

# WORLD GRAIN®

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# A monument to millers

After finding one of his customers' half-buried flour sacks on a beach in Dubai in 1998, Volkmar Wywiol began dreaming of constructing a museum that would serve as a monument to the flour milling industry that he has been a part of for so many years.

Wywiol, the owner of Ahrensburg, Germany-based Mühlenchemie GmbH & Co. KG, which for 86 years has offered flour improvement products to the milling industry, envisioned a museum decorated with hundreds of flour sacks from all over the world. Ten years later, Wywiol's dream became a reality as the Flour Art Museum opened its doors on June 10, 2008 in Wittenburg, Germany with more than 1,600 flour sacks from 110 countries on display.

Wywiol said he felt the illustrations and motifs on the sacks told of the significance of wheat and flour around the globe. He has long seen them as works of art instead of just packaging material. "We regard this as a tribute to all millers, for they make an impressive contribution to supplying the world's population with food," said Wywiol, noting that more than

by Arvin Donley

## New Flour Art Museum in Wittenburg, Germany features more than 1,600 flour sacks from 110 countries

400 million tonnes of flour is processed worldwide every year. "The Wittenburg collection is unique in the history of company museums in that we are exhibiting our customers' products and not our own."

Angela Jannelli, a free-lance curator and cultural historian from Hamburg, Germany, and architect Carsten Falkenberg devised the concept for the exhibition. Jannelli sorted and examined the flour sack collection and selected her topics from it.

(Above) Volkmar Wywiol, whose vision inspired the building of the museum, stands among the flour sacks. Photos courtesy of Mühlenchemie.



The Flour Art Museum is housed inside a historic building that was formerly the District Court House in Wittenburg.

When Wywiol first contacted her about his idea in 2006, Jannelli said she thought the idea “sounded so crazy.”

“But to my surprise, once I had seen the exhibits, I was gripped by the idea, because the flour sack as packaging material proved to be a wonderful carrier of information and meaning,” Jannelli said.

#### A LOOK INSIDE

Wywiol said Wittenburg was selected as the site of the museum, in part because his company has a production facility there and is very familiar with the city. “The town has become our second home. The mayor and town councilors agreed to lease us their most beautiful building, the former District Court House, a listed monument with a long and fascinating history,” said Wywiol, adding that it took 10 months to convert the building into a museum.

The museum building is a neo-classical design that was erected in 1848 on the foundations of a medieval palace, and sits on Wittenburg’s Amtsberg Hill, adding to its majestic appearance. Before being converted into a museum, the building functioned as an elementary school for 57 years and before that was a District Court House for nearly 100 years.

Museum visitors are greeted in the reception area by the “lovely miller lady,” who in her colorful flour sack dress welcomes visitors in several languages.

They then move to the World Room, which features a huge world map on the floor that highlights the countries that have contributed flour sacks to the museum as well as where Mühlchenemie has offices. Hanging from the ceiling are 32 flour sacks from various points on the globe with the motifs giving hints of where the sacks are from. On the wall, large letters proclaim the motto of the exhibition in 20 different languages: “Share your bread and it will

taste better. Share your good fortune and it will grow.”

Next is the Myth Room, a darkened room which includes 10 lighted showcase exhibits from different cultures and epochs — from the statuette of an Egyptian servant-girl grinding wheat from the year 2450 B.C. to the story of the Old Wives Mill (a German version of the Fountain of Youth legend). Jannelli said the 10 windows “show the natural and supernatural aspects of wheat, and tales and legends surrounding grain and flour.”

Visitors then move to the Symbol Room, which is described as being “a crash course in the international lan-

#### Flour sack contributors

Countries that have contributed flour sacks to the museum include: Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Belgium, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d’Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Lithuania, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauretania, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Congo-Brazzaville, Slovenia, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Taiwan, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, the United States, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen and Zambia.



➤ The World Room includes a floor map that shows where all of the donated flour sacks came from as well as 32 exhibits hanging from the ceiling.

➤ Museum curator Angela Jannelli stands next to a 'Kleiekotzer,' or 'bran puker,' which years ago was used in some flour mills to 'frighten off evil spirits.'



➤ The Sackothèque room displays flour sacks from more than 110 countries. The flour sacks are framed and stored in sliding shelves, as in a library.

guage of flour sack symbols. It is here that you learn why lions, locomotives, ears of corn and mills are popular motifs as well as why a camel on a sack from Morocco means the same as a dragon on a sack from China. Jannelli noted that many of the sacks depict the rising sun and that these symbols stand for "the strength, splendor and majesty of wheat." The room is equipped with recorded messages that are activated by light barriers.

Devoted to the spotless purity of white flour is the White Room, which is described by Jannelli as "a large, walk-in flour sack." This room serves as a tribute to the spotless purity of white flour and features flour sacks with fittingly "white" motifs such as polar landscapes, icebergs, snow-capped mountains and polar bears. The room contains sights, sounds and smells associated with purity, including the sound of someone walking through snow.

The next stop is the Sackothèque, which Jannelli calls "the heart of the museum," where 1,600 flour sacks from 110 countries are displayed in a 450-square-meter area.

All the sacks are arranged alphabetically (in English) according to their country of origin. The sacks are framed and stored in sliding shelves, as in a library.

"There you will find the major part of the collection, a worldwide encyclopedia of flour sacks where you can browse to your hearts content and wonder at the beauty and diversity of the motifs from every corner of the earth," she said. "Every sack has a place of honor. That seems to me a good and original solution that does justice to all the millers who have made their contribution to the project."

Another highlight of the Sackothèque is a huge likeness of Demeter, the goddess of grain and fertility, which was created by Kathinka Willinek, an artist from Berlin, Germany, who used knotted threads to bring the goddess to life.

Bidding the visitors farewell on the final stop of the tour is a replica of a "Kleickotzer," or "bran puker,"



More than 1,600 flour sacks are displayed at the Flour Art Museum in Wittenburg, Germany.

which used to be attached to the flour bin in which milled wheat was sieved. "Their eerie, demonic features were said to frighten off evil spirits," Jannelli said. "But here at the museum, the Kleickotzer serves as a talisman to bring visitors good luck from all the millers of the world."

### COLLECTION STILL GROWING

The museum is still a work in progress, Wywiol said.

"We are asking every miller in the world to send us his most attractive sack with the most interesting motif if we haven't got it in the collection already," he said. "We regard well-designed motifs as commercial art. At the last international milling symposium in Hamburg, I offered a prize for new flour sacks with new designs. The winner will be chosen by an independent panel of judges. We hope that will help flour sack motifs to gain more significance in the future, because in the past flour sacks generally just got a simple

stamp that showed where the flour came from."

The millers who have visited the museum have expressed their gratitude to Wywiol. "The millers are impressed by the dedication of Mühlenchemie toward the milling business," he said. "They also appreciate the fine and vivid way the museum has been put on stage."

The museum is open on the first Sunday of each month from 2 to 5 p.m. It will be open the following dates in 2009: March 1; April 5; May 3; June 7; July 5; Aug. 2; Sept. 6; Oct. 4; Nov. 1; and Dec. 6. Visits are also possible by appointment. To arrange a time, call Melanie Nickschat of Mühlenchemie at 49 (0) 40 284 039 55 or send an e-mail to [info@flour-art-museum.de](mailto:info@flour-art-museum.de).

Admission to the museum is free, but small donations are welcome and will go toward enlarging the flour sack collection. **WG**

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