

For medium-sized enterprises



THE BAGUETTE PRODUCTION WAS AUTOMATED ABOUT 20 YEARS AGO WITH THE ADVENT OF MECATHERM LINES AND THEIR TYPICAL PATERNOSTER BAKING OVENS. MORE THAN 350 OF THESE PLANTS HAVE NOW BEEN SOLD. WITH ITS NEW DEVELOPMENTS, THE COMPANY IS NOW ALSO FOCUSING ON SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES. BBI'S EDITOR-IN CHIEF HILDEGARD M. KEIL TALKED TO **BERNARD ZORN**, CEO OF MECATHERM S.A. IN BAREMBACH ABOUT THE MARKET AND THE FUTURE.

+ **bbi:** Mr. Zorn, has the universal upturn reached Mecatherm?

+ Zorn: The facts are clear. Our order quantities in 2005 were already 28% above the previous year and the development for 2006 looks even more promising. Since the beginning of 2005, we have already created 60 more jobs.

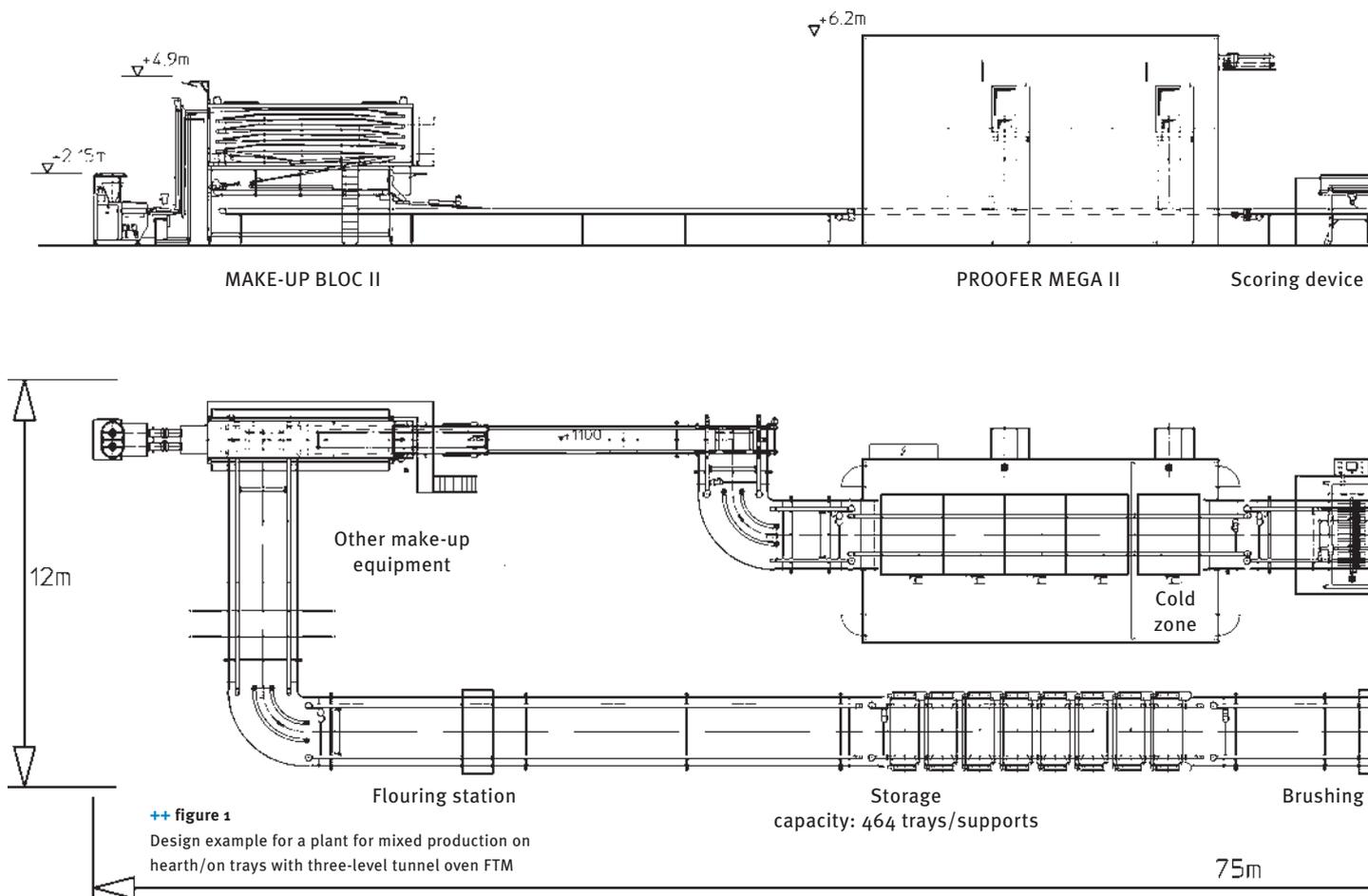
+ bbi: The term "boom" would obviously be more applicable then. What are the reasons for this strong demand?

