done. As if that was not enough work for one day, we decide to compress the material right away. My husband used his spare time that morning to borrow a



Opposite: Where is the ordered coating in stock? And what is the shortest delivery route? HORNBACH's procurement sourcing experts know the answers.

Above left: The HORNBACH Baustoff Union truck arrives on time and with the right mix of gravel and grit.

Above right: Tough-going. The material for the base has to be brought to the garden and then compressed.

Left: My own quality check. No resin in sight and expert processing. Tiptop.

compressor from Bornheim. HORNBAACH and Boels have worked together for nearly twenty years now. That is handy for anyone wishing to hire out tools and other implements rather than buy them. “The 80 kg vibrating plate should be enough for your project”, explains friendly Mr. von Boels, who not only loads the machine onto our trailer for us but also secures it like a professional.

SLABS AND SCATTERBRAINS

The old washed concrete slabs that have been lying around in the yard for three years finally gain a new lease of life – better than being consigned to the builders’ merchant depot. The new garden shed will have a wooden floor, underneath that the slabs will no longer bother anyone. The section beneath the overhanging roof does not have a wooden floor. There, we lay the same types of slab we used for the terraces, to make sure it all matches. Luckily, we had a few too many delivered at the time, so we can get down to laying them right away. We already drew the slab markings on the curbstones. One small hitch: The washed concrete slabs are twice as thick as the terrace slabs. But hey, who needs easy? I already ordered Cubo 2 in the meantime. That was the first time I ordered an article online and paid for it at the store. I had to go there anyway, so that made sense. It all went smoothly, but once home I noticed I had forgotten the coating. Should I go back to Bornheim? The app tells me the article would be available. We decide to order it online and spare us the journey.

SO THAT’S WHAT BULKY IS!

The slabs are still freshly laid when a local haulage company calls. A friendly woman on the phone asks when I would like the shed to be delivered. Tuesday would be great. I should be home between eight in the morning and four in the afternoon, the driver would call again thirty minutes before delivery. I am working from home at the moment anyways, so that is handy, but I wonder how people with less flexible employers or shifts cope? The driver does not call before arriving. That means he removes me somewhat abruptly from a video conference with very understanding colleagues. He greets me slightly skeptically when I open the door. Do I know how wide the yard entrance is? He is worried the shed will not fit between the gateposts. The yardstick I grab from the dining room quickly shows our gateposts are 2.45 meters apart, while the two pallets are 2.40 meters wide. Now I know what





Above: Days of coating – a laborious but meditative task.

Opposite: The shed is quickly fitted out – everything is in the right place.

Previous page: So many parts... where to start?

my colleagues in logistics mean when they talk about bulky goods. Either way, the driver expertly maneuvers the pallets into our yard. Despite his initial skepticism, the whole operation takes less than ten minutes.

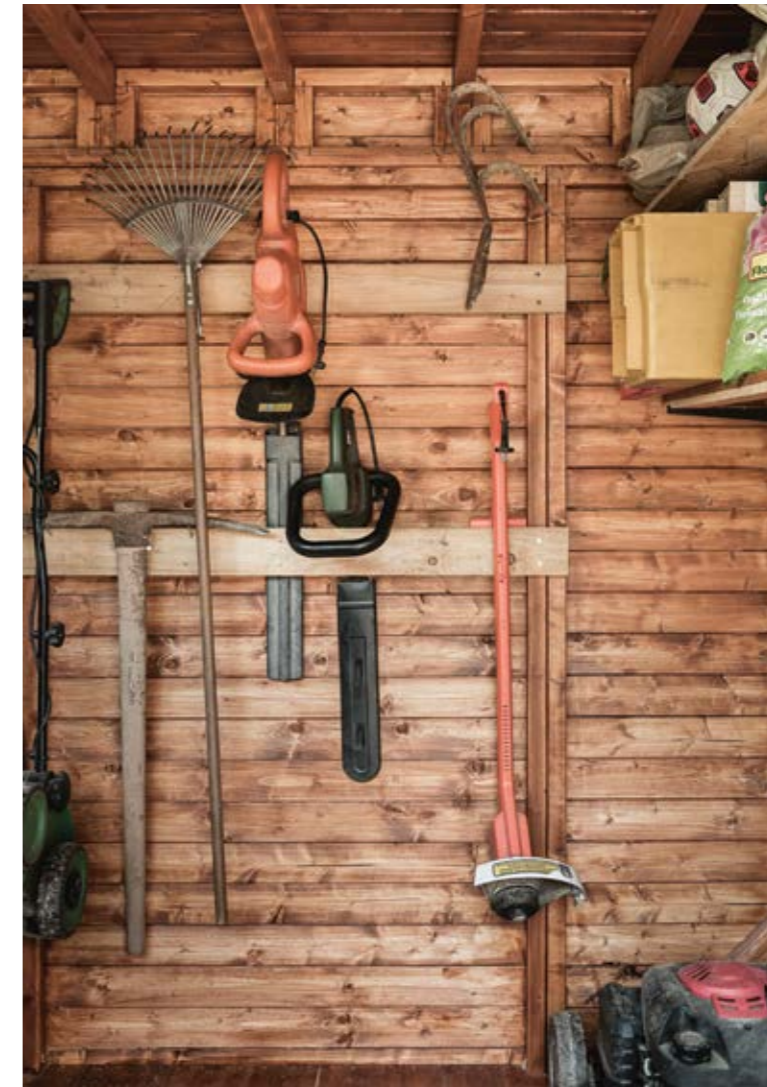
SENSIBLY PACKED

Together, my husband and I unpack the individual components of the shed. They are wrapped in foil, which is stapled onto the front ends. The corners are protected with hard cardboard. In virtually no time, the individual parts of the shed itself and the overhanging

roof are spread around the yard. We remove the staple clips with some pliers and take the foil and cardboard to their respective garbage cans. The supplier certainly did a good job – the product has no damages at all when it reaches us, and that with surprisingly little packaging. That is how it should be. The coating has also arrived in the meantime. The box has an unmissable neon-orange sticker “Risk of breakage! Do not throw!” I open it carefully and find one sheet of crumpled packaging paper and a HORNBAACH advertising brochure. Snugly fit in beneath is the 5 liter can of coating. A few clamps around the can and a stable plastic bag around it would surely prevent any mishaps. The packaging heads for the plastic garbage while the cats take turns to make themselves comfortable on the paper in the box. Upcycling is rarely a problem with cats.

BUILT IN THE BAT OF AN EYELID

We ignore the recommendations made by the shed manufacturer and coat the individual parts – twice – before assembling them. That way, the garden and yard are teeming with trestles holding sections of floor, roof, or walls that are either waiting to be coated or already drying. We need a few days before we can start building the shed. The damp proof membrane is quickly laid out, but aligning the flooring properly is slightly arduous. After all, neither the ground beneath nor the timber are absolutely flat. Once that is done, though, the fun can really begin: drill, screw, drill, screw. Two afternoons later, the shed is there! The windows are installed, the door is fitted, all trims are in place. Practice makes perfect, so the overhanging roof is even easier to install. Excellent team work! Just one day later and the garden equipment is all safely stored. Not only that, all the invoices are scanned and filed in the customer account. That marks the completion of our 2020 project. Pretty easy –thanks to HORNBAACH! ◀◀



SOCIAL COMMITMENT

THE HORNBACH MAP

160 35 11 7



The “Volunteers Day” is held every two years in the Rhine-Neckar metropolitan region. HORNBACH supports this by providing DIY store vouchers to the project organizers. It also sends its own team to offer hands-on assistance. In recent years, the projects implemented included new concrete and a coat of paint at the zoo and the putting the garden at a palliative care ward into shape.

GERMANY

96 33 3 6

NETHERLANDS

15 1

Our business in the Netherlands has its own foundation: “HORNBACHhelpt”. Here, colleagues from DIY stores with garden centers help local charities and social initiatives by rolling up their sleeves and offering advice and hands-on assistance with garden, construction, and renovation projects.



Laughter is the best medicine” – this campaign by the “CliniClowns” was supported by HORNBACH Austria. For every can of TIGER sold, the company supported ClinicClowns. Within half a year, this raised € 10,000 which was donated with cuddly tigers for the young patients.

AUSTRIA

14 1 1

HONG KONG

1



- DIY stores and garden centers
- Builders' merchant outlets
- Logistics locations
- Administration locations



Smartmatte.se is a reality-based math book to promote cooperation between schools and business. It benefits high school pupils aged between 14 and 17. The aim is to make the math needed in everyday work easy to understand and apply. Denis Zjajo, a store manager in Malmö, is really committed. He visits schools and helps pupils with examples of math taken from real life and with the exercises in the digital textbook.

7 1

SWEDEN

10 1

CZECH REPUBLIC

LUXEMBOURG

1

FRANCE

2

SLOVAKIA

4 1

ROMANIA

6 1

Since 2017, HORNBACH has supported the “Where we live” program organized by the “VIA” foundation. The program assists local people in revitalizing meeting points that are run-down or no longer used. This creates places where the community can actively meet. More than ten projects, including children’s playgrounds, have already been implemented in cooperation with HORNBACH.



Colleagues in Affoltern am Albis presented care staff at the local hospital with bags sporting the inscription “Hero’s Bag”. They rightly thought that the carers were the true heroes of the coronavirus crisis.

7 1

SWITZERLAND



SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

CULTIVATING OUR ROOTS

One aspect of corporate responsibility is a commitment to society. For HORNBACH, this involves active membership in clubs and associations and above all the support it provides to charities and charitable activities. One example is “Kids an die Knolle” (“Kids Go Potato”), a project in which the Palatinate-based potato growers’ association “Pfälzer Grumbeere” aims to spark an interest in gardening among schoolchildren. Petra Spilker and Anna Krall



Worn-out furniture, wobbly playground equipment, missing sun or privacy screens. Anyone who has visited a kindergarten, school, or welfare center will know what we mean. The money for much-needed refurbishment or renovation work is just not there. New acquisitions, “green classrooms”, or workshops are often out of the question. What could be more fitting for a DIY store with a garden center than to support local clubs and organizations with the materials they need for their next project? Here, HORNBACH can draw on its extensive product range to help out.

