

 **Tarkett**
THE ULTIMATE FLOORING EXPERIENCE

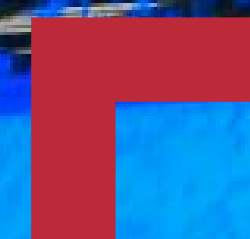
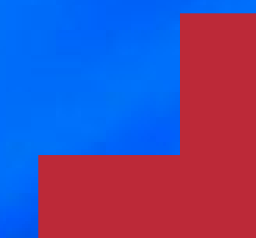
Tarkett a tale of entrepreneurs

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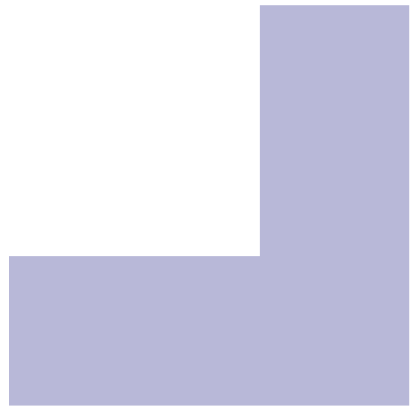


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Tarkett
a tale of entrepreneurs





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a tale of entrepreneurs



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4-meter (13 ft.) width
vinyl coating line,
Clervaux site, Luxembourg



Rubber flooring
manufacturing,
Middlefield site, Ohio, USA





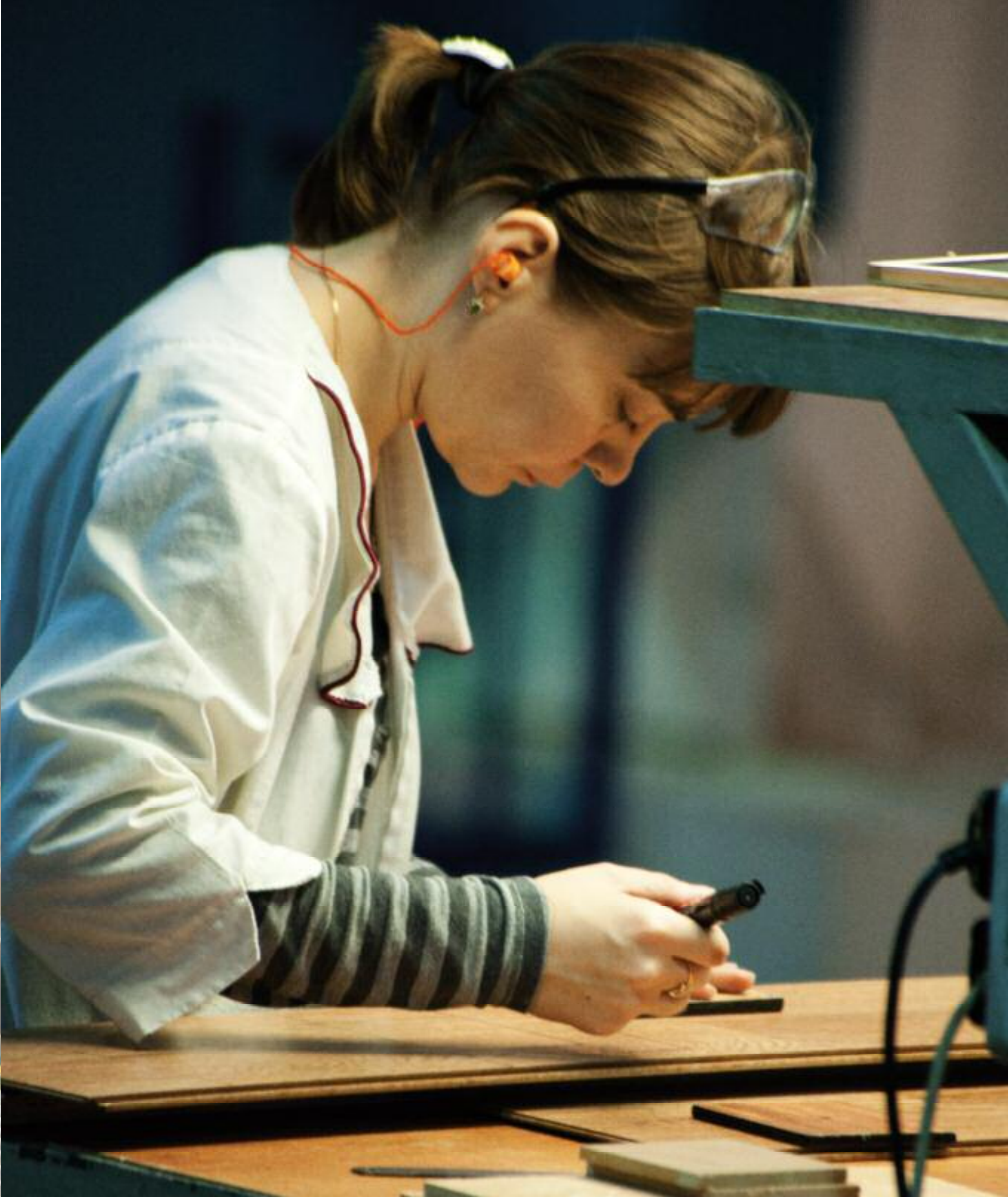
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manufacturing,
Chagrin Falls site, Ohio, USA



Parquet flooring
manufacturing,
Backa Pałanka site, Serbia



Laminate flooring
manufacturing,
Mytishchi site, Russia



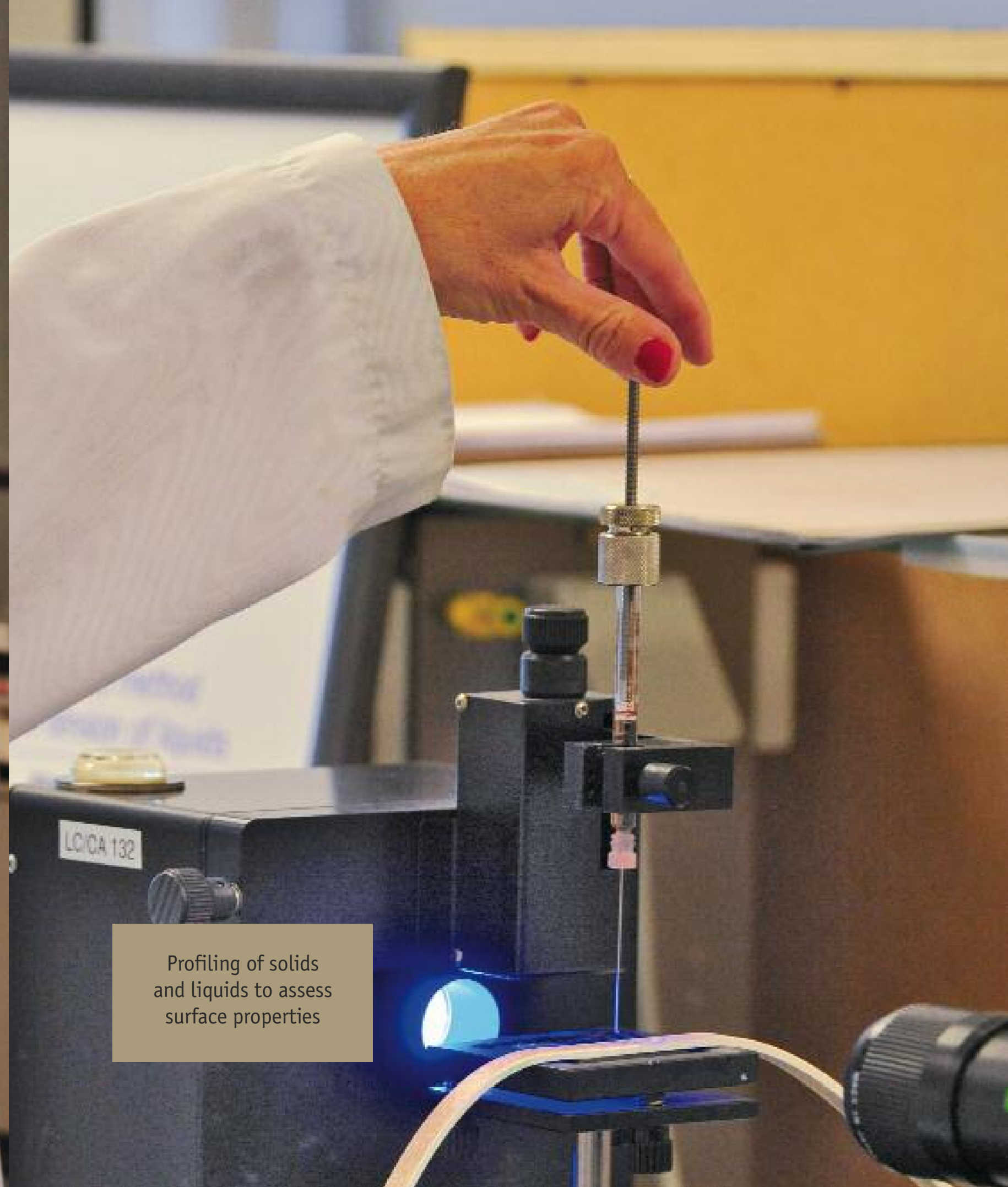


4-meter (13 ft.) width
vinyl coating line,
Farnham site, Canada

Research laboratory,
Wiltz site, Luxembourg




Profiling of solids
and liquids to assess
surface properties






VOC emission
level testing,
Wiltz site, Luxembourg




Research center,
Wiltz site, Luxembourg

Tarkett Studio,
Aubervilliers site, France






4-meter (13 ft.) width
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fiberglass accumulator,
Clervaux site, Luxembourg



2-meter (6 ft.) width
vinyl coating line,
Screen head,
Sedan site, France



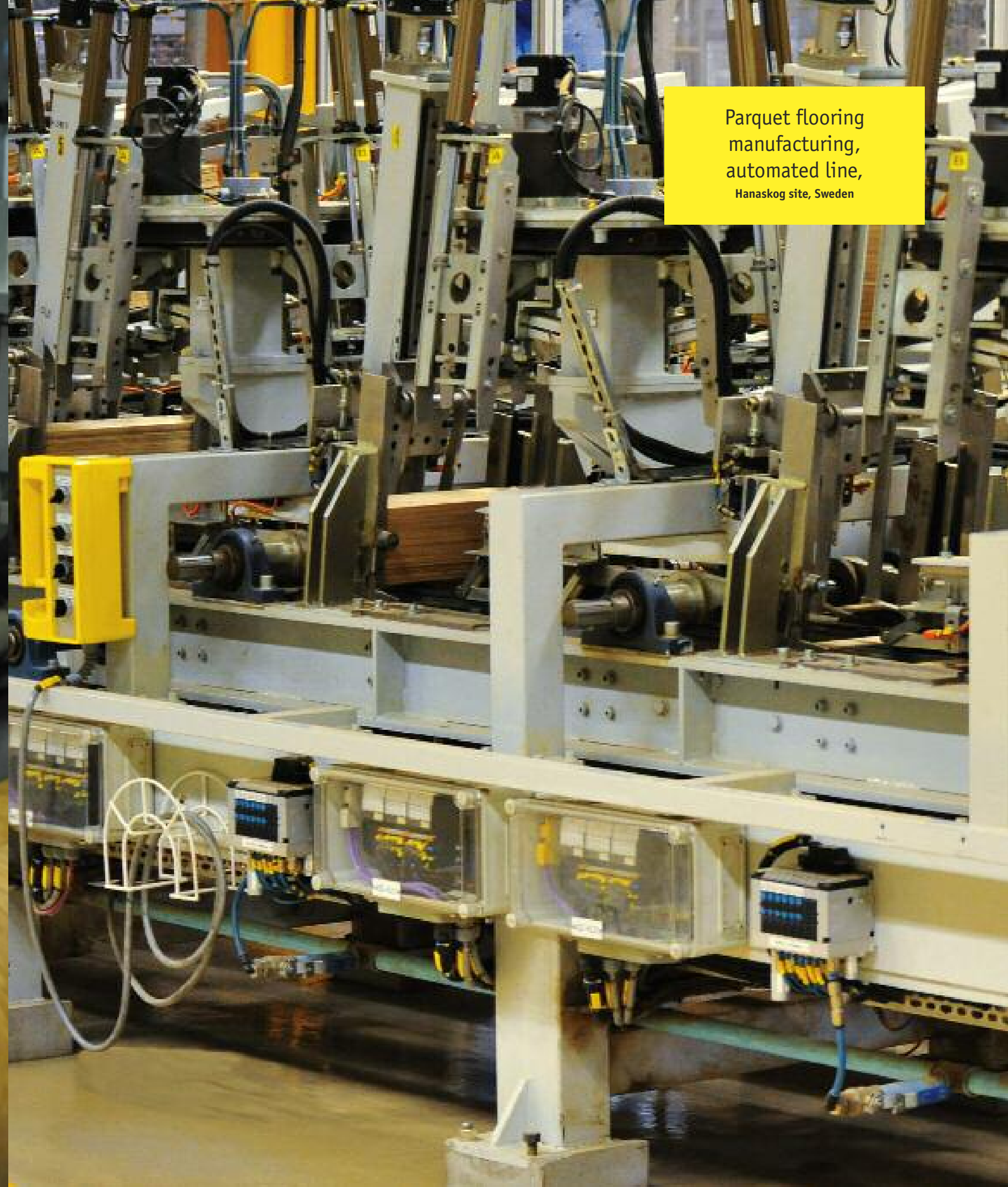
Thread bobbins
for Sintelon rug
manufacturing,
Backa Palanka site, Serbia



Johnsonite Logistics
Center,
Middlefield site, Ohio, USA



4-meter (13 ft.) width
vinyl coating line,
Otradny site, Russia



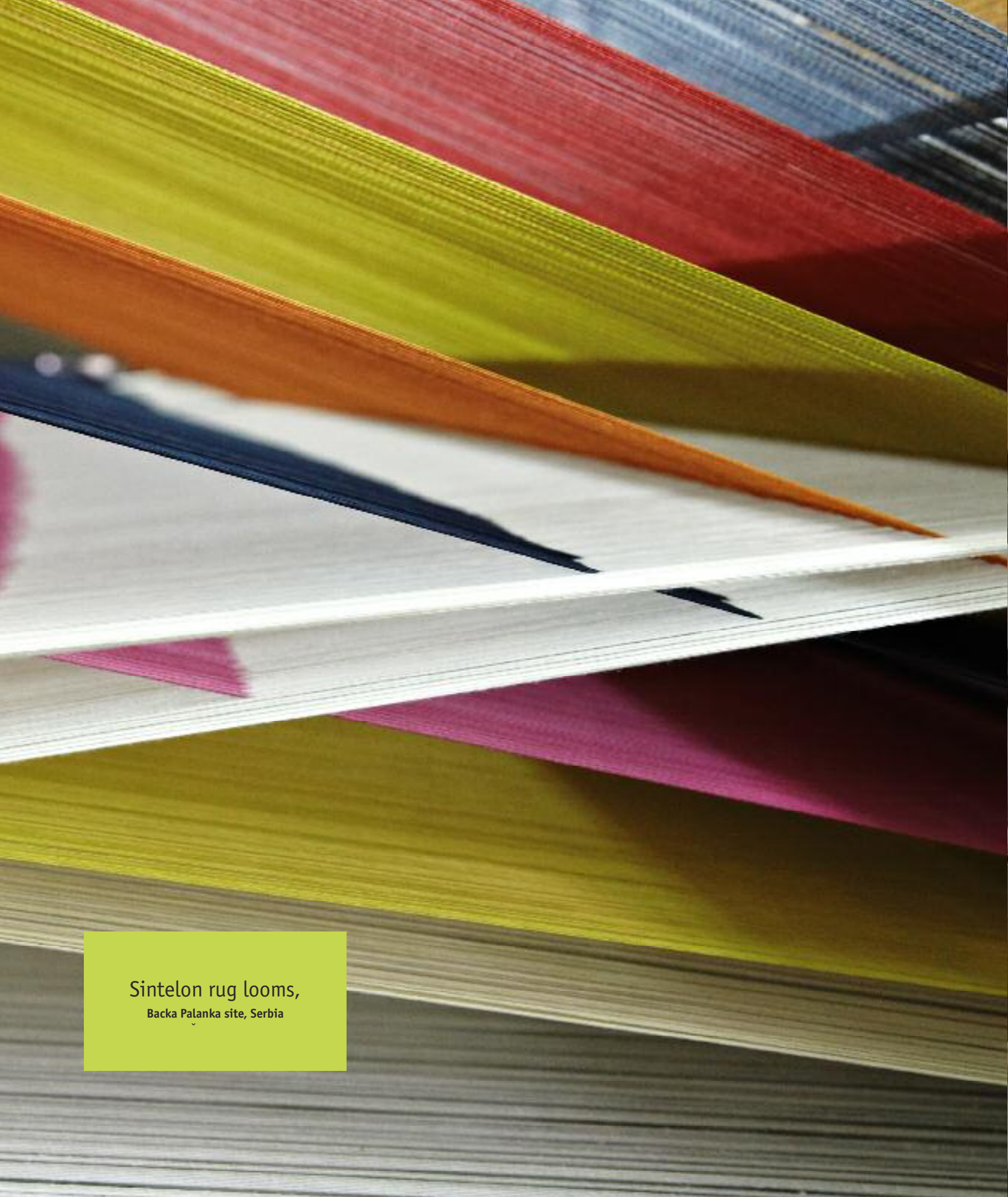
Parquet flooring
manufacturing,
automated line,
Hanaskog site, Sweden



Parquet production
lacquering line
and quality control,
Backa Palanka site, Serbia



Storage rack for FieldTurf
artificial grass weaving,
Backa Palanka site, Serbia



Sintelon rug looms,
Backa Palanka site, Serbia



4-meter (13 ft.) width
vinyl coating line,
Clervaux site, Luxembourg



Parquet manufacturing,
Hanaskog site, Sweden



2-meter (6 ft.) width
vinyl coating line,
Helio printing head,
Sedan site, France



