

ceo*

Das Magazin für Entscheidungsträger. April 2007

Markt Energie. Warum das Licht nicht ausgehen wird. Und wer davon profitiert.
Futuristisches Material. Weshalb Corian® Architekten und Designer begeistert.
Landwirtschaft. Wie der grösste Bauernhof der Schweiz gemanagt wird.





With his "Diode" lamps, the Australian designer Marc Newson (left) demonstrates how Corian® can be used to make luminous and sensuous sculptures. The material meets the most stringent hygiene requirements. A newly built operating theatre in the Beaulieu Clinic in Geneva recently had its walls lined entirely with Corian®.

Corian®. A material on the way up.

For almost 30 years, Corian® solid surface from US science and technology company DuPont has mostly enjoyed a luxurious application in kitchens and bathrooms. Today, the most renowned architects and designers swear by the qualities of this high-performance composite material. A lesson in marketing and public relations.



Zaha Hadid's futuristic kitchen project "Z. Island by DuPont" (picture right) is made entirely of Corian®. The prototype not only rolls back existing boundaries in design, it is also loaded with innovations – from the integrated multimedia centre to the aromatherapy feature.

The collaboration with renowned architects and designers was intended to ensure attention among the discerning trendsetters of the construction and home living sectors. The direction of the offensive was clear right from the start. Away from a niche presence into the global spotlight of top design!

Text: Kaspar Meuli

Wherever the British star architect Zaha Hadid goes, she can be sure of the media's attention. In April 2006, for instance, at Milano Design Week, she was surrounded by a barrage of cameras when she presented the "Z. Island by DuPont™ Corian®" project: a futuristic kitchen entirely made with Corian®, created by DuPont Surfaces in collaboration with Ernestomedea, the Italian kitchen manufacturer. The prototype not only rolled back existing boundaries in design, it was also loaded with innovations – from an integrated multimedia centre to a built-in system for aromatherapy. The streamlined cooking island was not the only installation or product made with Corian® to attract attention in Milan. DuPont Surfaces reported that 182 designers, companies and organisations at 63 events during Milano Design Week were showing a product, design or installation made with Corian®, which might well be a record for the most important international design event of the year. The slogan "Corian®: designed for designers" appears to have hit the nail right on the head. The close association of the manufacturer of surface materials with the design scene is the result of a clear strategy. About 10 years ago, DuPont – which defines itself as a science-based company – decided to give a higher profile to its brand Corian®. Its cooperation with major names of the design scene – the first was with the Italian master, Ettore Sottsass, followed by Marc Newson, Ross Lovegrove, Ron Arad, Zaha Hadid, Ingo Maurer and Ora Ito – to mention just a few of the most important and best-known designers worldwide – was intended to ensure attention among the trendsetters of the global interior design and architecture sectors. The company's focus was primarily on the architects, whom it hoped to inspire with the functional and creative options offered by the material.

"Architects and designers are a key target group for us. We see them as influencers of a discerning and well-informed clientele that is responsive to the many properties of Corian®." The strategy seems to be paying off. The brand's level of recognition has grown substantially over the past few years – as surveys among design enthusiasts reveal. "Sales growth is currently in the double digits," explains Jean-Yves Bach, business director of DuPont Surfaces for the Europe, Middle East and Africa region.

Competing with marble and granite

Corian® was commercialised for the first time in the USA, in 1967. The material was created at the height of the plastics boom in the 1960s when scientists at DuPont were testing out a variety of processes and formulations in the search for new building materials. From this came a poreless composite material made from a blend of bauxite and acrylic polymer (combining the best of natural and man-made) which was given the name "Corian®" (shortening the word "Corinthian"). This innovative composite material was positioned in the premium price segment right from the start. It was intended to compete with fine coverings made of marble. Corian® possesses an impressive range of positive qualities. It feels silky, is available in a hundred different hues, can easily be cleaned and is durable. The material is solid but can be worked like wood. When it is warmed, it can be shaped. And it can be glued without any visible joints. Despite all these qualities, Corian® was only moderately successful in the beginning. Up until a few years ago, the material's place in the construction world seemed clearly defined – and tightly restricted: custom-made baths and kitchens for private builders. That situation has since changed. Corian® has now been introduced into serial production at leading manufacturers of kitchens, baths and recently also furniture. Designers who collaborate with these companies have acquired a taste for it. "No doubt the successful result of our programs of marketing and public relations, in addition

