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Question**



**"Design, Quality and
Reliability - Since 1896,
these 3 words describe best,
the heritage that is Menrad."**

– Eberhard Müller-Menrad,
Managing Director of Menrad in
conversation with Alim Bolar



IN FOCUS

Who is?



Eberhard Müller-Menrad.
Owner /
Managing Director
of Menrad since 1997

Menrad set up operations in the Middle East with an office in Dubai in January, 2011. It held an event recently to announce this development, where the owner and Managing Director, Mr Eberhard Müller-Menrad took centre-stage

“Design, quality and reliability – these words describe Menrad's heritage best”

by profession, was a goldsmith. He had the opportunity to use gold to create eyepieces which hooked him on to eyewear manufacturing. In the 1920s he even travelled to the US from Germany and worked with Bausch & Lomb for two years before returning to Germany and applying his knowledge into the optical manufacturing business. We've had quite a few landmarks in our business and the list would be quite long if I had to mention all of them. But there are three specific instances that stand out for me. The first one would be when we expanded internationally in 1970's. We moved some of our manufacturing units beyond Germany but within Europe, in places like Switzerland, Malta and Ireland. At the same time, we expanded our sales network and founded many Menrad-owned sales subsidiaries in Europe.

The second instance would be the 1980's when we signed our first license agreements. We have been working with brands such as Jaguar, Davidoff and Joop since that time. And the third instance would be in 1997, when we built our factory in China (besides the Swiss facility that is still in place) - much before the world realised the potential that this part of the world held for manufacturing.

Eberhard Müller-Menrad has been actively involved in the handling of the company's business along with his brother Hermann. He talks to Alim Bolar about Menrad's heritage and the possibilities he sees in the Middle East.

Here are the excerpts:

Alim Bolar (AB): Hi Eberhard, it's nice to know that Menrad, a business house in existence for over a century, is establishing its presence in the Middle East. Could you please give a brief on the company and its heritage...
Eberhard Müller-Menrad (EMM): Thanks, Alim. It feels nice to be here in the Middle East. As for the brief on Menrad, well it is a family business with over 115 years of heritage. It was started by my great-grandfather, who

We are a company that provides great designs with the best quality and every product that comes from Menrad is backed with our trademark reliability. Today, it's the fourth generation that's running the company but our principles remain the same since 1896 - design, quality and reliability.

A B: German and Chinese products stand for two ends of the market. Your company seems to be a unique combination where German heritage and precision is enhanced by a Chinese workforce. How has this worked for you?
EMM: I would say that it's been a very good decision on our part and it has held us in good stead. However, you must know that there's a difference

in how we are present in China. This is our own factory, our know-how and our control. We are not sub-contracting it to some other manufacturer. We have always considered manufacturing as a very important part of our business. We have invested in setting up our own factory in China and it has worked very well for us.

A B: More companies now seem to be setting up their own factories in China. In what way is Menrad special in this context?

EMM: Let me explain it. We went to China in 1997, much before anyone else realised the country's potential. And it was very clear in the early 90s that China would be the place where manufacturing would flourish. Today, 80% of the frame-manufacturing capacity is in China.

What makes us unique is we had been running our own factories in Europe and when we had our factories in China it was an extension of the same. As it's our own unit, we did not hold back with the know-how and we strived very hard to get the best output. In fact, in 2005, due to this perseverance, I am proud to say that we had better quality output in our China factory than our factories based in Europe. We have a unique combination of tight control out of Germany and since it was our own factory, there was no reluctance in transferring the know-how.

A B: A company is always considered to be as good as the employees who represent it. How would you describe your team in the Middle East?

EMM: Our team here is highly qualified. Jules Tabet, our Sales Director for Middle East, has previously worked for a large international competitor. Stefanie, who is responsible for the International Marketing and Licencing in our headquarters in Germany, and will also support the local marketing needs, comes with the experience of having worked for companies like Adidas and Swarovski in her previous jobs.

I am very happy that we have attracted talent from such large companies. There are some things that we can't



Eberhard Müller-Menrad with his brother, Hermann

offer when compared to much larger organisations but there are other things like flat management hierarchy, an open and respectful handling of people, and I am very glad to see that, in spite of being a medium sized company, we can attract such talent. I am very proud of my team.

A B: You do have a few partners in the Middle East for some brands? What role would they play?

EMM: We have established a very efficient supply-chain partnering with local distributors to facilitate the daily business of our customers. In UAE, we have partnered up with Trubell Marketing LLC, one of the largest distributors in Dubai, who have been a great support at our launch event. We were also able to finalise distributors in KSA-Gulf Trading, and in Lebanon - Lebanese Optical Group and Third Eye to distribute different brands of our portfolio while our local office is directly catering for large chains covering all the Middle East.

A B: Well, a very important question that's on everyone's minds is, why was Menrad so late in entering the Middle East?

