



**Schmidt Groupe**  
The industrial artisan -  
dedicated to the art of living



TRUST



ENJOYMENT



RELATIONSHIP



RESPECT



EXCELLENCE

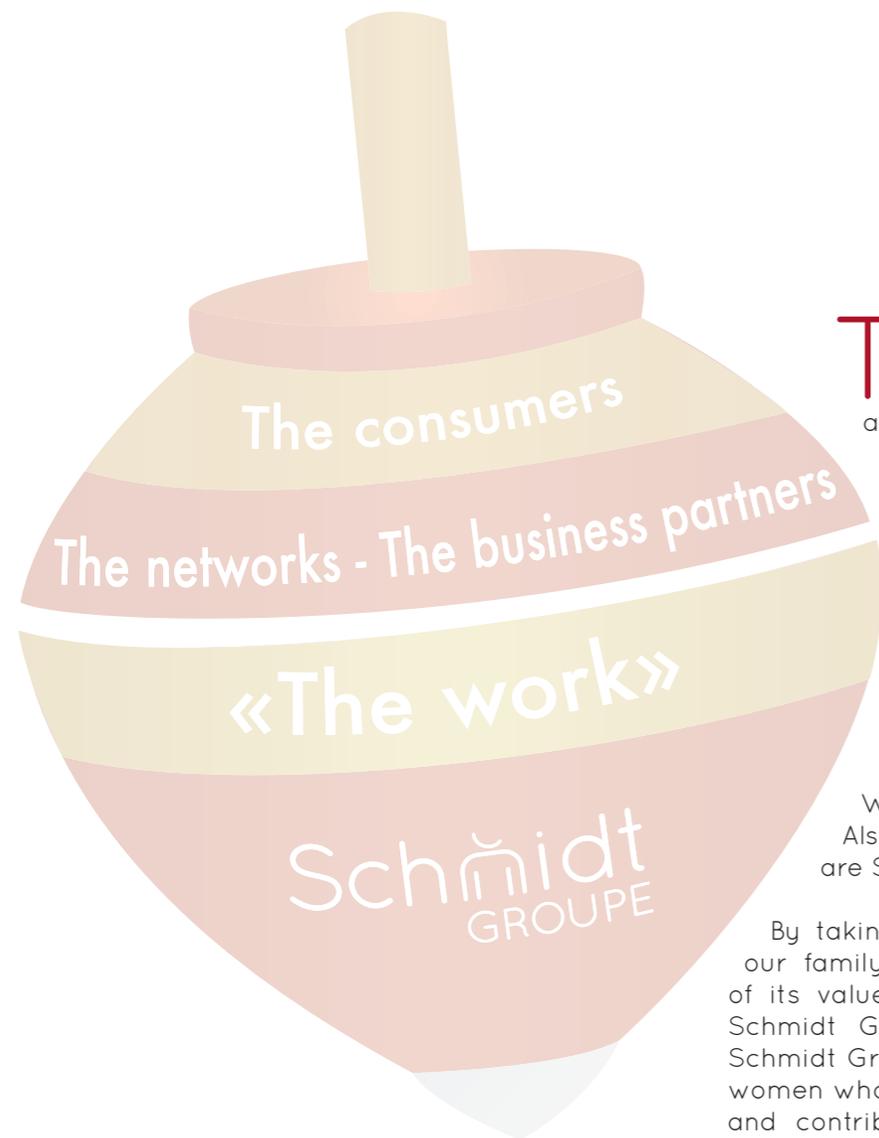


Laurent Lentz at the controls of the BIMA 480 robot at Lièpvre; he currently heads the process team at U1

# Schmidt Groupe

The industrial artisan -  
dedicated to the art of living

*Together  
we move on*



**T**he world is changing. Saying that is nothing new. But noticing and feeling it, experiencing it in one's daily life, at home and at work, brings in a totally different dimension. That's why it seemed essential for me to take the time to retrace the adventure of the Schmidt family group and make it into a book.

The world is undergoing change and we too are changing, without in any way modifying what has constituted the strength and singularity of our firm and forged its identity over time. We were Schmidt, then SALM (Société Alsacienne de Meubles), from now on we are Schmidt Groupe.

By taking on again the name of its founder, our family enterprise proudly asserts the first of its values: its confidence in what is human. Schmidt Groupe is no mere corporate name. Schmidt Groupe is a team, composed of men and women who work day by day developing the firm and contributing to its expansion with daring, innovation and creativity.

The world is changing and the firm is expanding. It is currently reaching a turning point. From its international dimension, it is moving on to becoming globalized.

Digitalization has completely changed the relationship between dealers and consumers. The teams are being renewed; long-standing colleagues are leaving; a new generation is joining us. We're becoming acquainted with a host of young people who are arriving to take over, to share our ambitions and objectives, bringing with them their skills, their vision and their added value. It is they who will write further chapters of our story.

But nothing can be written without memory. It is up to us to pass on the philosophy and the basic principles on which our predecessors built the enterprise, principles which are indeed values that we endeavour to keep alive and strong. If we wish to become by 2025 the Group providing consumers with their favourite brands of bespoke home furnishing, the idea of an extended enterprise has to be assimilated. Our "raison d'être" is first and foremost to contribute to pleasure and well-being, both as regards consumers' living styles and the way all our teams live harmoniously together. The whole meaning of our work is that: placing the consumer at the heart of our concerns. It is in order better to approach the future that I wish to draw lessons from the past. And to capitalize on know-how, what better method than making it known?

