

Dr. Hermann Fischer

born in 1953, has been committed to the use of natural products since the beginning of the seventies.

After studying chemistry, he founded the company AURO Pflanzenchemie in 1983. He is the Managing and Executive Director of the AG with 60 employees at 3 locations.

In 1992, he was elected "Ecological Manager of the Year by the WWF and the magazine Capital.

What we have accomplished

It is with great pleasure today that I look back upon the successful establishment and development of AURO Naturfarben. Soon after it was founded at the end of 1983, the company developed into a market leader that provided essential impulses in the areas of natural paints and self-sustaining chemistry. To this day, AURO has remained a driving force in healthy, ecological building, living and handling the relevant materials in a way that has a future on this planet.

Taken together with my founding and developmental years at LIVOS beginning in 1974, the development of natural paints has been the focus of my work for over 30 years now. In that time, I have - in numerous lectures, seminars and forums - done my best to teach the philosophy based on these "model products" to large numbers of people in Europe and elsewhere, and I have learnt from them in return. My encounters with so many fascinating personalities in all the corners of the earth have been one of the most memorable aspects of my time with Naturfarben.

Now ideas and concepts - something there has always been plenty of - are one thing. Developing and producing concrete products that can actually be used, and criticized, is another thing entirely. To do this right, a qualified team of employees had to be built up, people who could identify with the AURO concepts and make them into everyday reality: and I mean the whole range from research to production and shipping. The unusually high level of staff continuity at AURO speaks for the loyalty engendered by a common idea.

Right from the start, AURO has been a strong brand, even though, or perhaps precisely because, it was not a product of professional marketing, but rather a product of childlike creativity. The strong and melodious registered trademark AURO is now a worldwide presence, familiar and praised even beyond the bounds of our immediate product sector.

Our commercial partners in Germany and worldwide have contributed in a major way to the "aura" of the AURO brand. The characteristic AURO logo is readily recognized in every store selling AURO Natural Paints. At the same time, AURO has developed into a continuity factor for many of our sales partners. Especially in view of the difficulties now being seen in other product groups (insulation materials, floor coverings, etc.), this continuity has come to be valued very highly by our commercial partners in recent years.

With two decades on its back, AURO has become more than just a symbol of stability and constancy in an unruly market, it can even be said to have become something of a traditional institution in view of the many failed ecologically-based startups. And this means dynamic innovation is all the more important for AURO. Successful development of a completely new assortment of natural paint products completely free of solvents and in the very best technical quality constitutes impressive proof of just how dynamic and "renewable" an established brand name product can be. Today, AURO's product spectrum is by far the most modern in the branch with the best future prospects. A clean series of top-notch test results for the flagship AURO products is another indicator showing that our product innovations meet the industry's most stringent criteria.

Ever since AURO got started, the company has carried the main burden of public relations work for the entire natural paints branch. The expertise and experience of AURO is at a premium whenever a convention, podium discussion or press release on ecological production and healthy living is in the offing. The effects of these public relations efforts also go far beyond the small circle of natural paint products. This work contributes to broader efforts to find feasible ways to achieve a healthy and environmentally tolerable future for all mankind. We are particularly proud of this honorary work, which is also surely one of the reasons AURO has received so many honourable mentions, awards and prizes over the years.

What remains to be accomplished

Despite the successful development of AURO into a strong, widely admired company, this anniversary also provides an occasion to address some of the plans and intentions that have been left incomplete, have not yet been accomplished, or have simply failed.

We have not yet managed in sufficient measure to counter the tendencies towards shallow, diluted and erroneous information policies practised by some of our competitors in the natural paints sector - sometimes for lack of knowledge and sometimes arising from purely commercial motives. Our energy was limited and we simply were unable to communicate to these parties the strategic risks involved in such a procedure. What can happen is that this kind of policy can render natural products indistinguishable from purely conventional paints - i.e. to a loss of profile. More recently, initial signals have been seen indicating that the market intends to defend itself against the pseudo-products.

In this connection, it is particularly unfortunate that we have not been able to realize the concept, worked out over 10 years ago in cooperation with Mins Minssen, of a "Museum for Natural Materials and Naturalist Philosophy." Such a museum would give large numbers of people a chance to experience and understand the wide variety and interesting developmental processes of natural products. Visitors to such a museum would surely have gathered sensory and abstract information that would enable them to better differentiate between a genuine natural product and a cheap surrogate.

Another project that has been in the planning stage for some time, the "AURO Foundation for Plant Chemistry," has also not yet been realized. In such a forum, ideas contributing to a chemical industry based on renewable raw materials and ecologically compatible processes could be further developed and propagated in a free form that would be independent of the company. A share package has been set aside for the foundation, which would however not be able to finance its work efficiently until the earnings level improves over the longer term. It may take a few years of strong growth at AURO to get this foundation up and running.

Finally, the entire natural paint sector, AURO included, has not yet managed to break out of the situation that its share of the paint market in general is simply too small - a problem the branch has only itself to thank for. In many areas, the market shares of all natural paint brands taken together do not even reach 1 percent of the market, with larger shares seen only with a few special products.