to our effectiveness in sales and research and development," says Bach. By continuing to expand the current marketing strategy in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, he is also anticipating growth in the years ahead. "Corian® is a jewel in the crown of DuPont. It is one of the strongest brands of the whole DuPont company," says Bach. The direction of the offensive in Europe, the Middle East and Africa was clear right from the start. Away from a niche presence into the global spotlight of top design. The mission is being implemented differently in accordance with individual market requirements. There is a whole variety of approaches. In Spain, for instance, Corian® awards a design prize. In France the company has recently joined forces with the design magazine "Intramuros". To celebrate the magazine's 20th birthday, they jointly launched the "Plaques sensibles" project. Well-known designers around the world were sent a piece of Corian the size of an A4 sheet with an invitation to design an object from it. The results were brought together to create an exhibition that went on tour with a whole series of stops along the way. In Germany, DuPont invited a hand-picked group of architects to a workshop titled "Visions of Corian®" that was intended to demonstrate hitherto unknown uses for the material. The visionary designs could then be seen as part of a large-scale road show in seven cities from Berlin to Vienna. All around Europe, the Middle East and Africa, DuPont has organized an on-line design award, in collaboration with Designboom, leading independent website focused on design.

A game with many winners

The principle behind all these activities: trigger the creative ambition of exponents of the design scene, and then exhibit their results – with maximum publicity, of course. The presentation of Zaha Hadid's high-tech kitchen at Milano Design Week is a good



The engineer Moritz Waldemeyer combines electronics with design, opening up completely new markets for Corian®.



The presentation piece of the Milan industrial designer Matteo Ragni is "Strativari", an enormous vase that is milled out of a block of different-coloured layers of glued Corian®.





“Changing mentalities takes time.”

Jean-Yves Bach¹, business manager of DuPont Surfaces for Europe, the Middle East and Africa, about the properties of Corian® and the 4,000-year success story of marble.

Mr Bach, by cooperating with architects, you are hoping to appeal to discerning, cultivated consumers. How are you going to manage that?

People who respond to the qualities of Corian® are frequently well-informed consumers who are used to checking more than one option before making a decision. They get information from the media or obtain advice from specialists. Where the new construction or modification of a house is concerned, they hire the services of an architect. We want to show them all what Corian®, which differs from any other material on the market, can do. The architects need to understand Corian®; they need to be familiar with it and to feel confident when they suggest something totally new to their clients.

But Corian® is not that new. The material has been on the market since 1967. That’s true, but conversely, you have to remember that glass, stone and ceramics have had a market and technological presence of hundreds or even thousands of years. Marble has been used for building purposes for 4,000 years. Compared with the USA and Asia, Europe tends to find working with new materials difficult. Wealthy Chinese, for instance, much prefer to surround themselves with artificially produced materials rather than with natural ones. There are substantial cultural differences compared with the rather traditionalist Europe. However, with young consumers and those interested in design and architecture, we are detecting a great openness for new materials. Changing mentalities takes time – and a long-term communication strategy.

Corian® has recently been seeking close links to the stars of the designer scene and has consequently been in the news a lot. Does this strategy really pay off commercially too?

The significantly higher awareness of the brand among architects, designers, companies and consumers, and the fact that we are associated with innovation and design, gives us a clear advantage on the market. This also has a positive effect on our sales, both in the building and private sectors.

Can you give any figures?

We don’t publish any figures, but I can tell you that the regions for which I’m responsible have double-digit growth.

What do design professionals like about Corian®?

The material’s special characteristics that make it possible to put innovative ideas into practice. Things that they could only have dreamt of in the past. Architects and designers appreciate this so much that Corian® has now become one of their favourite materials. Another reason they like working with us: DuPont is a world-class player in the material sciences and technology sector. And we, in turn, like working with world-class designers. We have learned a great deal from them – and hopefully they’ve been able to learn something from us.