Lacquering line, parquet
flooring manufacturing,
Backa Palanka site, Serbia



FieldTurf quality control
and grab strength
testing,
Atlanta site, Georgia, USA

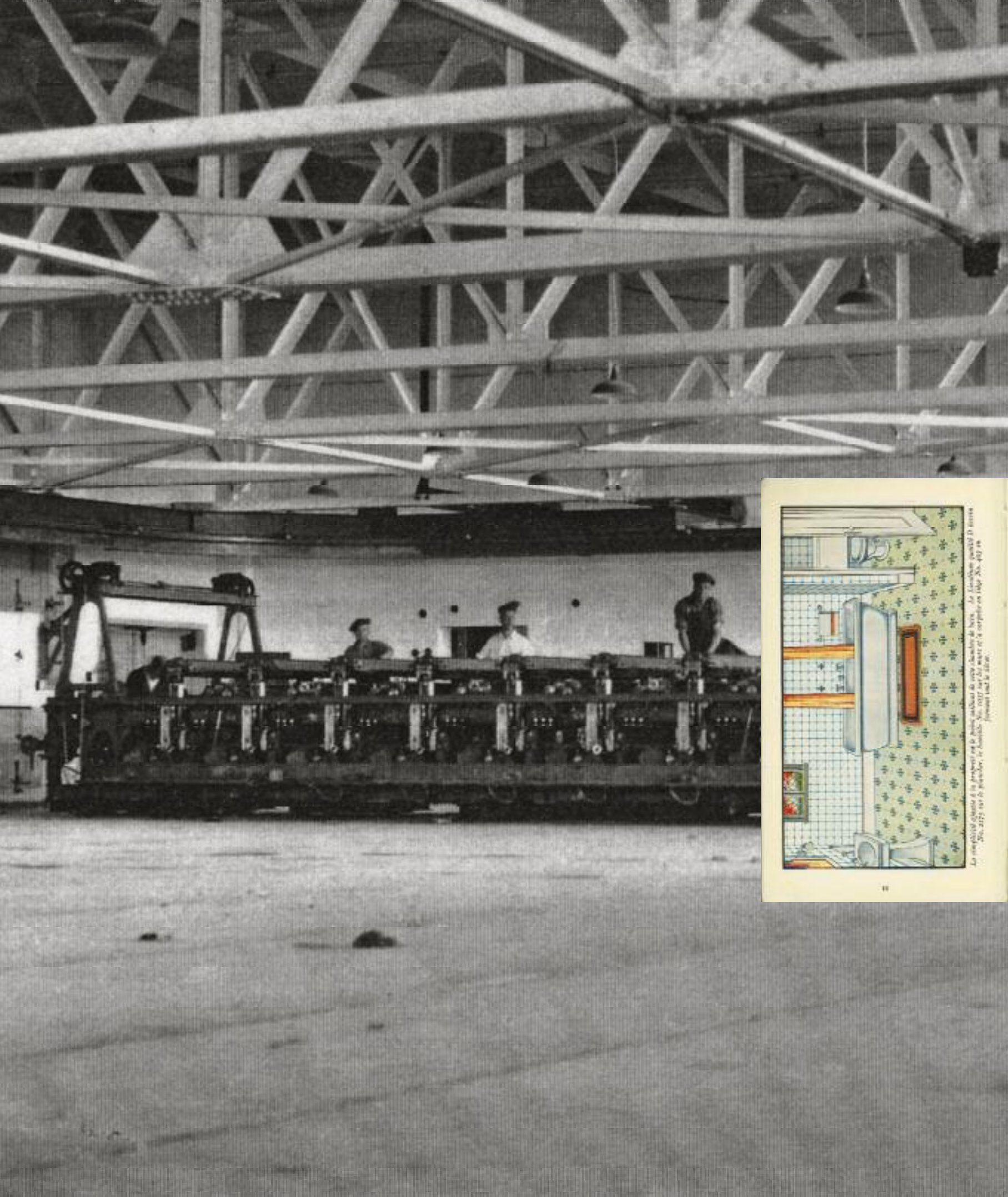




FieldTurf quality control,
Atlanta site, Georgia, USA



FieldTurf artificial turf
production line,
drying oven,
Atlanta site, Georgia, USA

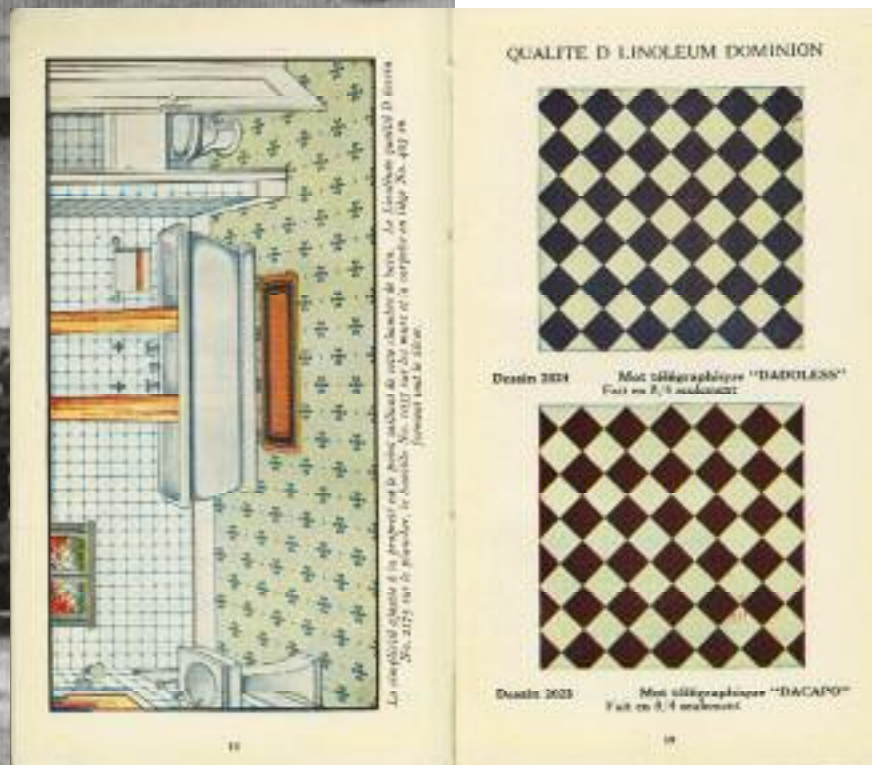


A

t the turn of the 19th century felt, hemp, jute, straw, wood and oilskin were the manufacturing staples for these precursors of Tarkett. These savvy businessmen, who largely managed family concerns, were able to diversify production, to choose the right products for the market, to make tough decisions and to innovate to ensure success and longevity. Thus, the Canadian company Dominion Oilcloth made the move into linoleum, which was hugely successful. At the same time, these early companies had to contend with the violent power of the elements – repeated fires, flooding of the Danube, etc. They weathered major economic crises and they struggled through world wars which devastated the first half of the 20th century, leaving Europe in ruins. The original Sommer family factory was destroyed in World War I. Shortages of raw materials and the war effort changed the face of North American manufacturing after World War II.

CANADA: FROM TARPAULIN TO LINOLEUM

In 1872, a new company appeared on the Canadian industrial landscape, the Dominion Oilcloth Company, founded in Montreal by eleven prominent local businessmen. In a small factory on the rue Sainte-Catherine, it manufactured tarpaulin, a heavy-duty painted or tar-coated canvas used to protect goods or buildings from rain or even sea water. Tarpaulin was manufactured from cotton canvas, linseed oil and pigments. Just two years after the company had been founded, the economic crisis of 1874 hit, affecting both Europe and North America. The company weathered the crisis and in 1887 took advantage of the opening of the Vancouver-Montreal railroad line to distribute its products throughout the country. In the early 20th century, tarpaulin was sidelined in favor of linoleum for floors, walls and tables. Linoleum manufacturing began at the rue Sainte-Catherine factory. It was made from natural materials sourced all over the world: jute from India and Nova Scotia, kauri gum from New Zealand, and linseed oil from seed grown in western Canada, Argentina or India. This new product was cheaper than wood, hygienic, and suitable for small and large areas alike. The “Battleship” line, as its name suggests, was used in battleships, but also for non-military



Left: The flatbed printing press at the Farnham factory prints designs on floor coverings (1940-1950).
Center: Feltol Floor Oilcloth catalogue, 1923.



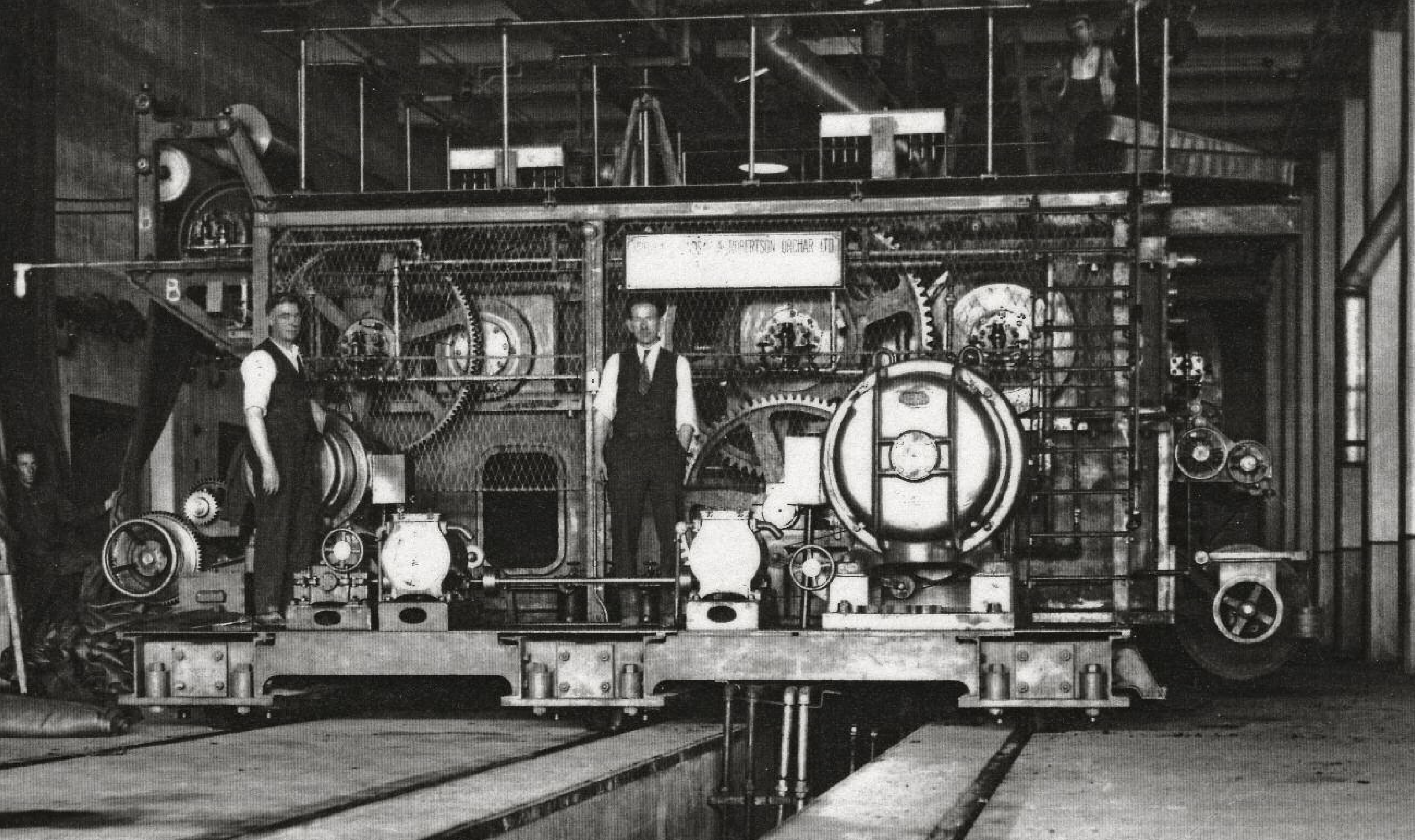
Above: During World War II, aluminum aircraft components were manufactured in the rue Sainte-Catherine factory in Montreal.

Left: Linoleum from the 1912 Dominion Oilcloth Company catalogue. Double-page spread overleaf: Machinery used for coating hemp cloth to manufacture linoleum from the 1930s to the 1960s in Farnham.

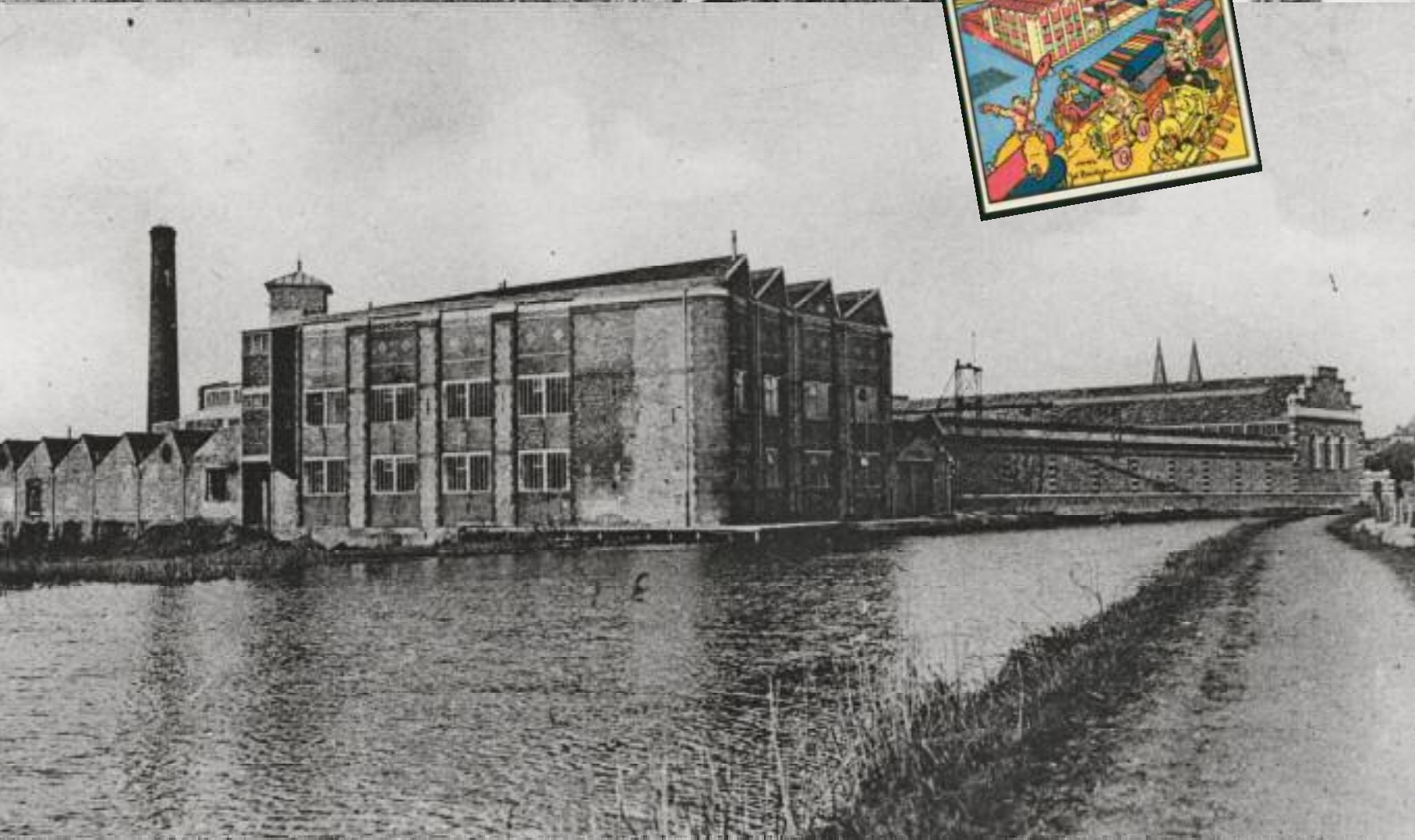
purposes such as offices and public buildings. The popularity of linoleum marked the beginning of a period of extraordinary expansion. Then, global conflicts disrupted supply lines. During World War I, the company struggled to obtain supplies of jute. To address this issue, the jute-backed product was replaced and felt-backed linoleum was launched. When peace returned, the company redoubled its efforts. It changed its name to the Dominion Oilcloth & Linoleum Company Limited in 1919 and joined forces with the Congoleum Company of Canada Limited to increase felt-backed output.

Linoleum, a modern product which brought brightness, color and practicality to homes and public buildings, was an integral feature of the Canadian lifestyle between the wars. Dominion Oilcloth reigned supreme in major Canadian public buildings and was used in the Ottawa Parliament in 1923 and for the Montreal railroad station concourse several years later. This highly innovative company launched Marboleum for floors in 1932, followed by Muroleum for walls, a flexible wall covering with noise-absorbing properties, in 1934. During this same period, it acquired Barry & Staines Canada Limited, one of its competitors based in Farnham, and in 1940, bought out Congoleum.

The year 1940 also brought World War II in Canada, which dealt a severe blow to the linoleum industry. Supply routes were blocked. The Canadian government needed linoleum for munition factories, offices, hospitals and ships, diverting product from the consumer and commercial market. Tarpaulin production was increased to make protective covers, camouflage gear, gas masks and tents. A proportion of the linoleum production capacity was put on hold to make way for the manufacture of aluminum airplane components until peace returned.



ROBERTSON SUGAR LTD



MOUZON IN THE FRENCH ARDENNES REGION: THE RISE OF FELT

Meet the Sommer family: entrepreneurs, risk-takers and pioneers, whose name is primarily associated with cozy felt and wool slippers which were very practical in the poorly-heated homes of the era. The Sommer venture began in 1880 when Alfred Sommer, a dyer from Meurthe-et-Moselle, founded a felt factory in Mouzon in the French Ardennes region, a traditional textile manufacturing area. Alfred began the business making felt and wool slippers, but eventually expanded by adding carpet and rugs to the offering. From the outset, the focus was on comfort – specializing in underlay which made carpets twice as thick, felted rugs which were much cheaper than wall-to-wall carpet and, the famous slippers. In 1912, Alfred’s son, Roger, began to help him run the family business. Inventiveness, creative flair and daring were the trademarks of Sommer junior, who was also an automobile and airplane manufacturer, flying ace and holder of two aviation records.

In 1914, Germany brought World War I to the region. The Sommer Company supplied the French forces with blankets, sheets, military great-coats and boot soles. Despite the war effort, the Ardennes region was occupied from 1914 to 1918 and the Mouzon factory was completely destroyed in the final days of the war. Alfred Sommer died in 1917, after being taken prisoner by the Germans. His son rebuilt the factory brick by brick and the first sheets of felt were dispatched from the factory in 1922.

During the 1930s, the Sommer Company became synonymous with felt. Not only did it produce 60% of French felt output, but it was also the only company to manufacture every type of felt, carrying stock of 10,000 items, according to the 50th anniversary book published in 1930. By this stage, the factory covered 35,000 m² (377,000 sq. ft.) and comprised more than twenty buildings. The modern factory, which was equipped with an electrical plant room to power the machinery, was a source of great pride to its owner and employees.

Top left: The Mouzon factory during the Belle Époque. It could manufacture 5 tons (11,000 lb) of felt per day.
 Bottom left: The Sommer factory, which burned down in 1918, was rebuilt by Roger Sommer, the founder’s son.
 Above: Advertising enthusiastically vaunts the merits of felted underlay in the 1930s.



*By 1930, Sommer felt was everywhere
- in wool, wool blend, pile,
pile and wool, or printed form.*

Roger Sommer managed his modern company in what would be known as the “paternalistic” style. The 50th anniversary book states: “Roger Sommer lives in a village with a population of 2,000. He realized that the first priority was housing for the workers. He had the necessary houses built for them, regardless of the expense. The Director, engineers, foremen and workers live in attractive dwellings. The gardens supply the families with the vegetables they need. Felt workers spend Sundays outdoors resting after the week’s exertions and enjoying healthy country pursuits. Workers must be **happy**. Roger Sommer has done everything possible to ensure the well-being of his workers. He provides them with premium quality food at very low prices. The factory has its own staff co-operative store which is superbly equipped with refrigerated cellars. Employees can buy meat and groceries at very good prices. In the evening, they spend a pleasant few hours in the factory movie theater, which seats 500 people.”