+ Zorn: The European market for baked goods indicates two developments in which we participate. First of all, the demand for highly efficient production lines for baguettes is

growing significantly. This is the core business of our Mega II plants. Secondly, the demand for production plants for small par-baked bakery goods is virtually exploding currently. This is the main field of our FTM ovens.

+ bbi: The FTM was only introduced in 2005...

+ Zorn: ...and has been sold a dozen times by now. The first plant is operating in Paris; five are currently in the assembly phase, one of them in Germany at Stauffenberg. The six remaining plants will also go into operation this year, almost all of them as complete lines including dough divider and make-up.



Mecatherm S.A. – Barembach, Schirmeck Cedex, France

MECATHERM

The company located in Alsace, France, is highly specialized. Most of the total annual turnover of 75m euros is generated by approximately 50 customers. The company was founded by machine manufacturer René Voegtlin, and now belongs to an industrial holding company. Mecatherm produces complete lines for the production of baguettes and small bakery goods, from the dough di-

vider to the freezer. Only technologically important parts are manufactured in their own factory. Everything else is contract manufactured by subcontractors. This way the production in Barembach is highly flexible, even with increasing order quantities.

75% of Mecatherm's sales are generated in France, Germany, Spain and North-America. +++

+ **bbi:** What has decisively contributed to this success?