Anne Leitzgen

Schmidt  
GROUPE





2014 - The Armada at the Euroforum

“ We are an Armada ! ”

## Foreword

### Winning over consumers

The sun is bursting over the port of Marseilles. The imposing cruiser waits at the quayside. Boarding passengers joyfully greet each other along the gangways: "Ah, you're here, too!" Concessionaire shop managers, salesmen, marketing staff, network organizers and managerial staff have arrived from all the regions and all the countries to attend Euroforum, Schmidt Groupe's grand get-together.

The liner will make three return trips between Marseilles and Genoa to transport close on 3000 participants. A very full programme awaits them: presentation of the aims and innovations, new sales-outlet concepts, an exhibition of new product ranges covering three floors in Genoa, and, finally, the screening of upcoming publicity campaigns. It is a strategic get-together for the group, the highpoint being exchanging views, listening to one another, but also the accompaniment of the networks and the discovery of the products.

In the evening things are more relaxed. The Catalans set the stage on fire, with the guys from Castres not far behind them; the whole deck is invaded by a bunch of pirates.

- "We are an Armada, a conquering Armada launching out to capture the heart of consumers", cries out Anne Leitzgen on the stage of the floating theatre, as the liner casts off.



Participants at the Euroforum in Genoa



Participants at the Euroforum in Genoa

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Over 80 years of a family and industrial adventure



Hubert Schmidt



The Heidi dresser



The first Schmid Cuisines album



1930 - The Türkismühle factory



1960 - Overall view of Lièpvre



28th January 1967 - Wedding of Karl Leitzgen and Antonia Schmidt



1973 - The Schmid factory in Lièpvre



Prestige 150

1934

Hubert Schmidt, at age 27, sets up his masonry firm in Türkismühle (Saarland).

1948

From the private turnkey house to the first Schmidt Küchen cabinets: the first manufacturing hall for kitchen cabinets is built and the first models are presented at the St Wendel Trade-Fair (Saarland).

1959

Saarland reintegrates Germany. On 6th July, Cuisines Schmidt is established in Lièpvre and manufactures Heidi dressers.

**With 4 salesmen, 57 employees – of whom 20 or so come from Saarland. The firm already has a turnover of 300,000 Euros.**

1967

Karl Leitzgen marries Antonia Schmidt and gives an incredible boost to the Cuisines Schmidt firm in Lièpvre.

**100 collaborators and a turnover close on 1 million Euros.**

1975

Kitchen cabinets are no longer in fashion. Cuisines Schmidt take a different approach and launch kitchen units; the first catalogue illustrating the Standard, Prestige and Classic ranges, goes to press. The bespoke facing process is under way.

**150 collaborators and a turnover of more than 5 million Euros.**

1983

On 13th July, the last Prestige 150 cabinet is manufactured. With the arrival of the first digital order, the firm becomes the Société Alsacienne de Meubles - SALM.

**It totals 270 employees and posts a turnover of 19 million Euros.**





1986 - Arcos



The firm's philosophy poster



1989 - Saintonge



Karl Leitzgen presenting the brand policy at the opening of UI



UI, the new SALM factory at Sélestat



Death of Hubert Schmidt



1995 - Integra



1993 - 1st generation Eolis



Launching of Cuisinella



Karl Leitzgen



After the death of Karl Leitzgen, Antonia Leitzgen becomes the CEO of SALM



Maxi Line



EMK products



The first tables and chairs to match with kitchens

1986

To step up sales in its exclusive outlets, Cuisines Schmidt enters the realm of publicity and opens shops in the UK. "Be the best, respect everyone, succeed together" are the keywords of the group's philosophy. **350 employees; a turnover of 44 million Euros.**

1989

SALM launches its brand name "Cuisines Schmidt" in Paris and becomes the second French group. A new modern factory is opened in Sélestat and the Türkismühle site is joined to France. **600 employees and a turnover of 65 million Euros.**

1990

Death of Hubert Schmidt and creation of a sales agency in Scandinavia. **650 employees and turnover of 77 million Euros.**

1992

The SALM group widens its scope and launches "Cuisinella": a new, more affordable, brand for young couples. Meanwhile Cuisines Schmidt enters the realm of bathrooms and accessories. **700 employees with a turnover of 83 million Euros.**

1995

Karl Leitzgen suddenly and brutally dies. His wife, Antonia, takes over the management aided by Jean-Marie Schwab. Schmidt offers a free choice of colours, styles and multiple combinations. Bespoke manufacturing becomes industrialized. **800 employees and a turnover of 94 million Euros.**

1998

SALM is the first French kitchen manufacturer to be awarded the ISO 9001 quality certification. The group pursues its diversification and sets up a subsidiary producing kit furniture, EMK, for mass-market retailing. **750 employees, the firm reaches a turnover of 123.5 million Euros.**





2001 -  
Shelve  
colours



2005 - An Italian line  
and bespoke handle  
fixing



The made-to-measure production line



2008 -  
In and Out



The U1 and U2 plants in Sélestat



From left to right: Caroline, Antonia  
and Anne Leitzgen



2010 -  
A new  
Janus Prize

JANUS 2010  
DE L'INDUSTRIE



Map of Schmidt counselling centres



The "Evolution 130"  
and "Perfect Fit"  
concepts



The new concept  
of Schmidt shops



Schmidt invests in China



Schmidt's  
3 worlds



Cuisinella's  
3 worlds

2004

The Sélestat plant is expanded. With new custom-manufacturing, finishing and profiling lines in Türkismühle, SALM launches a range of bespoke furniture and storage spaces totally adapted to individual consumer needs. Schmidt pursues the development of its exports.