By 1930, Sommer felt was everywhere - in wool, wool blend, pile, pile and wool, or printed form. It was used for keeping warm in the form of the famous slippers or other ready-to-wear items. Felt dolls brought joy to little girls. Felt was prevalent in home products because it provided comfort and noise insulation, muffling the sound of footsteps. It was used in rugs, rug pads, draft blockers for doors and windows, and shoe brushes. It was also popular with housewives because it was a substantial money-saver: Sommer underlay made a carpet last three times as long. Stair tread covers were even developed to protect the edges of steps from wear and tear. A motorist climbing into a car, which was the height of luxury in France at that time, would sit in comfort courtesy of Sommer padded upholstery. In offices, felt was found in typewriter mats that facilitated rapid typing. There were also countless other industrial applications.

Previous double-page spread: Women mixing felt in the early 20th century.



James Tissot, *Too early*, oil on canvas.

Parquet for the elite

Parquet established its credentials courtesy of the palace of Versailles, becoming both an interior design feature and a symbol of luxury and splendor. This jewel in the crown of French royalty was copied throughout Europe, from Swedish castles to Russian palaces such as the Peterhof, where visitors wore felt slippers to protect the precious parquet from the ravages of time. It became a work of art and the various designs bore the name of the castles where princes first walked on them, such as Chantilly in France or Arenberg in Belgium. Literature, and later the silver screen, shared a fascination with ball scenes, following dancers as they floated across highly polished parquet beneath glittering chandeliers. As an indicator of social status, a world away

from humble wooden floors, parquet was maintained by an army of servants who polished and waxed it on their knees. During the 19th century, it was the turn of the middle classes to glide across parquet floors, following in the footsteps of the nobility and thus displaying their newly-acquired wealth. In Baron Haussmann’s recently redeveloped Paris, new apartments were adorned with solid wood parquet which was buffed and waxed by many hands. Oak, chestnut, pine, acacia, poplar, ash, maple, beech and cherry wood were some of the many varieties used. In Sweden, which was just emerging from poverty and fast becoming wealthy, the new ruling class built townhouses and apartments in which parquet was a decorative feature.



The Mihels Factory was listed on the Vienna Stock Exchange and was the largest in the region.



BACKA PALANKA: HEMP AND JUTE ON THE BANKS OF THE DANUBE

The four Mihels brothers – Karl, Johan, Emerih and Julius – believed there was a future in hemp. So much so that they pooled the family funds in 1884 to set up a textile mill in the Vojvodina region, which was ruled by Austria at that time. The area was a melting pot, a migration hub, where a number of Germans and later Slovaks lived. In this part of the Empire many languages were spoken and a number of nationalities lived side by side. Here, surrounding what is now known as Backa Palanka (whose name was first mentioned in 1918 when the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was created) there were brick, tobacco and silk factories, as well as mills. A vibrant cultural life flourished and one of the earliest Serbian libraries was founded there in 1888.

Manufacturing of many types of rope, straps and sacks from hemp was booming and became a key activity in Vojvodina. The province produced half of all Serbian output in the 1920s and 1930s. Hemp was grown using intensive methods since the destruction caused by World War I had pushed prices up significantly. Ten thousand people were employed in hemp processing – steeping, crushing, pressing, separating fibers from stalks, spinning or weaving – either in small businesses or in a handful of large companies such as the one owned by the Mihels brothers – the Mihels Factory for Hemp Soaking and Rope Production. The Mihels Factory was listed on the Vienna Stock Exchange and was the largest in the region. It exported its products to Germany, Austria and Hungary. The factory employed nearly 400 people at a time when it was highly unusual in the Danube area to have more than a hundred or so people on the payroll. Preparing hemp was extremely unpleasant for the workers, who were usually very young women, since processing the hemp released clouds of dust and caused many respiratory complaints. Legislation was passed in 1935 enforcing the installation of ventilation, but the owners of the various factories were reluctant to make the necessary investment at that time.

In 1926, and again in 1928, the Danube flooded the Backa Palanka hemp plantations and causing problems for the processing industry. In order to offset the shortfall, company owners responded by introducing jute in 1930. The fibers were

Above and left: Spinning at Backa Palanka, early 20th century.

sent to Vienna and processed into sacks and wall coverings there. The company adopted the name Jute and Hemp SC, demonstrating its dual capability, and its headquarters were transferred to Belgrade, the capital of the new state of Yugoslavia, which was proclaimed in 1929.

During World War II, the Backa Palanka region was occupied by the Hungarians, who were German allies, and the factory was cut off from its headquarters in Belgrade. The young patriots there refused to submit to the yoke of fascism and a detachment of partisans played a heroic role in the struggle against Nazi occupation by fighting on the home front or joining units of the national liberation movement. Sadly, ten factory employees lost their lives.

SWEDEN: PARQUET AND LINDERMAN BOARD

The story begins in southern Sweden with a joiner called Anders Martensson. This craftsman transformed his workshop into a factory and set up AB Malmö Snickerfabrik (the Malmö Joinery Company) in 1886. The province of Scania, in southern Sweden, was an ideal location for woodworking with its oak and beech forests that were renowned for the quality of their timber. The Malmö Joinery Company produced furniture such as sofas, but more particularly, timber and joinery products for the construction industry. It employed some twenty people. The company expanded in 1890 under Rudolf Fredrik Berg, a former cement works manager, who decided to gamble on parquet. Parquet was very popular with the affluent middle classes at the turn of the century. Berg saw the opportunity and took the necessary steps to enter the parquet market. He built a new factory in Limhamn, near Malmö, and acquired huge forests to supply the business with oak and beech. Berg not only manufactured and marketed the parquet, but also arranged for it to be laid, and backed it by a warranty.

When Berg died in 1907, Ernst Wehtje took over as company director. He had to build a new plant in 1911, as the Limhamn factory burned to the ground. During the Swedish economic recession, in order to avoid bankruptcy, the company



Above: List of prizes won in 1911, with the only known photo of the factory located in Limhamn.

Right: The main Skanska Parkettfabriken factory building in Hanaskog in 1907, which was bought by Limhamn in 1942.



The riches of the Swedish forests

At one time, Sweden was dominated by forests: 54% of the country was covered by forest. Birch, aspen, spruce and Scots pine punctuated the landscape, with oak, ash, alder and beech, white poplar, hornbeam and lime trees thriving further south in warmer climates. The government kept a vigilant eye on these riches following the mismanagement prevalent in the 19th century, when large-scale felling jeopardized forests in some regions. Trees were cut indiscriminately to make way for livestock and for firewood, but there was no replanting. The country passed legislation in 1903 to preserve its forests based on the Finnish model: by law a new forest had to be replanted for every forest felled, since they constituted a national treasure. Forests had been a source of wood and fuel since time

immemorial and also supplied mines and the steel industry. They played a part in the economic boom of the lumber and paper industries. In 1922, René Musset in his *Annales de Géographie* estimated that wood production in Sweden was 35 million m³ (1.24 billion cu. ft.) of which 2.2 million m³ (77.7 million cu. ft.) was for domestic consumption, 6 million m³ (212 million cu. ft.) was turned into charcoal and 9.6 million m³ (339 million cu. ft.) was exported or consumed by export industries (with excess deforestation accounting for the remainder). During the 1930s, the lumber industry became the country's largest sector. Swedes have preserved a unique relationship with their forests. It is said that they used to wash their floors before Christmas so that they smelled of fresh wood.

Left: Carl Larsson, *Bathroom*.

Right: Prince Eugene, *Forest*.



Above: Limhamns' parquet catalogue for 1928, a year in which the company sold over 80,000 m² (860,000 sq. ft.) of parquet.

was forced to sell its Malmö sites, subsidiary businesses and forests and to focus exclusively on parquet. The parquet was assembled in the Limhamns joinery workshop then, after another fire, at the Liljeholmen plant near Stockholm.

By 1925, there were far too many parquet companies for a single country, so consolidation of companies began to take place. Over the next few years, the company experienced a variety of trials and tribulations and was eventually reborn under the name Limhamns Traindustri AB, managed by Hugo Wehtje. It ranked among the leading companies in the sector, marketing over 80,000 m² (860,000 sq. ft.) of parquet in 1928, at a time when domestic demand was approximately 500,000 m² (5.3 million sq. ft.).

Limhamns Traindustri AB began to innovate prolifically in the late 1930s. The first phase was the invention of the Linderman board in 1938: an assembly of solid wood rods forming a long strip which could then be given a tongue and groove profile. This was the first long, mass-produced, ready-to-lay board. It was cheaper both to manufacture and to lay – an important consideration at a time when labor costs were rising.

Being profitable became even more difficult when the cost of solid oak and beech began to rise as the company no longer owned its forests. The company came up with the solution - replacing one of the components of flooring with pine - and carved out a reputation for ingenuity. This change led to the invention of multilayer parquet which had the added advantage of reducing play and warping in the wood. Multilayer parquet was an immediate hit and required the company to look for a new site since the Liljeholmen premises proved to be too small. It opted for Hanaskog, and this signaled the start of the modern phase of the company's history.

Sweden was one of the few European countries to be spared involvement in World War II. Therefore, the company continued to expand during the early 1940s. An existing factory, built at the turn of the century, was taken over in 1942 and modernized, becoming fully operational in 1944. Meanwhile, another company was purchased in Ronneby, on the coast. This gave the business a factory near a port, facilitating the transport of goods and allowing them to enter the export market once peace was restored in Europe in the mid-1940s.

THE UNITED STATES: FROM DAIRY PAILS TO RUBBER GASKETS

In the late 1800s, in the vicinity of Middlefield, Ohio, Swiss cheese was standard fare made by the many dairies in this small town. The cheese was made by the Amish, most of whom came from Switzerland and Germany, to traditional recipes passed down by their ancestors. Middlefield flourished with the arrival of the railroad in 1873, as this link to the modern world attracted entrepreneurs.

In 1895, a group of Middlefield citizens, led by Joe Johnson, founded the Udall-Shellito Company. Joe Johnson was a wooden pail maker and came from one of the town's most prominent families, owners of an agricultural supply store. At one point, he became Mayor of Middlefield and was the first citizen in town to own a car. When founded, the Udall-Shellito Company made wooden components for barrels.

In 1898, the company was renamed Ohio Pail and manufactured and supplied wooden pails and barrels to local Amish farms with wood sourced from all over the country. The company was very successful and eventually all milk in the region was transported in Ohio Pail containers.

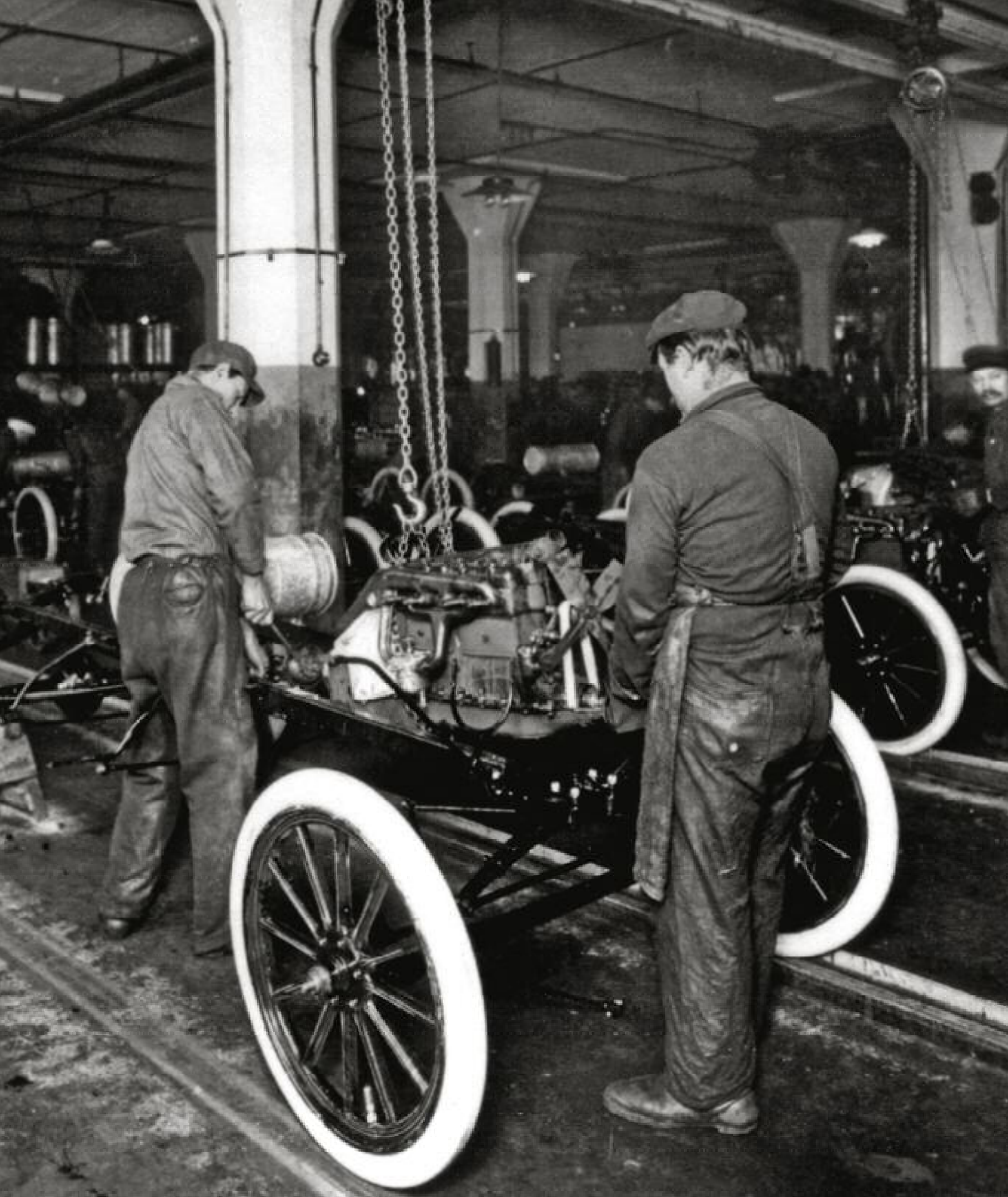
The factory was gutted by fire several times, plunging the whole town into darkness on one occasion as Ohio Pail also supplied Middlefield's electricity. Each time, the factory was rebuilt. Given the flammability of their product, and the lack of water-tightness inherent in wooden buckets, the company decided to look for another solution. As a result, Ohio Pail converted to steel buckets. These buckets were more reliable and popular with customers, especially the large paint companies. Ironically, it wasn't the steel bucket that led to the company's success. It was the design of the lid - a version sealed with a rubber gasket - which would rewrite the company's future.

The gasket-sealed lid met with universal approval and the company struggled to meet demand. However, some customers complained about the quality of the gaskets and some gaskets proved to be defective. In order to preserve its healthy market share, the company approached a specialist manufacturer in the town of Akron, which was experiencing financial difficulties during the Great Depression.



**Above: Pail with
a rubber gasket.
Right: Workers
at the Cadillac assembly
plant circa 1920.**





Above: Allibert factories specialize in footwear comfort products.

Left: Model T Ford assembly line circa 1920 using Ohio Pail rubber components.

Its employees joined Ohio Pail to design a high-quality gasket facility. Output of gaskets far outstripped the number of buckets being produced, so the company found new markets – selling extruded rubber tubing to the automobile industry. This enabled the company to weather the Depression.

In 1935, the original pail manufacturing operation was sold and the company changed its name a year later to Johnson Rubber, highlighting its new line of business. The old buildings were destroyed to make way for a modern factory and an extruded rubber department was created.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Johnson Rubber contributed to the war effort and new uses were found for its products. Every day, 50,000 gaskets for munition boxes left the Middlefield factory.

MONESTIER-DE-CLERMONT: A FRENCH SOLE SUCCESS STORY

Winters were hard in Monestier-de-Clermont. This little Alpine village 800 meters (2,600 feet) above sea level had a population of fewer than 600 people and was in danger of becoming deserted. However, the village had no intention of sinking into a snowy decline and embraced tourism as the miracle solution. The healthy mountain air, the proximity of Grenoble, the existence of several hotels and a mineral water spring were all assets in the bid to transform a sleepy village into a popular resort in the Dauphiné area in summer and winter alike. One of the earliest skiing competitions was organized there in 1908 by a Grenoble club and a local committee. A military brass band and a 7-meter (23-foot) high triumphal arch greeted the 1,500 people who attended the downhill, cross-country and ski jump events. The committee office had some fifteen members at the time and the sports committee was led by a young man in his twenties called Joseph Allibert.

Allibert's dynamism was on a par with that of his village. He was a hay merchant who shipped deliveries all over the world - from Marseille to as far away as South Africa. He had the foresight to open a factory in his village manufacturing insoles made from straw woven by the villagers during the long winter evenings. In those days people kept the same pair of shoes for many years but changed the insoles often. The insoles even came in summer and winter versions.

Two years after the Allibert Company was founded, World War I broke out and Joseph Allibert was sent to the Front. His wife ran the business until Allibert returned wounded, demobilized. In the post-WWI years, Allibert Soles conquered Europe and sold extremely well in the French colonies. 130 people worked in the factory producing 300,000 soles per month. Allibert Senior, as he was known in the village, was also an advertising and marketing pioneer and was one of the first people to display a giant advertising banner on a building visible from the road.

In August 1940, a young soldier, Bernard Deconinck, who was a 21-year old medical student and the son of a northern French textile industrialist, found himself in the village of Monestier-de-Clermont. As he belonged to the only French regiment authorized under the terms of the Armistice agreement, he volunteered to supervise a compulsory work camp for 250 young people. Two years later, he was demobilized and married Joseph Allibert's daughter. Bernard's native region in northern France had been classified a prohibited area by the occupying authorities. This meant the newly-wed could not return to his home. His father-in-law suggested joining the business, on a temporary basis, until he could leave.



Above: Joseph Allibert, founder of the eponymous company. Allibert insoles cornered the market in Europe.



The Martel brothers' dining room designed by architect Robert Mallet-Stevens circa 1920.

The golden age of linoleum

Linoleum was the first modern, democratic floor covering. This invention – patented in 1863 by a Scot, Sir Frederick Walton – had a revolutionary impact. From the late 19th century right up until the 1950s, it was one of the few products which was simultaneously practical, hardwearing, non-flammable, low-maintenance and cheap. Before the advent of linoleum, the only available floor coverings for homes or communal buildings were wood or tiles. In the early 20th century, about one hundred factories were combining natural materials (linseed oil, jute, cork and pigments) to make linoleum by the square meter. It was everywhere in Europe and North America,

gradually growing more sophisticated as it became feasible to create hand-drawn designs. In Italy, Giovanni Battista Pirelli, founder of the eponymous group, purchased a factory in Narni in 1894 that specialized in manufacturing gutta-percha rubber goods which became the Società Italiana del Linoleum S.p.A. four years later. It was the first company to produce this material in southern Europe. In the very early 20th century, the Dominion Oilcloth Company began manufacturing linoleum in Canada. The German Bauhaus movement, the trend in architecture and design in the interwar years, latched onto linoleum and established its design credentials. Progress, modernity and linoleum were synonymous. A truly 20th century home or business had linoleum underfoot. People paced up and down on it on railroad station concourses, in hospitals and it also graced shop counters. Linoleum was deployed during World War Two with ships, munitions factories, hospitals and military bases swallowing up the bulk of all output. Linoleum played its part in the war effort because it was hardwearing in even the most extreme conditions and easy to clean. When the war ended, domestic linoleum use resumed, but only for a short time. During the 1950s, the introduction of vinyl sounded the death knell for linoleum. It would resurface in the late 20th century, carried by a wave of environmental awareness.

