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The Knights of Rettenberg

Düsseldorf, August 2019 – They could almost have met: the actual Black Knight of Rettenberg, after whom both the local legend and the Zötler independent brewery's strong Baltic Porter were named, and Conrad Bach, who in 1447—and in the very same Allgäu village—founded what is now the world's oldest family brewery. Today, the dynamic company is definitely not letting grass grow under its feet. Their beers are just as popular among Allgäu natives as they are among tourists—the Alpine hikers, the mountain-sports enthusiasts, the spoiled-for-choice city escapees. Tasking GEA with refurbishing the brewhouse under historic copper domes was one of the largest investment projects of a brewery that has its eyes firmly fixed on the future.



Idyllic Allgäu in Swabia is the perfect place to savor life. The Alpine panoramas invite you to let body, mind and soul relax, meander past meadows as cowbells clang, and treat yourself to an Alp-style feast of tempting cheeses from the nearest dairy—and beer that's as local as it gets. How about a Zötler Gold? The Zötler independent brewery's bread-and-butter product has been consistently achieving an 86% degree of fermentation for decades, as brewmaster Markus Würz proudly reports. In the 23 years he has been master of the vessels, he has never failed to make this bestseller good enough to set a new record in terms of turnover. This consistency is remarkable. It is

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the product of a team who work together like a well-oiled machine and bring a deep-felt love of their home region and customs to their work. Plus, of course, the capable hands of a beer perfectionist such as Würz, who guards his six yeast propagators like treasure.

“People in the Allgäu are pretty set in their ways,” Würz says. “They like it when things stay much the same as they always have been.” Change? Needs to be digested slowly before it’s accepted. So the Zötler Brewery’s “change is the spice of life” philosophy comes as a bit of a surprise. “Reacting to the market, moving with the times—we’re not afraid to go there,” says young CEO Niklas Zötler, who just took over as head of the family business in 2018. “That’s what drives us. And it’s definitely the reason we are bucking the downward trend on the German beer market. We are growing, and our product range as well as demand and our catchment area are expanding.”

Turning tradition into innovation

Can tradition also hold you back? “On the contrary, our tradition is propelling us forward,” Zötler says with conviction. “It’s a huge motivating factor for putting ourselves to the test and finding new perspectives and facets in the old things we know and love.” Drinking habits have changed in recent years and the Zötlers have always been adept at anticipating what consumers want. Niklas’s father, Herbert Zötler, was a visionary who, for instance, foresaw a bright future for non-alcoholic beer at a time when other regional brewers were still scoffing at the concept.

Würz has brought scores of ideas to life for the Zötler family. Now that responsibility has been passed on to a new generation, the pace of innovation has shifted up a gear. The two men grin because Zötler is a hustling, marketing-savvy manager who succeeds in turning people’s diverse cravings and occasions for enjoying a beer into a rich variety of innovations. The mountains, the bar, the lake, summer, winter—it’s always the right time and place for a beer, or possibly another beverage from Zötler’s full range. And Würz, the master brewer with such vast experience under his belt, is always kept on his toes.

Liquid tribute

Their most complex beer to date is the Herzsolo, a craft beer created in memory of solid-as-a-rock grandfather Herbert Zötler II. Highly attenuated with Belgian witbier yeast and Zötler wheat yeast and cold-hopped with four different types of hops, the potion feels much leaner than its 5.2% alcohol might suggest. Beloved grandmother Mimi also got her own “liquid tribute,” the Heilewelt beer whose name translates as “ideal world” and tastes as sweet as it sounds. Cold-hopped with lemondrop aroma hops, the fruity craft beer is as balanced and gentle as a worry-dispelling granny with a sympathetic shoulder to lean on. To both, we say: more, please!

“We are not typical craft-beer brewers,” Zötler says, despite his well-groomed beard. “But we like the fact that the craft movement is talking about styles and products and is again are proud of the character of the beers.” Which is

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why the creations Würz and his team produce with varying artisanal techniques are now just as popular as their large portfolio of lagers, wheat beers, naturally cloudy beers, Pilsners, shandies and bocks.