**1,200 employees and a turnover of 200 million Euros.**

2006

Anne Leitzgen takes over the chairing of the family group; she reinforces the network of exclusive outlets and endeavours to take a first turning: to become the leading European firm and expand it into an international group.

**1,300 employees and a turnover of 295 million Euros.**

2008

SALM takes pride in obtaining three certifications (Quality, Environment and Hygiene), a 'first' among kitchen manufacturers. The firm starts up its new, totally automated, U2 production site in Sélestat. The group becomes the N° 1 French kitchen manufacturer.

**1,420 employees and a turnover of 304 million Euros.**

2010

Schmidt is present in 25 countries. Thanks to its policy of sustainable development, the group obtains a further eco label.

**1,444 employees and a 332 million Euro turnover.**

2014

SALM opens a factory in China by signing a joint-venture agreement with the S.S.K. which already has a network of 1,200 furniture outlets. Two new Schmidt outlet concepts in Europe: Schmidt Home Stories and Schmidt Cupboards and bespoke furniture.

**With 1,400 employees and 6,000 collaborators throughout the world, the Group achieves a turnover close on 400 million Euros.**

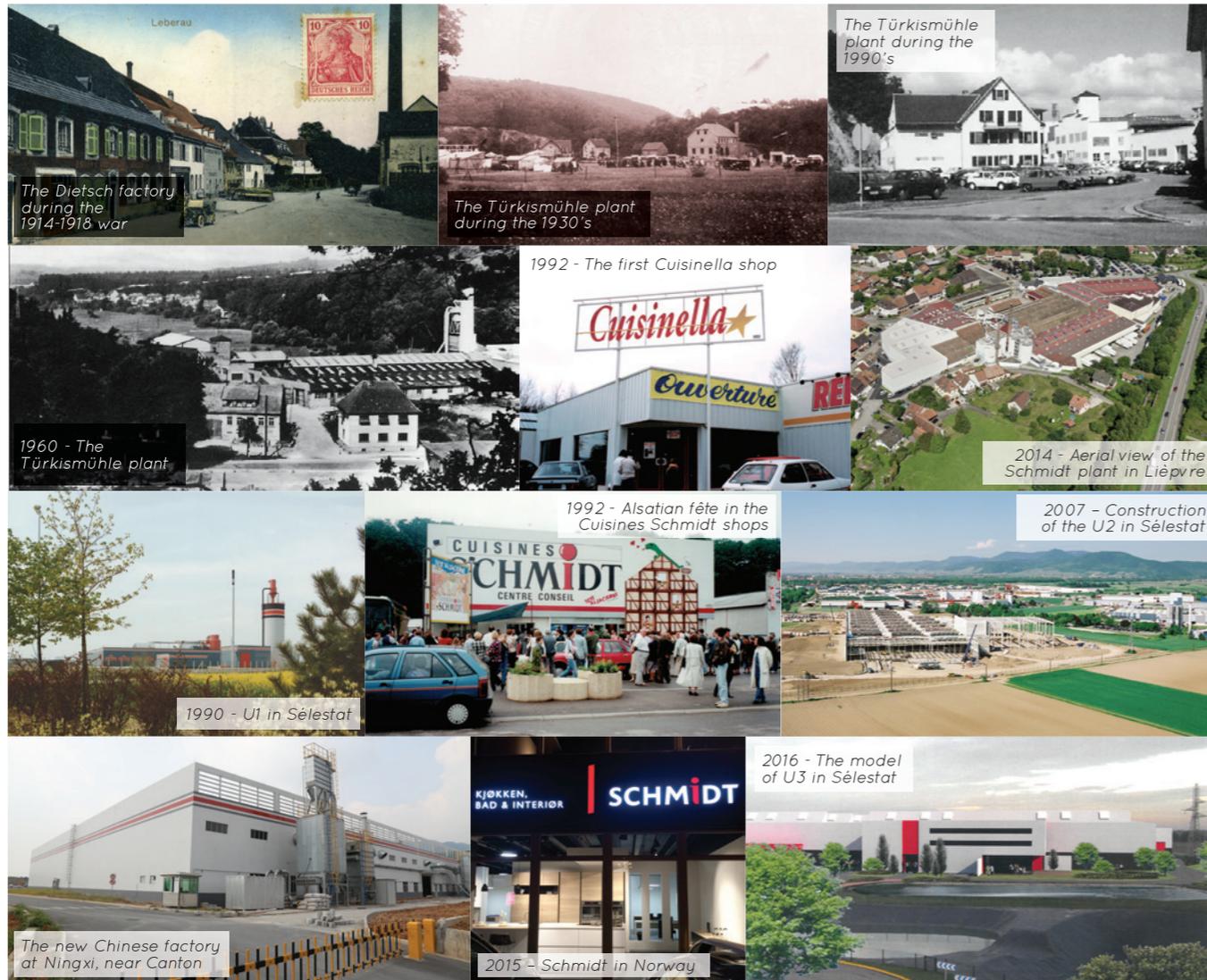
2016

SALM becomes Schmidt Groupe. By taking back the name of its founder, the Group proudly asserts its faith in what is human. The consumer is at the heart of the concerns of the extended Enterprise with the final aim of delighting every client. The Excellence Warranty contract is launched.

**1,500 employees, 7,500 collaborators throughout the world and a turnover of 460 million Euros, 15% of which comes from international sources.**

Schmidt  
GROUPE





Once upon a time, a young man bursting with energy and ambition wanted to become somebody. Hubert Schmidt lost his father when he was four and, as he grew up, he decided not to work on the family's farm. Being manually very gifted, he trained as a mason-plasterer and did his best to master the trade.

