

GERMANY

40 Years of VOGT

For 40 years, VOGT GmbH has been on hand to support diverse user segments as a competent partner in the production of functional solutions with ceramic components (aluminium and zirconium oxide such as steatite and cordierite). Gerald Vogt Jr. (GV) is managing the company in the second generation. A year ago, his wife Andrea took over responsibility for international sales. We took the company's 40-year anniversary as an opportunity to find out more about its range of expertise.

CA: What motivated your father to found the company? What specific competences did he channel into it?

GV: My father's career began at STEMAG in Lauf, where over the course of the years he acquired extensive and diverse expertise in Technical Ceramics. First, he completed an apprenticeship as a toolmaker and engineering draftsman, then became a tool designer for dry presses, and parallel to this, he trained on a demanding evening course as an

engineering technician. In 1981, at the age of 40, following an excursion into electrical engineering and finally as Operations Manager for Technical Ceramics in Lauf, he decided to establish his own company.

The freedom to realise his own ideas without being impeded or hampered by anyone, without dependence on colleagues and superiors was the motivation for him. The founding years were characterised by very frugal, pragmatic company management. He started off with just three employees. I would describe the character of my father in business as follows: being independent for him meant constantly acting independently himself. He had entrepreneurship in his blood. Unfortunately, he died just short of 80 years in age, just before our company's anniversary.

CA: How was the company positioned on the market compared to its major competitors?

GV: My father opted for flexible production and fast solutions with short lead times. His exceptional expertise, especially in personal consultation for new developments of Technical Ceramic components, was an asset. Toolmaking was his core expertise. The business organisation was very efficient and low cost, without overheads. He picked up his commercial know-how on the fly. My father's tireless, independent work in his company always came with an extremely high personal work commitment. It was not surprising that there only remained little time for family and balance in his private life.

CA: What are the company's core competences today?

GV: Traditionally, dry pressing is designed for large volumes at low cost, and is our specialist know-how. It accounts for around 70 % of the turnover and is supported by inhouse toolmaking and fully networked design with 3D-CAD/CAM. As the second shaping process, we have extrusion (screw and piston extruders).

Relatively new for us is the CIM process. We bought ceramic bodies from specialist suppliers who cater for our specific requirements. We are also well equipped to perform all high-end grinding ourselves. For hard machining, we are equipped



Fig. 1
Managing Director Gerald Vogt Jr. (r.) with his wife Andrea Vogt
(International Sales)

Milestones in the Company History

- Founded in **1981** in rented rooms in Hersbruck with three employees
- From **1984**, own, small factory building in Henfenfeld near Hersbruck
- Continuous, step-by-step extension in all directions
- From **1993**, Gerald Vogt Jr. joins the company following his studies in mechanical engineering, he receives extensive training in all areas and gradually takes over responsibility in a long-term process
- From **2009**, sole takeover of management from the father
- From **2010**, set up of in-house grinding facility with full equipment
- From **2016**, Gerald Vogt Jr. is sole owner of VOGT GmbH
- Current production area of approx. 4000 m² with 20 presses from 4–50 t and 45 employees

with all relevant processes. In addition, we apply green component machining and glazing as surfacing finishing where appropriate. Naturally, we have several intermittent kilns for firing to 1750 °C. Our many long-serving and experienced employees in all key positions are our strength. They work hand in hand with our younger employees.

CA: Did you take new directions when you took over the management?

GV: I certainly have a different character from that of my father and interpret independence a bit differently. This quickly led to a change in management style, allowing the department heads and managers to work more independently and take more responsibility. As a result, employee satisfaction increased, which contributed to lower fluctuation. I have given high priority to environmental protection as well as work health and safety. To become even more efficient for the future, we have introduced a comprehensive new software (completely networked ERP) and modern IT systems.

CA: How is the company networked on the international market today?

GV: Our main sales markets are in Europe. We have a commercial representative in North Germany and are currently setting up a professional sales agency for India and Asia.

CA: What are the most important user segments for the products?

GV: We have a very broad base and manufacture insulators for domestic application, high voltage, plant engineering, lighting technology, etc. In addition, sensors for pressure, temperature, etc. We have components for diverse automotive applications, nozzles for high-pressure and wear protection and components for wear protection for pumps and various valves. Our products are also used in high-temperature and heating engineering as well as in measurement equipment and temperature controllers.

CA: How are you further developing the product portfolio?

GV: The already long-standing manufacturing expertise for CIM and downstream debinding has now been successfully introduced into series production for three years. We are always exploring new materials – like, at the moment, 99,99 % alumina. Very important for our quality assurance was also our investment in a state-of-the-art optical/tactile measurement machine. This self-calibrating Keyence IM features automatic temperature balancing and a high meas-

urement velocity. With the integrated measurement probe, precise measurement of $\pm 2 \mu\text{m}$, including form and position tolerances, can be guaranteed.

CA: What impact has COVID-19 had on your company's business so far? How are you looking forward to 2021 in this respect?

GV: On-call orders have been postponed, new developments at customers that would trigger corresponding enquiries are relatively limited. We have noted a slight decline in turnover

40 years
Know-how & Experience

VOGT
Ceramic Components

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Innovative in ceramics

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Fig. 2
Gerald Vogt Jr. and Karin Scharrer visiting the pressing section

compared to 2019, have, however, been able to retain all employees so far on the basis of proportionate short-time working. The prospects for 2021 are very positive thanks



Fig.3

to several new customers and new projects, and I am looking optimistically to a considerable increase in our capacity utilisation.

CA: Environmental matters are important to you – what concrete measures have been implemented?

GV: We have certification in compliance with DIN ISO 14001 environmental management since 2018.

We rely on fully electric vehicles for the management and a small van for the employees. We have a large photovoltaic system (all company roofs are completely covered) and enable full CO₂ compensation of the required gas and electric energy. We do our business trips mainly by rail (i.e. we manage without aeroplanes and cars wherever possible). We are reducing our consumption of copying paper thanks to efficient software. In manufacturing, we have a centrifuge in operation for reconditioning the grinding suspension, which separates even very small particles.

CA: What topics are a priority for you with regard to the company's further development (technologically, market-related, personnel)?

GV: • Technologically: Reduction of costs and an increase in efficiency.

• Market: More international customers in Europe and Asia.

• Personnel: Qualification and motivation.

• Digitalization is a very important overarching issue.

CA: Thank you for talking to us.

KS



Fig. 4
Some examples of ceramic components for different applications from VOGT's portfolio