Our family-based company has long prioritized projects that benefit children and young people. Another key focus is on associations driven by volunteers and their commitment, such as repair cafés or neighborhood help schemes. The projects should be sustainable and ongoing, so that the benefits created are of lasting value.

“KIDS AN DIE KNOLLE”

The potato growers’ association “Pfälzer Grumbeere” has been organizing the “Kids an die Knolle” campaign since 2011 and cooperates here with the German Potato Retail Association (DKHV). “We kept hearing that schools would like to take part but did not have a school garden. We decided to see if we could find a partner to help. HORNBACH’s raised beds did the trick”, explains Hartmut Magin, Chairman of the potato growers’ association. HORNBACH has been on board for two years now. As the need for work materials such as shovels, gloves, and rakes has also grown steadily, schools participating in the project can now apply both for a raised bed and for a goods voucher from HORNBACH. The winners are then drawn out of a hat. ➤



Super potato: Since the school garden project was launched, more than 700 school classes across Rhineland-Palatinate have already taken part and planted their own potatoes. Based on the motto "Sweat for your Spuds", the school classes can see for themselves how much time and effort it takes to grow potatoes before they can be served as delicious soups, potato pancakes, or fries.

The children learn how to take responsibility for their potatoes and sometimes how to deal with setbacks, particularly when the weather is unhelpful. At some schools, the children also become mini-researchers: Who knows how starch is produced from potatoes?



INTERVIEW

TAKE A STANCE TO SHAPE DEVELOPMENTS

Awareness and information – two concepts on which Erich Harsch, CEO of HORNBACH Baumarkt AG, bases his understanding of sustainability.

Companies have a responsibility to offer sensible and sustainable solutions for their customers. Ultimately, customers decide which solutions best meet their needs. Oliver Lotz

HORNBACH ALWAYS STRESSES THAT IT IS A FAMILY COMPANY WHICH THINKS IN GENERATIONS RATHER THAN QUARTERS. HOW IS THAT REFLECTED IN ITS APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY?

That is something I too have experienced for many years now – in my previous role as a Supervisory Board member and now as part of the HORNBACH family. People here focus on the medium and long term, rather than the short term. That is the stance we take. The company is always interested in longer-term developments. That approach gives rise to many positive things. It also offers a good definition of sustainability – the creation of lasting value. It is fantastic that this stance, along with other values characteristic of an “honorable merchant”, such as honesty and openness, form part of HORNBACH’s mindset.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE STRONG VALUES SUCH AS THESE WHEN IT COMES TO SUCCESSFULLY STEERING A COMPANY?

You always need a certain orientation, and that is best provided by a values-based stance. That makes it so important to actually live the values rather than just having

them on paper. Stable underlying principles are crucial to make sure we all act and develop with a shared focus. Without enduring values, our actions would be arbitrary.

Having said that, sustainability cannot become a dogma. You have to keep questioning to find out what actions are appropriate or necessary in a given situation. If a company has to take a decision to secure its own survival and that is not the most sustainable decision from an ecological perspective, it may nevertheless be a reasonable course of action if it secures the company’s economic sustainability. That way, the company can focus all its energies on ecological objectives once again at a later date.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO SUSTAINABLY TRANSFORM A COMPANY?

Sustainably transform sounds like you just press a button, but that is not possible. A company is a social organism that is always evolving. The core questions are: How can I set the right steps enabling me to reach the objective I have recognized as reasonable? And how can I reconcile the steps needed from an economic perspective with those



that make sense in terms of sustainability? That is a never-ending process. The key thing is for sustainability values to be internalized, ideally within each individual, rather than just in a company department. What we need are perceptions based on an awareness of sustainability, and that from as many people as possible within the company. After all, awareness is the prerequisite for actually changing things.

IN TERMS OF SUSTAINABILITY, WHAT IS HORNBAACH ALREADY DOING WELL?

It has the right ethical stance. This has led to many sensible decisions, such as the delisting of hand-hewn natural stone in 2013 and glyphosate two years later. There is much talk about optimizing packaging and shipments – the best approach there is to combine sustainability with self-interest. You do yourself a favor if you cut out unnecessary resources. That also makes it more economical. We just converted nearly all our stores to LED lighting, saving

» *High-flying ambitions are very important, but acting against customers' interests can be dangerous. In the long term, the only meaningful approach is one that is good for both people and the planet.* «

more than ten thousand tonnes of CO₂ a year. That is a substantial upfront investment, but pays off in the form of lower electricity and resource consumption, and over a comparatively short period. It also shows that economics

and ecology are not mutually exclusive. So a lot of things are already moving in the right direction, but there is still plenty scope for improvement.

CAN YOU GIVE US AN EXAMPLE?

We can reach even clearer arrangements with our suppliers, particularly for the sustainability-related features of our private label products. By definition, our ability to influence developments here is greater than with other brands. Another crucial factor is how consistently we respond to any unhealthy aspects we notice. HORNBAACH's enormous product range offers endless opportunities in this respect. But we have to be careful! If we delist products due to sustainability considerations while there is still widespread demand for these products, then customers will simply go to competitors. That is something no stationary retailer can afford in the foreseeable future. High-flying ambitions are very important, but acting against customers' interests can be dangerous. The solution is to make sure we always offer alternatives. This way, consumers can themselves decide to act sustainably and choose sustainable products at our stores.

WHEN IT COMES TO SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING, TRANSPORT, AND RETURNS MANAGEMENT, ONLINE RETAIL HARBORS GREAT POTENTIAL FOR CONFLICTING OBJECTIVES.

Many things are not necessarily sustainable. With 200,000 articles available in the online shop, there are certainly many products we can optimize even further in terms of sustainability. As a retailer, however, our primary duty is to our customers. If they call for this service, if the world is moving in that direction, then we will not shut ourselves off and say "we don't do that". On the contrary: We have to help shape these developments as well as possible. We should not idealize or demonize individual items. The world is permanently in flux. So we have to be ambitious in trying to shape developments, always in line with the needs of the specific situation and based on our underlying values. It all depends on what is needed and what people want.

HOW CAN CUSTOMERS SEE THAT HORNBAACH OPERATES SUSTAINABLY?

I know what you mean. We still have potential to improve our external communications here. On the other hand, before Greta Thunberg and Fridays for Future sustainability topics were hardly present in social media. That has now improved. It is not that nothing happened before, but de-



velopments were maybe slower. There is now greater momentum and the question arises: Are you shaping developments or being driven by them? The way I see it, too many players are being driven by developments, while too few are really helping to shape them.

It is about making the topic resonate by providing specific examples. That means not talking about sustainability in itself, but highlighting the benefits of a sustainable product. But you have to be careful: The louder you shout, the higher customers' expectations will be, and you have to be able to actually satisfy these.

ABOUT ERICH HARSCH

Erich Harsch, 58, has been CEO of HORNBAACH Baumarkt AG since January 2020. He previously spent 38 years at the drugstore chain dm, where he was CEO from 2008 onwards. An Austrian by birth, he has known HORNBAACH since early 2014, when he was appointed to the Supervisory Board of HORNBAACH Baumarkt AG. Erich Harsch is married and has two children.

HOW WOULD YOU YOURSELF DEFINE THE TERM SUSTAINABILITY?

It bothers me when sustainability is used as a slogan and unilaterally waved around as an ecological demand, when aspects specific to the individual situation are ignored and statements are made on a dogmatic one-sided basis. I do not react well to that. For me, it is about cultivating an awareness for meaningful development. The greater my awareness, the more able I am to make sustainable decisions.

» *The core question is: How can I reconcile the steps needed from an economic perspective with those that make sense in terms of sustainability?* «

Outside work, I also try not to waste resources and avoid acquiring an abundance of products I do not really need. For me, sustainability is part of a holistic approach and covers as many aspects as possible. I see social diversity, for example, as a prerequisite enabling people to structure their lives sustainably. In the long term, the only meaningful approach is one that is good for both people and the planet.

WHAT CONVICTIONS GUIDE YOU AS A BUSINESSMAN?

The most important quality is a focus on people. For a retailer, that makes it crucial to focus on customers. But it is just as important to focus on colleagues, i.e. the people sitting in the same boat and pulling together to make sure our customers are well supplied. It all fits together: How I can best focus on the customer while at the same time being as committed as possible to our em-

ployees? Of course, that also has economic dimensions. In business, you have to keep your eye on the economic realities, otherwise you will do a poor job.

WHAT CHANGES DO YOU SEE IN CUSTOMERS' EXPECTATIONS IN SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS, AND IN COMPANIES WITH SUSTAINABLE OPERATIONS?

People's expectations are rising, as are those of society as a whole. People are now more aware of quality, including a focus on more durable products, and attach greater importance to this. Sadly, we cannot exclude the possibility that this may change in the wake of crises such as coronavirus. Trends and other developments often come in waves. That does not make it any easier for future generations of businesspeople. On the other hand, fantastic new technologies are being developed and we should use these. After all, with enhanced technology we can improve our business and operate more sustainably. The crucial point is that, regardless of the individual topic you address – whether it be quality standards, climate change, or the shortage of specialist staff – you should always ask: Which options are healthier for the future? And where do we fall short of these standards?

HOW IS HORNBAACH MAKING SURE IT IS READY TO MEET FUTURE REQUIREMENTS?

You can never secure the future, you can only account for probabilities. And that was never clearer than in times such as these. The most important measure is to empower people and enable them to tackle and shape things under their own responsibility. We have to enhance their awareness of the question: "What makes most sense for our future?" The more people at HORNBAACH who think and act along sensible entrepreneurial lines, the more the organism will develop in the right direction and the better the decisions taken will be. We can make every effort to progress on this course, but there is no guarantee of success. My job is to play my part in raising that probability of success at HORNBAACH. «



A VIRUS AND ITS EFFECTS

THE CORONA CHALLENGE

At HORNBACH too, developments in 2020 are dominated by the global coronavirus pandemic. The crisis presents the company with new challenges in all areas. It also releases enormous energy and makes space for innovative solutions. In this special section, we venture behind the scenes in the memorable months of January to May. Florian Preuß

PART 1

WHEN THE CRISIS TURNS INTO AN EMERGENCY

The main worry at first is that of a large-scale interruption to the supply of goods. But measures to protect employees and customers quickly become the key topic in the coronavirus crisis. HORNBACH takes decisive action.