The mid-1940s marked the beginning of an era of reconstruction in Europe. Industries serving the building and consumer markets were operating at full capacity as soon as machinery became available.

In North America, companies which had answered the call to support the war effort resumed their original activities. Innovations proliferated, changing manufacturing methods and equipment.

1947 marked the birth of “Tarkett”, the first vinyl floor covering manufactured by the Swedish company Limhamns. In France, in the early 1950s, the new Allibert factory specialized in manufacturing plastic products and the Sommer factories invented Tapiflex. In 1957 and 1962 respectively, Domco, leader in Canadian linoleum, and the company which would eventually become Sintelon in Yugoslavia, began manufacturing vinyl flooring. The first rolls of vinyl flooring left the Eurofloor factory in Luxembourg in 1963. In the United States, Johnson Rubber manufactured its first baseboards in 1964.



The age of entrepreneurs

From 1945 to the early 1970s





Above: Early Tarkett vinyl floor coverings in the 1950s. They were extremely durable and ideal for commercial premises such as this grocery store (left) or school canteen and hospital (below).

A



After the grueling war years and shortages, Europeans sought comfort, dreaming of a cozy life in modern, well-heated and well-equipped homes. Post-war North America experienced economic growth due to pent-up consumer demand and affordable mortgage rates that fueled a housing boom. Optimism and resilience were universal sentiments. The various companies which would eventually make up Tarkett shared these characteristics of working towards a more comfortable world, adapting to changes in society and forging a vision for the future. The postwar world was developing at high speed. A multitude of products appeared during the three postwar decades, along with a new generation of management. Whether they inherited their businesses or rose through the ranks, these managers transformed the industry.

IN SWEDEN, 'TARKETT' RHYMES WITH *PARKETT*

The postwar years found Europe in a state of destruction and chaos, whereas Sweden, which had remained neutral, was unscathed and determined to capitalize on its strength, innovate, develop its industry and conquer foreign markets. Construction was booming on the domestic front due to Swedes' growing prosperity and also across the continent as a whole, as reconstruction was underway. Buildings had to be constructed quickly and with wood prices soaring, less costly options for interiors were being sought.

Thus, when Limhamn conducted trials in 1947 and marketed a plastic floor covering a year later, it attracted a great deal of interest. This new vinyl floor covering was named Tarkett to stress its relationship with parquet – parkett in Swedish – and would remain a key product associated with Sweden. Local authorities were very enthusiastic about vinyl, which was much cheaper than parquet, low maintenance and resilient. Tarkett vinyl also reduced demand for forestry resources.

Limhamn was split at that time between Hanaskog and Ronneby, the locations of the company's two factories. The newest factory was built in 1951 exclusively for vinyl manufacturing. Willi Senn, a young Swiss engineer specializing in designing industrial machinery, was brought in to oversee the successful



Left: Heterogeneous vinyl floor covering was manufactured until 1985. Imitation ceramic tiles.

construction of this plant: “When I graduated, Limhamns offered me the opportunity to come to Sweden to build a vinyl flooring factory as the company had begun manufacturing vinyl tiles on a small scale. It was my first contract. In early 1951, during my honeymoon, I therefore came to Ronneby just to ‘have a look’. I stayed and set up a much bigger manufacturing plant than had originally been planned”.

Initial output was modest – 50,000 m² (538,000 sq. ft.) in 1948. Production rose to 400,000 m² (4.3 million sq. ft.) in the mid-1950s. However parquet was still going strong and Limhamns manufactured 700,000 m² (7.53 million sq. ft.) in that same year.

In addition to tiles, vinyl could be manufactured into baseboards, edging and ramps. Manufacturing output was split in 1960, with Hanaskog focusing on wood and Ronneby on vinyl. By 1961, Willi Senn was Technical Director of the company and plastic and wood flooring were being manufactured in equal quantities of 1 million m² (10.76 sq. ft.) each. This year also marked the appearance of homogeneous vinyl. Two years later, the first homogeneous vinyl flooring with a foam backing (acoustic flooring) appeared. Public buildings all installed it in rapid succession. Limhamns was also a pioneer in recycling in the late 1950s.

In 1966, the owners sold a share of the capital and the company was listed on the Stock Exchange in 1967 under its new name –Tarkett.

BERNARD DECONINCK REWRITES ALLIBERT’S FUTURE

At the age of 23, and without a scrap of industrial experience, Bernard Deconinck found himself managing a company with 130 employees, manufacturing ultra-soft insoles in Monestier-de-Clermont, 20 miles south of Grenoble. This former medical student, brought to the Alps by the vagaries of war, took over the business from his father-in-law, Joseph Allibert. Allibert was loath to take out business loans to implement his son-in-law’s modernization schemes and decided to retire. The company was too small to accommodate two such strong personalities who were equally reluctant to share power.



Having gained control of the factory, Bernard Deconinck realized that insoles lacked future potential and strove to diversify. Nobody could have anticipated that the humble shoehorn would change the company's fortunes. The Allibert Company boosted turnover with externally sourced products, including useful accessory: shoehorn, as well as shoe polish, Saphir shoe brushes and Roa laces. The shoehorns were manufactured from molded plastic in Oyonnax by a manufacturer who never met deadlines. This infuriated Bernard Deconinck, who imported an injection molding press from the United States in the early 1950s in order to manufacture his own plastic accessories. This machine was very effective, but was underutilized. He therefore sought out and secured customers in the refrigerator industry who required small plastic components which perfectly matched the capacity of the newly acquired press. The Allibert Company's future lay in plastics. Bernard Deconinck realized that plastic was the shape of things to come and that this material would be used in all the capital and consumer goods currently in such short supply. In 1955, only 10% of households owned a refrigerator. His customers, Frigidaire, Norge and Kelvinator, also wanted larger components such as frames for containers or doors, which would require larger machinery. Deconinck therefore bought two Italian presses, which subsequently transpired to be badly calibrated, causing major problems. However, his customers were unaware of this issue and placed orders for plastic containers to replace the existing poorly-insulated design made of enameled pressed metal.

When the Monestier site became too small, Bernard Deconinck bought an abandoned factory in Grenoble and installed new American presses, similar to his very first model. Annual turnover topped the symbolic million mark in old French francs. He wanted to manufacture containers, which had previously been made in two parts and glued together, as a single component in order to steal a march on his competitors. This involved purchasing the world's largest injection molding press, the P300, which had recently been developed by his American supplier. When it arrived a few months later, it did not disappoint. The scheme was a resounding success! Radio set, record player and television manufacturers now wanted plastic casings and cabinets rather than wood. Thomson based in Angers and Radiotechnique based in Suresnes, representing the Philips and Radiola brands, soon became major customers. In 1960, when manufacturing also outgrew

Above: A shoehorn, the first plastic item manufactured by the Allibert Company.
Right: Tintin braves the storm wearing Allibert insoles on one of the small number of advertising posters created by the cartoonist Hergé in the post-war period.





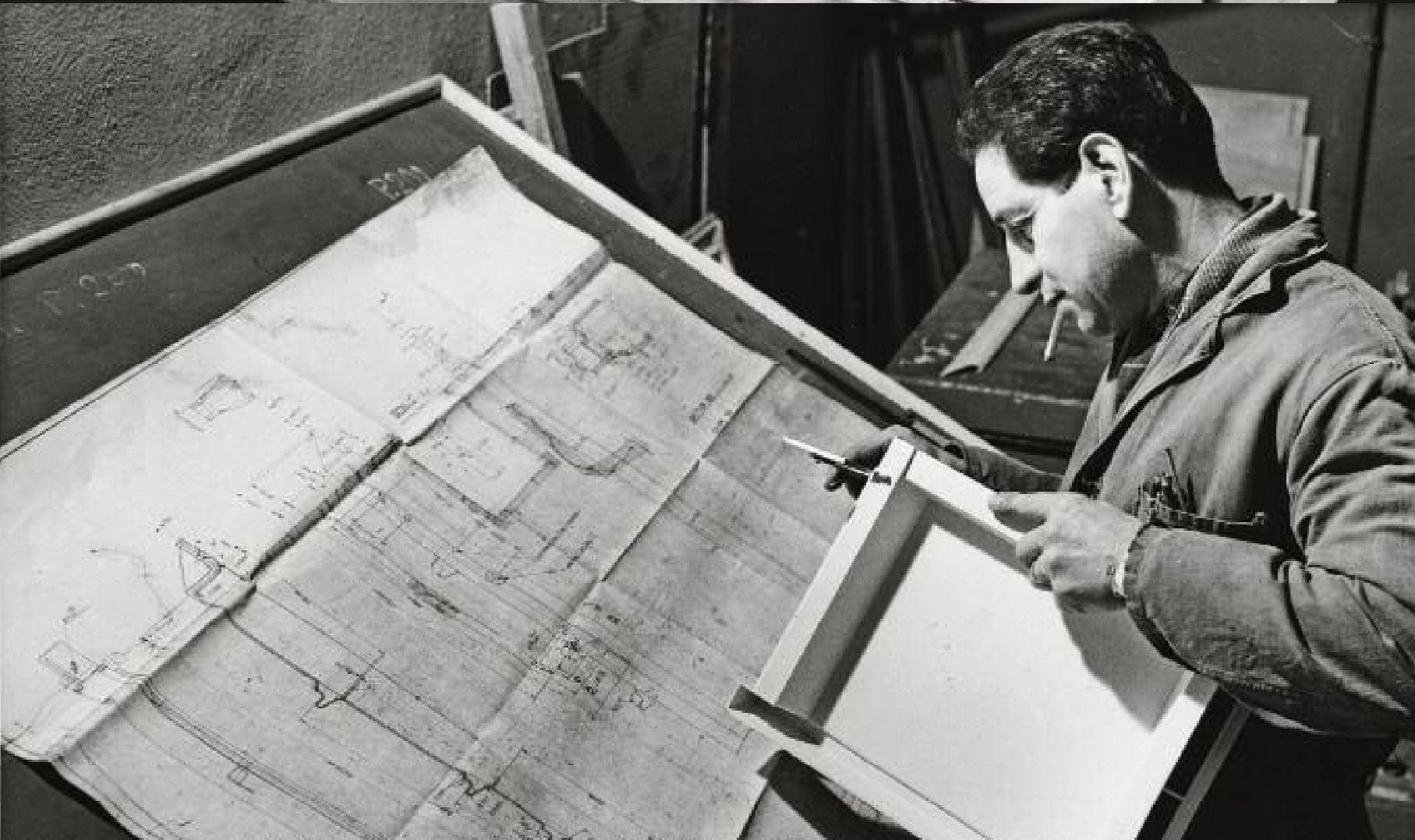
ALLIBERT 

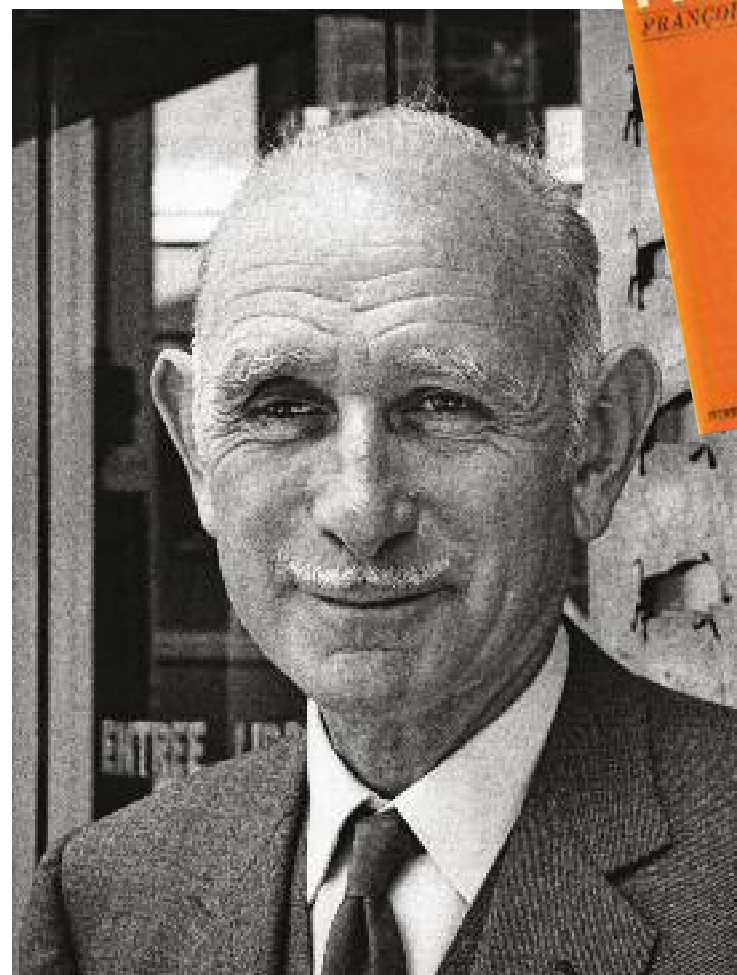
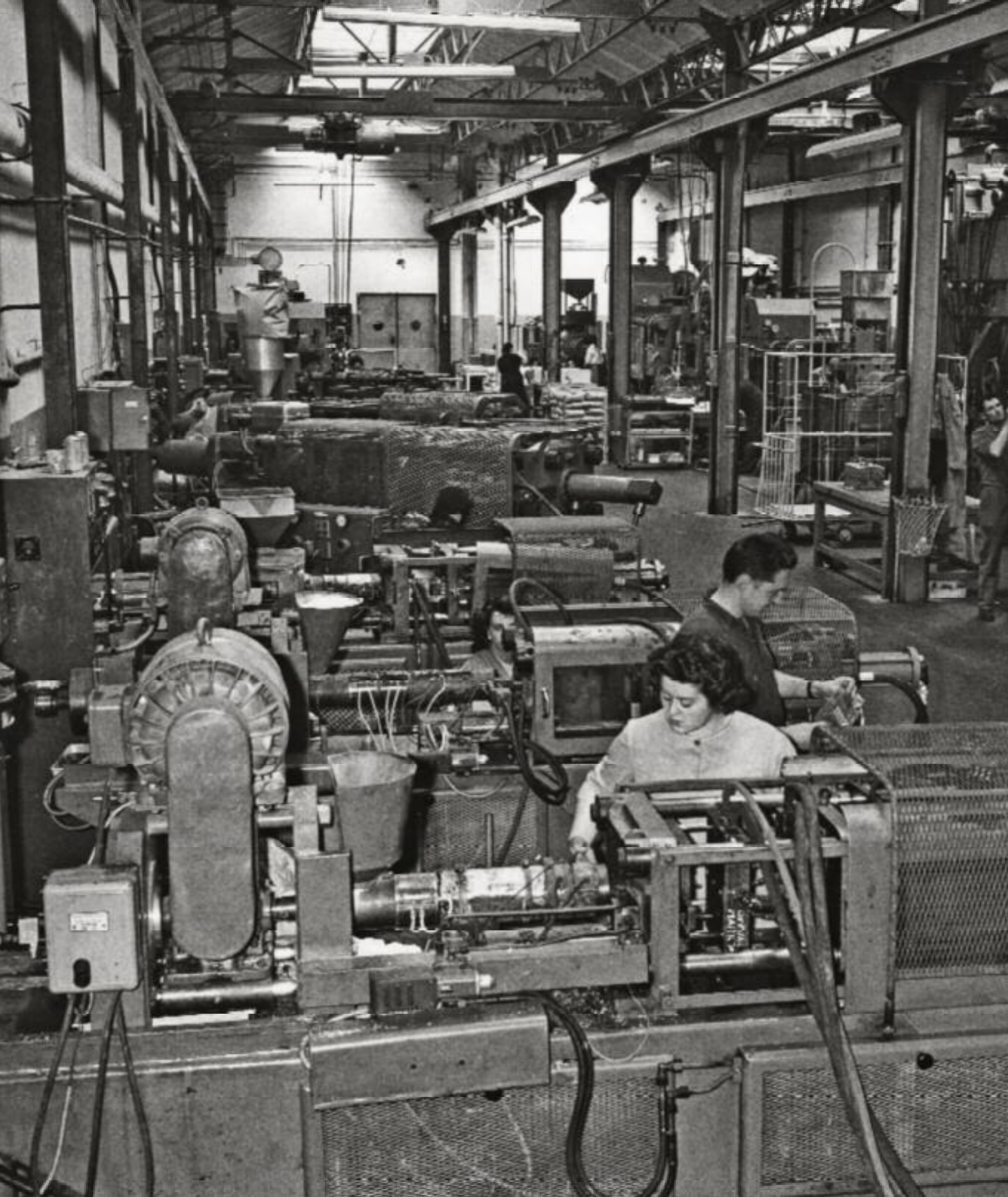
Left: The first generation of homogeneous vinyl floor coverings in the 1960s.
Above: Bernard Deconinck fits out modern bathrooms.

the Grenoble factory, Bernard Deconinck built a factory in Méru, 30 miles north of Paris. At the same time, the Allibert Company marketed its first bathroom cabinet, which became a bestseller with the general public, especially in Germany where it is still referred to as "ein Allibert". Its origins lie in a meeting with a hotelier in Nice who wanted to retain the same design of bathroom cabinet in his guest rooms, but to replace wood with plastic. It was a simple design with two sliding mirror doors. It would not have been profitable to fulfill this single order since injection molding presses were expensive to operate and could manufacture several thousand items per run. However, Bernard Deconinck had sound business sense and a keen eye for new ideas and launched a mass-produced version. There was huge demand for the product. A variety of designs were created with features such as three swivel mirrors, integral lighting and drawers and production very swiftly exceeded the hundred thousand cabinets per month mark. The Grenoble factory focused exclusively on manufacturing bathroom cabinets, bathroom accessories and a small number of household products. The comfort revolution was underway, but the automobile revolution was also gaining traction. The automobile industry was keen to replace as many metal components as possible with plastic. The Allibert Company was quick to invest in this promising sector as a supplier of automobile interior components. In 1963, the first injection-molded dashboard for the 2CV rolled off the production line at the Méru factory, which manufactured exclusively for industrial customers. The company's automobile industry business grew steadily, providing the main source of revenue by the late 1960s.

The Allibert Company was also involved in manufacturing polyethylene tote boxes and bottle racks and bought out a company specializing in this sector with a factory in Gaillon, approximately 60 miles from Paris. Revenues sky-rocketed in the 1960s with these three new factories. The Frankfurt subsidiary, created in 1965, marketed almost two thirds of output from the Grenoble factory and a high proportion of output from the Gaillon factory. Tote boxes were of considerable interest to the BSN group, with whom the Allibert company went into business briefly at the end of the decade.