At 27, he set up his own small masonry firm. Being a hard worker, he quickly moved on from building houses to making traditional kitchen cabinets and then on to the industrial manufacturing of kitchen units.

This exciting adventure began in 1934 and goes on today expanding and transforming. Over 80 years, the firm has undergone many fresh developments, been spurred on by remarkable figures, taken daring bets, encountered setbacks and successes... It has indeed come a long way!

The story of Schmidt Groupe is one of those moving epics because it is so human. It is out of the question for this discreet firm to let the personalities of its managers overshadow those of the women and men who, with their skills, worked to raise their Group up to become the fifth largest kitchen manufacturer in Europe and the first in France.

Of course, this story did not just happen on its own. Starting out from a small masonry workshop in Türkismühle to becoming a leading industrial

group catering to made-to-measure lifestyles, manufacturing in France and Germany as well as conquering the huge market in China, constantly developing its brands and running huge publicity campaigns - all this could not have been simply decreed with a snap of the fingers.

As the economist Keynes said: « *You can't beat the market* ». Such is the whole point of the development of our Group geared to meet the expectations of consumers and all those who have chosen to live their daily lives in Schmidt and Cuisinella environments.



Once upon a time, there was a man who wanted to shape the prime elements of what brings men and women together since the dawn of humanity: home sweet home, where all of us eat and drink, of course to survive, but also where the various cultures of the world develop, become refined and are passed on.

In the beginning was the Word, but Food was just as essential.





1425 - Kuchenmaistrey,  
drawing by Peter Wagner

# 1. *The heart of the home*

Kitchen, cooks, cookery, kitchen-builders, « kitchen sink theatre », « kitchen councils » « cooking the books », « too many cooks spoil the broth », « to cook someone's goose »: the wealth of idioms, turns of phrase and expressions demonstrates the central function of the kitchen and « the eating room » in the life of Mankind. Over time things have changed a lot.



“Schmidt Groupe knows and implements better than anyone the idea that from now on cooking will be digital or die away.”



## Fire



In the 18th century  
the kitchen is a living space  
© Erica Guilane-Nachez - Fotolia

Our distant prehistorical ancestors wandering around the planet took many big steps for humanity, among the most important of which was the taming of fire. First used to keep people warm and ward off predators, fire only gradually moved in to cook food. The caveman genius who first had the idea of eating hot food and winning over his companions to imitate him did not leave his name for posterity, but our human race is deeply indebted to him. This way of eating not only contributed to enhancing taste but also ensured survival by killing off parasites and making food healthier.

Having paid this tribute, let us now gaily jump over several thousands of years. The Romans were the first in the world to set the kitchen (culina in latin) apart in the household. Among the “others” (whom the Romans called « barbarians »), the chimney was completely unknown; people crammed together in a single one-storey room with a high ceiling. Part of the smoke from the fire would escape through a hole made in the roof but the rest would create a smothering haze for the occupants. This rudimentary type of dwelling lasted until the Middle-Ages in the greater part of the western world.

But let’s move on in time. The single open room with the fire was gradually closed in, becoming a separate part where few entered. In upper-class homes, it became the servants’ domain where the mistress of the house would occasionally come to

give her orders. Architecturally, the kitchen was set apart. Not in all classes of society though, for the poorest people still have only one room to live in. But, little by little, the kitchen found its place and thereby established its pedigree.

Over a long period, in bigger homes the distance between the kitchen and the dining room was such that the chief concern of the diners was to get their meals served hot! This inconvenience was remedied at the end of the Renaissance with the invention of the dish-warmer. However, in many countries kitchens remained ill-ventilated and dark, notably in England owing to a prohibitive tax on the number of windows...

Other innovations were brought into kitchens. The tall flames from the roasting hearth disappeared with the first cookers and their small gas-rings. These cast-iron stoves were initially manufactured by artisans and then, after the Industrial Revolution, in factories. Wood fuel was replaced by coal, itself later to give way to gas, thus definitively taming the flames. All this before the introduction of what we now take for granted: electric hotplates, microwaves, induction and the thousand-and-one technological improvements brought about at the end of the 20th century and perfectly mastered by Schmidt Groupe. From now on cooking will be digital or die away.



Illustration  
Sabine Charrier



“The culinary revolution is under way.”

## The secluded scullery



Illustration  
Sabine Charrier

But let's not anticipate... For centuries, the kitchen remained a hidden space, a room apart. In small flats, meals would be served there, but as soon as lifestyles went up, dining rooms appeared. The image of the cook carrying the steaming tureen onto the laid table has become a great classic.

And a separate room naturally makes one imagine specific furniture. But that was far off! In middle-class homes, the kitchen doubled, even trebled, in size with a scullery, a pantry and a coal store. The furniture was as simple as could be: wooden chests and shelves, sheltered from the air and light... Only the table stayed on and was used as what was yet to be called a worktop. The dishes were stacked on a sideboard, sometimes imposingly installed in the dining room. As for the sink, it was usually hidden away in a room at the back, in the laundry, and only appeared in the kitchen itself with the installation of tap water. Most homes in the past had a mere tub or a basin.

Everything moved on with standardization and comfort accessible to all. Even so, the kitchen remained a secluded area.

The first piece of furniture truly designed for the «eating room» was an icebox - before the invention of the refrigerator. In 1844, “frozen” cargo arriving from the USA created quite a stir in England. Since cold could now travel thanks to relatively speedy haulage, it could enter into peoples' daily lives. Special cupboards for preserving foodstuff were built into kitchens.