The New Year is just a few weeks old when news reaches the headquarters of HORNBACH Baumarkt AG in Bornheim/Palatinate of one topic that will overshadow all others for months to come – coronavirus. One of the first people to tackle this is Susanne Jäger, the member of the Board of Management responsible for procurement. Colleagues at the import office in Hong Kong have sounded the alarm. Ever more factories in China have had to halt all their production, numerous ports are already closed, and many containers with ordered goods are no longer able to leave the country. And then there are worries of an entirely different nature. The number of infections with SARS-CoV2 is rising fast in Hong Kong as well, panic buying is emptying the city's supermarket shelves, and stocks of face masks have sold out.

Despite isolated media reports, at this time the crisis in the Far East still feels very distant to many people in Europe and does not seem relevant to their own lives. "For us, though, it was soon clear that we would have to deal with this situation very seriously", comments Susanne Jäger. At her invitation, managers and staff from various specialist departments meet at headquarters on January 31 already and form an initial crisis response team. As well as adopting immediate measures to help the colleagues affected in Hong Kong and taking preventative actions to secure the supply of goods for the important spring business, the team also looks into what implications any spread of the virus to Europe might have for the company, its employees, and customers.

ACTING EARLY TO ISSUE INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO EMPLOYEES

The colleagues from occupational health and safety are in the team from the very outset. Together with company physician Dr. Achim Weisbrod, in the first week of February the team compiles a set of hygiene guidelines for all company employees, including initial recommendations on social distancing, avoiding physical contact, cleaning frequently used objects, and hand hygiene. Cleaning intervals are significantly shortened and large volumes of disinfectant are ordered for the company's stores, logistics centers, and administrative sites. When clusters of new cases start cropping up in Northern Italy as well, the company largely puts a stop on business travel and on employees attending trade fairs. At the end of the month, the occupational health and safety team issues a further information sheet: "What should I do if I think I might be infected?"

In the days afterwards, the telephones hardly stop ringing. As well as the first suspected cases, there are numerous inquiries that can be seen as indicating high levels of insecurity. "We had calls from colleagues where the daughter of a friend was sick and wanting to know what they should do", recalls Julia Wittig, who works as a specialist in occupational health and safety. "Some concerns were clearly over the top and maybe due to extensive media reporting. All in all, though, the measures definitely helped to raise awareness among all our colleagues and to convince them to comply with the hygiene and protective measures."

Previous page: By mid-March, the checkout areas and many advisory sections at HORNBAACH's stores are already fitted with home-made protective screens.

Below left: To promote social distancing, Alessandro Pellegrini and the Swiss store team place markings on the floor.

Opposite: Christina Selbach (left) and Julia Wittig from the Work Safety team compiled the first hygiene and protective concepts for the company in early February already.

And new measures are added all the time. Many teams are split into smaller groups, restrictions are imposed on using break rooms, meetings are replaced by video conferences, administration employees increasingly work on a mobile basis, and social distancing is observed for all customer contacts at the stores.

QUICKLY INTRODUCING SOCIAL DISTANCING AT THE STORES

The unrelenting rise in demand makes it ever more difficult to comply with social distancing. At the beginning of the second week of March, Alessandro Pellegrini, Managing Director of HORNBAACH's Swiss business, stands in the main aisle of the Etoy store, located above Lake Geneva and quite close to the coronavirus hotspots in Northern Italy. Even though the media have been reporting increasing numbers of infections for days now and appealing to people to social distance, custom-

ers pour into the store as if there were no tomorrow. "Many people were clearly worried that the DIY stores and garden centers might close. They just wanted to grab the materials they needed ahead of the approaching lockdown", explains Alessandro Pellegrini. "It was a fantastic challenge for some of our colleagues, while with others I could see the fear in their eyes." He grabs the red and white barrier tape from the shelves and uses it to place distance markings on the floor in the advisory sections of the store. Together with the store team, he uses a rapidly assembled wooden construction to lengthen the advice counters. This way, there are always at least two meters between customers and employees. Notice signs and mobile disinfectant dispensers for customers are installed throughout the store. These measures will later be included in the official safety concept of the Swiss Retail Association. However, they are no longer able to prevent a temporary closure



of the DIY stores and garden centers. By now, the rate of infection is just too high in the Alpine republic. From March 17, the doors are temporarily closed.

POLICE AND PUBLIC ORDER AUTHORITIES PAY TRIBUTE TO HORNBAACH'S MEASURES

The groundwork performed by our Swiss colleagues and clearly documented in texts and images is nevertheless worth its weight in gold in the other regions. In Germany, for example, the Federal Government and Federal States agree on March 16 that, given their important supply function, DIY stores and garden centers should be allowed to stay open as long as they take targeted measures to ensure hygiene, control access, and avoid lines. Even before this agreement was announced, teams at HORNBAACH's 96 locations in Germany had already begun to adapt the measures devised by the Swiss colleagues. And they worked! "Particularly in the early days, our stores received regular visits from the authorities and the police. And they always voiced their praise and respect for the measures", explains Julia Wittig. "What's more, our consistency in

implementing these protective measures is surely one reason why we have so far managed to avoid any wave of infections at our company."

Out of total workforce of around 22,000, exactly 23 colleagues reported confirmed infections with the coronavirus in the first six months of the pandemic*. "As far as we are aware, none of these cases originated at the stores. They often involved colleagues who had just returned from ski vacations and who, thanks not least to our early communication measures, stayed home at the first sign of sickness. We tracked each individual case and, to be on the safe side, also asked colleagues from the relevant departments to self-isolate where necessary", explains Julia Wittig and adds: "All colleagues affected are now well again. Luckily, nearly all of them had only mild symptoms." >

*Status: Early July 2020



LOCKDOWN SOLUTIONS

While demand from customers virtually explodes in spring 2020, DIY stores and garden centers in ever more countries are required to close either in part or in full. Is that a dilemma? No, it is actually a turbo booster for new ideas and vigorous implementation.

Keeping up with developments at HORNBACH in the second week of March is not easy. News is already out that DIY stores and garden centers in the Czech Republic and Slovakia will have to close their doors to private customers from March 14. Now, on March 13, managers at the company's Austrian headquarters hold their breath while watching a press conference given by the country's Chancellor. Responding to the rapid rise in mortality rates in neighboring Italy, Sebastian Kurz announces a far-reaching lockdown for the Alpine republic. DIY stores will be closed to all customers from Monday, March 16. Colleagues in operative departments immediately start preparing for the record sales expected at all 14 stores the following Saturday. Michael Hyna and the e-business team, on the other hand, are asking themselves very different questions: "What information do we need on the homepage? Where do we have make the closure visible? How to make sure we can deal with the approaching boom in online orders to the satisfaction of our customers?"

Managers at Group HQ in Bornheim also have their eyes firmly fixed on developments to the south and east. When it becomes clear that the stores in Luxembourg and Switzerland will also have to close at the beginning of the new week, the company immediately turns all meeting rooms on the ground floor of Building 3 into the "project zone". Colleagues from logistics, technology, e-business, and operations now meet on a daily basis – often linked by video conference. Together, they devise emergency concepts for those regions where stores have to close. What options do we still have to supply our customers with the goods they need?

THROUGH THE "AIRLOCK" TO THE DESIRED GOODS

The first "emergency concept" targets those locations where customers are no longer allowed to enter the stores but can drive to the location. HORNBACH introduced its "Reserve online and collect at store" model in nearly all regions in 2011 already. Volumes of these orders, known as "R+C", now go through the roof. At some locations, they are more than twice as high as one year earlier. Customers reserve goods via the online shop, but also by telephone and e-mail. "The number of orders rose so massively in March already that we could no longer meet our normal target of making goods available for collection within two hours", explains Olga Hahn, who leads a project group. "To ensure social distancing, we eventually had to allocate timeslots to customers. At many stores, we also had to install "airlock systems" with a one-way road and just one entrance and exit. Later, we also set up collection points." For payments, HORNBACH makes increasing use of contact-free options. Customers still wishing to pay by cash can use cash recyclers at the airlock gates and goods collection points. One option introduced for the first time for R+C orders and immediately drawn on by large numbers of customers is that of paying in advance.

At this point, there are still no restrictions on DIY store and garden center operations in Sweden and some other European countries, but elsewhere full lockdowns are already in force. In Austria, for example, no customers are permitted to shop at stores, not even tradespeople and com-



mercial customers. This also removes the option of collecting reserved goods at the stores, so there is an explosion in online orders. Volumes in the third week of March alone are already more than 200 percent up on the previous year. "A week earlier we expected to see a significant rise, but certainly not on this scale", comments e-business manager Michael Hyna. As a precautionary measure, the number of employees has been increased at the two store dispatch centers (SDCs) which have been processing a substantial share of the company's online orders for several years. Colleagues from closed stores now come to lend a hand.

EURO PALLETS CREATE EXTRA WORKSPACE

This in turn creates further new challenges for the company. Extra workspace is needed to make sure colleagues can practice social distancing. Without further ado, the stores themselves are turned into SDCs. In Bad Fischau, employees use euro pallets to build new packing tables in the middle of the drive-in facility and other departments. Rapidly rising volumes of goods are now also stored on a

makeshift basis in every available nook and cranny. "Some days, our SDC operations meant we removed as many goods from the shelves as we would sometimes do when stores are open for normal operations", explains Michael Hyna. "And it was still not enough. At some point we had to step on the brakes and limit the order options."