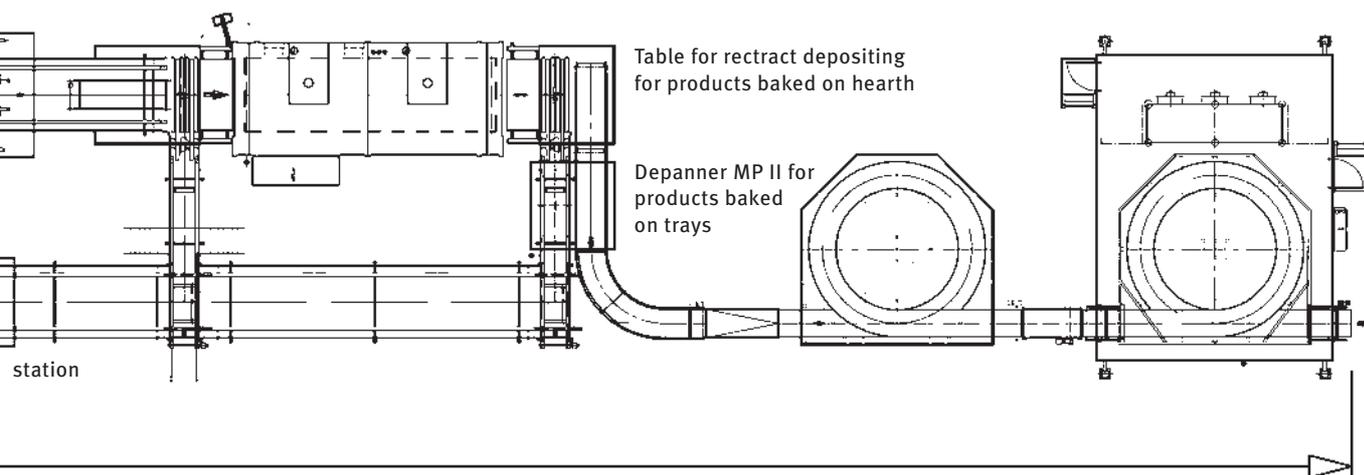
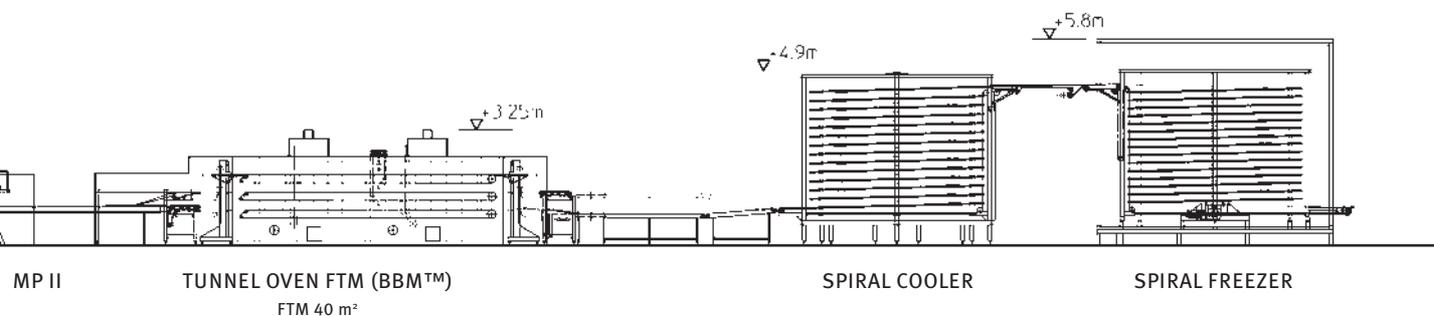
+ **Zorn:** In Europe as well as in the USA there is currently a boom in the sector for small bakery goods. They are easy to eat and they fit the out-of-home consumption trend. Up to now larger companies – chain stores and industrial bakeries – had to bake such items on trays. On the FTM-lines they can be baked for the first time on hearth, for example 24,000 pieces/hour on a line at Stauffenberg. These products are quite different from the mass products made so far. Their crumb structure is much lighter.

The specific heat transfer system of the FTM makes sure that the small goods are baked very hot from the bottom while only radiation heat is applied on the top thus leaving the surface light. The bottom heat results in a quick and strong oven spring. This is similar to a traditional roll baked in a traditional oven. Within seven or eight minutes, we achieve

a product with a stabile crumb which contains a lot of moisture but which does not develop a gummy bottom or collapses during cooling. In addition, the shelf life is increase by this type of baking process. This resulting product is of an entirely different quality which is also rewarded by the market. Well rewarded, because from the 80 g the dough piece weighs, there are 72 g left after seven minutes of baking.

+ **bbi:** Who should employ this new technology?

+ **Zorn:** The FTM can of course be operated as a mono-line that can bake products on trays and hearth; it is the optimal equipment for large chain stores and semi-industrial bakeries. Automation is possible – for example automatic trays feeding or removal from the baking belt – and the baking quality matches the one provided by an artisan baker. ►



++ figure 2



+ **bbi:** With the FTM-line you went back to the principle of unmoulded products which have been available since 1986. Why did you move away from this principle at that time?

+ **Zorn:** At that time the focus was on the automation of baguette production. A baguette is the product with the shortest life span. It stays fresh and crunchy only for a few hours – not the very best requirement for industrial production. The process was industrialized with our Mega-lines for semi-finished par-baked goods. The process itself was of course developed by the bakers themselves. We put the baguettes onto sheets and moved them through the proofing, baking and cooling stages. This process is decisive for the high performance of these lines. In the 90s, these products experienced a real boom in Europe. Today, more than 350 of these lines are in operation all over the world and we deliver about 30 more, each year.

+ **bbi:** But why did you turn back now?

+ **Zorn:** Trends are being copied and one always has to be ahead. In Europe, we see now a strong concentration within the bakery industry. If new capacities are created or replaced today, then this change does not take place in small companies. Therefore we adjusted our equipment to respond to this trend.