A kitchen stove early 1900's  
© Adobe Stock.

All that was needed was blocks of ice that could be bought on the market and used for storing fresh food - a child's game! Tin cans came in soon after making everything that much more convenient.

The culinary revolution had begun.

Ovens and cold stores were soon to become no longer exceptional luxuries but everyday objects. All the more since a few years earlier, towards the end of the 18th century, an Englishman had had the brilliant idea of mass-producing kitchen furniture: no longer any need to build individual pieces but simply manufacture the same chests, chairs and tables for the majority of people. Everything was handmade in workshops and the pieces manufactured had simply to be assembled. With the appearance of machine tools, the era of standardization had opened. Kitchen cabinets could arrive on the scene.



# Kitchen dressers



The Nicole dresser



Illustration  
Sabine Charrier

In the Renaissance refined crockery and cutlery were neatly tidied away in a 'dresser'. Enamoured of gracefulness and functionality, the 18th century gave up the classical all-purpose sideboard, preferring specific pieces of furniture for each use (dressers and credenzas). But the dresser came back with a vengeance under the reign of Napoleon III, mass-produced by the chisels of Art-Nouveau cabinetmakers who designed furniture sets adapted to the specific use made of each room in the house. Sideboards varied with fashion and epochs.

They usually consisted of a double-door cupboard, topped by a shelf where you could put whatever you wish. Above that was another cupboard, embellished with doors and often glass panes. Souvenir postcards were slipped onto the glass panes, a seashell and trinkets nestled in the open space, which could also be used for storing plates and table-mats according to taste... Not to be forgotten were the two drawers filled with napkins and cutlery. This sideboard, both aesthetic and functional, was designed for the dining room and it was to remain there for a long time...

Then came the whirlwind of modern life and progress... The great fitted kitchens, self-standing or fixed to the wall, which appeared during the boom following World War II, tolled the knell for the traditional sideboard. A picture remains in many of our memories of this piece of furniture covered in yellow, blue or green Formica and the characteristic noise of its metal snap-lock.



The dresser enters into upper-class living rooms - © Adobe Stock.

It came in with the advent of standardization: with suburban housing-estates and fully equipped flats. Adverts then publicity took over this world.

Catch phrases abounded, sparking off imagination: « A piece of furniture signed Lévitán is guaranteed for a long time ». In Paris, Le Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville, sold « housewives' dreams »; the big brands launched into the production of kitchen furniture; the era of household art had opened.



The Brigitte dresser 140 cm  
„Brigitte“ 140 cm



“ However, a new invention was to chase the dresser out of the dining-room and render it obsolete: the television set, the new house-cricket. ”



© Adobe Stock

## The open kitchen

Years go by but certain habits remain and even, one might say, become embedded: the kitchen becomes the room in the home where people gather, not only to prepare meals, but to chat, have a coffee, to smell and taste... People also listen to the radio there, miniaturization having made radio sets, the famous transistors, that much more portable. But new competition was threatening the scene: television was beginning to spread, and what could be more maddening than to miss one's favourite programme because the dinner bell had rung and the mistress of the house had called out: « grub up! »?

This trend rapidly spread over all western countries, with, nevertheless, some distinctive features: the Italians don't have a draining board beside their sink, but a draining counter installed above it. A detail, but in Italy all manufacturers offer it.

This brings us to the expectations of the modern customer: made-to-measure yes, but similarity, no. That's why it's part of Schmidt Groupe's creed.



1960 - The Schmidt Küchen catalogue

The TV cult was born in the USA. Pragmatic Americans decreed that if television was not for the kitchen, then the kitchen had to be in front of the TV set. All that was needed was to dismantle the partitions! And thus gradually the idea of an open kitchen came about, got accepted and took over.

The bar followed close on its heels. Then, the fitted kitchen, more practical and capable of integrating new appliances: the washing machine, the microwave, the freezer...



1976 - Classic



1984 - Prima

“ Uniformity breeds boredom: it is said. And that's why Schmidt Groupe's adventure, and that of all its men and women, is anything but boring. Follow the guide! ”





The Türkismühle site

## 2. *From mass- production to custom manufacturing*

Exit the little station; go to the end of the street, turn left, and carry straight on. After a few minutes, factory buildings appear on your right, then a brand new « Schmidt Küchen » showroom. Enter the courtyard, walk along the big wall-panel decorating the frontage, and there, Caroline Leitzgen, granddaughter of the founder and now Schmidt marketing manager for Germany as well as the Group's associate general manager, calls out with a wide smile : « You are on the exact spot where it all began! ».

## Türkismühle, the company's birthplace



It's a small town in Saarland, quite close to France, one of those places quickly driven through. Life here seems pleasant with the neat houses and the inhabitants who courteously greet you. In 1934, it must have been much the same, a shade more rural perhaps.



The Türkismühle plant in the 1930's

That year, a young couple, who had married on 2<sup>nd</sup> January – in spite of the hesitations of the young bride's family who were reluctant to have a son-in-law without a stable job – had just settled in. He was called Hubert and she, Antonia; he was 27 and she'd just turned 23. Hubert and Antonia Schmidt both originated in the village of Schwarzenbach, some nine kilometres from Türkismühle.

His parents, Ludwig and Maria Schmidt, were small farmers. The father died too young, leaving his wife to look after a numerous family and the farm as best she could.

