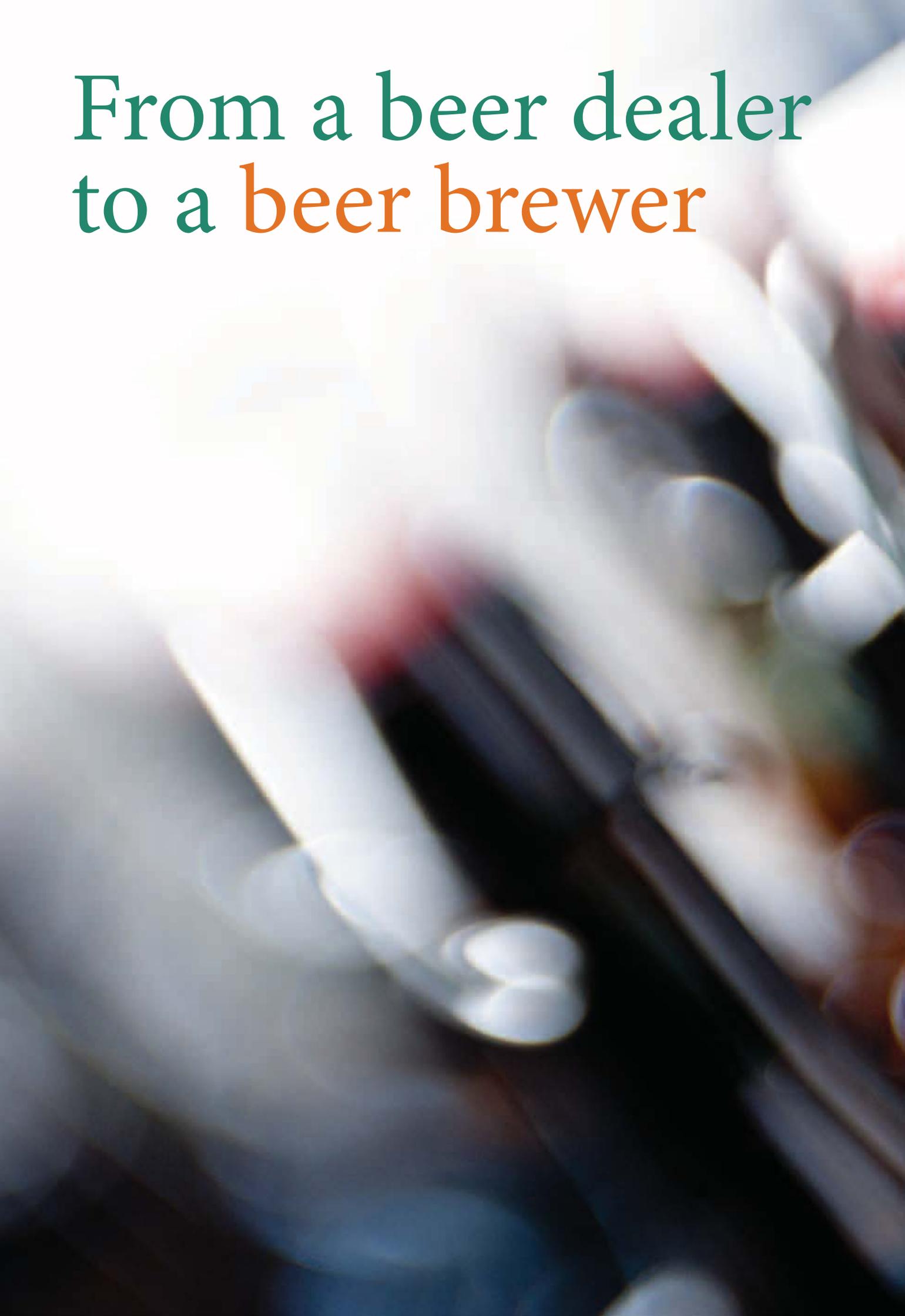


From a beer dealer
to a beer brewer





*In recent decades, the story has been a not unfamiliar one: long-established, tradition-steeped breweries had to close down their brewing operations, defeated by the pressure of competition and shrinking levels of demand, concentrating henceforth on selling beverages as a specialist wholesaler. Harald Eisenmann has travelled an opposite path. From a beverage wholesaler to a beer brewer. By re-opening the **Bitterfeld Brewery**, he has determinedly translated his product ideas into lovingly crafted reality. For the sheer fun of it and from dispassionate business projections as well. The huge popularity of his specialty beers has now enabled him to upsize his capacities to 10,000 hectolitres. Helped not least by a Kosme labeller rated at 4,500 bottles an hour.*

Harald Eisenmann, 43 years old, beer brewer, businessman, beverage wholesaler. His parents emigrated to West Germany in the late 1950s, from the Halle/Saale region. With the advent of German reunification in 1989/90, the family returned to its original home town, and set up a beverage sales business, which has operated successfully for two decades now on its chosen market, concentrating primarily on Bitterfeld and its surrounding region. In the Communist era of East Germany, Bitterfeld, as a centre of open-cast lignite mining and the location of a large state-owned chemical conglomerate, was synonymous with the desolate condition of the East German economy and the country's dangerously polluted environment. Following reunification, billions of deutschmarks were invested in recultivation designed to transform the mining-scarred landscape around Bitterfeld into a scenic

panorama of forests and lakes, nowadays a popular destination for hikers and water sports fans. Bit by bit, Mother Nature is growing over its ancient scars. With its new "Chemicals Park", however, Bitterfeld is nowadays still a significant location of what is meanwhile a modern-style chemical industry.

Bitterfeld's beer tradition revived