A good beer calls for a good story

The legend beers, for example, have become legends in their own time, as confirmed by Meininger's International Craft Beer Awards jurors, who bestowed their Platinum prize on the Schwarzer Ritter von Rettenberg ("Black Knight of Rettenberg") in 2019. Black as night indeed, the Baltic Porter steps up with a fine sparkle and intense roast aromas followed by a strong, bitter aftertaste of hops. The real knight, a crusader, suffered a sad fate. He returned home to find he had been cuckolded, murdered his wife and is rumored to haunt Rettenberg to this day. Happily for us, his fate served as inspiration for the Zötlers' full-bodied creation.

Another fabled countryman also found his way into the brewery's recipe books: Heinrich der Kempter was a knight who fell into disfavor but then saved Emperor Otto despite being exiled—stark naked, incidentally. As their monument to him, the Zötlers brewed a red bock. It goes down with a subtle sweetness, a pleasant malt aroma and even a hint of smoked malt on the palate that references the royal palace in Bamberg as the home of smoked malt. The revival of these old legends has been received as warmly by the tourist board as by drinkers.

New splendor under old domes

Does the pace of innovation in the family brewery create excessive pressure? Especially considering how little use the set-in-their-ways Allgäu natives generally have for new things? "No, we don't feel pressured. Patriotism and tradition give us wings to fly. They enable us to act fast—probably faster than the others," says the resolute Niklas Zötler, who embraces this philosophy to stay ahead of the competition. He uses his advantage to tap into new markets and create the financial cushion the company needs to make investments.

And so it came about that the new brewhouse, Zötler's heart, today beats under glorious copper domes—courtesy of GEA. The old [Huppmann vessels](#) had been in service since 1962, and replacing them had become inevitable. As if the buzz and bustle of the Christmas business weren't enough for the Rettenberg crew, the brewery decided to make a major investment in the future. In November and December 2018, they shut down production for six weeks to replace the brewhouse vessels—the mash-wort kettle and lauter tun—and fully automate all the equipment. GEA was responsible for fitting out the new brewhouse—in chrome-nickel steel, of course—and for all the piping leading into and from the whirlpool.

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Pushing a camel through the eye of a needle—at a sprint

The mammoth project had even the usually unflappable Markus Würz agitated. “The time between demolishing the old equipment and the first brew was four and a half weeks,” he recalls. “Every day, we prayed the batches we had already produced would be enough. Every day, we were prepared for disaster.” Disaster that never happened, even though the tight schedule meant all trades and crafts were working at the same time. “We couldn’t have done this project without the help of our outstanding partners, who worked in sync like precision clockwork,” says Würz, praising the companies involved. Despite the tension, the anticipation was undeniable—a new brewhouse had been at the top of the master brewer’s wish list for quite some time.

The “brutal building site,” as Würz dubbed it, reached a milestone on December 6, 2018: GEA had installed the new vessels, newly insulated and mounted them, and completely replaced the piping leading to and from the whirlpool. By then, as GEA’S project manager Erik Löschner put it, the whole undertaking felt like squeezing a camel through the eye of a needle. To save time, the large vessels were pre-assembled at GEA’s Kitzingen facility and then had to be lowered into the cellar in Rettenberg while the plumbers were still laying the tiles.

Zötler Brewery: GEA’s new showpiece in the Allgäu

“We were thrilled to do this project with the Zötler Brewery,” Löschner says. After all, the project revolved around brewhouse technology, the most fundamental core competency of the GEA experts from Kitzingen. “With the big picture in mind, we made suggestions for the brewhouse configuration which the client accepted.” For instance, Zötler agreed to expand the number of connecting valves between the vessels. The brewers are now delighted to have a great deal more freedom to vary the occupation and cleaning times. GEA also adjusted the vessels’ heat and hot water supply. The result: the brewery not only saves time but has also expanded its capacities and the efficiency of the entire operation significantly. The combined mash-wort kettle and the [LAUTERSTAR®](#) lauter tun are designed for an annual output of 60,000 to 70,000 hectoliters. In terms of extraction efficiency and yields, the new brewhouse takes Zötler to a whole new level.

Even when tensions were running high, consumers never noticed a thing, according to Würz. “Our beers have character and attitude,” he says, “and we wanted to keep them that way. Rebuilding the brewhouse has not changed their character one iota. Our brews may even taste a little cleaner.”

“We are naturally proud that the old Huppmann brewhouse gave over 50 years of loyal service. After all, that’s where GEA has its roots in the brewing business. Now we hope Zötler will be happy with GEA’s solution for 50 more years to come,” Löschner says. So far, at least, the partners have reaped nothing but praise and a huge compliment: “Consider us a GEA reference project in the Allgäu,” Zötler and Würz agree.