FRANÇOIS SOMMER – A TECHNICAL AND SOCIAL INNOVATOR

The Mouzon felt factory, which was partially destroyed during the war, resumed operations under the management of Roger Sommer, assisted by his sons. The company's future took a whole new turn in 1953 when felt and plastic were combined to create Tapiflex, a carpet with a plastic surface on a needled felt backing. François Sommer came up with the concept for this new floor covering which was highly flexible and soundproof and it was designed using the company's original staple product: felt.

François Sommer began managing the company with his brother Pierre. He was a legendary figure who had been awarded the distinction of "Companion of the Liberation". The Sommer family was patriotic to its core and the traumas of World War I were still fresh in its mind. As an airman from 1939 to 1940 and a Resistance fighter from the outset in occupied France, François Sommer had rallied to General de Gaulle in London and joined the Lorraine squadron of the Free French Air Force, becoming squadron leader. In peacetime, he successfully combined his various passions: his business, hunting (he was responsible for the creation of the Museum of Hunting in Paris), photography, writing (Hemingway wrote the preface to one of his books), and the Ardennes countryside where he built an estate.

1959 marked the birth of Tapisom, the first synthetic needled floor covering. Sommer opened up a new market with this very affordable product. Somvyl, a vinyl foam product, appeared shortly after. In order to capitalize on this commercial advantage and to create enough space to expand, a factory devoted exclusively to wall and floor coverings was built in Sedan, a few kilometers from the historic headquarters in Mouzon. During an official visit in 1965, French Prime Minister Georges Pompidou toured this modern plant. The future French President was driven round the factory aisles by François Sommer in his Land Rover. In that same year, the felt factory in Mouzon made way for Sommer SA, a company with 1,916 employees.



Above: François Sommer, a pioneer of employee profit-sharing. The wild boar was the emblem of the Ardennes region and of the Sommer company, whose CEO was a keen hunter. Right and previous double-page spreads: Reporting at the Grenoble factory in the 1960s.



Above: Leaflet distributed by Dominion in the 1950s and 1960s.

Left: Demonstration on vinyl flooring at a trade fair – United States, 1950s.

François Sommer rubbed shoulders with the great and the good and also had a reputation as a social innovator. Not content with technical experimentation, he was also a pioneer of employee profit-sharing plans and promoted the idea in political circles. Monsieur François, as he was known to his employees, introduced profit-sharing in 1961, when this approach was not mandatory (an optional ruling was passed in 1959). Furthermore, he wrote two books on this subject dear to his heart: *Au-delà du salaire* (Beyond salary) in 1966 and *Participer* (Profit-sharing) in 1968.

In the first year, employees received the equivalent of almost two months' salary in profit share. The bonus peaked in 1964 at the equivalent of more than four and a half months' salary! Unfortunately, the amount dropped in the early 1970s. This windfall was split, with one portion being paid before the summer holidays and the remainder in February. Former employees recall how auto dealers used to rush to the Sommer factory at bonus time, knowing the employees had funds to buy cars and they could easily boost their annual car sales.

Over a period of twenty years, the company increased turnover thirty-fold as Tapiflex, Tapisom, Muravyl, and Tapiflex triconfort, cornered the market in apartments, schools, hospitals and lobbies.

The company also turned to the automobile industry, designing felt and vinyl items with sound and heat insulation properties for interiors and engines.

In the late 1960s, the Sommer group employed 6,500 people, 5,200 of them in France, and had 26 subsidiaries, including 17 abroad. It won Olympic recognition when Tapisom was used to cover Grenoble ice rink for the medal ceremony at the 1968 Winter Olympics.

DOMCO COMBINES LINOLEUM AND VINYL IN CANADA

Domco was synonymous with linoleum; thus the Canadian company was considered the undisputed linoleum specialist. In the postwar years, supply struggled to meet demand. According to a 1948 advertisement for Marboleum, which had the look of marble and the flexibility of linoleum, "a smart interior has to have

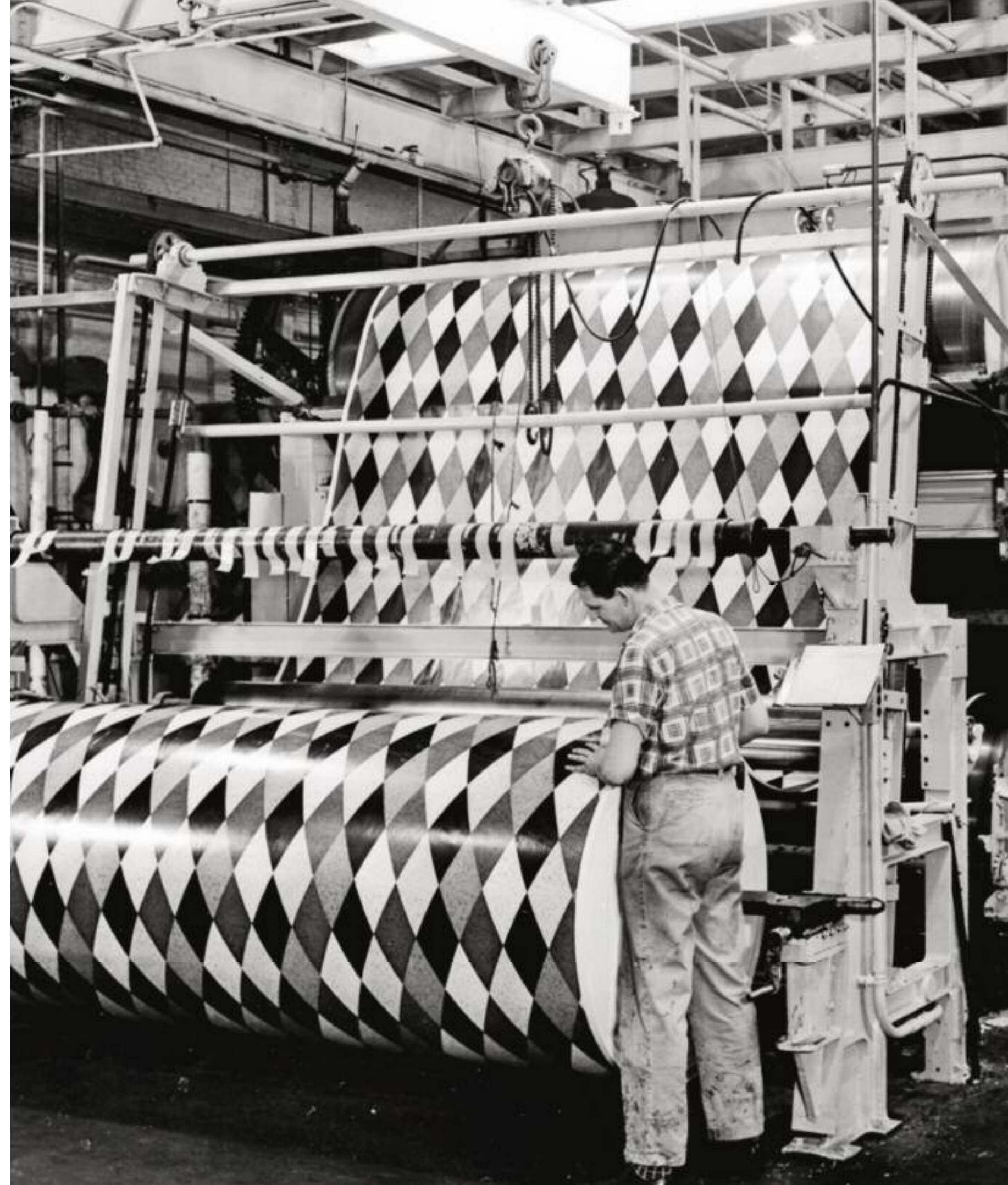
beautiful linoleum parquet floor.” In the late 1940s, the company had over 1,600 employees, who were well-cared for, according to the book published in 1947 to celebrate the company’s 75th anniversary. Domco supplied a medical service, with a doctor on duty five days a week and a full-time qualified nurse on-site, a cafeteria and canteen which was supervised by nutritionists. There was even a leisure club which offered a wide range of recreational activities.

In 1957, the company began to produce vinyl, rapidly expanding its product range (asphalt tiles, vinyl by the yard and cushioned vinyl sheets). But, linoleum was still the preferred choice in the 1960s as it was fashionable, low-maintenance and very durable. A wonderful advertisement dating from 1955 showing a tiled floor stated: “Linoleum is the fashionable, low-maintenance option for kitchens”. “It lasts over a hundred years,” recalled Marc Lemieux, Domco Design Support Manager. “In Quebec, which is known as the ‘province of a thousand steeples’, it was used for church floors as well as in government buildings. Then vinyl tiles came along, which had added decorative potential.”

The year 1967 brought major changes to the company. Manufacturing shifted to Farnham with the creation of Domco Inc., born of the merger between Dominion Oilcloth and Linoleum Company, the Congoleum Corporation and the Barry and Staines Linoleum Company. The product range was reduced to focus primarily on vinyl. Also in this year, Domco created its own distribution network – as a result, Domco had warehouses in major Canadian cities and a network of representatives who could offer retailers supply and credit services. According to former company employees, developing credit sales meant that Domco’s first retailers could set up their own businesses. Many of these retailers started out in business with Domco – and that same business was handed down to the next two generations, with many store owners recalling how their grandparents started out with Domco. This boom period came to an end in the early 1970s when the company experienced serious difficulties culminating in the sale of its historic headquarters in Montreal.



Above: Congoleum stand in the early 1960s. The merger with Congoleum Canada offered tar-coated products for residential use. Right: The United States champions modernity and sets the pace. Vinyl flooring manufacturing in the US in the 1950s.



“Living room, bathroom, garden”

In the late 1940s, Europeans viewed North American living standards as a Hollywood dream compared to their run-down, badly-heated homes. Fewer than 10% of apartments had bathrooms and one in three homes had no running water. American housewife's basic appliances, such as washing machines and refrigerators, seemed the height of luxury compared to hand washing, meat safes and communal lavatories on the landing. The baby boom in Europe fueled new housing, built to accommodate the next generation. New apartment buildings, often located on high-rise estates, were popping up everywhere. They were spacious and met the modern criteria for comfort, with fully-fitted kitchens, separate bathrooms and combined living and dining rooms. New vinyl products, which were low-maintenance and durable, arrived just in time to brighten up the lobbies, corridors and interiors of these new buildings. Vinyl products were in demand throughout Europe. Sommer's Tapiflex and Eurofloor's floor

coverings offered a variety of new interior design options as well as sound and heat insulation. Walls were covered with Somvyl, a flexible covering manufactured in Sedan, which had advanced sound insulation properties and was very easy to hang. Allibert furniture reigned supreme in the brand-new bathrooms. In Germany, the Allibert bathroom cabinet was so revered that it was referred to as “ein Allibert”. On little terraces, or in the gardens of detached houses, people were soon relaxing outdoors on Allibert plastic chairs. If you fancied a cold drink, then the bottle was also stored in a rack made by Allibert. Sweden's Bromma airport featured gleaming Tarkett flooring. Thousands of new homes built to address the Swedish housing shortage in 1945 installed multilayer wood from the Hanaskog factory. In Yugoslavia, people relaxed at home on a cozy rug or other floor covering, manufactured by Sintelon. On the other side of the Atlantic, linoleum still held sway in kitchens, but vinyl was taking its place in most public buildings.

Top: Allibert bathroom cabinet.
Below: A 1960s American interior.



In 1969, the company once again changed names: Sintelon.

THE FIRST VINYL FLOORING IN YUGOSLAVIA

The postwar years were extremely difficult in Yugoslavia. There were widespread shortages of materials, labor, energy, spare parts and transport. The Mihels brothers' factory, which was nationalized in 1946, was now called Mihalj Samo Jute and Hemp and continued to produce jute in very difficult conditions, salvaging second-hand equipment, including looms dating from 1905. A new factory opened in 1954, with machinery built by the workers themselves. During the 1960s, the company once again re-established itself as a major jute mill, supplying sacks by the ton. It gradually abandoned hemp, for which demand was in decline. It operated on a workers' self-management basis, a political and economic system introduced by the Yugoslav authorities whereby every factory or company in the country belonged to its employees, making them responsible for it.

A major change occurred in 1962, with the production of the first vinyl floor covering with a jute base. "Before manufacturing vinyl flooring, the company only produced textiles, in particular jute canvas for sacks. There was a great deal of waste. In 1961, the idea took shape of using textile off-cuts to make a type of felt which could provide a base for the vinyl floors which were first manufactured in 1962," explains Svetozar Brankov, who joined Sintelon ten years later. This heralded the beginning of a new venture and a new name for a company trying to establish its industrial credentials: Industrial Plant for Hemp, Jute, Plastic and Building Products. Floor covering manufacture doubled after a year and its quality made it extremely popular.

In the fall of 1965, the population of the region faced one of the worst of Danube floods – a flood that lasted 113 days. Factory staff were on the front line and the company was awarded a merit medal with a silver star in recognition of its heroic efforts in the fight against this tragic flood.

In 1969, the company once again changed names: Sintelon. The new name designated the department of the factory which was devoted to synthetic fiber textile floor coverings. Two years later, a rug department was launched in response to local demand as rugs were among Yugoslav homeowners' favorite decorative items.



Eero Aarnio armchair, 1969.

Plastic reigns supreme

In the 1950s and 1960s, plastic was everywhere. It was found in the construction, automobile and food processing industries, and in medical products. It replaced many natural materials and in some cases prevented depletion of those resources. The 1956 Paris Home Show exhibited a house made entirely of plastic. Bakelite, the first synthetic plastic, was invented in 1907 and came into use in the 1920s. The invention of various polymers gathered pace in the 1930s when Germany and the United States invested in this research field. Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) was manufactured in these two countries for the first time with

the aim of finding an alternative to rubber. PVC conquered the world in the postwar era due to its many properties - it could withstand weather, harsh chemicals, corrosion, impact, and wear and tear. During this period, many other polymers appeared including polystyrene (packaging, switches), polyethylene (bottles, packaging film, toys), polyamide (including the famous Nylon), polyurethane (furniture, construction, automobiles), polyester (construction and navigation), polycarbonate (components for the mechanical and electro-technical industries), and polypropylene (bathroom equipment, domestic appliances, packaging, etc.).

EUROFLOOR - THE JEWEL IN LUXEMBOURG'S CROWN

Wiltz was a flourishing industrial town in Luxembourg; papermakers, cobblers, drapers and tanners had gravitated toward its river. The town authorities wanted to attract new business to the area after the Idéal tannery, with nearly 1,000 employees, closed in 1960. The Belgian company, Balamundi, heeded the call and created Eurofloor SA in 1961 on the former site of the historic Idéal tannery. It manufactured Balatum, a floor covering made from asphalt-coated paper invented by Auguste Lannoye, founder of the Genval paper mills. Balatum was a great success initially because it was cheap, but it went into decline as it was considered to be an outdated material. Beginning in 1963, Eurofloor turned things around for Balamundi by manufacturing vinyl-based floor coverings for distribution throughout Europe. From the outset, the company had a conspicuously modern image with the world's first 2-meter (6-foot) wide calender machine.

In 1966, Gilbert Franck, CEO of Eurofloor, played host to a distinguished guest in the person of Grand-Duke Jean. He toured this jewel in Luxembourg's industrial crown, greeted the assembled employees and was offered a number of gifts. During the tour, he learned how specialty products were manufactured: Balaflex, a vinyl-backed floor covering, Palatred on a jute base, and also Palamil on a felted cardboard base. In this same year, the factory was equipped with a vinyl waste recovery facility, heralding the first recycling system.

Production figures soared in subsequent years, reaching a total of 15 million m² (almost 162 million sq. ft.) in 1970. Balaflex and Real (100% vinyl) accounted for 57% of output. Balatred (vinyl floor coverings on jute underlay backing) accounted for 35% and Balanil (a derivative of Balatum with a transparent vinyl printed film on its inner surface) 8%.

UNE TRIPLE BIENVENUE

C'est moi, Kabala le Kéala. J'appartiens à la famille de ces petits ours amateurs de feuilles d'eucalyptus. J'étais né en Australie et tous s'accordent à nous trouver charmants, paisibles et affectueux. Mais je me suis assis de la grande famille de ceux qui savent leur confort, et comment! Il est donc bien naturel qu'un ail fait appel à mes services pour vous présenter à ma manière ses trois nouveaux revêtements de sol: BALAFLEX, BALATRED, BALANIL.

BIENVENUE A balaflex

A tout respect, tout honneur! Voici BALAFLEX, fait de matières premières sélectionnées, dont le principe de polyvinyle. Ses caractéristiques sont vraiment remarquables. Jugez-en:



BALAFLEX est le revêtement pour tout le globe.
BALAFLEX résiste aux chocs et peut supporter de 2 mètres de hauteur.
Avec BALAFLEX, les revêtements sont plus sûrs.
BALAFLEX est résistant, durable.
BALAFLEX s'installe sur tout type de sol.
BALAFLEX est facile à nettoyer.
BALAFLEX est le plus sûr des revêtements.
BALAFLEX résiste aux rayures.
BALAFLEX est résistant aux chocs.
On n'a jamais vu un ours à l'école!
BALAFLEX n'a pas peur du feu.

Above: 1966 advertisement for Balaflex.

Right: Following in the footsteps of Betty Grable and other icons, the Johnsonite pin-up presents a plastic pipe in the 1950s.





JOHNSON RUBBER ON EVERY FRONT

After the highly-charged years of war output in the United States, Johnson Rubber resumed a civilian existence. It proved difficult to make the transition to peacetime, as rubber was gradually being ousted by plastic, replacing it in a number of industrial applications. In July 1946, Bill Miller, a former lawyer working for Toledo Rubber Products, a Johnson Rubber client company, took charge of the company. He managed Johnson Rubber until 1979. His office door was always open and nobody ever called him "Sir" – he was known to all as Bill.

It was up to Bill Miller to get the company back on track. The company invested heavily to make the shift to plastic component manufacturing and achieved this by 1948. It bought equipment from a company based in the New York area and shipped it to Chagrin Falls, Ohio to a site acquired from the local gun club, then moved to Auburn, which was also in Ohio. Plastic manufacturing began there, specializing in refrigerator, washing machine and lawnmower gaskets. It was reinforced by the launch of the Johnson Plastics division, managed by Bill Miller Jr.

The company then consolidated its operations in the automobile industry by buying out the Green Rubber Company (which became Nobalt Rubber), specializing in radiator components. Several years later the Johnson Rubber Company was central to the American Way of Life, marketing the products required to run washing machines, seal refrigerator doors, cool automobile engines or cover domestic floors.