Since 1880, there had also been a brewery in Bitterfeld, which ended up as a state-owned company (VEB) as part of the socialist economy. Following reunification, the brewery was closed down in 1990, and subsequently demolished in 1995. With the support of Bitterfeld's town council, Harald Eisenmann acquired the brand rights in 2006. In his younger years, Harald Eisenmann had begun an apprenticeship as a brewer, but had then re-trained as a restaurateur.





The very compact Kosme Extra labeller features an Extrafix centring unit that enables different bottle formats to be handled up to a size of three litres.

“The very best beer you’ve ever beheld – it’s brewed, of course, by Bitterfeld” is what Harald Eisenmann, throwing modesty to the winds, declaims poetically on the beer mats.



On the left: The actual brewing of the beers in Bitterfeld is the responsibility of a team headed by Jacqueline Christ, qualified brewmaster.



Two original cold-glue labelling stations from Krones dress the bottle in body, back and swing-stopper tamper-evident labels.

At the end of April 2011, the Süddeutsche Zeitung newspaper provocatively declared: “In the USA and other countries, a beer culture has evolved that has left German breweries lagging behind” and bemoaned “nondescript run-of-the-mill beers from Germany”. A verdict that Harald Eisenmann cannot unequivocally reject: “The ongoing globalisation process in the brewing sector has lastingly changed consumers’ identification

habits. As a regional wholesaler, we have definitely observed this on the market. Which is what gave us the idea of reviving the old regional beer traditions in Bitterfeld. For keeping the old traditions alive and reviving the recipe for Bitterfelder beer, I was lucky enough to secure the services of retired brewmaster Heinz Dembek, who worked as the brewmaster at the Bitterfeld Brewery for more than 50 years right up until the end. Back then, unfortunately, none of the region’s commercial banks was prepared to finance the project against the background of the global economic crisis. In December 2009, with the support of a vendor, we succeeded in brewing original Bitterfelder beer again for the first time in 20 years, using the old recipes handed down. But with only half the capacity we had actually planned for.”