But the tight situation of the Schmidts proved to be an incentive for everyone to earn an honourable living. Hubert, hardworking and manually gifted, trained in masonry and soon decided to launch out and become his own boss. Antonia, his wife, the daughter of a civil servant, looked after the books while he exploited his talents as a mason-cum-plasterer. Success came fast. Hubert was a convivial salesman and an excellent technician. He very soon became no longer satisfied with simply building dwellings.



The building of a house  
© brizmaker - Fotolia

## THE SCHMIDT FAMILY

Hubert (1907-1990), the son of Ludwig and Maria Schmidt, was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> August in Schwarzenbach; Antonia (1911-2003), the daughter of Michel and Katarina Kaufmann, on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1911, in the same village. He, with six siblings, was an orphan; she, with seven siblings, the daughter of a forest warden.



Antonia and Hubert Schmidt

Together they were to have three daughters: Adelheid (1934-2013), Antonia (born 1<sup>st</sup> November 1936) and Hilde (born 1939).

The second, Antonia, married Karl Leitzgen (1936-1995), the future CEO of Schmidt, in 1967.



Antonia and Karl Leitzgen's wedding day

The couple had two daughters, Caroline (born 14<sup>th</sup> March 1972) and Anne (born 18<sup>th</sup> September 1973). Caroline and Anne followed in the footsteps of their mother pursuing the work of their father, Karl, and their grandfather, Hubert.



Caroline and Anne Leitzgen





Antonia Leitzgen

At almost 80 years of age, Antonia Leitzgen (née Schmidt), has lost none of her dynamism nor her authority. Spruce, still keenly interested in sports cars, and overflowing with affection for her granddaughters, she lives in her house at Lièpvre.

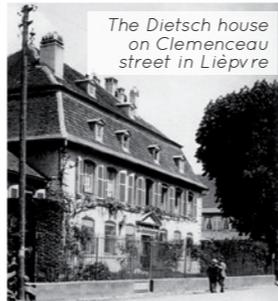
It's a beautiful residence with a Mansart style roof and triangular pediments emblematic of 18th century architecture. Antonia Leitzgen remembers the work and success her father, Hubert. Having grown up with the enterprise, she is the family's memory. With a smile Antonia explains "Business was flourishing. When my father bought his first car, my grandmother, Maria, was almost ashamed to see her son at the wheel of the sole car in Türkismühle..."

War broke out. Hubert Schmidt, like most young men of his generation, was called up, and drafted into the Kriegsmarine (Navy). He spent four years in uniform, the last as the driver of an admiral in Paris. At the liberation of Paris, Hubert was taken prisoner by the British.

Back in Germany, it was his wife, Antonia who was managing the business:

- My mother had to undergo major surgery to remove a kidney. My uncle and a governess looked after us and the firm. Once back in civvy street, Hubert Schmidt encountered new challenges.

After five years of war the country had to be rebuilt; needs were enormous. Being recognized as a good artisan, he conceived the idea of proposing turnkey houses and he immediately found buyers. He quickly expanded his business and took on dozens of workers. He was contracted to build blocks of flats and administrative buildings, moving from one worksite to the next.



The Dietsch house on Clemenceau street in Lièpvre

Hubert Schmidt gathered around him good qualified workers, tile setters, electricians and carpenters. He knew every trick of the building trade.

One day, a customer of his made him a suggestion: - Since you have such competent artisans, why don't you start making kitchen furniture? Cabinets are all the thing, you know...



August Schmidt, the workshop manager, with a workman

It did not take him long to recognize the advantage of such a move: manufacturing furniture required many fewer skills and fewer administrative constraints than those involved in building houses. Furthermore the market was immense, for a huge number of German homes needed re-equipping. - Ten cabinets, then 20, then 50 and so it went on...he built the first for our own home, drawing up the plans himself. In this way, little by little, he reduced his building activities to launch into kitchen cabinets... and it was an immediate success, his daughter, Antonia recalls.

In 1946, the activity rose onto an industrial scale; the first factory was built, then a second, in 1950. Hubert Schmidt became a well-known figure, a prominent industrialist and a town-councillor to boot.

Then, just when everything was beginning to take shape, a catastrophe occurred: two fires in quick succession devastated the factory production hall,

the offices and the warehouse. Several years of hard work went up smoke:

- My parents were convinced it was a criminal act; my father had seen the silhouette of a man lurking around the buildings on the evening of the second fire. But we never knew who it was.

Whether it was criminal or not, other people would have been disheartened. Not so Hubert Schmidt, who immediately got back to work embodying to the letter the words of Kipling's poem: "You'll be a Man, my son!" If you can watch the things you gave your life to, broken, And stoop and build 'em up... and start again at your beginnings."

Two years of uncertainty before the machine could be got under way again, then rapidly develop. In a short time many events were going to take place over the border.



The Lilli dresser



## THE "DINOSAURS"



The first Hubert Schmidt logo

Then of them sitting round a big round table in Türkismühle. With a grin, Caroline Leitzgen nicknames them the "dinosaurs". There's Gernot Klee, who joined as an apprentice in 1951, the three Stephan brothers, Hans-Jürgen, Dieter and Horst, together totalling 134 years of service in the company, Ulrike Hares, Elfi Molter, Anita Deßbesell, the accountant who speaks movingly of « grandfather », Jürgen Fries, who built a hunting watch for Herr Schmidt, Eberhard Thies, and Hubertus Kirchen, the most talkative, understandably so because he was Schmidt Kitchens exclusive travelling sales representative.