By now, around 40 percent of all HORNBACH stores, including those in the German federal states of Bavaria, Saxony, and Lower Saxony, are fully or partly closed. Tradespeople, commercial customers, and farmers are exempted in individual cases and in some regions R+C is still permitted for private customers. However, most customers now only have the option of ordering goods via the online shop. High demand brings sweat to the foreheads of colleagues in some specialist departments. The logistics centers are working at full capacity, transport service providers have virtually no capacity available, the number of customer service inquiries rockets and, given the explosion in the number of visits to the online shop, the technology experts race to boost the number of processors and ensure adequate computing power. Hard to believe that enough time still remains to press ahead with

the latest innovations, such as the self-scan function on the HORNBAACH app. This enables customers to scan their stationary purchases with their smartphones and thus avoid contact and reduce waiting times. Where stores are still open, there is a surge in the number of accesses using the app and self-scan function. Given the prospect of stores being reopened, the function is also rolled out at short notice to those locations still closed, such as to all Swiss stores from the end of March.

NEW DISPATCH CENTERS OPEN ON A WEEKLY BASIS

The existing store dispatch centers are now working well above capacity. There is no more space to process further customer orders. To address this problem, a project group led by logistics developer Jochen Pohnert at the Bornheim headquarters devises a concept to rapidly set up further SDCs, focusing on stores currently closed. Within just a few weeks, additional emergency SDCs appear virtually out of thin air at various locations across the group, with at least one per country. “That is amazingly fast if you think we would normally need several months to install a new SDC”, enthuses Jochen Pohnert. Old virtues that once made the company great now witness a renaissance across all departments. The coronavirus crisis creates room for innovation, energizes all involved, and promotes rapid and uncomplicated cooperation across all boundaries and borders. For the emergency SDCs, locations receive hands-on support from their local head offices when it comes to aspects such as technical preparations, selecting transport service providers, supplying materials, and training new staff.

But the greatest achievements occur on location. Colleagues who previously worked in incoming goods, sales, or at the checkouts of stores that are closed now help to install new workplaces in the emergency SDCs, often improvising with materials available on site. And then the new tasks have to be mastered: commissioning, packaging, returns management, and many more. “One frequent source of difficulty involved larger-scale orders with numerous different items. That’s why, alongside the full-scale emergency SDCs, we also developed ‘SDC light’ solutions with far simpler processes”, explains Jochen Pohnert. Operations with several of these SDC light solutions were launched in Germany and Luxembourg in April and May. Not only that, a direct mailing center able to

send articles from the central warehouse directly to end customers was set up in the bat of an eyelid in Essingen. These measures all help the company to get to grips with the high order volumes.

STORE EMPLOYEES DELIVER GOODS IN RENTED TRANSPORTERS

The “Emergency Concepts” project group makes another contribution. Within one working week, the team around Olga Hahn devises a further concept: “Reserve and Deliver”. In Austria, Romania, and several German federal states, customers are now supplied directly from the store. Goods reserved online are commissioned at the store, forwarded by delivery, and paid for in advance or directly on location. Ideally, local freight carriers make the delivery, but goods are often delivered by store employees in rented transporters or pool vehicles. New regulations to combat the virus are introduced in the various regions on an ongoing basis, some of which create curious hurdles to be overcome when making deliveries. In Austria, for example, only people from one household are at times allowed to sit together in a vehicle. For deliveries of particularly heavy or bulky goods, this means that the truck and its driver are followed by a store employee driving by car to the customer to help unload the goods upon arrival. That is a huge effort, and one that can certainly be viewed critically in terms of economic viability. For many customers, though, it is also a straw on which to clutch in difficult times.

For all gardeners and home improvement enthusiasts urgently on the lookout for material for their vegetable patches, household repairs, and other indoor or outdoor projects, the situation only begins to ease as April progresses. Responding to lower numbers of infections, ever more states cautiously lift their lockdowns. In the Czech Republic, DIY stores and garden centers are allowed to reopen from April 9, Austrian stores reopen from April 14. By April 20, the German states are all singing from the same song sheet and the Swiss stores reopen on April 27. Slovakia follows in early May. All 160 HORNBAACH stores are now open again. >



Above: In Austria, Michael Hyna and his colleagues see a huge surge in online orders from mid-March. Store dispatch centers are extended at short notice using improvised work surfaces.

Previous Page: At Group HQ in Bornheim, the teams led by Olga Hahn and Jochen Pohnert draw up emergency concepts to operate stores and online shops – often based on virtual cooperation.

“IT’S SERIOUS NOW. IT AFFECTS US ALL.”

For the 160 store managers at the HORNBAACH Group, the coronavirus crisis presented an immense challenge, one that involved many new tasks and decisions. They had little choice but to rise to the occasion, as the following example from Bielefeld shows.

It is a mild spring day in mid-March 2020. Hans-Jörg Specka stands pensively at the entrance to his store. He has closely followed the media reports in recent days. Social distancing is on everyone’s lips. Here in Bielefeld, customers are pouring into the HORNBAACH store as if there were no tomorrow. And the peak is still ahead, with the really sunny days just round the corner. In normal times, this would give the store manager reason to rejoice. The season is underway at last and demand is finally picking up again. Not so in 2020. Hans-Jörg knows all too well: “It’s serious now. It affects us all. I have to do something to protect my colleagues and customers.”

He acted early to initiate some measures at his store, such as a new hygiene concept, and the sophisticated shift system for his team. And they just installed protective plastic sheets in the checkout area. The local health authorities were already on site and signaled their agreement. Representatives from the work safety authorities, who came by slightly later, spoke of exemplary solutions. But that is not enough. If customers continue to pour into the market like this, then there is no way they will be able to maintain social distancing between each other and employees. Like many of his colleagues, Hans-Jörg now decides on a radical step, one that is unprecedented in the 50 plus years of the company’s history. From now on, access to the store will be regulated. Only 70 customers will be allowed in at any one time. All others will just have to wait.

TRAFFIC JAM ATTRACTS THE ATTENTION OF THE AUTHORITIES

To get control of the situation and send out a clear signal, the store manager immediately changes the traffic routing. Now there is only one exit and one entrance. And this promptly attracts a long tailback of cars. That attracts the attention of the public order authorities and later the police are also on the phone. Calm and collected, Hans-Jörg explains the reasons and is able to convince them. He and his team manage to do the same in their contacts with customers. In mid-March, Hans-Jörg repeatedly spends a few hours with the security people he has taken on to regulate the flow of customers. “I needed to see how they treated our customers. And I also wanted to know how our customers were reacting to the new situation and whether they understood what we were doing.” He is pleasantly surprised. Apart from a few isolated cases, most customers show understanding for the measures. They wait patiently and then make rapid, targeted purchases. Now is not the time for browsing and people no longer bring their families for a trip to the DIY store.

To underline this approach, alongside the numerous other new challenges he faces Hans-Jörg also takes time to talk to local journalists. Over a ten-day period, he gives four interviews and leads editors through the store. As a final resort, he even allows himself to be photographed. “I’m

not really the photogenic type and hate posing for photos. But I needed to show readers they could shop here with a good conscience as we had done all of our homework”, he adds as he recalls those memorable weeks.

GAINING NEW SKILLS IN THE CRISIS

In recent weeks, he has been able to scale back various measures at his store. The shopping experience has become slightly more normal for both customers and employees. “So far, we have come through this crisis in good shape. We have not yet had a single infection at our store, and sickness levels have generally been low in recent months. Everyone pulled together fantastically and I know

I can rely on my team. Should the situation in Germany get worse again, then we are well prepared and can apply the brakes in well-dosed measures.” Alongside this confidence, the experienced store manager also highlights other positive aspects when looking back from his own personal perspective. “It was really stressful at first and I also noticed that physically. But the crisis has also given me the opportunity to grow, gain new experience, and feel appreciated not only by my team but also within the company. That did me good.” ◀

Below: Hans-Jörg Specka, manager of the Bielefeld store, talks to customers to find out how they are reacting to the new hygiene and protective measures.



EUROPEAN FORESTS

HI FOREST! HOW ARE YOU DOING?

Predicting the imminent death of Germany's forests is nothing new. Back in the 19th century, the famous natural scientist Alexander von Humboldt already warned his contemporaries about the dangers of increasing deforestation. In the 1980s, the end once again seemed nigh when acid rain from cars and industrial emissions damaged large areas of Germany's forests. As the saying goes, those condemned live the longest. Even today, our forests have not yet died. But they are increasingly suffering, especially from climate change. How can we now protect the forests? And how does HORNBACH deal with the topic of timber? We take stock.

Tilman Sanner

Germany has around 90 billion trees which grow on an area of more than eleven million hectares. According to the National Forest Inventory, that means just under one third of the Federal Republic is covered by forest, more than any other country in Central Europe. There is an average of one hectare of forest for every seven inhabitants. The most common types of tree in Germany are the coniferous spruce (25%) and pine (23%), followed by the deciduous beech (16%) and oak (11%). Since the last great debate on the death of the forests in the 1980s, the condition and development of Germany's forests have been under constant observation. Sadly, the 2019 Forest Status Report showed that our forests are not in good state. Specifically, since the long-term monitoring program began in 1984 they have never been in a worse condition.