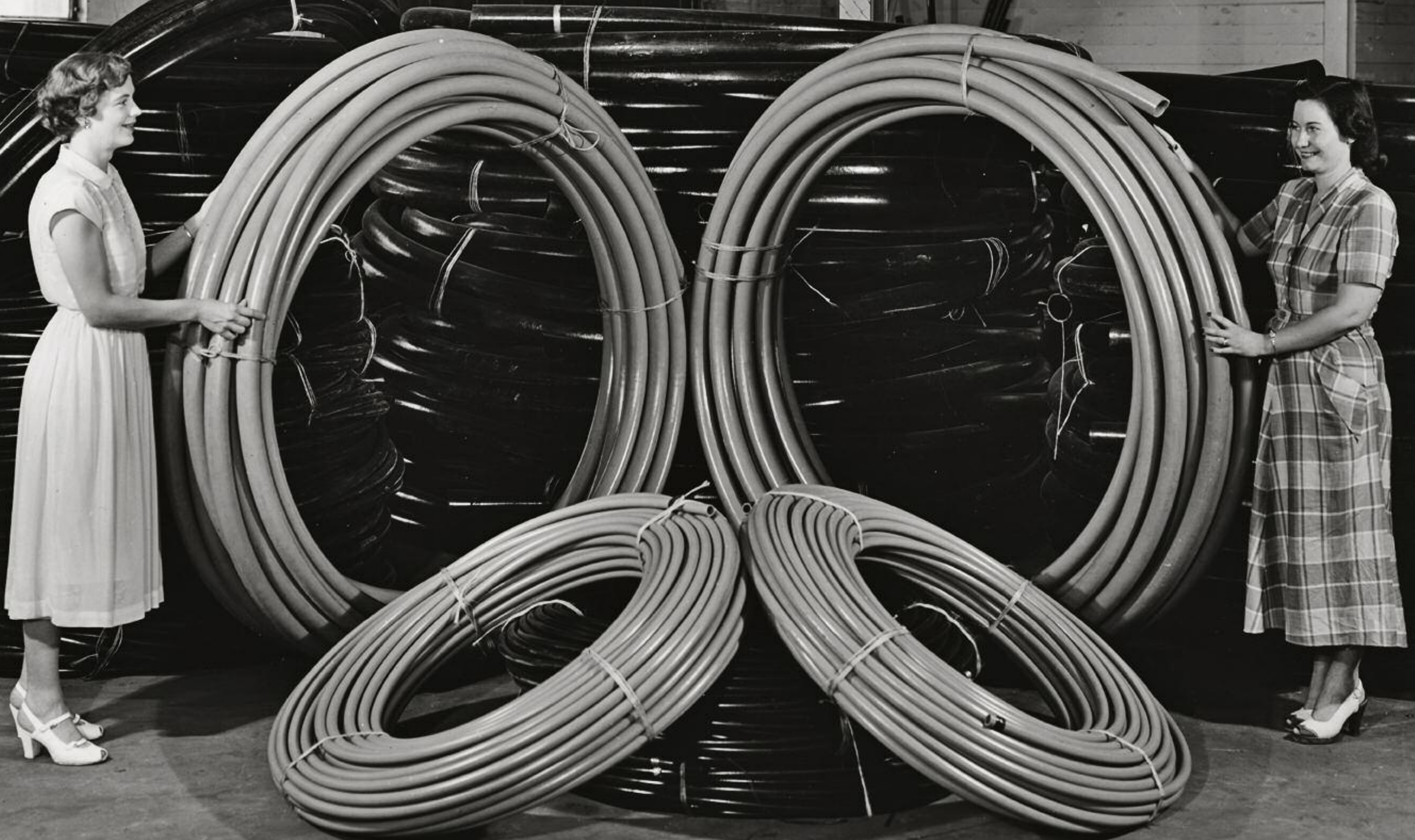
The company made its first foray into the floor covering sector in 1964 with the launch of a line of baseboards. It also became involved in the construction market which had the advantage of being less cyclical than the automobile market. Promoted by Paul Miller, who was now CEO of the company, production of baseboards took off. The company was also renowned for its components for the railroads and the navy. In 1969, it began manufacturing rubber bearings. These bearings were renowned worldwide, particularly in the Benelux countries, courtesy of a dedicated local agent. Johnson Rubber increased the number of product lines, subsidiaries and representatives in the late 1960s.

Top left: Johnson Rubber workers in the 1950s.

Below, left: The Chagrin Falls, Ohio factory circa 1970.

Double-page spread overleaf: Johnson Rubber warehouses in the 1950s; glamor is de rigueur for an advertising image.

Right: Leaflet for a range of plastic pipes.



The first oil crisis of the 1970s marked the end of three care-free postwar decades. Increases in the cost of raw materials created an economic domino effect. The European Economic Community grew from six to nine members in 1973. The advent of perestroika in the East in the mid-1980s led to a thaw in relations with the Soviet bloc. In 1993, the brand-new European Union comprised 15 countries, including a reunified Germany, created after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The Sommer and Allibert companies merged in 1971. Tarkett, which was now controlled by the Swedish Match group, focused on floor coverings and merged with the German company, Pegulan, in 1987. In Yugoslavia, Sintelon began manufacturing floor coverings in 4-meter (13-foot) widths in 1979, using a new process developed by its experts. Johnsonite, a division of Duramax, made radical changes to its customer culture. The Canadian company, Domco, set its sights on the United States in 1991. In Russia, a factory in Otradny, which would become the world's largest manufacturer of vinyl floor coverings in 4-meter (13-foot) widths, began operations in 1995.



Gathering momentum

From the 1970s to the late 1990s





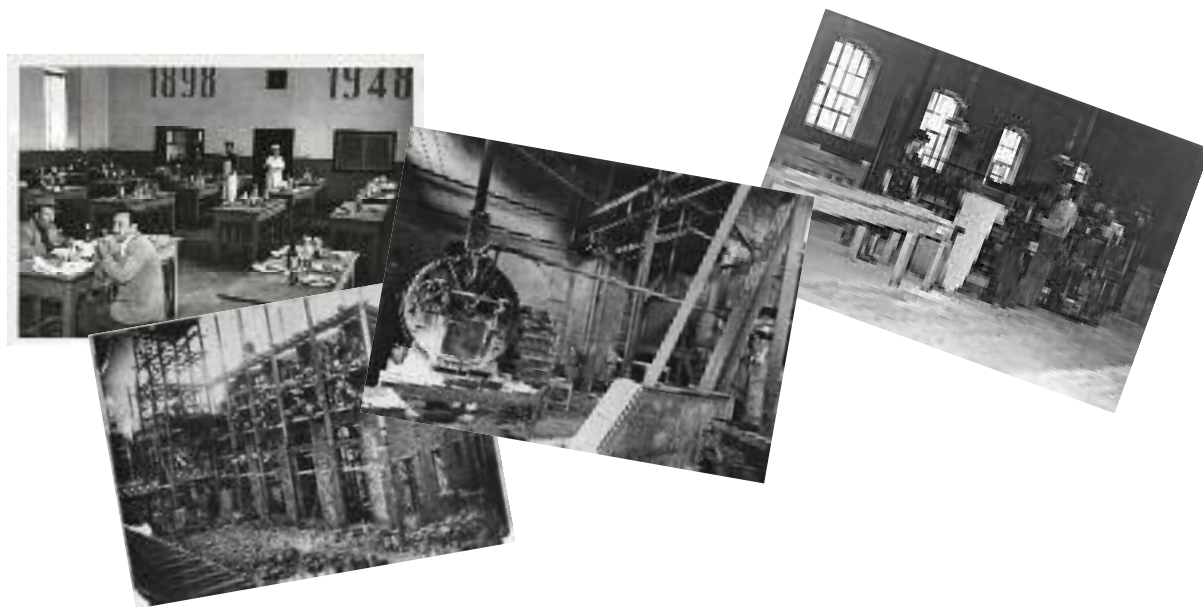
Left: An example of an office interior in the 1970s.

I

In the 1970s, companies merged in order to tackle rising costs and stiffer competition which had reached an international level. A series of major energy price increases significantly changed the economic landscape. Although industry was in flux, this was also a period of research into technical innovations and of increased awareness of emerging environmental issues. New managers appeared who epitomized their companies, such as Nikola Pavicic who managed Sintelon for three decades; Robert Van Buren, who took the helm at Domco, Sommer Allibert's North American headquarters; Jeff Buttitta, who transformed the Johnsonite ethos, and Marc Assa who, along with Bernard Deconinck, successfully took the Sommer Allibert group into the international arena.

THE METEORIC RISE OF SOMMER ALLIBERT

Since the European Common Market was promising to gradually open up borders, François Sommer, of the Sommer Company, and Bernard Deconinck, of the Allibert Company, knew that their businesses had to step up their research, marketing and investment capabilities to survive long-term in a global industrial landscape. François Sommer, who had no heir and knew that he was ill, was looking for a partner "whose company was of a similar scale and shared a similar manufacturing, economic and human ethos", according to the columns of the *Courrier Sommer* spring 1972 issue. The two French companies, Sommer and Allibert, combined their names and formed a group. The owner of Allibert had not initially been interested in this merger, which was suggested by a major French bank. However, he was finally swayed by the prospect of a radical change of scale. The agreement, signed in December 1971, created a holding company responsible for coordination and organization, with the operating companies each retaining their own identity. The stated aim was to become the leader in the company's main business areas – the automobile industry and house wares. When François Sommer, the first CEO, passed away in January 1973, Bernard Deconinck was the logical successor and he held the position for several decades.



Sommer Allibert, the name of the new company, now promoted itself as the leading European plastics processing company – a key plastics industry player offering useful and attractive everyday items for the home (floor coverings, bathroom furniture, garden furniture, cosmetics and perfume packaging with Qualipac), for automobiles (dashboards, interiors, soundproofing, signposts), in shops (tote boxes) and in the street (garbage bins).

During this period, injection molding of plastic automobile components became the main activity. In order to keep up with competitors, it was crucial to set up plants as close as possible to automobile manufacturers, who insisted on using local suppliers.

The early years of the floor covering merger were far from idyllic. Sommer was experiencing a slowdown. It was a rude awakening for Sedan and Mouzon, especially since the floor covering market as a whole was affected by the oil crisis in 1974. Bernard Deconinck made two decisions with far – reaching consequences – to bolster the business by acquiring Dalami in 1977 and then to merge with Balamundi a year later. This brought the three leading European manufacturers within the Sommer Allibert fold, creating a new Floor Covering Division. Balamundi, managed by Marc Assa, had a reputation for being in the forefront of vinyl flooring and had a well-established European network. The business was reorganized with Sedan now focusing on commercial applications and Luxembourg on the retail market. In 1980, the new Eurosol SA factory in Luxembourg manufactured the first “cushion floor” in 4-meter (13-foot) widths on a continuous production line, a significant innovation which gave a new lease on life to vinyl flooring.

The Group tripled in size between 1972 and 1985. The time was ripe to compete on an international scale. In the mid-1980s, Sommer Allibert focused exclusively on foreign markets, as the economic situation in France was not evolving. It attempted to break into China by setting up Anssom in 1987, a joint venture manufacturing 2-meter (6-foot) wide floor covering for the retail market, with a factory located in Anshan in the north-eastern Chinese province of Liaoning. However the Chinese remained attached to parquet and tiled floors. The factory was not as successful as anticipated and closed in 2000. By contrast, products for commercial buildings (hospitals, airports, etc.), marketed by local representatives based in Shanghai, were able to successfully break into the marketplace.

Above and right: Linoleum factory, Narni, Italy.





Above: The Clervaux factory, Luxembourg.
Opposite: Plastic makes its appearance on terraces and in gardens with Allibert garden furniture.

With a foothold in both Asia and the United States, Sommer Allibert bought a stake in the Canadian company Domco in 1986. This was the first stage of the conquest of the North American flooring market, with control being achieved in 1994. A factory for needed flooring for the automobile industry was built in Greenville in the USA, followed by the construction or purchase of several plants manufacturing exclusively for the automobile industry across the North American and European continents.

Sommer Allibert then sought an opportunity to add to its offering in the form of linoleum. The opportunity for linoleum was driven by the environmental interest in this product from Scandinavian countries. In 1988, the company bought the remains of the Italian company Narni at auction with a view to resurrecting it. In the late 19th century, it had been the first factory to manufacture linoleum in southern Europe. Like its contemporaries, it subsequently went into decline in the 1960s, and the site was abandoned in the late 1970s: "It was like a shipwreck, everything was left inside. A jungle of grass and trees populated by animals had overrun the site. More significantly, all the know-how had been lost! The processes had been handed down by word of mouth since the 19th century from one generation to the next. Former employees therefore had to be called in to get the manufacturing process going again. One hundred years of expertise had to be built back up again over the course of ten years. Since manufacturing resumed in the late 1980s, Narni has met all its growth milestones and reached maturity in 2005," explains Giuseppe Cioffi, who joined the company in 1999 and is now the Director of Tarkett Italy. As of 1993, the five divisions – Homes, Goods Handling, Automobile, Cosmetics Packaging, and Flooring – were managed from the Nanterre headquarters.

Bernard Deconinck became Chairman of the Supervisory Board in 1989 and was responsible for the strategy being implemented by Marc Assa. The historic CEO made a successful break with the past and took the Group in a new direction. In 1997, bathroom products, the items that were most familiar to the general public, were sold off. The Allibert industrial legacy gradually disappeared due to the decision to focus on the original Sommer product – floor coverings.

Tarkett, a family business renowned for its innovations and especially well regarded in Scandinavian countries, underwent a complete transformation in the 1970s.

In 1997, international sales already accounted for 73% of Sommer Allibert business. In that same year, the company launched a major advertising campaign featuring Pope John-Paul II, Gandhi, Dali and The Who on Sommer Allibert flooring! Floor covering became the Group's star performer with aspirations to global market leadership.

TARKETT: INTEGRATION AND INNOVATION

Tarkett, a family business renowned for its innovations and especially well regarded in Scandinavian countries, underwent a complete transformation in the 1970s. At the beginning of the decade, the company, based in Ronneby and Hanaskog, left the Limhamns family fold and joined the industrial giant Swedish Match with its 150 subsidiaries. Willi Senn was appointed chairman in 1971 and sped up the focus on floor coverings. Subsidiary operations were sold off in 1973, and numerous acquisitions were made, with many former competitors now coming under the Tarkett banner in Sweden, Denmark, Austria, Germany and France.

The residential market was now the target. "I started this expansion because I wanted us to be the best in the world. I was banking on innovation to persuade people to pay our prices. Our policy was not to be the cheapest, but to be the best. In fact, we have always been the most expensive on the market and Tarkett has become the number two in the world-wide floor covering market," states Willi Senn. This leading position was attained through the acquisition of a major vinyl flooring company in the United States. The acquisition brought about a change of scale.

In 1983, Tarkett acquired the Harris Manufacturing Company, the oldest wooden flooring manufacturer in the country. Its foundation in 1898, a reputation which spanned the continent from the east to the west coast and the fact that it had been run as a family business by three generations of Harrises were a source of great pride to the company. The grandson of the founder in fact became Vice-President of Harris-Tarkett. This alliance made Tarkett the world's largest manufacturer of parquet flooring. In 1984, 80% of output was marketed outside Sweden.

Right: Pope John-Paul II features in a daring Sommer advertisement.

SOMMER

Today, most flooring experts are demanding more hygienic, easy-clean surfaces.

Ensuring that everything that can be done, is done to reduce micro-organisms and bacteria and to create a low-maintenance surface, has always been a major concern for us. Which is why our carpet tile, vinyl and linoleum products are the ideal solution for today's demanding applications and why they are so widely used by hospitals, nursing homes and schools throughout Europe. For more information just call 01905 795004 or fax 01905 794306.

TAPISOM
LINOROM
CENTURY
SOMPLAN
TAPIFLEX

500 products

Carpet tiles, broadloom, vinyl and linoleum floor coverings.

SOMMER
The world at your feet.



Technical and environmental initiatives proliferated throughout this period of acquisitions.

Technical and environmental initiatives proliferated throughout this period of acquisitions. In the mid-1970s, the Swedish company produced a reinforced polyurethane floor covering which was even more hard-wearing and low maintenance than previous products. In 1984, a new generation of homogeneous vinyl floor coverings called Optima appeared and was installed by numerous local authorities in hospitals. Tarkett's vinyl products were the first to be manufactured on fiberglass backing in the 1970s. Substantial investment was made at Ronneby in 1989 to meet more stringent environmental standards.

Solutions to address health and environmental concerns were included in the spate of innovation. In 1997, Ronneby inaugurated its waste recycling facility where waste was reduced to granules and fed back into the manufacturing process. In 1998, Tarkett was personally awarded a prize by the King of Sweden for its environmental protection initiatives. In Hanaskog, employing more accurate cutting methods already meant that there was less wood waste than in the past.

Under the aegis of Swedish Match, the company merged in 1987 with the German company Pegulan, which was founded in Frankenthal in 1946. "After the war, the German market was huge because of the scale of the destruction, but it was also very difficult to penetrate. Our rival at that time, Pegulan, was selling far more than us," recalls Willi Senn, who left his management post at the company to become Chairman of the Board at Tarkett and Vice-President of Swedish Match. In 1988, Stora took over ownership from Swedish Match and in 1994, the Tarkett Pegulan pairing, with its CEO Lars Wisen, was taken over by an Anglo-German investment company, CWB Capital Partners Ltd and Goldman Sachs. The company set up its headquarters in Frankenthal in 1994 and was listed on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange in 1995. Tarkett was now a German-Swedish global company.

Left: An imitation parquet heterogeneous vinyl floor covering. Illustration from a 1970s sales brochure.

*After modernizing its processes
and abandoning some of its obsolete products,
the Company grew by leaps and bounds
and substantial investments were made.*

SINTELON: FROM MODERNIZATION TO THE RUSSIAN MARKET

On November 5, 1973, Backa Palanka hosted Marshal Tito on his first tour of the Industrial Plant for Hemp, Jute, Plastic and Building Products, which would become the Sintelon Company. The president often visited the region as he liked to go hunting in Karadordevo, a few kilometers from Backa Palanka, but he had never set foot on the company site before. Marshal Tito was very impressed by the facilities and warmly congratulated the assembled employees on the quality of their work. After such glowing tributes, the company redoubled its efforts.

In 1974, Yugoslavia adopted a new constitution advocating greater decentralization. Nikola Pavicic was appointed director of this workers' cooperative company (a system which applied to all national manufacturing output) and, assisted by Gojko Kurtes, he successfully modernized it. "They were young men, 36 and 37 years old respectively, but they had vision and real energy. They shaped the future of the company," says Dragan Zarkovic, a young economist at the time, who got his first job at Backa Palanka in 1978 and became President of Tarkett's Eastern Europe division from 2002 to 2012. "Their first move was to hire a number of young, highly-trained people - engineers and economists - and to send them on training courses abroad to learn about alternative working methods. Nikola Pavicic, an excellent chess player and sharp strategist who ran the company for 36 years, had his sights set on expansion and export".

It was the only factory in the country manufacturing vinyl floor covering. After modernizing its processes and abandoning some of its obsolete products, the Company grew by leaps and bounds and substantial investments were made – the largest since its creation. State-of-the-art equipment was installed, as well as several high-end rug units. Rugs were popular with Yugoslavs, more so than with their western European neighbors.