1950 - Türkismühle employees gathered in the refectory



On the right, Hubert Schmidt shows visitors around his workshop

All of them speak with passion about the firm they saw grow and evolve and all remember the strong personality of Hubert Schmidt, « Herr Schmidt » or "der Chef". On one side, Gernot Klee shares stories with his neighbours about his beginnings, while Hubertus recalls the loading of the vans prior to deliveries...

The first cabinets were presented at the Saint Wendel trade-fair in Saarland. It was in 1948 - Hubertus Kirchen, a cousin of Antonia Leitzgen, remembers: *I arrived in Lièpvre in January 1959 to replace the sales-technician who was retiring. I made my first sale, a Heidi kitchen cabinet, on 6th July 1959. I rediscovered it a few years later and bought it back to give to Mrs Leitzgen. Now, it stands alongside other old cabinets we found here and there and display in the Studio at Sainte-Croix-aux-Mines: it's become a sort of relic...*



Hubertus Kirchen with Antonia Schmidt



## The call from France

The French market was within close reach, a few kilometres away, and it, too, was crying out for kitchen cabinets.

Buoyed along by the economic revival after World War II, French families went in for modern installations with huge, roomy kitchen cabinets.

It was a godsend for Schmidt, whose firm, being in Saarland - then under French administration - was exempt from customs duties and excessive taxes and all the time-consuming

frontier formalities. Hubert Schmidt began supplying eastern, then northern France with his delivery vans, marked "Cuisines Schmidt - Buffets de cuisine" (Schmidt Kitchens - Kitchen Cabinets), recognizable from afar.



The renowned dresser Heidi

Success had been achieved but politics would change things.

In 1959, Saarland decided by referendum to become definitively incorporated into the Federal Republic of Germany. The main industry, mining, weighed heavily in the vote; the miners were convinced that they would profit by becoming German...but they were to lose their bet.

On 6<sup>th</sup> July 1959, a frontier appeared between the enterprise and its French market.

- *We had to fill out lots of papers for customs clearance: a time-consuming, complicated and expensive process, Anita Deßbesell recalls.*

Tired of all the red tape, Hubert Schmidt decided to circumvent the obstacle by setting up a factory over the border. But where? In Bitche? In Metz? No! Neither of these towns! The choice fell upon Lièpvre.



1863 - The Dietsch factory canal



# Number 51 at Lièpvre

The store plan

The French High Commission in Saarland, under Gilbert Grandval, gave us nightmares, recalls Antonia Leitzgen.

The choice of Lièpvre was due to a Schmidt driver who had heard of an old mill that belonged to the Dietsch family and was up for sale. It was a 6,000 sq. m. former horse-carriage relay converted into a weaving mill in 1816, but it was in a deplorable state of repair. It needed to be completely cleaned out, old machines dismantled and the whole site rebuilt to stock at last the first cabinets.

On 25th June 1959, twenty or so Saarland workmen came over to the site. They were to train the future employees of "Schmidt France", later to become the Société Alsacienne de Meubles (SALM).

-It was utterly filthy and it took us three months to clean up the mess. The local tradesmen in the valley weren't too happy to see us arriving, recalls Antonia Leitzgen, but they soon realized that, far from being rivals, we would soon be bringing them work and customers.

Some colleagues had to be convinced to join the adventure in Alsace.

In 1959, four regions had been covered: two in eastern France (Lorraine, Champagne-Ardennes, Alsace, and Franche-Comté) plus those in the North and the Lyons regions. Hubertus was the sole exclusive sales representative, a job he kept throughout his career.

Hubert Schmidt told me: I want you to take over the sale of cabinets in France. That was in 1961.

He would also look after the Schmidt stall at the Paris Furniture Trade-fair, at the Porte de Versailles, together with Hubert Schmidt and the three other sales representatives.



1979 - the Paris Furniture Trade Fair



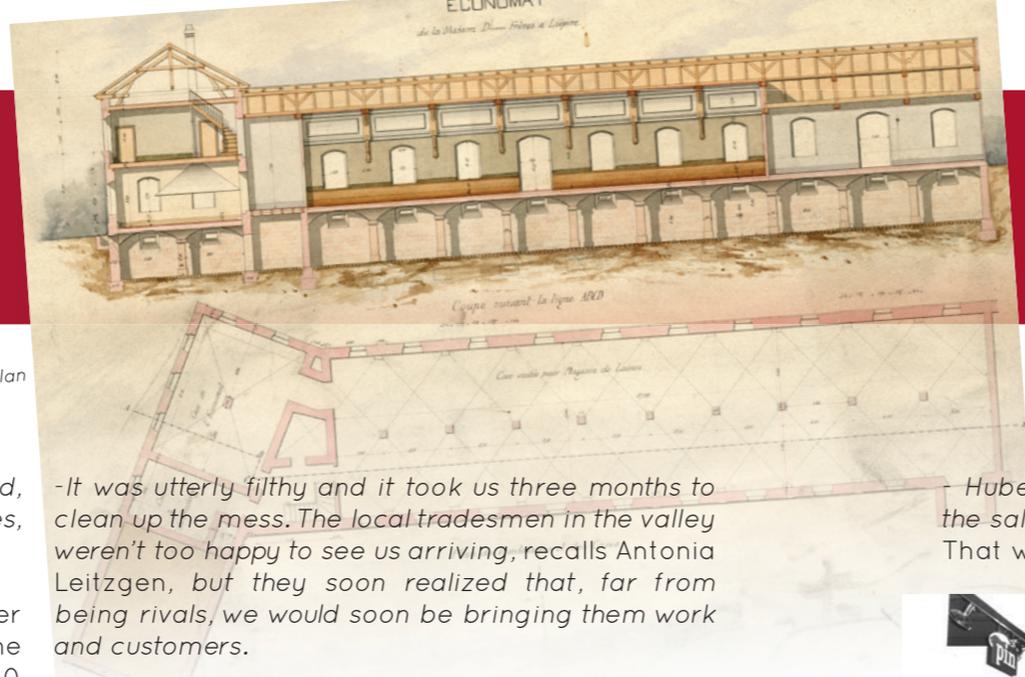
The stand at the Paris Furniture Trade Fair

This event, an unequalled 'must' in the furniture world, was held each year over ten days at the end of January. It was a true 'institution'.