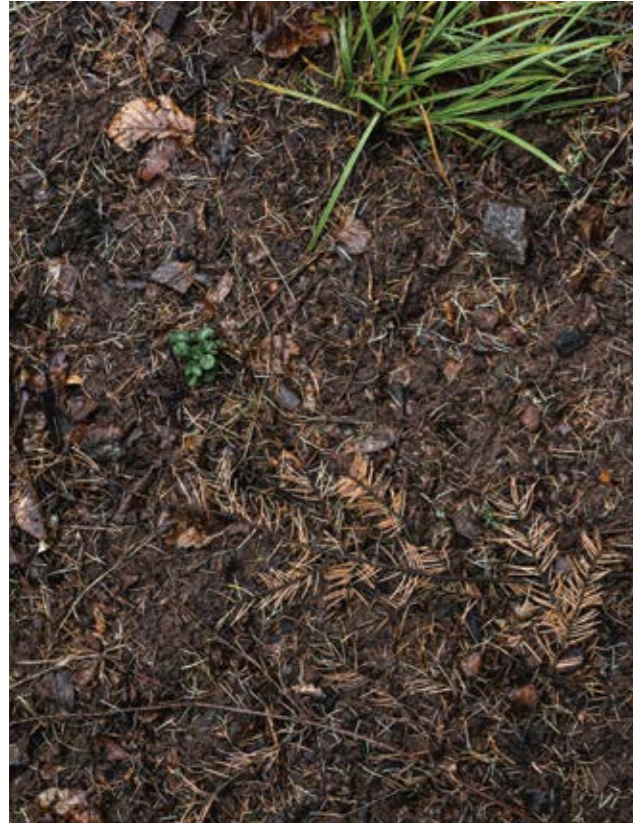
FORESTS SUFFERING MASSIVELY FROM HEAT AND DROUGHT

The extreme shortage of water in two consecutive dry summers has massively weakened the resilience of the trees. 2018 was the hottest year since weather records began in

1881. Alongside increasingly sparse crowns, the mortality rate of both deciduous and coniferous trees rose drastically in 2019 and was more than twice as high as in previous years. No fewer than 180,000 hectares of forest have already died. Pests such as bark beetles found ideal conditions for mass proliferation. Pine trees, already damaged, have proven particularly prone to these pests, but beech trees, previously less susceptible, also showed signs of stress due to heat and drought.

As climate change continues, researchers expect extreme weather events to increase in frequency, with hugely harmful effects for the forests. Having said this, forests not only react sensitively to climate change but also play a key role in protecting the climate. Germany's forests make a major contribution here. According to the 2017 Carbon Inventory, they are among the richest reserves in Europe, with 358 cubic meters of timber per hectare. Living trees and deadwood currently store around 1.26 billion tonnes of carbon. According to the Ground Status Survey (2006-2008), the forest floor stores about the same amount again. The harm currently caused to the forests could change these figures.





Above left: Extended drought means many trees are shedding needles to reduce their evaporation surface.

Above right: The heat has damaged the bark on the side facing the sun. This impedes the transport of water beneath the bark, makes it easier for pests to invade, and can lead to the tree dying.



Looking further afield, we can see a similar picture in the rest of Europe when it comes to the condition of forests. Around 43 percent of the European Union is covered with forest. But there is also good news. According to the latest figures released by the United Nations, which publishes a corresponding study every five years, the total area deforested worldwide each year recently fell from twelve to ten million hectares. This was due to sustainable forestry. Growing areas of forest were now being managed for the long term, thus slowing the rate of forest destruction.

DEMAND FOR TIMBER IS ON THE INCREASE

Timber has always been important to human beings as a building material and as a source of energy. Today, the timber industry is highly diverse. The value chain ranges from raw timber, which is processed by the sawing, wood composite, pulp, and paper industries, to fur-

Previous page: An idyllic view in the south of Palatinate Forest. In the background, though, the trees already show disease-induced discoloration.

ther processing of timber and wood products in the furniture and packaging industries and at trade companies, to construction, through to retail sector sales. HORNBAACH also sells around 350,000 cubic meters of timber a year, of which around 200,000 cubic meters in the product groups of solid timber, construction timber, and terrace timber and a further 150,000 cubic meters as wood composites and boards. Over and above this, the company sells around 12 million square meters of parquet and laminate flooring a year. In terms of the timber, the predominant types are coniferous: pine and spruce, as well as larch and Douglas fir. Among deciduous timbers, oak and beech are the key players. "These days, we sell very little tropical timber, which is mostly needed for terraces", comments Klaus Götz, Group Director of Construction Procurement at HORNBAACH Baumarkt AG. HORNBAACH has a long list of products containing timber – everything from fences and summer houses to windows, doors, and



Left: Trees weakened by drought or pests are less able to withstand strong winds and more likely to buckle.

staircases, through to tool handles and kitchen and bathroom furniture. "Trends such as healthy living have boosted demand for timber. During the coronavirus crisis, we also noticed increased demand for timber products for use in DIY projects. Here, we reported the highest turnover with construction timber", he explains.

SHORT ROUTES, CERTIFIED SUPPLY CHAINS

Sustainability criteria play a major role in HORNBAACH's timber procurement. The company procures most of its timber from responsible European sources, mainly in Germany and the Czech Republic, as well as in Sweden and Finland. "In our logistics, we pay particular attention to short transport routes. HORNBAACH stores procure their timber goods from sawmills that are generally within a maximum of 150 kilometers of the store", explains Klaus Götz. All timber which HORNBAACH pro-

cures from sources outside Europe and not covered by the European Timber Regulation has to bear the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) Seal. In Europe, that also applies for Romania. In 2007, HORNBAACH was the first DIY store chain with international operations to be awarded the FSC Chain-of-Custody certificate. This guarantees that the supply chain is checked from the origin of the timber through to the end product. An annual audit performed by an independent institute ensures that the company is still entitled to bear this certificate. At all HORNBAACH DIY stores, tradespeople and home improvement enthusiasts can now choose from a range of several thousand timber products bearing the FSC trademark. Back in 1996, HORNBAACH already provided WWF and Greenpeace with a voluntary undertaking that it would no longer import any non-certified tropical timber. Today, HORNBAACH can guarantee that all timber on offer at its stores comes from certified stocks.

Next page: Forester Karlheinz Bosch inspects drought-induced damage in his district. The Managing Director of Rinntaler Wald GmbH is head ranger for two municipal forests in the south of Palatinate Forest.

The Forest Stewardship Council has defined uniform global basic principles for responsible forestry. To implement these, uniform indicators are developed on national level using a standard process. However, the certification process does not only look at the forest. Other major factors are employee rights and working conditions. FSC-certified forestry operations are required to uphold and, where possible, improve the social and economic situation of their employees. Overall, the FSC standard is also intended to support forest owners in making their forests more resistant to the effects of climate change by altering their management approach. The key focus here is on sustainable forestry which retains the biodiversity, productivity, and ecological processes of the forest.

WHAT DOES SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY MEAN IN PRACTICE?

“The term sustainability has its origins in forestry”, explains forester Karlheinz Bosch, Managing Director of Rinnthaler Wald GmbH, and district manager for two municipal forests in the southern Palatinate Forest. His forests also supply fresh firewood for regional sales by customers such as HORNBAACH Forst GmbH (see report on Page 44/45). Sustainable forest management is a legal requirement in Germany. In practice, that means that the volume of trees regrown in a forest over a ten-year period has to be measured and registered. “We are only allowed to harvest the amount that has actually regrown”, explains Karlheinz Bosch. This sustainable form of management is monitored by local forestry authorities. If pests, wind, or drought lead to large quantities of damaged timber in the forest, then the volume felled has to be reduced accordingly. That means the basic volume of timber within the forest is maintained on a long-term basis.

However, even sustainably managed forests are not immune to climate-induced damage. “The greatest threat to the forests is the enormous drought we are now seeing for the third year in succession. The immune system of the trees really suffers and they become more prone to problems such as fungus and bark beetles. Ultimately, their circulation collapses and they die”, he reports. The district forester has noticed the effects of drought in his forests as well: “Beech crowns are beginning to die, but so far not too many. At the moment, pine trees are hardest hit due to the bark beetle.” Can anything be done to counter the effects of the drought? “Cross your fingers and

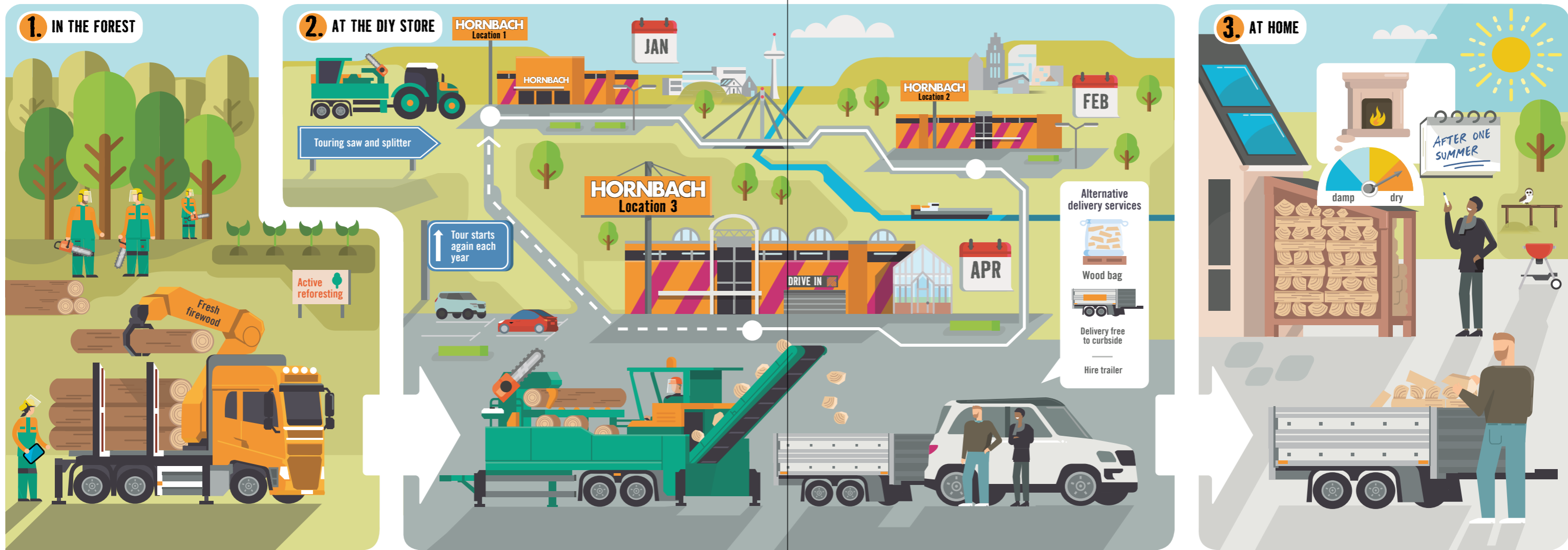
hope for rain”, he replies. A forest is not like a garden that you can just water. “One added problem is that precipitation increasingly takes the form of sudden heavy rain that flows on the surface rather than slowly penetrating the soil. What we need is a sustained period of rain.”

