



YESTERDAY *Today* TOMORROW



Together with customers, employees, long-standing partners and associates, Umdasch Group has written 150 years of company history – and highly successful ones at that. A large portion of this success can be attributed to the dedication of owners Hilde Umdasch and Alfred Umdasch. Consequently, they decided to give the anniversary year of 2018 the slogan “Part of 150 years Umdasch Group”. As members of the fourth generation of the founding family, the siblings steer the company’s fate. Today, in their capacity as owner representatives on the Supervisory Board of Umdasch Group. shops asked them for an interview.

An Interview with the owners Hilde Umdasch & Alfred Umdasch

Ms. Umdasch, the company was founded by your great-grandfather in 1868 and has remained a family-run business since then. Your father Josef Umdasch did an excellent job in rebuilding the company after World War II. Can you pick out one thing to account for his success?

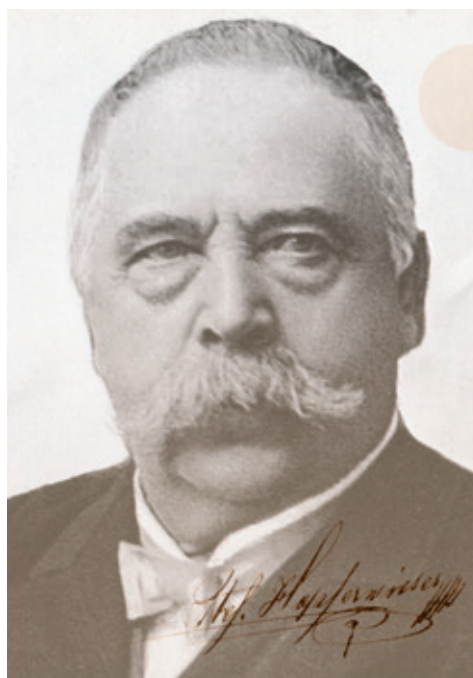
HU I don't think there was one particular factor. There were a number of characteristics typical of entrepreneurs that characterised my father. He did not have a business background (note by editor: Josef Umdasch was a teacher, who in 1937 married Mathilde Hopferwieser, the company founder's only daughter). But from the start he adopted a very entrepreneurial and visionary way of thinking; what's more, he had the gift of being able to get people excited about his ideas.

And was he the one who infected you with the entrepreneurial bug?

HU Yes, I suppose so. I joined the company not long after my language training. In the 1960s the company was undergoing a period of radical reorganisation and restructuring. In many respects my father and his management team had adopted totally new approaches. And for me as a young woman it was enormously exciting being part of all that.

Mr. Umdasch, you joined the company at the age of 24. How exactly did your career begin?

AU I joined the company straight after completing my studies at Rosenheim University of Applied Sciences. One of my first assignments was to help set up our sales company for Doka formwork panels in Munich.



How it all began. The forefather of the later Umdasch Group was Stefan Hopferwieser. On 19 February 1868 he was granted a "licence to operate a carpentry business" in Kollmitzberg, a small town near Amstetten.

1868

19 February
The company is founded

Stefan Hopferwieser opens a
carpenter's shop in Kollmitzberg.

You were primarily active abroad. What would you say motivated you to go out into the world?

AU I worked for 38 years in sales. Once the sales organisation had been set up in Germany we wanted to create additional bases in Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and so on. I really enjoyed it. When in the mid-1970s we were called to South America I was fascinated by this continent. I even learned Portuguese, because you can't get very far with English in Brazil. Then when the oil boom in the early 1980s led to an incredible amount of construction work in the Middle East I worked with my employees on developing sales organisations in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates. I always enjoyed working with people, building and maintaining relationships.

Talking of relationships – Ms. Umdasch, you recently put in a lot of travel for umdasch The Store Makers, visited projects and cultivated personal contact with customers. Did you see that as a necessary task or a welcome change?

HU Notwithstanding all the challenges growth involves, there is one thing you should never forget: the customer. Especially when companies reach a certain size you really must remind yourself every day: What we do is to benefit our customers. That's why my brother and I often take the opportunity to visit our customers. I always find it a special experience to attend shop openings. When you experience first-hand how customers' expectations are met it becomes much more than just business, and emotions are also involved. And if I might add a personal comment I would say I have always found travelling and meeting people of different cultures very enriching and I still enjoy travelling today.

Mr. Umdasch, you have also travelled widely for the Group, and for Doka. Were there impressions of other regions in the world that influenced you personally?

AU Naturally, during our activities in Brazil I learned for example that a straight-line is not necessarily the shortest route from A to B. We often achieved success in a roundabout way, by making detours. The Brazilians call that "jeito". Or once in Egypt, where we were offering formwork and scaffolding for the construction of a power plant in Suez. We travelled to Cairo for the final negotiations, and could not have been more surprised to see our three closest competitors sitting around the large conference table. It was a completely new experience for us to talk about prices, services and essentially to haggle over details with the customer in front of our competitors. But such things teach you to respond quickly to new situations. And the conclusion I drew from all this was that you cannot simply blindly transfer successful European sales models to other markets.