+ **bbi:** Mecatherm is specialized in a very specific field within the production of bakery products. Bread lines or mixers for example are not part of the product range you offer. Aren't you interested in becoming a so-called system supplier?

+ **Zorn:** If you offer a broad range of products, you can hardly be good in all segments. We prefer to focus on what we can and we do it right. We have developed this market and we will develop it further in future.

+ **bbi:** The international fair iba is just around the corner. What will Mecatherm present there?

+ **Zorn:** We will show a complete line including dough divider, automatic final proofing, cutting station and oven which will be put into operation twice a day. The dough divider is a new developed model. The entire line can be changed over from belt operation to baking on trays within the blink of an eye without interrupting the operation.

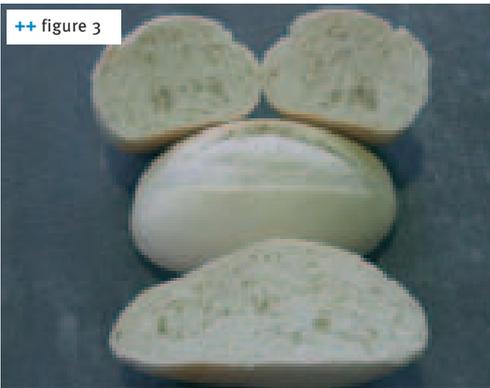
+ **bbi:** Are you aiming at medium-sized enterprises as your target group now?

+ **Zorn:** Most of the twelve companies that will currently be getting an FTM plant are bakeries that have not been customers of Mecatherm before and that can be considered as medium-sized enterprises. Except for one, all have decided to go for a fully automatic line even though we offer the line in modular design for later expansion or automation. However, the FTM-line provides flexibility and quality to an extent not yet available on the market. Baguettes will look like the ones made by bakers in Paris many years ago: high, crunchy, fine crust, fluffy crumb and vividly colored surface (or white if it is only par-baked).

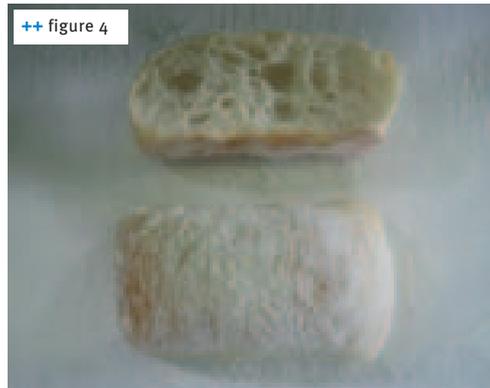
+ **bbi:** What do you mean by flexibility?

+ **Zorn:** Flexibility is the seamless transition from baking on trays to baking on hearth and vice versa but also thermal flexibility. Just look at today's ovens with six or more levels which are divided into several heating zones. They can not be used flexibly any more and that is not the baker's fault.

+ **bbi:** Do you think there is the risk that such medium-sized companies will someday be swallowed up by the industry or in the worst case even be squeezed out of the market?



++ figure 3



++ figure 4

++ figure 2 (left page)
Pure radiation heat from the top makes baguettes really colorful

++ figure 3
Par-baked small bakery item made in the FTM. The crust provides for stability

++ figure 4
Ciabatta, baked on the FTM line

+ **Zorn:** No. When these bakers specialize in their area, they are unbeatable. They will find customers there which are too small for the industry but still willing and able to pay good money for a good product. For example caterers, food service companies, smaller retail groups and others that count on quality and diversity. The bakers can serve this market flexibly, offer service, do not need freezer storage capacities and also have their logistics costs under control.

I know a couple of such companies in France that are really successful with this concept. They are of course competing with the small

artisan bakeries but the industrial companies are not their competitors.

+ **bbi:** You have mentioned a new dough divider. May we have some more details of which direction this development is going?

+ **Zorn:** The principle lies between classical dough division and dough band. More can not be disclosed at this moment. But you are very much welcome to take a look at the entire line at iba.

+ **bbi:** Mr. Zorn, thank you very much for the interview. +++

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