In 1977, a new floor and wall covering called Topling was designed and developed by onsite research teams, who were awarded the highest civil distinction in the Vojvodina region. Its quality, modernity and price made it ideal for export to western European countries at a time when traditional jute-backed products

A flooring factory receives
the official seal of approval
as Nikola Pavicic plays host
to Marshal Tito and his wife,
Jovanka Broz, in 1973.





Europe gets behind the wheel

In France, three out of ten households owned a car in 1960, rising to five out of ten in 1967 and to seven out of ten in 1980. The democratization of car ownership was now complete in Europe. Car prices were falling, salaries were rising and a visit to an automobile dealership was the key reward in a consumer society, particularly for men. Between 1970 and 1998, the number of cars per 1,000 inhabitants rose from 184 to 451 in the 15 founder nations of the European Union. It had taken Europe almost forty years to catch up with automobile ownership levels in the United States. From

the 1970s onwards, cars were no longer a luxury but an essential tool for daily life. Some cars have retained their iconic status, such as the famous VW Beetle which was assembled in the hot sunshine of Puebla in Mexico. A few meters away from the Volkswagen factory was the Sommer Allibert factory, which in 1998 was busy producing all the dashboard components, designed with Siemens, which would be used to completely fit out the VW Beetle. This was plastics manufacturer Sommer Allibert's final flourish as an original equipment manufacturer.

Over 20 million iconic Volkswagen Beetles have been sold worldwide since the car was launched in 1938.

The idea of building a factory in the Soviet Union rapidly took shape, fueled by the prospect of nearly 300 million potential customers!

were produced for the eastern European market. 1979 marked a historic year for the site: a new department was created to manufacture this new flooring in 4-meter (13-foot) widths. Management style evolved in line with political developments and, for the fifth time in its history the company changed its name - adopting the name of its flagship product, Sintelon. There were already a number of shops in the country trading under this name, the first of which opened in 1969. With 2,000 employees to its credit, the new Sintelon Company moved into the commercial building sector. It supplied the bulk of national flooring output, manufacturing 10 million square meters (almost 108 million sq. ft.) of vinyl flooring, and was renowned for the quality and variety of its rugs.

In the early 1990s, Sintelon was one of the first companies in the country to be privatized. The idea of building a factory in the Soviet Union rapidly took shape, fueled by the prospect of nearly 300 million potential customers! However market conditions were difficult as manufacturing consumer products was not a priority. Furthermore, it was the custom to trade goods rather than sell them - for example floorcoverings were traded for metal or cotton and these goods were then sold abroad for hard currency. Perestroika created a new climate and joint ventures could now be set up with Soviet businesses. "The decision to build a factory in the USSR was crucial to Sintelon's future and we were fortunate enough to meet Vladimir Iline, who had vision and was motivated and organized. When the project got underway in 1989, we were based in Yugoslavia and wanted to invest in the USSR. By the time it was completed in 1995, there was no Yugoslavia and no USSR either," points out Dragan Zarkovic.

During the years of horrific fighting which raged in this region, Sintelon managed to manufacture in Ukraine and then to relaunch and achieve a major position in the Russian market when peace returned. "We had to start from scratch again in 1995: we had lost our customers, all our markets except Serbia and our financing. However we had potential, technology, manpower, expertise, ideas and amazing drive. We fought to get back into the race and built everything up again," recalls Svetozar Brankov, Technical Director of the Eastern Europe Division.



JOHNSONITE: PASSIONATE ABOUT CUSTOMERS

The early 1970s were a time of serious growth for Johnson Rubber, which marketed a large variety of products: floorcoverings, numerous plastic products for the automobile industry, specialist lines created for the railroads and navy, and its famous rubber bearings which were renowned on several continents. In 1981, the company adopted the name Duramax Inc. and structured itself into divisions. Its Directors, Paul and Chuck Miller, were being pressured on price, quality and services by automobile manufacturers and made the difficult decision in 1986 to part company with General Motors, one of their main customers.

As a result of the 1981 restructuring, the Johnsonite division was formed to specialize in floor coverings. Jeff Buttitta became CEO of Johnsonite in 1990. Unlike most other managers Jeff's background was not in the automobile industry but in office furniture. Design and interior decor were his realm. When he took over, he changed the ground rules and challenged Johnsonite employees to become passionate about their customers. Brenda Ciccarello, a manager, explains what this means in practical terms: "We do absolutely everything to satisfy the customer, even if what they want isn't in our catalogue. Johnsonite is not just a flooring manufacturer and retailer but a partner offering fast, easily accessible solutions. Our role is to understand the client's problem and to respond by explaining how a floor covering can enhance their lives."

This new direction was reflected in innovative, creative new sales approaches and greater employee flexibility, speed and agility in order to satisfy the customer. "This ethos creates the feeling of making 'more than just flooring' and enhances our products," says Jeff Buttitta, President of Tarkett North America since 2007. He also realized that the rise of the service sector would make offices the main workplace, with more staff than factories. "How can you improve productivity in an office? By decorating the workspace in a way which makes employees



Left: Marks and Spencer store.

Right: Bromma airport, Stockholm.



Providing flooring and protection for local authorities

At La Défense, the business district on the outskirts of Paris, the Elf Aquitaine tower has been reaching for the heavens since 1985. It is the second tallest building in the business district and one of its most noteworthy architectural achievements and the flooring was supplied by Sommer. If you walk around an airport, such as Bromma on the outskirts of Stockholm, or a hospital, you are almost guaranteed to have Tarkett flooring underfoot. When the large Sunderby hospital was built in the 1990s in Norrbotten Province in northern Sweden, and outfitted with the latest technology, a homogeneous floor covering called Eminentre, reinforced with a polyurethane surface, was chosen to cover 76,000 m² (818,000 sq. ft.).

A number of criteria were taken into consideration including hygiene regulations, ease of maintenance (daily sweeping and dry polishing and cleaning with wet polishers if required) and also resistance to wear and tear and life expectancy. Shopping for sales bargains in Marks and Spencer's or Ikea stores offers another opportunity to walk on Tarkett flooring. In the United States, Cleveland University Hospital contains Johnsonite products, as do most Las Vegas hotels and casinos. The world gambling capital cannot get enough of imitation wood baseboards. And countless square meters of Tarkett flooring are installed in the new Moscow offices of Gazprom, the Russian industrial giant.

People are really very simple creatures.



Make them happy
and they'll return the favor.
Delight them and they'll go
through fire for you.
Inspire them and they'll
teach you to fly.



The future will belong
to organizations that put
people firmly in the center,
that design spaces and invent
workplaces around people.

Research shows that
well-designed spaces are the
single most important factor
in increasing organizational
performance, creating gains
of as much as 20 percent.

In the future,
organizations will demand
return on investment from every
system in a space, from light-
ing to flooring. We're looking
forward to the future.

We've been working
these for years.

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feel happy: plants, comfortable armchairs, workstations, etc. but also, and above all, floor covering and baseboards. Johnsonite is a marketing company that creates value and sells flooring products which have the power to enhance attractive office furniture, a designer chair, etc. We make an emotional and intellectual commitment to our customers because flooring will tie everything together harmoniously and become an integral feature of the room".

"We have successfully brought about a huge change in attitudes by making people aware that flooring is as important as lighting or an armchair," confirms Carmen Pastore, who joined Johnsonite in 1993 and currently holds the position of Executive Vice-President.

A change of mind-set and new product innovations – such as the Safe-T-First System, the first stair tread with a luminescent strip to make it visible in the dark - won acclaim for its design and ingenuity. Accordingly, the company experienced a tremendous rate of growth.

THE DOMCO REVIVAL

In Canada, floor covering is synonymous with Domco. Wearing its hundred year history proudly, the company continued to expand in the early 1970s, notably with the creation of Domcor Inc, its distribution division. However, it had to deal with a major financial crisis which forced it to sell its historic site in Montreal and to focus all manufacturing at its Farnham site. Domco was able to get back on track by rationalizing its operations. In 1986, there was a major change in shareholdings when Sommer Allibert acquired half of the shares belonging to the majority shareholder, Eugenio Cefis, roughly 30% of the capital.

An American, Robert Van Buren, took over the management of the company from Frenchman Didier Deconinck in 1989 (until 2000). Robert Van Buren was a flooring industry man through and through. He worked in a factory in Texas as a student and had spent his entire career in the industry which he came to know like the back of his hand! Moreover "Bob", or RVB as he was also known, was renowned for his phenomenal memory. He could remember the name of every

Left: Advertisement depicting the Johnsonite logo with its three circles. A man features in the center.



The French group therefore had a firm footing on American soil and declared its intention of becoming the name to be reckoned with in the floor covering market.

retailer's wife and how many children they had. He forged close relationships with customers and employees alike and managed to create a team spirit which motivated employees and took the company to new heights. In 1991, Domco acquired the American company, Azrock, with its headquarters in San Antonio and factory in Houston. Azrock, founded in 1912, specialized in vinyl composition tiles, strengthening Domco's presence in the USA and providing a toehold in the commercial sector. Robert Van Buren was on familiar territory having been president of Azrock for ten years prior to taking over at Domco.

Expansion into the United States continued with the acquisition in 1994 of NAFCO (National Floor Products Company), a company founded in Florence, Alabama in 1956. NAFCO could help deliver the high-end residential market since they were renowned for high-quality flexible luxury vinyl tiles which were sound-proof, easy to install and water-resistant. Domco was showing healthy growth, sound profits and was one of the leading North American vinyl flooring manufacturers. The Group now offered every type of vinyl flooring for the commercial and residential sectors. The company combined sales and marketing operations for the three brands in Alabama and manufactured at the companies' three sites. Sommer Allibert increased its shareholding and became the majority shareholder in 1994, buying out all of the Cefis family's shares. The French group therefore had a firm footing on American soil and declared its intention of becoming the name to be reckoned with in the floor covering market.

Left: A Canadian design from 1972 inspired by Beatlemania. Wallpapers of the era provided inspiration for flooring.



The factory has been operating at full capacity ever since it opened to supply the world's largest vinyl market!

**RUSSIA:
MASSIVE OUTPUT
IN A NEW TOWN**

Otradny was built on oil and gas when extraction began after the "Great Patriotic War" and the small town officially became a city in 1956. It is located 90 kilometers (56 miles) from Samara, where a number of factories had relocated from Moscow during the war, in case the Germans invaded the capital. The famous Bolshoi Theater also retreated to this area. In 1995, in what is now the world's largest flooring factory, manufacturing of 4-meter (13-foot) widths of vinyl began for the first time in Russia. The venture grew out of an alliance between the Serbian company, Sintelon, and the Russian company, Roof and Polymers, run by Vladimir Alexandrovitch Iline (former General Manager of Tarkett Zao) and Valery Nuzhdin, his deputy manager. Both men had been nurturing the idea of creating a large floor covering company since the mid-1980s. The former was a building and civil engineering works specialist and the latter an engineer in a factory in the Samara region who would go on to design all of the factory's production lines. The two men visited Sintelon in 1987 to see the production lines. Two years later, construction work began on a vast and deserted 33-hectare expanse of land. It would not be completed until 1995, due to lack of financing. The factory has been operating at full capacity ever since it opened to supply the world's largest vinyl market!



Left: The factory at Otradny, Russia, became the world's largest vinyl manufacturing plant.

Crises and accomplishments punctuated the transition from the 20th to the 21st century. No sooner had the Russian market recovered from its 1998 collapse, than the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York marked the start of the new millennium. Europe congratulated itself on the successful introduction of its new single currency, the euro. In 2007, a new recession began, triggered by the subprime mortgage crisis in the United States. Drastic socio-economic changes worldwide and fears about global warming made environmental concerns a shared priority.

Tarkett and the flooring division of Sommer Allibert merged in 1997. Legacy branches such as homes or automobile equipment manufacturing were sold in order to focus on a single activity – floor and wall coverings. Tarkett, which had been operating under this name since 2003, was now represented in 100 hundred countries. In the East, the Group signed a joint venture in 2002 with the Serbian company Sintelon, which opened up the Russian marketplace. On the other side of the Atlantic, Tarkett became the majority shareholder of Domco in Canada then acquired FieldTurf in 2004, thus carving out a major role in the sports surface sector. Johnsonite followed in December 2005.



**Fully
international
and fully
devoted
to flooring**

From 2000 to the present day





Left: Tarkett exhibits at the Domotex trade fair, Hanover, Germany, in the late 1990s.

T

he Deconinck family and KKR (Kohlberg Kravis and Roberts) owned equal shares in Tarkett as of 2007. This new configuration drove development, particularly in the East. As the world leader in innovative and sustainable flooring and sports surfaces solutions, Tarkett was at the leading edge of environmental awareness.

AN INTERNATIONAL GROUP IS BORN

Tarkett Sommer came into being in late 1997, the product of the merger of Tarkett and the Flooring Division of Sommer Allibert. It immediately became number one in Europe and number two in the United States in the highly competitive floor covering sector. This new group covered every geographical area – with a presence in 50 countries – and every specialty. In fact, although these two companies operated predominantly in the vinyl market, Tarkett also offered parquet and the Sommer Allibert flooring branch had extensive textile experience.

This brand-new branch of the Sommer Allibert group, headed up initially by Lars Wisen, was severely affected by the collapse of several eastern-European markets in the wake of the Russian economic crisis in 1998, as well as by competition from laminates. Bernard Deconinck and Marc Assa spearheaded the recovery.

This was crunch time for Sommer Allibert: it had to choose between relinquishing the flooring branch, as a major competitor was waiting eagerly in the wings, and relaunching flooring as the sole focus of the business. The automobile division accounted for 65% of Sommer Allibert's sales based on its 1997 results. In late 2000, a strategic decision was announced: Faurecia would take over the Group's original automobile equipment manufacturing branch. The Bathroom and Equipment divisions had already been sold. Flooring was now the Group's core business. Distribution networks were merged and manufacturing was consolidated in the most productive plants. As of 2003, there was a single name and a single activity. Tarkett was now the Group name, the common brand for a shared future. "We could now resume a strategy of conquest and investment in the East," explains Michel Cognet, COO at that time.

The company set its sights on the East at a time when many western European companies were wary of the Russian market.

THE ROAD TO MOSCOW PASSES THROUGH SERBIA

In 2002, the group went into partnership with Sintelon to set up a company in Serbia and another in Russia. "At our first meeting in 2001, Marc Assa suggested joining forces to set up a joint venture as we had a lot to offer each other. Bernard Deconinck then came to see us at Backa Palanka, before going on to Russia. He was an inspiring leader. If he saw a glimmer of motivation, he would forge ahead. This was an extremely difficult period for both Serbia and Russia, but he felt that we shared the same values," stresses Dragan Zarkovic, President of Tarkett Eastern Europe until 2012.

The company set its sights on the East at a time when many western European companies were wary of the Russian market. "Not only did Bernard Deconinck and Marc Assa have no fears with regard to Russia, but they had the nerve to set up a business after the 1998 economic crisis at a time when westerners were stepping back from the Russian market," explains Vladimir Iline (former General Manager of Tarkett Zao).

"During this difficult time for the country, we made the right choices about products, development and distribution and we were therefore able to expand our initial presence. We created branch offices in the regions. This was a period of very rapid growth. But without new expertise and input of experience, we couldn't have survived in the long term," says Andrey Kotov, General Manager ZAO Tarkett RUS.

Membership of the Tarkett group brought new knowledge, technologies and management methods. "The great company directors who created this group worldwide had accumulated a significant amount of experience which facilitated development," concludes Dragan Zarkovic.

Right: Product testing
in the laboratory
of Backa Palanka, Serbia.



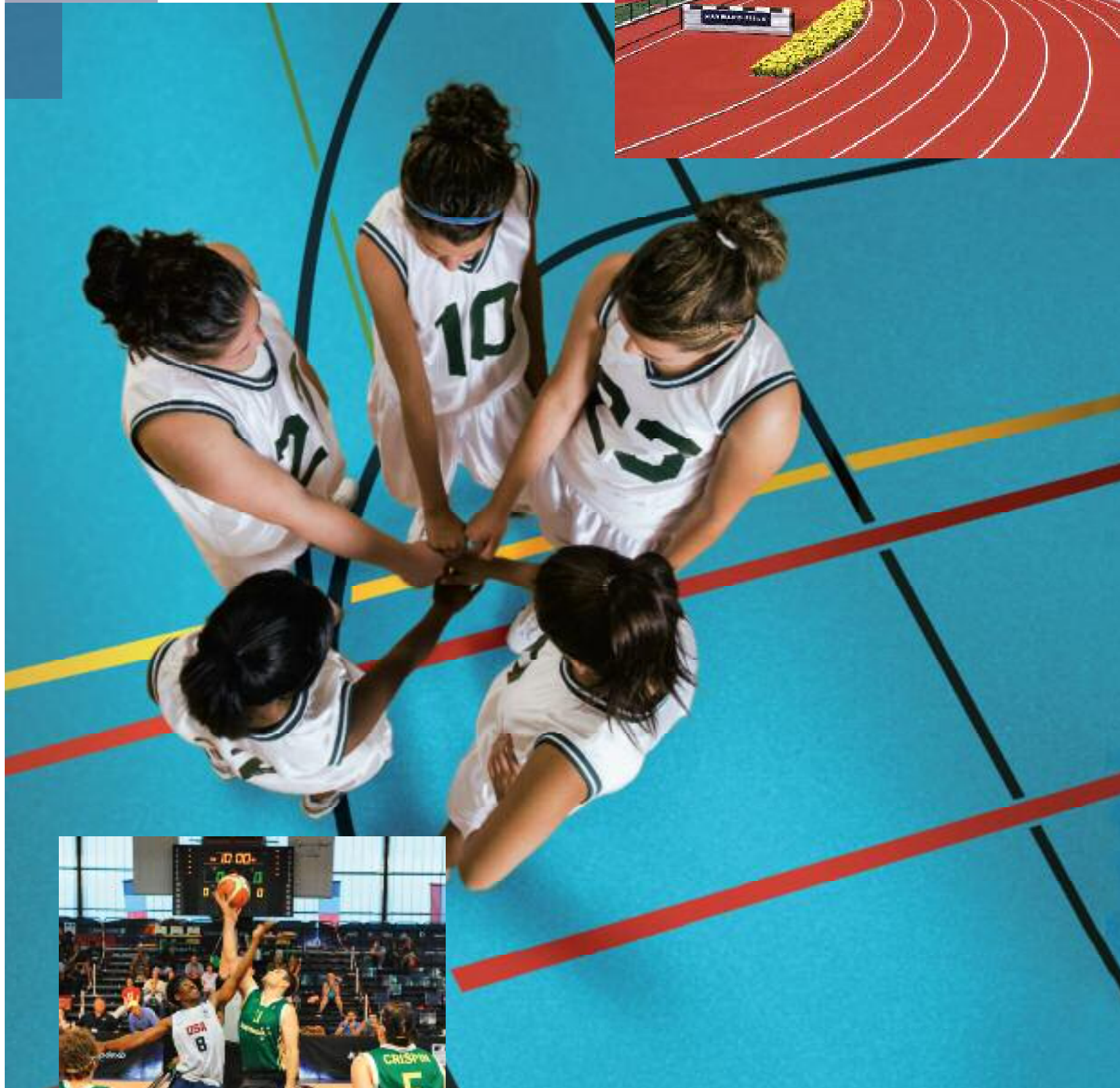


The sports craze

Tarkett, the market leader in indoor and outdoor sports surfaces.