MIXED FORESTS ARE HEALTHIER THAN MONOCULTURES

Heat and drought, not least in conjunction with wind damage, additionally benefit the spread of millions of bark beetles. These are the greatest pest, particularly for spruce trees. Is it at least possible to sustainably combat the bark beetle? “The way things seem now, not really. We would have to use enormous quantities of poison, and that would be wrong. Nature has to try and solve the problem itself, and people will have to live with the consequences”, says Karlheinz Bosch. “Where possible, infested trees should of course be removed quickly to stop the beetles spreading further.” The ever greater ecological strain felt by many trees manifests itself in various ways. “Beech mast used to appear every 7 to 10 years, these days we see it every 2 to 3 years. That is a typical sign of stress. The trees produce more scions in order to survive”, he adds. So can nothing be done to prevent the growing damage to forests? “In general, mixed forests are less prone to problems than monocultures, such as the large areas of spruce planted across Germany after the two world wars”, he explains. Particularly when reforesting damaged areas, foresters should focus on planting mixed forests with trees typical to their region.

Having said that, it is not only the natural world that is feeling the effects of climate-induced forest damage. The worsening condition of the forests also impacts on products offered on the timber market. Currently, far more damaged timber is available than can be used. The growing damage to the forests has initially increased the timber supply. “Once the situation hopefully normalizes again, then less timber will be available overall. Due to sustainability factors, it will then only be permitted to harvest a smaller amount”, he concludes. At present, though, it was still absolutely unclear how the condition of the forests would develop in future. ◀◀





S U S T A I N A B L E A N D R E G I O N A L

FIREWOOD FRESH FROM THE FOREST AT HORNBACH

Heating with wood is a real trend – ever more people are cozying up their homes with log fireplaces that often act as an additional source of heating. Those burning larger quantities often head for a local forest to cut their own timber. For just over a year now, HORNBACH Forst GmbH has offered an equally sustainable alternative: firewood fresh from regional forests that is delivered directly to customers in practical cuts. Tilman Sanner

The soothing crackle and gentle glow of the fire – for many people, nothing is quite as cozy as a warm log fire. Not only that, wood is viewed as a sustainable fuel when used for heating. However, anyone not cutting timber themselves should look into the sustainability aspect when buying logs. When it comes to imported timber, long transport routes and artificial drying processes that are often energy intensive mean that the ecological benefits go up in smoke.

If felling, sawing, and cracking the fuel is too time-consuming or just not your thing, then the service provided by HORNBACH Forst GmbH offers a sustainable alternative. The timber does not have far to travel from the forests around HORNBACH's DIY stores and garden centers to the home fireplace. Freshly felled trunks are processed into fireplace logs using a wood sawing and splitting machine. A forklift transports the tree trunks to the machine feed. A chainsaw cuts the trunks into 25 cm or 33 cm pieces.

A Vario log splitter with a force of 16 tonnes splits the wood into square-shaped pieces. Via a conveyor belt, these blocks are then loaded directly into the customer's trailer. The sawing and splitting machine spends the whole year on tour at various HORNBACH stores in Germany.

AND WHAT MAKES THIS SOLUTION SO SUSTAINABLE?

The first thing is the origin of the wood, which is sourced from sustainably operated regional forests. These do not permit more timber to be felled than can subsequently be regrown. Areas where trees are felled are actively reforested. The next thing, particularly advantageous, is that the transport routes are very short. The routes from the forest to the HORNBACH store and from there to the customer are all short and in the same region. Direct deliveries also make it possible to do without additional packaging. That in turn saves waste and energy. Last but not least, HORNBACH Forst GmbH does not dry the wood blocks using artificial drying, which is extremely energy intensive. Customers store the timber through the summer and the wind and the sunshine see to the rest.

Short transport routes and natural drying processes ensure a positive CO₂ footprint throughout the entire production process. When burnt, the wood only emits the same amount of CO₂ that it previously absorbed from the air throughout its growth. It has to be said, though, that the burning process gives rise to particulate matter. To deal with this problem, there are stoves and fireplaces with modern filters – also available at HORNBACH.

The model offered by HORNBACH Forst GmbH benefits not just the environment but also consumers. Uncomplicated production processes that avoid artificial drying, packaging, or long distribution routes make it possible to keep costs down. Thanks to their shape, the square wood blocks also have particularly high calorific values. ◀◀



FROM POLAR SHIP TO PASSIVE HOUSE

USING GREEN BUILDING METHODS TO SHRINK THE ENERGY FOOTPRINT

Special insulation, an airtight outer shell, a controlled supply of fresh air – these are the key features of buildings based on passive construction. Passive houses use less energy than conventional buildings. That is what makes this construction method particularly good for the environment. But can this way of building also be mapped onto large-scale retail properties? HORNBACH Baumarkt and HORNBACH Baustoff Union have looked closely into whether passive construction would help them to boost energy efficiency at their locations – or whether better alternatives are available.

Sonja Korte

Visitors to the Fram Museum in Oslo can admire what is now believed to be the first example of passive construction: the Fram Polar Ship. Back in 1893, when the Norwegian Fridtjof Nansen set out in the ship for the North Pole, he must have felt well equipped for the expedition. Unlike other research ships, which often failed to return from their ventures into the Arctic, the Fram was built so that it could drift in the pack ice. Inside, Nansen installed cozy accommodation for his team, as can be seen in the Fram Museum. The outer shell was insulated several times over using a mixture of pitch, tar, and sawdust. On the outside, the ribs were covered with two layers of oak, while inner walls had a pine covering. In the living space, the boards were additionally covered with tarred felt, on which in turn three layers of wood paneling with isolation between were applied.

The Fram is now seen as a pioneering example of passive construction, as it already demonstrated many of the features characteristic to this approach. A passive house does not have to drift in the Arctic Sea, but its outer shell is certainly comparable with that of the polar ship. According to the Passive House Institute in Darmstadt, the key features of a passive house are “special windows and a shell of highly effective heat insulation in the outer walls, roof, and floor to keep the heat inside. The passive house uses the sources of energy available within, such as people’s body warmth or incoming solar warmth – and this makes it far easier to heat.” Fresh air is supplied via a ventilation system. This involves inputting fresh air from outdoors on a controlled basis and extracting used air from the interior. Here, the heat contained in the waste air is captured. According to calculations compiled by the Passive House



Above: Complex cables, endless switches: building control technology at the HORNBAACH store in Heidelberg.

Institute in Darmstadt, this means that a passive house uses far less heating energy, namely up to 90 % less than a conventional building and up to 75 % less than a new building meeting current energy standards.

PASSIVE CONSTRUCTION INVOLVES HIGHER COSTS

On the other hand, passive construction also has some disadvantages. These are reflected above all in higher construction costs: It costs around 10 % more to build a new passive house compared with regular construction methods. And then there is the complex planning process: “To avoid heat bridges in the outer shell and achieve a very high degree of airtightness for the building, all connections between components have to be planned in

detail”, explains Roland Träger. The architect and managing director of Träger Architekten GmbH is a specialist in energy-efficient building refurbishment. For several years now, he has supported HORNBAACH Baustoff Union (HBU) in enhancing the energy efficiency of its outlets. He stresses: “It’s essential to make sure the construction plans are correctly executed at the building site.” After all, any defects in the airtight outer shell may lead to damages due to damp and mold.

Despite these drawbacks, passive construction may offer a sensible alternative for both private and office buildings, and that in both ecological and economic terms. But can the passive house principle also be mapped onto large retail properties, such as DIY stores? We ask Bernd Wambsgans, who heads up

Previous page: The HBU outlet in Kaiserslautern has extensive greenery on its roof. That offers extra insulation, protects against UV radiation, and provides insects with a habitat.



Above: The HBU outlet in Kaiserslautern uses regenerative energies. The warehouse roof is fitted with large-scale solar panels.

HORNBAACH’s construction team. “Our DIY stores are basically warehouses. That means they are based on a hall construction approach, which is efficient from a cost/benefit point of view”, the expert explains. “Compared with office and residential buildings, warehouse stores automatically include elements that are critical from a passive construction perspective. The large sectional doors for goods deliveries or customer access points, for example, are often opened and closed and that leads to a permanent loss of heat.”

APPROACHING PASSIVE STANDARDS WITH NUMEROUS SMALL MEASURES

The strengths and weaknesses of warehouse stores built using passive construction can be seen at HORNBAACH’s store in Heidelberg,

which has loosely been based on this approach. “Here, passive construction principles were applied for what is almost the first time to a warehouse store”, explains Wambsgans. “The facade, roof, and transitions between construction components and doors and gates are far more airtight than at other stores.” By reference to passive house construction, the whole heat insulation system was also enhanced and strengthened. Sectional doors are insulated with thermo-frames and equipped with high-speed sheet gates to reduce air exchange. The door curtain systems installed on the inside of the automatic gates serve the same purpose. “We subjected the finished store to a blower door test. That enabled us to find and remedy any leaks”, he explains with regard to the final steps before the building was put to use.

Alongside its airtight outer shell, other factors reducing the energy consumed at the Heidelberg store include the use of night ventilation in the summer, which cools the store with air from outdoors, and a heat recovery system. Extensive greenery on the roof also enhances the building's energy efficiency. Here, the plants provide extra insulation while also helping to protect the roofing film against UV radiation and thus extend the lifetime of the sealing foil. "Despite all these measures, we nevertheless found that, compared with other stores, the higher construction standards were not as effective in terms of energy savings as we had hoped", comments Wambsganss.