Ms. Umdasch, Mr. Umdasch, over the years that you managed the two divisions umdasch The Store Makers and Doka, you have met innumerable people – employees, customers, suppliers and partners. Would you mind telling us which encounters especially influenced you?

AU Naturally, when you are operating globally you deal with people of different nationalities and cultures. For example, I recall a large high-rise project in Hamburg. The managing director of the construction company asked to see a reference building site of a similar size and with similar problems. Then the managing director in Belgium organised a visit to a construction site that was to end with a joint lunch. When we sat down at the festively decorated table without much ado the Hamburg entrepreneur had everything removed, spread out his plans and began a discussion on the questions that concerned him.

1961

The company gets a new name

In 1937, Mathilde Hopferwieser marries Josef Umdasch, who subsequently sets about shaping the company. Umdasch is established as the company name in 1961.

Only when the questions had been answered to his satisfaction did the meal take place. And I experienced the very opposite when the owner of a construction firm in Nairobi had me travel out there to sign what was admittedly a very large contract; he wanted to talk about all sorts of things, but not about his project. (laughs)

HU I must admit I don't find it easy to pick out one meeting in particular. Life consists precisely of that: the sum of meetings that we have. And it is not much different in the business world. Looking back over the decades of my working life I have met many people who definitely deserve to be described as "special encounters". Incidentally, a highly fundamental aspect of being an entrepreneur is your experiences with other people. You often have to rely on your intuition, say when a vacant position is to be filled. A curriculum vitae might be helpful but it is by no means a guarantee. Selecting staff also requires a good knowledge of human nature, something you only develop after experiencing many different encounters.

Given your very different answers, allow us to ask a question: Did you always agree when it came to matters of management?

HU (laughs) Of course, we sometimes differed. But we were always aware that in the interests of the company we needed to find a joint decision that best served the firm and to advance it.

AU On the contrary, it would be exaggerated and also unusual if we always agreed on everything. Of course, we had discussions here and there, but essentially we agreed on the company's strategic alignment.

Mr. Umdasch, your company is now being run by the fourth generation of the founding family, which has been at the helm for 150 years. What would you say characterises a successful family business?

AU There are only a few things that characterise a successful family business: First and foremost, a high level of personal commitment, and connected with that the endeavour to remain up-to-date with what you're offering and quickly grasp the signs of the times. Finally, the mission to always be the "best in class".

What factors particularly paved the way for the success of the Umdasch Group?

AU After the War our father was quick to recognise that firms could only be successful if they concentrated on producing a few products, but products with a future. As you know, in the mid-1950s we not only operated a sawmill, but also a carpenter's shop, a box factory and a laminated timber workshop. Around that time the decision was taken to position ourselves with formwork technology as a supplier to the construction industry, and in addition as a shopfitter to secure a share of the emerging market for retail self-service elements – with a highly efficient carpentry operation.

Our employees also represented and still represent a further success factor. I have always endeavoured to find employees who are fired with passion for our ideas and are prepared, so to speak, to "go through fire and water with us".



1966

umdasch attends the first EuroShop exhibition

The international retail trade fair EuroShop takes place for the first time in Düsseldorf – and umdasch The Store Makers is there.



→ I remember a good example in this context: When I and an employee from the technical office in Amstetten were fighting to win a large contract from a Korean construction firm in Saudi Arabia, more precisely in Kamish Mushayt, changes were made to our scope of services and the offer on an almost hourly basis. So when, way past midnight, the head of production planning approached us with yet another alteration and we needed to adjust and recalculate everything again my employee was on the verge of despair. But in the end we secured the contract in the early morning hours, before we both retired to our rooms. That also meant missing our flights back to Jeddah the next day. Well, in the end we did get a flight, but that's another story entirely ...

Ms. Umdasch, your brother has just cited employees as the key success factor for your company history. How highly do you rate appreciation as part of your corporate culture?

HU I'm personally convinced that it is an important and decisive factor in people's lives to be appreciated. This is why I rate appreciation so highly as part of our corporate culture. It is something that not only our employees can expect, but also our customers, suppliers and all our business partners. Moreover, we have established respect and appreciation as values in our corporate policy.

You have also always been absolutely committed to striking a social balance in the company and society. You have initiated numerous private social projects and together with your brother set up the Umdasch Foundation. What importance do you assign to corporate social responsibility?

HU As I see it – and the Umdasch Foundation is also an expression of this conviction – corporate social responsibility is a commitment we absolutely must have. As a corporate group with global activities we also strive to facilitate and support the education of those young people who live in socially deprived areas. I am especially pleased to see that increasing numbers of employees in various countries get involved in such work. This also demonstrates their high personal interest in social responsibility.

Ms. Umdasch, Mr. Umdasch, you recently set up your own innovation firm – Umdasch Group Ventures, which addresses pioneering and disruptive developments in the construction world. To what purpose?