The popularity of sport shows no sign of abating either among participants or spectators. In the early 20th century, sport was viewed as a marginal activity in Europe, practiced by a few eccentric high society figures. Today, 65% of European citizens claim to take part in a physical activity at least once a week. However the Dutch and Scandinavians claim to be sportier than their southern European neighbors, who are primarily spectators and enthusiastic TV viewers of major soccer tournaments and certain Olympic events. In the United States crowds flock to baseball and American football matches. Basketball and ice hockey are also very popular. The thrills and confrontations, the values of sharing and striving for new heights, are achieved on sports fields with surfaces manufactured by Tarkett, which equips stadiums, tracks, gymnasiums, basketball, handball and tennis courts. The Group is a natural partner for the French National Olympic Committee (CNOSF), supporting it from Beijing in 2008 to London in 2012. This five-year commitment provides Tarkett

with an opportunity to mirror sporting values within the company by promoting commitment, team spirit and a competitive approach. This partnership allows the flooring group to promote its expertise and to share it for the benefit of the whole sporting community. Tarkett is also in partnership with the French disabled sports federation, *Fédération Handisport*, and has made a pledge to supply the French national handball team with portable flooring to allow it to take part in competitions in a variety of venues. This close relationship with the sporting world plays a major role in product development. In 2010, the FieldTurf brand developed one of the most innovative artificial turf manufacturing technologies to enhance performance and durability as part of a joint venture with the German company Morton Extrusion Techniks. It is certified by the International Rugby Board (IRB), the International Hockey Federation (FIH), the Australian Football League (AFL), and was named "International Federation of American Football Preferred Supplier".





NEW CONQUESTS IN THE WEST

With development firmly established in Eastern Europe, the Group was keen to reinforce its position in the United States. Tarkett, which had a sports division, took the giant step in 2004 of acquiring FieldTurf, the American sports surfaces specialist. The company was the world leader in next-generation artificial turf. FieldTurf's patented system was as attractive as real grass and had several advantages: a durable, value-for-money surface which was safe because it cushioned falls. Invented by a golfer, Freddie Haas, and popularized by a team which included a large number of American football players, artificial turf initially won over colleges which were early FieldTurf adopters. The sports division of Tarkett was a European leader in its own right, with its Prestige brand, and also marketed floor coverings for sports tracks, tennis courts and indoor facilities. These two brands, focusing on both indoor and outdoor sports pitches, displayed similarly high levels of innovation.

"In order to grow, FieldTurf needed a partner with financial resources at its disposal and a global approach to the turf market. The company had a high profile in North America, but was not very well known in Europe. Tarkett was in the opposite position. From a geographical point of view, the merger of FieldTurf and Tarkett created the world's largest artificial turf business. Today, FieldTurf, which has offices and manufacturing plants worldwide, can meet demand from customers wherever they may be," states Darren Gill, Vice-President of Marketing at FieldTurf.

In late 2005, Johnsonite became part of Tarkett. The prestigious American company was looking for a trusted partner. In fact, its owner, the investment fund Max Capital, was about to relinquish control. For its part, Tarkett was anxious to grow its presence in the commercial sector. What had started out as a marriage of convenience, became a long-term relationship.

"Tarkett wanted to acquire our brand because we had become leaders in our sector, renowned for our innovation and uncompromising approach to customer service. We told them, 'We have a unique way of doing business. This difference is one of the keys to our success.' We struck a deal. Today, our corporate culture has changed because we are now part of a global group. As a global brand, we want people worldwide to think Tarkett when they think of resilient flooring," says Carmen Pastore, Executive Vice-President of Johnsonite.

Left: FieldTurf is a preferred supplier of the National Football League (NFL) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

By 2005, Tarkett was represented in approximately 100 countries and sales doubled in the period 2000 to 2007.

Jeff Buttitta, President of Tarkett North America, says with pride, "We have been able to develop global strategies by respecting regional cultures and characteristics. This is what has enabled us to forge a Tarkett entity in North America, incorporating all of the companies."

A HIGH-PROFILE PRESENCE

By 2005, Tarkett was represented in approximately 100 countries and sales doubled in the period 2000 to 2007. In 2006, following the death of the founder of the Group, the Deconinck family brought the investment fund KKR (Kohlberg Kravis and Roberts) into the capital structure. Once this transaction was complete, the Deconinck family and KKR each held 50% of the Group's shares. The Company now had a 2.1 billion euro business and 9,000 employees. Michel Giannuzzi, CEO of the Group since 2007, consolidated its presence in the East and its investment in Russia by acquiring 100% of Sintelon's capital (Tarkett had already owned 64% of its capital). The aim was to achieve a secure, permanent position in the Russian market with its housing stock of 32 billion square feet, three quarters of which was in need of refurbishment!

Tarkett was also expanding very rapidly in Ukraine and Kazakhstan and was now the number one name in flooring for Russian consumers. It had also been manufacturing homogeneous vinyl and high-end vinyl tiles in Otradny since 2011. Furthermore, a laminate flooring manufacturing plant was launched in April 2010 in Mytishchi in the Moscow region – Tarkett's most significant investment to date.

In North America, Tarkett became the leading supplier of athletics tracks with the acquisition of Beynon Sports Surfaces, which was selected to provide training tracks for the Beijing Olympics in 2008, and Atlas Track & Tennis in 2009. With FieldTurf, Beynon and Tarkett Sports Indoor products, Tarkett combined performance, safety and durability.

Tarkett has secured its position among the leading players. Its history is still being written, not one country or even one continent at a time, although each large region has its own special characteristics and relies on premium brands.



The Russian Revolution

Russians, who are passionate about the pre-revolutionary history of their country and fascinated by reminders of the splendor of the nobility, are particularly keen on gold and inlaid wood. Although the wealthy elite can afford to lay inlaid parquet in their huge apartments, most consumers are delighted to find vinyl imitations or are tempted by simulated marble or ceramic designs. Russia is the biggest vinyl market in the world: 70% of flooring is made of vinyl.

This craze is explained by the cold climate since vinyl has useful thermal insulation properties. It is also easy to clean and install. The Russian and Ukrainian markets are very similar, but present slight differences: high-gloss surfaces are particularly prized in Ukraine and green is very popular, whereas blue is the favorite color of its huge neighbor. However, the younger generation is beginning to adopt more western tastes in both countries.



*Tarkett actually initiated
vinyl flooring recycling
in Sweden in 1957.*

Collaborations and cooperative ventures between entities within the Group have helped Tarkett to build a global corporate identity. Open and collaborative innovation ensures that excellence is developed in all activities in a group which defines itself as a world leader in innovative, sustainable flooring and sports surface solutions.

AN ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENT

In 2010, Tarkett made a commitment to the Cradle to Cradle® environmental philosophy in order to evaluate the potential environmental impact of a product, beginning with the design stage, and to ensure that it can be recycled or reused. The aim is both to reduce potential environmental nuisances during manufacturing and to guarantee healthy products and clean air in buildings and homes fitted with Tarkett floor coverings.

All Tarkett flooring is manufactured following the strictest environmental standards. Worldwide, 97% of Tarkett manufacturing sites are certified ISO 9001 and 90% are certified ISO 14001. Tarkett actually initiated vinyl flooring recycling in Sweden in 1957. Luxembourg was also a pioneer and has been recycling heterogeneous flooring since 1964. "Our Recycling and Environmental strategy was born of conviction and was not based on an opportunistic cost-cutting rationale," stresses Anne-Christine Ayed, Executive Vice-President for Research, Innovation and Environment. Once again Sweden led the way in 1997, offering an installation waste collection service at fitting sites, a practice launched in the United States under the name "Re-use", which is now standard practice. Today, Tarkett's ReUse/ReStart™ program is the industry's largest recycling program and operates in the US, Sweden and France.

Contributing to the well-being of people and society means ensuring our products are safe and protect human health. A leader in low-VOC and vinyl flooring with VOC emissions below quantifiable level, Tarkett is continuously working to replace TVOC emitting materials to protect indoor air quality and the health and well-being of consumers. Globally, most products have low TVOC emis-

Left: Waste collected
for recycling.

Lastly, the environment is also taken into consideration once the products are installed.

sions. In 2011, 10% of flooring production had non-detectable levels of TVOC as defined by local standards. Tarkett fully intends to exceed regulatory requirements both in this area and as regards phthalates (plasticizers derived from phthalic acid), which have been eliminated in the North American and European markets.

Lastly, the environment is also taken into consideration once the products are installed. Many products have surface treatments that are designed to require very little in the way of chemical cleaning and are therefore good for air quality. The next generation of XF linoleum produced in the Italian factory in Narni has a unique surface treatment which is highly resistant to abrasion, thus reducing maintenance impacts, water consumption and cleaning time. This innovation was rewarded with the "Green good design™" prize in 2009 in the industrial category, awarded by judging panels from the European Centre for Architecture Art Design and Urban Studies and the Chicago Museum of Architecture and Design. Innovation and environmental concerns are drivers on all manufacturing sites:

- In Canada, recycling began in 2005 with paper and cardboard. Plastic was added in 2008, as well as fiberglass sheeting, when recycling levels reached 75%.

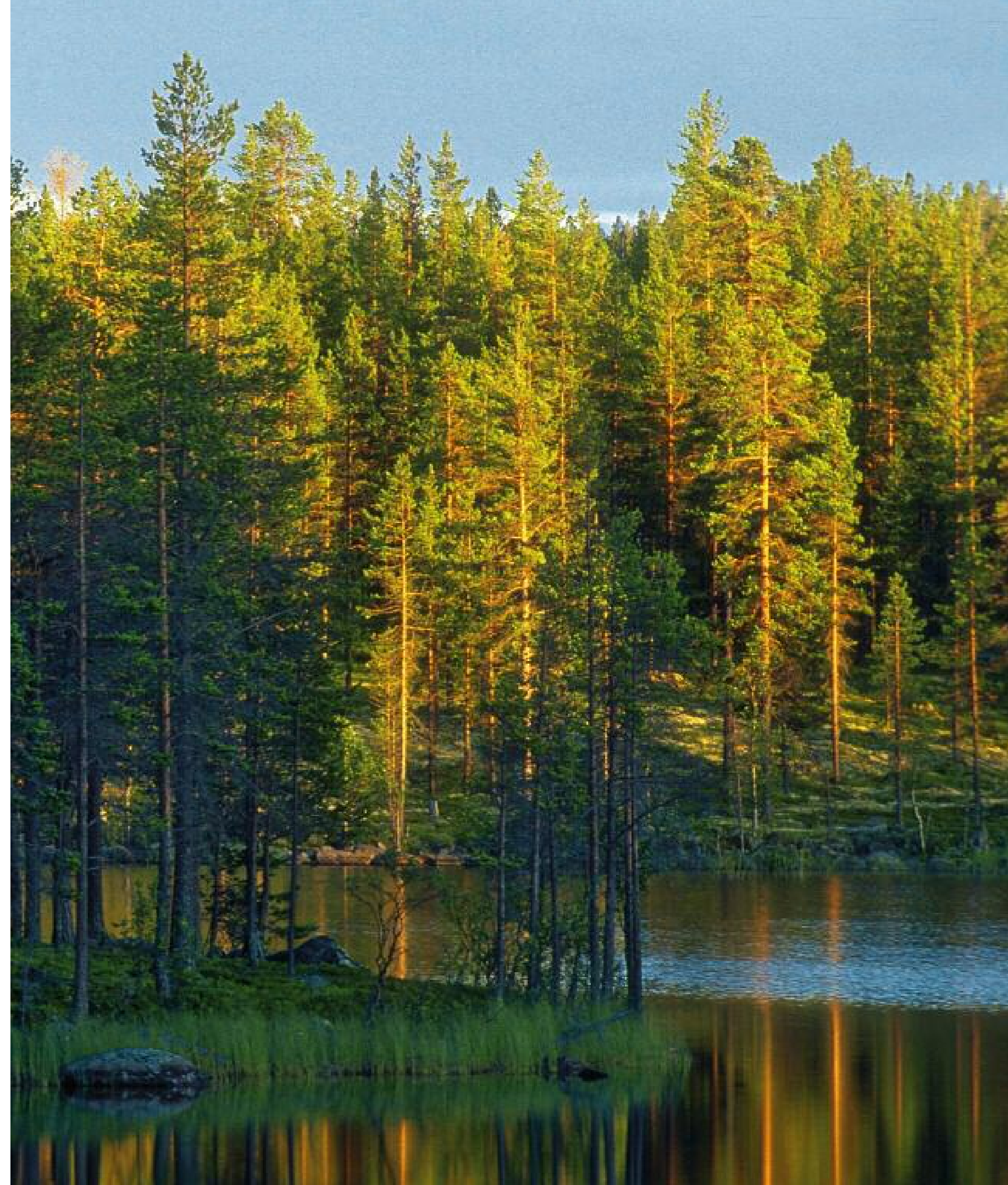
- A FieldTurf installation is 100% recyclable when it reaches the end of its long lifespan. FieldTurf was the first company in the sector to offer turf recycling. With its "Take Back" program, Tarkett Sports undertakes to replace customers' worn flooring and fully recycle the old product.

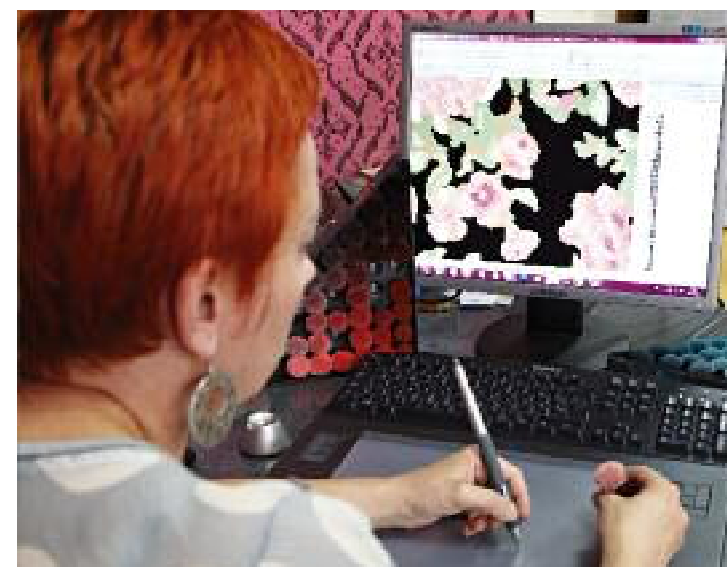
- With its plan for a new calendar, the factory in Otradny, Russia will be installing a sixth production line enabling it to recycle 100% of its waste in two years time. Otradny, which is ISO certified, has already been singled out for its environmentally-friendly approach and was nominated an eco-leader not just for the Samara region, but for Russia and the former Soviet Union area as a whole.

- In Backa Palanka in Serbia, a wood burner fuelled by sawdust produced in the parquet plant has been providing heat for the vinyl flooring production line since 2009.

- In the United States, one customer reached the million-pound mark for recycling of installed floors, using the ReStart program.

Right: The Swedish forest is one of its most important natural resources.





UNVEILING NEW COLLECTIONS

Luxembourg is the heart of Western European floor fashion. The Clervaux Design Center in Luxembourg, creates designs in every type of material, working with vinyl and linoleum, as well as wood and laminate.

Collections are unveiled every two years without so much as a runway or super-model. They are published in *The Tarkett Observer*, a reference document, and the manifesto produced by the style office, which spots trends with a view to transforming them into beautiful, innovative products and flooring solutions. Colors, prints, patterns and materials are created for several different sectors – healthcare, education, residential, retail and offices. Many factors are taken into consideration, reflecting the importance of floor coverings in everyday life.

Luxembourg also coordinates design for other geographies, which each produce designs in keeping with customer expectations and their own creative approach. Creativity is the order of the day, as Brian Fink, the manager of the Johnsonite factory in Chagrin Falls explains: “We offer a unique palette of colors, patterns and profiles. Our production line is constantly changing product. It’s a challenge! Rubber may be a very traditional material, but we have a unique way of working with it. Johnsonite is very focused on design and interior decor. We work from 170 basic colors and regularly offer new collections. We manufacture high volumes in half a dozen fairly traditional colors – black, dark brown, beige, terracotta shades and metallics. Our collections are used in famous companies and colleges and we export as far as the Middle East.”

According to Andrey Kotov, “25 to 30% of designs are replaced every year. We adopt a scientific approach to analyzing Russian customers’ tastes, which vary from region to region. In our design center, working groups come up with new ideas which are then tested on approximately 5,000 people. Customers’ first criterion for making a choice is style, followed by quality, with price only ranking in third place. People change their flooring every twelve years on average. We work on our products so that they feel strong to the touch.”

The Tarkett Studio on the outskirts of Paris is not a film set but showcases the group’s products in context. This installation, which was launched in late 2011, provides an opportunity to discover Tarkett’s world in an environment

Above: Collections are unveiled regularly depending on the trends.
Left: Tapiflex Excellence Matrix range.

which combines sound and images. Visitors can walk through some sixty different spaces including a bedroom, lobby, classroom, office and sports pitch, each displaying a Tarkett solution. The Tarkett Studio is also a research facility with a materials library housing 3,000 samples. A flooring school covering 1,000 m² (10,800 sq. ft.) plays host to the young flooring specialists of the future and offers training to course participants.



THE TRAINING CHALLENGE

Expertise is passed on worldwide through Tarkett Academies. At the entrance to the historic Sedan site is the tall building devoted to training. This location highlights the emphasis placed on the transmission of knowledge. A training session on linoleum is underway next to the current testing area for kitchen and school flooring and the installation academy. The previous day's lesson was on solid wood flooring. Sedan is the headquarters of the Western Europe Tarkett Academy and also supervises Cleveland and Moscow, headquarters for training in North America and Eastern Europe. There are a dozen centers worldwide, training professionals in quality, safety, maintenance and sustainable development issues.

The Tarkett Academy provides a better understanding of homogeneous vinyl and also teaches professionals who are not very familiar with this material how to install it. They follow a training program working both with homogeneous and heterogeneous flooring and receive an installation certificate on completion of their training. The Otradny and Galitsyno Tarkett Academies which opened in 2007 can no longer meet the demand generated by growth in the market. The training landscape will have to be totally overhauled by 2015. The Galitsyno Academy on the outskirts of Moscow is due to close and a larger space will open on the laminate flooring factory site in Mytishchi, and two offshoots will be created in Yekaterinburg and Novosibirsk.

Above: The Tarkett Studio outlines the Group's history in its corporate section.
Right: The Tarkett Academy in Aubervilliers where many professional floor fitters are trained every year.



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Melodia range,**

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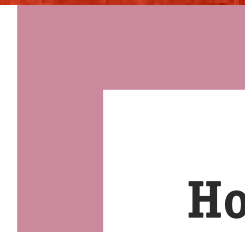
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Zagoroxoria Hotel, Greece



**Parquet flooring, Epoque
range Oak Winter,**
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