¹ Frenchman Jean-Yves Bach (50) is head of DuPont Surfaces for Europe, the Middle East and Africa. DuPont Surfaces is a division of DuPont, a US science and technology company based in Wilmington, Delaware (other major products and brands of DuPont are Teflon®, Kevlar®, Nomex®, Tyvek® and Cromalin®). Bach holds a degree in business economics, specialising in finance. He has worked for DuPont in various positions in Europe and the USA for 25 years. He moved to DuPont Surfaces in 1999, becoming head of global finance. In 2001, he took over responsibility for global strategic planning. He has held his current position since 2003.



In his exhibition “The Electric Kid Show”, Moritz Waldemeyer from Germany displays tables made of Corian® with interactive game interfaces – the material is translucent and reacts to touch.

The versatility of Corian® opens up hitherto unknown scope for creativity. The trick was getting the designers and architects to try out the material.

for hotel bathrooms but also for the health sector. In the Beaulieu Clinic in Geneva, for example, a recently built operating theatre had its walls lined entirely with Corian®. Alfred Grazioli and Adolf Krischanitz, the architects of the newly reopened Rietberg Museum in Zurich, also like its many application options. They use white Corian® as a combining element that runs from the wet rooms and the bar counter to the lift cabin. “We wanted a sophisticated, joint-free construction, with a certain degree of weightiness,” says project manager Elke Eichmann.

The greater the number of experimental minds testing the limits of Corian®, the more qualities the material shows. At any rate, the employees at the DuPont laboratory working on the research programme “Building Products Venture” in the 1960s could scarcely have imagined the potential uses their development would one day offer.

example of this systematic approach. Here a question arises about the motivation of minor and major stars in participating. Do they get paid? “Each case is different. It’s never about the design fee. Mutual interests are what count when working together.” Specifically, Corian® holds the aces such as technical expertise and a well-oiled public relations machine; for their part the designers offer catchy names and ideas for innovative use of the material. “In this game, everyone’s a winner,” says Claudio Greco, marketing communication manager for DuPont Surfaces in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

This is how the industrial designer Matteo Ragni sees it too. He runs his design studio in a Milan apartment block where many architects, fashion designers and other creative professionals work. You could say that Ragni and his team are specialists for objects made of Corian®. His prize exhibit is “Strativari”, a solid vase milled out of a block of different-coloured layers of glued Corian®. “A huge success,” says Matteo

Ragni, enthusiastically, “not perhaps from a financial perspective, but definitely in terms of communication – the vase was pictured in design magazines all over the world!”

Inspiring creativity

Unusual interiors realised with Corian® as a pivotal element are nowadays all the rage – from the lobby of the Nordic Light hotel in Stockholm and the jewellery shop Jacob & Co. in New York to the ships restaurant of a Japanese luxury liner. The “monolithic look” of the material is particularly attractive for designers. Large-format pieces can be made from Corian®; they then look like they are made from one solid piece. This inspires creativity. Hadid, for example, used formal studies on melting ice and flowing glaciers for her kitchen. And she exploited two other advantages of the material: the translucency of certain colours and its capability to incorporate technology, like electronic circuits and components, into touch control devices. Interactive push buttons, for instance, can be directly integrated into an installation made with Corian®.

Another advantage of Corian® is that it meets the most stringent of hygiene requirements (it has been certified by the German organisation LGA Qualitest GmbH). This makes the material interesting not only

The marketing top is spinning

Yet the company also seems to have had a lucky hand in its choice of marketing strategists. “Working with the DuPont Corian® teams is enjoyable; they are interested in the creative aspects of our work too,” says, for instance, Moritz Waldemeyer, a German graduate engineer who works in London. He has made a name for himself by combining electronics with design. For his exhibition “The Electric Kid Show”, where he recently exhibited tables in Corian® with interactive game interfaces, he was provided with material and specialist designers. “Corian® is tremendously committed to making a name for itself in the design world,” says Waldemeyer. //