Capacity doubled after a single year

The brewery was then officially inaugurated in April 2010 with a rip-roaring party attended by more than 3,000 guests. At first, swing-stopper bottles were filled on a two-valve manual filler in special sizes of 0.75 litres and 2 litres at a speed of 200 bottles an hour and sold on the regional markets – at respectable prices, the 0.75-litre bottles for about two euros. Labelling, of course, was also performed by hand – label by label. Nowadays, a team headed by Brewmaster Jacqueline Christ, brews Bitterfelder Beer, Bitterfelder Bock, Amber beer and Dark, plus a seasonal Christmas beer. In addition, the beer is racked in 30 and 50-litre kegs, and served at regional festivities and in catering establishments. And recently the brewery has added 5-litre party cans to its range.

The approximately 5,000-hectolitre capacity of this, the smallest industrial brewery in the state of Saxony-Anhalt, if not in the whole of eastern Germany, was already well-nigh exhausted in the very first year. Most of the brewery’s beer passed through the gates in kegs, for the catering trade and events. That’s why purposeful consideration was given to capacity upsizing and automated bottle filling. This project was completed in the summer of 2011.

Revamping the range of bottles

The official inauguration of the new bottling line went hand in hand with a revamping, or more pre-

cisely an expansion of the bottle range being used. The Bitterfeld Brewery intends in future to operate the laborious manual filling and labelling procedures for the 0.75-litre and 2-litre swing-stopper bottles only when handling its specialty beers. For Bitterfelder Pils, by contrast, there is now a 0.33-litre Steinie bottle, a 0.5-litre euro-bottle and a 0.5-litre long-neck bottle. This enabled Harald Eisenmann to smooth his path onto the retailers' shelves while simultaneously opening up a second important sales channel in addition to the catering trade, which tends to report declining sales almost nationwide. "More and more, people tend to drink their beer at home in front of the plasma TV or in the garden, because for various reasons they can no longer afford or want to go to a pub", opines Eisenmann. "Consumers' habits have changed." For the new bottle sizes, he arranged for an eleven-bottle crate to be developed, a size that's not so fiercely contested on the market as the regular crate holding 20 bottles. Moreover, the price of a crate can thus stay significantly below the ten-euro mark. "This means Bitterfelder beer is also available for the lower income classes, but nonetheless has a price-per-litre that sets it apart from other vendors." What really helped him was that the region's retailers came to him of their own initiative, because here, too, the success of the Bitterfelder beers sold from the brewery's premises had not gone unnoticed. "The very best beer you've ever beheld – it's brewed, of course, by Bitterfeld" is what Harald Eisenmann throwing modesty to the winds, declaims poetically on the beer mats.

Kosme labeller for different bottle formats

For labelling its bottles, the Bitterfeld Brewery chose a Kosme Extra labeller. This very compact machine, which is also frequently used for labelling champagne bottles, features an Extrafix centring unit that enables different bottle formats to be handled up to a size of three litres. Just what the Bitterfeld Brewery needed for its range of bottles. Two original cold-glue labelling stations from Krones dress the bottle in body, back and swing-stopper tamper-evident labels. "The fact that Krones is behind Kosme was, to be honest, a crucial argument for our decision. Otherwise I wouldn't really have felt all that confident. The strong regional support, communication in German, this was really important to us. Actually, we

wanted to get the entire bottling line from Krones, but our bank wouldn't go all the way with the financing. We were pleasantly surprised to see that Krones took such enormous trouble with such a small brewery. That was exemplary. I can only recommend anyone who's tackling a project like ours to seek out Krones as a partner. In our view, there are technological worlds between the simple machines and those from Krones and Kosme."

With 10,000 hectolitres of capacity at his disposal, Harald Eisenmann can now produce just as much beer himself as his beverage retailing firm achieves in total beverage sales. Harald Eisenmann has become a beer brewer: "That was the right decision."

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Harald Eisenmann, businessman, beverage wholesaler, has become a beer brewer:
"This was the right decision."