HU Today, developments come about, run their course and sometimes also disappear again at an incredible speed. If a company is to be fit for the future, it is essential to establish a unit that in addition to simple product advancements also deals with totally new ideas. Will people still shop in stores in 50 years' time, or do more of their shopping on the Internet? Will formwork be the only method in future to prevent concrete from deforming? Maybe. But should there be developments that negate these questions, at the very least they should not take us by surprise.



A department store for a sheik

Umdasch realises the luxury department store Fitaihi Centre in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia – a door opener to the region.



AU I can only agree with that. If we want to remain at the forefront of technical advancements, we need to concern ourselves with pioneering innovations in a timely manner. This is a highly promising new business field for us, and is sure to give us a strong boost.

Ms. Umdasch, it is part of the model of a venture firm to invest in young start-ups. Where do you see the benefits here?

AU I think that in particular disruptive business models have little opportunity to come about in ordinary businesses. After all, ultimately they can have a cannibalising effect. And you can hardly expect a team to develop something that is a threat to its own products. I believe such models require ideas from the outside. It is not really a question of how do we make our products better still, but which products might possibly be better than our own? Every company is well advised to ask itself this question – before others do.



2018

150 years of Umdasch Group

Let's celebrate together



→ **Mr. Umdasch, Ms. Umdasch, just over three years ago in the division umdasch The Store Makers you and the management agreed on establishing a new business field: Digital Retail. Can you give us an initial assessment?**

AU As my sister has already emphasised, in store making in particular it's crucial to address modern methods and technologies. I think we are excellently positioned with our innovations, digital products and services. This new division gives us and above all our customers a lot of pleasure. It breathes new life into what to date has been a highly traditional shopfitting business. And that is greatly appreciated. Many of our customers are currently undergoing phases of transition, and can benefit from the know-how Digital Retail offers and its often unconventional ideas.

Ms. Umdasch, do you see the ever-increasing influence of digitisation as a chance or a risk for your Group?

HU Oh, definitely as an opportunity. And anyway there is no way we can halt this development. Aristotle said "I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination." However, "adjusting the sails" also involves a number of challenges we still have to master. And all of this necessitates a totally new outlook on work, something we still need to cultivate. To my mind our digital awareness lags behind our digital technologies. This means we not only have to adjust our methods and products, but also our mindset.

What is your personal vision for Umdasch? What will it take in order to successfully navigate the company through the next 150 years?

HU What our predecessors and past pioneers have already done so successfully: In future it will also take courage and a sense of responsibility coupled with a willingness to take risks in order to successfully advance current business fields. But I am convinced that it is absolutely essential to always be on the lookout for new developments, so as to identify and exploit new opportunities in time.

It stands to reason that our employees will play a decisive role in this. And it will be equally important to have a good financial basis so as to enable investments in the future as we do in the venture field.

Ultimately, I believe that thinking big and being prepared for changes are important factors for a company's success.

Do you mind us finishing with a question on your own personal recipe for success? Ms. Umdasch, Mr. Umdasch, what advice can you give to young employees for their personal development and advancing their career at Umdasch?

AU Be cosmopolitan, remain mobile, learn languages, be prepared to work in a team. Approach the tasks at hand with humility and respect, demonstrate endurance. I honestly believe: no pain, no gain.

HU The conviction of being in the right company and being able to identify with its products and values is an important prerequisite for being successful at your job. The willingness to engage in lifelong learning, and as my brother already said the ability to work in a team and commitment are also factors for a successful career. (ero)

Thank you for the interview.

The interview for shops was conducted by Silvio Kirchmair, CEO umdasch The Store Makers, and Petra Böttinger-Barth, Group Marketing Director.

Editor's note: Some of the questions came directly from The Store Makers staff, who had been requested in advance to put them to the owners.



150 years of impressive company history.

You can read about it and view images on the Umdasch Group anniversary website:
 ↪ www.150years.umdach.com





The Umdasch Group relies on employees who are passionate about ideas and willing to go through fire and water with the management. Consequently, owners Hilde Umdasch and Alfred Umdasch are devoting the anniversary year above all to their employees. And 150 years on to the day – namely 19 February 2018 – around 8,000 employees around the world celebrated the Group's anniversary at over 180 locations, in over 70 countries.



Umdasch Foundation. Corporate social responsibility as an obligation: worldwide the Umdasch Foundation supports initiatives on the topics of education and the transfer of knowledge, here with the project "Teach for Austria".

UMDASCH AT WELTMUSEUM WIEN (WORLD MUSEUM VIENNA)



One of the most recent projects of the Umdasch Foundation is supporting the World Museum in Austria's capital, Vienna. On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the company's establishment there was an interactive exhibition in the guise of two pavilions. One pavilion is devoted to the historical development of the Umdasch Group, while the second one displays future visions for the global economy. Incidentally, the concept was designed by Stefan Umdasch, son of owner Alfred Umdasch. The Store Makers realised both the analogue and digital solutions.