[Fact box]

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GEA LAUTERSTAR®: Thorough extraction, higher yields

The [GEA LAUTERSTAR®](#) lauter tun is the product of many years of development work on the part of GEA's brewing experts and technicians. The result is a lauter tun that can handle any cycle and, with up to 14 brews per day, it sets the pace in the brewing process. Key components such as the lauter tun pipes and the raking machine have been reworked. The geometrically optimized wort run-off system increases plant efficiency because spent grains are leached out more evenly. That not only makes extract recovery faster but also results in a higher yield. Unlike other products, GEA's raking machine features a denser arrangement of knives and a double-shoe design. As a result, the malt grain bed can be treated intensely, more evenly and more gently. The lautering time is reduced, flushing and cleaning times are minimized, and operating and maintenance costs are lower than with similar systems. The LAUTERSTAR® works so efficiently that the investment quickly pays for itself, thus keeping life-cycle costs down. This high-performance lauter tun features our intelligent lautering program Multifunctional Lautering Management (MLM), which optimizes lautering time, yield, wort quality—in short, all phases of the lautering process.

Images ([please use the link to the downloads](#))



Image 1: Tip-top inside and out: The old Huppmann brewhouse held up for nearly 60 years before Huppmann's successor GEA refurbished everything under the gorgeous copper domes in 2018. Photo: Brauerei Zötler/Petra Reger – wertvoll fotografie

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Image 2: In 2018, CEO Niklas Zötler took over at the helm of the family brewery, marking the transfer to the 21st generation. Photo: Brauerei Zötler/Petra Reger – wertvoll fotografie



Image 3: Raising a glass with the partners who made a virtually impossible dream come true (from left): Senior brewer Herbert Zötler, Thomas Hübner (GEA), Markus Würz (Zötler), Marc Schreder (GEA) and brewer Niklas Zötler inaugurate new brewhouse. Photo: Brauerei Zötler/Gesa Zötler



Image 4: Thomas Hübner, head of sales at GEA, presents CEO Niklas Zötler with a plaque commemorating the successful team effort. Photo: Brauerei Zötler/Gesa Zötler

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Image 5: Legends in their own time, the craft and legend beers augment Zötler's broad range. Image: Brauerei Zötler

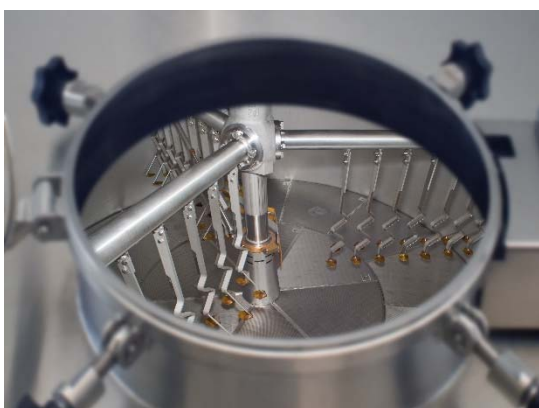


Image 6: The raking machine in GEA's LAUTERSTAR®: Thanks to GEA's refurbishment of the brewhouse, Zötler Brewery today benefits from the maximum yield and efficient use of resources resulting from the lauter tun's high level of effectiveness. Photo: GEA

Get more information at gea.com

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[More than 145 years of the Huppmann legacy at GEA](#)

[Zötler Brewery, Rettenberg, Germany](#)

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About GEA

GEA is one of the largest suppliers of process technology for the food industry and a wide range of other industries. In 2018, GEA generated consolidated revenues of about EUR 4.8 billion. The international technology group focuses on machinery and plants as well as process technology and components. GEA also provides sustainable solutions for sophisticated production processes in diverse end-user markets and offers a comprehensive service portfolio. The group generates around 70 percent of its revenue in the food and beverages sector, which enjoys long-term sustained growth. As of December 31, 2018, the company employed approximately 18,500 people worldwide. The company is listed on the German MDAX (G1A, WKN 660 200), the STOXX® Europe 600 Index and selected MSCI Global Sustainability Indexes. More information can be found online at gea.com.

If you do not wish to receive further communications from GEA, please send an e-mail to pr@gea.com.