» *Wherever possible, we use energy from regenerative sources. Heidelberg is not the only store with both solar panels and greenery on the roof.* «

Bernd Wambsganss

Alongside passive construction, HORNBAACH is permanently on the lookout for ways to enhance energy efficiency at its stores. One approach involves exchanging all lighting. By the fall of 2020, 125 stores will have been fully converted to LED lighting. Not only that, artificial lighting is automatically switched off when enough daylight comes through the skylights. HORNBAACH is also improving its energy footprint by using effective ventilation concepts, separating recyclable materials, and planting native trees on outdoor spaces. "Wherever possible, we rely on energy from regenerative sources", adds Wambsganss. "As well as PV systems, we also plant greenery on the roof. We deploy ventilation systems equipped with heat recovery and summer night ventilation, which we use at nearly all our stores. Having said this, such systems are not particularly effective at locations in countries with Mediterranean climates."

Compared with the large self-service high-bay warehouse systems at HORNBAACH's DIY stores, the outlets operated by HBU are significantly smaller. To boost its energy efficiency, HBU has already implemented various measures together with Roland Träger. "In recent years, we have installed 16cm full heat insulation on all newly built office and sales buildings. Not only that, all windows are triple glazed and large sections of the roof now have greenery and in some cases solar collectors", he reports. "All lighting now meets the latest technological standards. We are also looking into that at existing outlets, where we are gradually modernizing the lighting." None of these measures will enable HBU to reach passive house standards, but the subgroup has nevertheless significantly shrunk its energy footprint.

CONSTANT EFFORTS TO IMPROVE ENERGY FOOTPRINT

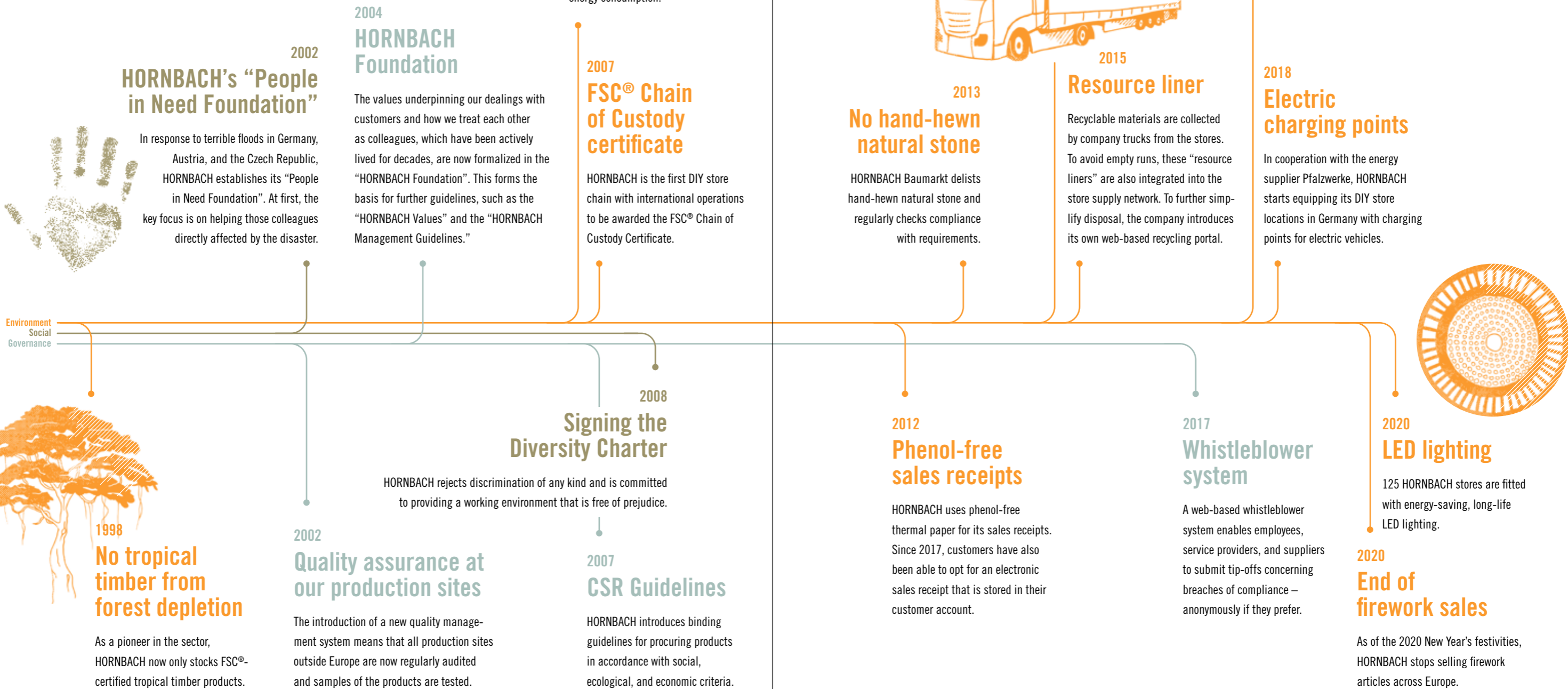
In summary: What Fridtjof Nansen tried out with his arctic vessel more than 100 years ago still largely works today in residential buildings, where energy consumption can be cut by working with effective heat insulation and controlled ventilation. Warehouse stores, however, can only attempt to come close to passive construction standards. The differences in hall construction methods are just too great and the heat exchange due to flows of customers and goods cannot be controlled with enough precision. HORNBAACH has nevertheless shown that there are alternatives. Together, numerous seemingly minor measures, such as regenerative energies, daylight, and roof greenery, can cumulatively improve the energy footprint. Roland Träger and Bernd Wambsganss and his team will continue to hunt for further opportunities and implement their findings. «

Opposite: Effective ventilation concepts are crucial for energy efficiency. At HORNBAACH's Heidelberg store, heat is recovered using the aeration plant.



THE WAY IS THE GOAL

For HORNBAACH as a retailer, the key focus of its commitment to the environment, social welfare, and responsible corporate management is on its own products and employees. Having said that, over the past decades we have also made quite a few improvements to our DIY store operations. Anne Spies



2002
HORNBAACH's "People in Need Foundation"

In response to terrible floods in Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic, HORNBAACH establishes its "People in Need Foundation". At first, the key focus is on helping those colleagues directly affected by the disaster.

2004
HORNBAACH Foundation

The values underpinning our dealings with customers and how we treat each other as colleagues, which have been actively lived for decades, are now formalized in the "HORNBAACH Foundation". This forms the basis for further guidelines, such as the "HORNBAACH Values" and the "HORNBAACH Management Guidelines."

2007
Building control technology

Building control systems now manage the operating times of systems at HORNBAACH's stores in line with requirements and thus optimize their energy consumption.

2007
FSC® Chain of Custody certificate

HORNBAACH is the first DIY store chain with international operations to be awarded the FSC® Chain of Custody Certificate.

2008
Signing the Diversity Charter

HORNBAACH rejects discrimination of any kind and is committed to providing a working environment that is free of prejudice.

2002
Quality assurance at our production sites

The introduction of a new quality management system means that all production sites outside Europe are now regularly audited and samples of the products are tested.

2007
CSR Guidelines

HORNBAACH introduces binding guidelines for procuring products in accordance with social, ecological, and economic criteria.



1998
No tropical timber from forest depletion

As a pioneer in the sector, HORNBAACH now only stocks FSC®-certified tropical timber products.

2015
No glyphosate or neonicotinoids

HORNBAACH removes all highly concentrated glyphosate agents from its product range, as well as all products containing insecticides classified as harmful to bees (neonicotinoids). The nurseries which grow products for the Floraself private label also stop using any of these agents.



2015
Resource liner

Recyclable materials are collected by company trucks from the stores. To avoid empty runs, these "resource liners" are also integrated into the store supply network. To further simplify disposal, the company introduces its own web-based recycling portal.

2013
No hand-hewn natural stone

HORNBAACH Baumarkt delists hand-hewn natural stone and regularly checks compliance with requirements.

2018
Organic certification

To offer plants meeting organic quality standards, HORNBAACH undergoes an independent organic certification process.

2018
Electric charging points

In cooperation with the energy supplier Pfalzwerke, HORNBAACH starts equipping its DIY store locations in Germany with charging points for electric vehicles.

2012
Phenol-free sales receipts

HORNBAACH uses phenol-free thermal paper for its sales receipts. Since 2017, customers have also been able to opt for an electronic sales receipt that is stored in their customer account.

2017
Whistleblower system

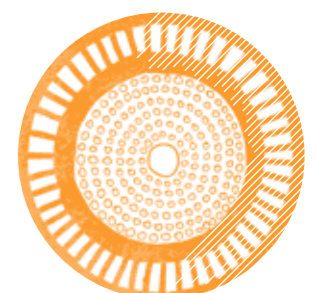
A web-based whistleblower system enables employees, service providers, and suppliers to submit tip-offs concerning breaches of compliance – anonymously if they prefer.

2020
LED lighting

125 HORNBAACH stores are fitted with energy-saving, long-life LED lighting.

2020
End of firework sales

As of the 2020 New Year's festivities, HORNBAACH stops selling firework articles across Europe.



OUR COLLEAGUES

YOUR ONLY LIMIT IS YOUR MIND

Denny Ertel has spent all his life with a spastic disability and impaired hearing. That certainly has not stopped him from working at HORNBAACH's Hamburg store. Stefan Wolf

Back then, Denny Ertel got word from his mother that HORNBAACH was building a store in the Hamburg district of Eidelstedt. She had heard that the family-run company and Hamburg's employment agency were offering training to make jobseekers fit for the work involved. "Age and appearance do not count. Suitability is the only thing we care about", promised the then store manager in a newspaper article. At the time, Denny Ertel had already been unemployed for five years. As a qualified office clerk, he only had a vague idea of retail, but he seized the opportunity. His application was soon ready. And that would change his life, because HORNBAACH kept its word: More than half the total of around 120 vacancies at the store were filled with unemployed people. One of them was Denny Ertel, who started out at HORNBAACH in the fall of 2008. In January 2009, the store then opened its doors.