EMM: Yes, that's a very important question and not so easy to answer. There are two issues that we need

"It's the fourth generation that's running the company but our principles remain the same since 1896 - design, quality and reliability."
Eberhard Müller-Menrad, MD, Menrad

to consider: On one side, we have focused our personnel resources during the past years on the expansion of our sales network in China. On the other side, we have already been serving the Middle East through our export department in Germany. However, we felt the need of being closer and more active within this region. Some might feel that it's not the right time to enter the market considering the economic crisis that has hit the region. But we are a family business and we have a long-term strategy in place. We don't have shareholders who worry about the short-term results. We see huge potential in this region, even at this point, and for sure in the future. Our study and our forecasts will hold us

in good stead and we are sure that in terms of growth and particularly in the target audience that we are looking to cater to, Middle East is the place to be. To answer your question though, I would say that yes, we are late. But it's better late than never!

A B: Of all the regions that make up the Middle East, which region interests you the most?

EMM: I think it's obvious today to say that it's Saudi Arabia. Beyond that I see huge potential in Egypt too. Middle East, as a whole, is something that we are looking forward to. And Dubai, for us, is the perfect place to set up our office. I have been visiting Dubai for the past 10 years as I have friends here and I have grown to love this place. Right now, it may be going through some tough times but I am sure they will soon regain their former glory.

A B: You have a kitty of six brands - Menrad, Morgan, Joop, Davidoff, Jaguar and Zeiss. Which of these are you banking on?

EMM: Without any doubt it's Jaguar. We've been associated with Jaguar for 25 years now and people know this in the market. This brand association is very strong and particularly in this region the brand recall is very, very high. Davidoff is another brand that holds a high recall value in this region. Internationally, too, these two brands have been doing extremely well.

A B: What, according to you, is Menrad's strength?

EMM: Reliability. We are a very precise German company and our reliability is not just about the quality of the product but also the service. If we

say it, we mean it and if we mean it, we do it. This is what Menrad is about. Earlier at the presentation, Jules Tabet promised 90 percent order delivery of our stock to the Middle East but I can assure you that we could currently deliver much higher than that. This is where we differentiate ourselves from our suppliers. Since we control the value-chain, including the production, we can offer better availability of products. We are well organised in a way that the day we launch our product our stock is available for order delivery.



A B: So unlike other companies who launch a product and assure deliveries a few months later, you can deliver immediately?

EMM: Yes. Other companies do it differently. There are many facets to the word 'Reliability' and stock-availability of products is just one more way to be reliable.

A B: Every product is seen and judged for its design aspect and its production quality. What, according to you, is more important?

EMM: I am involved in the product development, design and production and from our understanding, product quality is the base to build upon but it's not a differentiating factor. It's also very important to have an up-to-date design. The combination of production and design is most important but I would say that with excellent quality and poor design you cannot achieve a good product. So design is very, very important.

A B: Coming to the design aspect, could you tell us who designs the products- Menrad or the brand's design department?

EMM: Menrad does the designing. Yes, we do it within our organisation and usually it is approved by the licensor of the brand. It all depends on how tight the relationship is with the license holder. We have a number of brands and in some cases the approval takes longer if the license holder has to approve each design individually, but nevertheless the design always comes from our team internally.

A B: I think the fact that Jaguar designs come from Menrad says a lot about your design capability and strengths.

EMM: We've been doing Jaguar designs for 25 years and after so much time there's a trust that's built. We share this trust with Jaguar.

A B: You are the fourth generation in the business today? How does it feel?

EMM: Oh, it feels great!. It's a heritage and I am very proud of it. Today it's me

and my brother Hermann who handle the business. The way we share our roles is that he takes care of the sales and marketing and I handle the product development and manufacturing. He has been with the company for 20 years and I've been with the company for 14 years now.

A B: What about the fifth generation? Are they already looking forward to joining Menrad?

EMM: Oh yes! I have two sons aged 10 and 12. Initially they wanted to be fire-fighters but nowadays they say that they are looking forward to joining the family business. So I am sure the heritage will continue.

AB: Thanks Eberhard for sharing your time and your views with us. We wish you all the very best for your endeavour in the Middle East.

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 Email us at arabia@visionplusmag.com

Menrad showcases its collection in Dubai



Stefanie Schweitzer, Eberhard Müller-Menrad, Jules Tabet and Tim Halter at the event, flanked by models on both sides

Over 100 existing and potential customers as well as distribution partners for the Middle East, alongside media gathered on October 17th, 2011, at the Le Meridien Dubai to celebrate the official launch of Menrad's Middle East subsidiary.

Eberhard Müller-Menrad, Managing Director, presented the company, its history and the brand portfolio to the guests. The Middle Eastern upcoming services and plans were explained by Jules Tabet, Sales Director for the Middle East.

A fashion show presenting the latest optical and sunglass collections of JOOP!, Jaguar, Davidoff, Zeiss, Menrad and Morgan ended the official part of the presentation. Menrad's team and the invitees shared a casual dinner closing the event.