



Volkmar Wywiol, the owner of Mühlenchemie and founder of the museum

A fabulous homage to the world's millers

The world's biggest, indeed unique, collection of flour sacks now comprises 1925 sacks from 115 countries - millers from all over the world are eager to be part of the 'flour art museum' and send their flour sacks, adorned with beautiful logos - and visitors find them fascinating.

The world's biggest collection of flour sacks has been a runaway success in its first year.

When it opened in June 2008, there were 1600 flour sacks from 110 countries in the collection; now those figures are 1925 sacks from 115 countries.

Newly represented countries are Mozambique, Austria, England, Korea, Cape Verde and Romania.

Private individuals from all over the world have read about the museum and sent in flour sacks, which tell a personal story of their own. The brilliant idea and

its fabulous realisation combine to produce a fascinating visitor experience. The idea originated eleven years ago on a Dubai beach, when Volkmar Wywiol, the owner of Mühlenchemie GmbH & Co KG, stumbled over a flour sack from one of his customers.

"Millers from all over the world were initially sceptical, but then responded enthusiastically to our appeal," says Mr Wywiol.

And the museum does in fact bind the millers of the world into one big family - through the medium of the flour sack.

"We have observed that millers who visit our museum feel much the same way. For example, one mill-owner from Nigeria was so moved by the sight of his exhibit that he was unable to hold back his tears.

A tour round the museum

The first exhibition room reflects the international significance of flour.

Numerous sacks from all corners of the earth are suspended in the room. The motifs are typical of their country of origin: a camel at the gateway to the Sahara; an Indian from Colombia; the 7-star hotel "Burj Al Arab", Dubai's famous landmark.

The second room is dark and mysterious, introducing visitors to the cul-



tural and religious significance of flour as a basic food of man.

The next room is dedicated to the motifs on the flour sacks, which are divided into three groups of symbols – representing the sun, strength and tradition. Symbols of the sun and majesty point to wheat as the “king of grains”. Muscular men and machines signify that wheat is a mighty source of energy, and historic wind and water mills point to the long tradition of milling.

Visitors are then guided into a white sack, telling us the personal story connected with it. It would seem that the millers are beginning to view the collection as a sporting challenge, they are sending us flour sacks from all over the world so that their country can be represented in the museum.”

The heart of the museum is the famous Sackothèque, in which every original sack has been given a place of honour, arranged alphabetically by country name. Every visitor can use the computers to look for their favourite symbols, countries and mill names.

The museum opened in June 2008 with 1600 flour sacks from 110 countries.

In the space of just one year, the collection has grown by an astounding 325 sacks; another 50 are waiting to be registered.

And six new countries are represented:

Mozambique, Austria, England, Korea, Cape Verde and Romania.

Angela Jannelli, the museum’s curator, says, “It’s a moving experience when ordinary people who’ve heard about the museum phone up, then come along and sometimes even give us a flour sack from all over the world so that their country can be represented in the museum.”

Witnesses to major historic events

Three of the new sacks stand out in particular; they document the effects of the Second World War and were sent in by people





for whom the sacks hold wartime memories.

The flour sack from the Hoffstädter Mil in Posen-West Prussia (now Poland) documents the story of Anna Berwald, who lovingly hand-embroidered each sack and repaired them time after time until they were no longer usable at the mill.

Being passionately fond of coffee, she used to give soldiers flour in exchange for real coffee during the war. And if the soldiers didn't have a suitable container, Anna Berwald used to give them an old flour sack. At the end of the war, one of the soldiers returned the borrowed flour sack to its owner. When granddaughter Isolde Richter heard about the 'four art museum' she donated this very sack.

Another historic flour sack was once US Army property and is a reminder of the liberation of Paris from German occupation in 1944. Peter A. Braun donated the sack to the museum; Americans had given his parents-in-law the flour sack in 1944 and they had kept it as a memento.

Another US Army flour sack is a reminder of the Berlin Airlift between June 1948 and May 1949. It bears the logo of the European Recovery Program, better known as the Marshall Plan, the most important recovery programme initiated by the USA following the Second World War; Deutsche Bank donated this sack.

What is a cereal? What varieties are there? Where and how do grain crops grow? Who eats what? What does wheat contain? And how does that affect the final product? These and other global issues relating to the future of nutrition and the way we handle the world's resources are to be the topics addressed in the cultural history section of the exhibition.

Mr Wywiol has realised his personal dream – and the response has been fantastic.

"Thank you for sharing your dream with the rest of the world," one visitor wrote in the visitor's book.

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More than packaging

Flour sacks are much more than just packaging. This "beautiful garment for flour" offers a first-rate way to express the importance of wheat for human life. The motifs on the flour sacks reveal that the symbols used for wheat and grain serve as a universal pictorial language understood all over the world.

The motifs form a joint basis for global cultural understanding. At the same time the sack is a communication medium between millers and bakers or consumers.

Volkmar Wywiol wants to see his branchid grow even bigger.

"Our gallery of flour sacks is growing and thriving. We shall continue to collect sacks and hope to get to the 3000 mark. We are also planning to expand the museum into the 1st floor."

Here the idea is to demonstrate wheat's nutritional value and its significance