SIGNED FOR TWO YEARS, NOW AT HORNBAACH FOR ELEVEN YEARS

During the job interview with the store manager, both sides openly discuss how the wheelchair user can be deployed at the store. "To be honest, I wasn't expecting that many

opportunities", recalls Denny Ertel. "Sales wasn't my thing, not least because I didn't know enough about the products. Checkout might have worked, but they would have had to do some conversion work". In the end, he started out in the special orders department. He also handled goods collection and was thus part of the store logistics team from the very outset. A wheelchair user in logistics? Denny Ertel laughs. "I must say I hadn't thought of that. Forklift trucks were the only thing that came to mind when I thought of logistics." He initially signed a two-year contract with HORNBAACH. "That way, we could see if it worked. That's now eleven years ago", says Denny Ertel, visibly proud.

ON HAND IF ANYONE NEEDS HELP

Six years ago, he moved to the incoming goods department, where he is the first point of contact for suppliers, takes care of notifications, processes customer complaints and returned goods, and prepares packages for mailing. He now knows his way round the incoming goods department like the back of his own hand. "I'm keen on sports and have played wheelchair basketball for 30 years now,



so I'm pretty nimble", he says and laughs. And when he nevertheless encounters an obstacle, his colleagues usually remove it quite fast. Everyone in the store team is helpful and friendly, says Denny Ertel. "We stick together. And if anyone needs my help, then I'm also there for them. That goes without saying." He rejects any special treatment. "I'm the kind of person who likes to solve problems myself", he says self-confidently. "My motivation is to test my limits. There is always a solution." No one would likely have thought he could move pallets around in his wheelchair, that is until he grabbed the pallet truck and just did it. "I've also been known to unload the delivery in the central warehouse myself because we were short of people", he recalls. The 40 year-old enjoys surprising others by showing what he can do despite his disability. And when he does come up against an unsurmountable obstacle, he knows he can rely on his colleagues. "If you just talk to each other, then everything is possible." The counter at the goods collection point, for example, has been lowered and a stair lift was installed at the store years ago to enable him to get to the break room. "That means I just need someone to carry my wheelchair, but that's never a problem."

» *We stick together.
If anyone needs my help,
I'm there for them.
That goes without saying.
If you just talk, every-
thing is possible.* «

And how do customers react to him? Denny Ertel pauses to think: "At first, there was the odd reservation now and then. But they usually disappear quickly when customers notice that the advice I give is just as friendly and useful as anyone else's." And he is the first point of contact when other wheelchair users come to the store. He also helps to advise deaf customers, as he is fluent in sign language. "I'm glad when I can help. Of course there are days when I'm not at my best. But what counts is that customers should always feel they are in good hands with us." «

WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL

Denny Ertel's passion is wheelchair basketball, whether as player, trainer, or referee. His team, BG Hamburg West, plays in the First League. "We are a colorful bunch, people with and without disabilities, young and old, migrants and natives, men and women. What we all have in common is that we are open to everyone." He began playing wheelchair basketball at the age of ten and has played at clubs such as HSV. He also tried out swimming, athletics, and table tennis at the same time. When he turned 15, however, he had to choose one sport. Keeping up with his vocational training and four different kinds of sport was just too much. He chose basketball

"because it's a team sport rather than one you do on your own." Six years ago, he qualified as a trainer and founded a separate section for wheelchair basketball at BG Hamburg West. "I thought it was important to have a second club in Hamburg offering this sport alongside HSV. That means people who enjoy playing basketball have a choice." For Denny Ertel, wheelchair basketball is all about passion and emotion. "It's also a very informal and fair type of sport. Everyone involved respects the others. There's absolutely no place for violence, and we all shake hands when the game is over."



About Denny Ertel:

Denny Ertel, 40, has worked at HORNBAACH for eleven years. Born in Hamburg, he is a fan of the "Game of Thrones" series, listens to Rammstein, likes cars, and has an HSV season ticket. His great passion is wheelchair basketball.



STRUCTURING THE PRODUCT RANGE

SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS DO NOT COME FOR FREE

But do they have to be more expensive than their conventional counterparts? A glance at HORNBAACH's product range shows it need not be that way. Florian Preuß

Will the coronavirus crisis have the effect of further raising awareness among consumers and injecting fresh momentum into the trend towards sustainable consumption? According to a study published by the management consultancy Capgemini in July 2020, 80 percent of European consumers are currently reconsidering their consumer behavior and aim to grant higher priority to environmental friendliness and social responsibility in future. On the other hand, many economists believe that the crisis will reduce consumers' income and purchasing power, at least temporarily, and that this could lower demand for more expensive organic and fair-trade products. Maybe they are

thinking of the clear price differentials on supermarket shelves, where consumers can buy ten barn eggs for the price of six organic free-range eggs or twice the amount of conventional coffee for the price of half a pound of fair-trade coffee. But is it the same story at DIY stores and garden centers?

ORGANICALLY CERTIFIED HERBS, SEEDS AND CO.

Manure, soil, plants and seeds – organic products bearing suitable seals have been a permanent fixture in HORNBAACH's garden divisions for years now. Having voluntarily

renounced the use of glyphosate and neonicotinoids harmful to bees in 2016 already, in 2018 the company underwent an independent organic certification process and committed to doing without chemical pesticides, synthetic manures, and weed killers in the relevant products. Instead, it relies on beneficial organisms to fight pests, deals with weeds mechanically, and uses organic manures. Customers who like cooking or seasoning their food with fresh herbs are now spoilt for choice. One example: A pot of parsley costs € 2.44 when conventionally cultivated, while its organic equivalent of the same size is 19 cents cheaper.

TRANSLUCENT ROLLER BLINDS MADE OF RECYCLED PET BOTTLES

It would be wide of the mark to think that a product needs organic certification to be sustainable. One recent megatrend is recycling, often in conjunction with upcycling. This involves reusing waste products or even converting them into new more valuable materials. Customers wishing to save natural resources will find suitable products in nearly all of HORNBAACH's product divisions. In its wallpaper division, for example, the company stocks an ingrain product from the prestigious manufacturer Erfurt that is made exclusively of recycled paper and certified wood fibers from sustainable forestry. A 20-meter roll costs € 8.28, which makes it marginally more expensive than the traditional "Avantgarde" version offered by the same manufacturer, which is priced at € 7.98.

A few aisles further down, customers will find a new translucent roller blind sold under the private label Soluna. It is wholly made of recycled PET bottles, which has the added benefit that it takes far less energy and water to produce. With a width of 60 centimeters, the blind costs € 24.32 and is thus € 5.90 dearer than its conventionally manufactured counterpart of the same size and darkening factor. Incidentally, the upcycling trend also extends to technology. HORNBAACH recently intro-

duced the Bamboo wireless doorbell produced by Avidsen. Its front consists of recyclable bamboo, while the housing is completely made of recycled plastic. The product costs € 34.02, which is pretty much identical to the retail prices of comparable wireless doorbells offered under the Philips and Thomson brands.

CONTAMINANT-FREE FLOORING AND WALLS

Before they can begin a second life in another article, the contents of waste products have to be recyclable. And that is not so easy when they include materials harmful to the environment. PVC, for example, contained chlorine and harmful plasticizers. Those are not good for the environment and certainly not conducive to healthy living. Even trends are often

Opposite: As its name implies, the attractively designed Bamboo is made of recyclable bamboo.

Below: Roller blinds sold under the Soluna private label are made of recycled PET bottles.





Above: The micro-drip system makes sure the water is well dosed exactly where the plant can best absorb it.

recycled and vinyl tiles have just made a huge comeback. These days, PVC is mostly free of harmful plasticizers, but anyone wishing to be on the safe side when it comes to indoor air quality and recycling will find “Green Vinyl” in HORNBAACH’s product range. Offered under the Classen brand, these tiles are completely free of PVC. Consumers wishing to buy these vinyl tiles will have to budget for € 24.32 per square meter. Comparable PVC-based vinyl flooring costs between € 19 and € 27.

Gypsum fiberboard is another article that was rarely recyclable in the past. The renowned manufacturer Fermacell has now provided this classic interior fitting product with a makeover. The “Greenline” version harnesses nature for its effect, more specifically the cleaning power of sheep’s wool. Using a natural process, contaminants are chemically bound and decomposed. A “Greenline” board costs € 9.50, two euros more than its conventional counterpart of the same size.

USING WATER EFFICIENTLY – INDOORS AND OUTDOORS

One key topic in the sustainability debate is how to put natural resources to careful use. Making economical and targeted use of drinking water is not only sustainable. It also benefits the wallet, which is noticeable when the next bill arrives from the utility company. HORNBAACH’s product range includes suitable products to optimize water consumption both indoors and outdoors. One solution for the bathroom which could hardly be easier and cheaper to implement is the Avital eco Adda showerhead. This has two different water-saving settings which enable the volume consumed to be reduced from 13.7 liters a minute to nine or even five liters. At € 19.45, its price is middle of the range for showerhead products, which begin with affordable starter models of around € 5 and go right up to adjustable designer models costing more than € 50.



Above: The wood used in the “Nico” shelf system comes from environmentally-friendly and socially-responsible forestry.

Anyone looking to control the volume of water they use in the garden will find an interesting solution offered by Gardena. The micro-drip system is particularly well suited for efficient root irrigation in rows of bedded plants or potted plants stood next to each other. The precious resource is applied exactly where the plants can best absorb it. In its smallest 15-meter version, the set costs € 26.31. A conventional square sprinkler or small-scale sprinkler system would cost about the same. These are able to irrigate far larger surfaces but are also known to waste large quantities of water.

EVEN MORE PRODUCTS FROM SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY

We finish our tour by paying a visit to what is a classic example of the HORNBAACH Group’s commitment to sustainability. For nearly a quarter of a century now, the company has advocated an environmentally-friendly and

socially-responsible approach in the timber industry. In 2007, HORNBAACH was the first DIY chain with international operations to be awarded Chain-of-Custody certification by the FSC. This guarantees a certified supply chain from the place of origin through to the finished product. Today, more than 10,000 different articles are FSC-certified – and new ones are added every year. One really new product is the “Nico” wooden shelf system that is ideal for storing things in the basement, or just as useful as a bookshelf in a student flat. In its basic version with a width of 80 centimeters and height of 180 centimeters, the shelf system costs € 43.87 and can easily be extended with various individual add-ons. «

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