AURO, traditionally the driving force for the branch, sees an important future obligation in this situation. In the coming years, we will be redoubling our efforts to break into new customer groups and thus to give AURO products (and all other natural paint products along with them) the market relevance they deserve on the basis of their conceptual, ecological, technological and health-related quality and their irreplaceable presence in construction of healthy living quarters, and preservation of a healthy environment, for the future.

Our plans

It may be pure accident, but our jubilee at the end of 2003 marked the beginning of a new era for AURO.

For many years, actually since the very beginning, the products and the technology were the main determinants of the rhythm and melody of our work. This emphasis on technical aspects is of course responsible for many of the essential qualities of the company, but it has become more and more evident that the enormous potentials of this brand and these products can only be exploited to the fullest if the AURO symphony is directed by market realities to a much greater extent than has been the case to date.

Now in our 21st year, we are doing our best to get this project off the ground, with new ideas, new energy and some new faces inside and outside the company. It is certainly a pleasure to me to observe how our representatives, commercial partners and employees alike are picking up on these new dynamics and contributing to the best of their abilities.

Basically, we want to re-invent AURO. We will of course make sure the noble, strong and time-proven roots of the company are preserved and strengthened in the process. But a fair amount of trimming remains to be done way up in the branches of this healthy tree, the aim being to cultivate healthier, tastier and more plentiful fruit in the future.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to preserving the motivation and energy still seen at AURO after 20 years. These are the things that will make it possible to have a hearty go at this project for the future.

History

1922 Goetheanum: The first building constructed with nothing but ecological materials (wood, cork, plant-based paints, etc.)

1960 Plant-based paint research revived by Günter Meier

1972 Initial research efforts on natural and plant-based paints by the later founder of AURO

1974 The first natural paints company is founded ("Fischer, Friends and Family" = LIVOS)

1975 Introduction of first building paints to supplement the Livos plant-based art paints

1979 More and more people whose health has been affected by wood preservatives begin to use biocide-free natural paints

1982 STERN articles "Gefahr im Gebälk - Danger in the Woodwork" publishes the wood preservative scandal

1983 Foundation of AURO Pflanzenchemie GmbH in Braunschweig (beg. in 1998: AG)

1983 The first environmental party wins seats in the Bundestag ("Die Grünen - The Greens")

1984 First complete content declaration of a technical chemical product by AURO

1984 First AURO production location in a foreign country (Kleinglödnitz/Austria)

1985 Ten smaller and medium-sized producers now grace the natural paints market

1986 The first major AURO Natural Paints Convention in Braunschweig

1986 Reactor catastrophe in Chernobyl makes many more people aware of environmental themes

1987 AURO achieves market leadership in the natural paints sector

1989 First product test: AURO wall paint: Stiftung Warentest: "good"

1989 Use of pentachlorophenol in wood preservatives banned

1990 Market introduction of detergents and cleaning agents (AURO brand AWALAN)

1991 New construction "Hall 7" on newly acquired property

1991 Project startup: "Linseed oil for AURO paints from controlled organic cultivation"

- 1991 Foundation of the "Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU) - German Federal Environmental Foundation"
- 1992 Runup of the first resin oil cooking plant at AURO Austria
- 1992 WWF/Capital: Award: "Eco-Manager of the Year"
- 1993 Series of detailed television and radio broadcasts on AURO
- 1993 Foundation of the "Fachagentur für Nachwachsende Rohstoffe (FNR) - Agency for Renewable Raw Materials"
- 1994 Award of the B.A.U.M. (TREE) Environmental Prize to AURO
- 1994 AURO is the first manufacturer of natural paint products to issue an environmental report according to the EU standard
- 1995 Export of AURO products to Asia, in particular to Japan and Korea
- 1996 AURO No. 1 in the branch: neutral ranking of the best environmental reports
- 1996 AURO receives Environmental Prize from the State Government of Lower Saxony
- 1997 First series of AURO seminars in Japan and Korea
- 1998 Introduction of AURO Partner Trader System
- 1998 Startup of R&D project "Solvent-Free Natural Paints" with DBU funding
- 1999 Environmental Prize awarded by the international environmental foundation "Friends of the Earth"
- 2000 Public market introduction of solvent-free AURO product assortment (Aqua, PurSolid, Powder)
- 2001 Complete AURO product range of solvent-free paints, scumble glazes, waxes and oils on the market
- 2003 Ökotest Yearbook "Bauen - Building": All 12 AURO products tested "very good"
- 2004 First NaturPlus certificate awarded in the paints and glazes sector for AURO finishing paints

Our hopes and plans for the future:

- 2005 Government passes "100,000 Walls Programme" to promote use of natural paints
- 2005 World Fair in Nagoya, pavilions with natural paints, focus on the environment
- 2006 More stringent solvent restrictions give AURO solvent-free products another big push forwards
- 2007 AURO opens its first production site for natural paints overseas
- 2008 Genuine natural paint products break the 10% market share barrier on the paints market
- 2009 Invitations to tender for hospital buildings are restricted to genuine natural paints
- 2015 Share of renewable raw materials used in the chemical industry tops 20%
- 2038 For the first time, more chemical products are based on renewable raw materials than on petroleum
- 2090 The petrochemical era is a thing of the past; petroleum used only for expensive specialities.
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