Schmidt representatives sold their models to furniture traders, carpenters, and mass-market furniture stores. They took care to prepare their arrival by informing these 'customers' by mail of their presence at the trade-fair and inviting them to meet at their stall where six to eight kitchen-cabinets were on display.



1885 - Overall view of the Dietsch factor, before Cuisines Schmidt

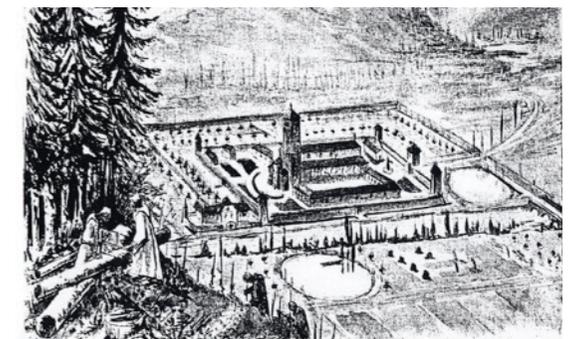


Gruss aus Leberau (Lièpvre), Els.

1836 - The Dietsch factory

## The Lièpvre Priory

This drawing of the priory in Lièpvre by the Mines judge, Michel Bischler, was made in 1549. The priory, situated on what is now the Schmidt Groupe's site, consisted of a church and convent buildings. It was built between 762 and 774 AD by a certain Fulrade, a close counsellor of Pépin the Brief in the Val de Lièpvre, a valley opening from the Vosges mountains onto the Plain of Alsace. Nowadays the valley is served by the N°59 national road, an important link between the Vosges and Alsace.



# HUBERT SCHMIDT A HUNTSMAN BOSS



1967 - Hubert Schmidt with clients

He laid the foundations of his business philosophy which today still governs the firm: "moving forward with other people".

Antonia Leitzgen proudly describes her father's personality:

- He liked to laugh and have parties, but he always behaved. He was very punctual and respected by all. He loved hunting - he'd have given his life to that, but he never neglected his business for a single second.

Remembering her mother, Antonia, she adds:

- Do you know what the wives of huntsmen are called? "Green widows", because their husbands are often away. But my mother knew that hunting was her husband's passion but a passion that never once harmed his family. She liked to go with him whenever she could. My father passed on his passion to my two sisters, Adelheid and Hilde. But I was never interested.



1978 - Hubert Schmidt with his granddaughters Caroline and Anne

Hubert Schmidt ran his business from Germany, coming to Lièpvre each week. The French subsidiary was run by a German managing director, Mr Radloff.

- My father always planned the future of his business a long time ahead. He was a man of vision, not of quick tricks. He, too, knew how to provide time for things to happen properly... he retired in 1975.

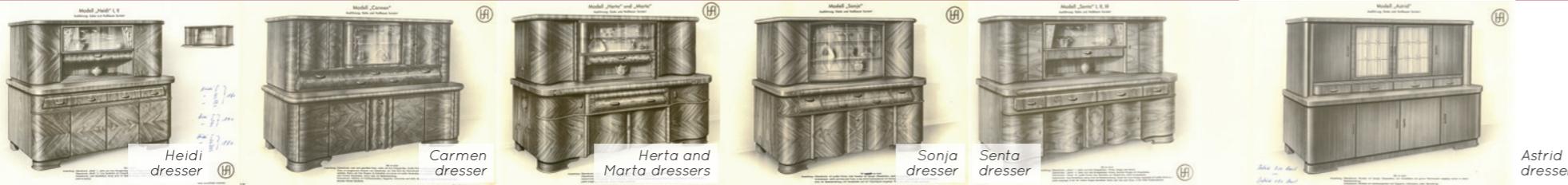
Every morning, around 5am, Mr Schmidt would go out hunting. He'd be back by 8am, don his suit and be at the factory at 8.30 immediately to start reading his mail while checking the arrival of his staff. That was the way his day began. Such is the memory of Anita Deßbesell, an accountant who joined the company in 1963.



Hubert Schmidt with his hunting trophy

Two passions, two worlds: hunting and business. All those who knew Hubert Schmidt remember an upright man, in appearance stern, but deeply human.

On fine days he would jump on his motorbike to ride around the woods. On rainy, windy or snowy days, he'd use the old 4-wheel drive. Well aware of his responsibilities, Cuisines Schmidt being one of the chief employers in the region, Hubert Schmidt involved himself in local life.



Heidi dresser

Carmen dresser

Herta and Marta dressers

Sonja dresser

Senta dresser

Astrid dresser

To place an order at the factory, all you had to do was pick up the telephone and, since things were not yet automatic in those days, ask the operator to connect you with "Nr 51 at Lièpvre".

Once the order had been noted, the vans were loaded and started out on the roads. Every delivery trip had to be made cost-effective. Back in those days, the firm had only three vans which undertook deliveries chiefly in the North, Paris and the surrounding area, and eastern France.

For other zones, Schmidt Kitchens called in haulage contractors. François Dumoulin, the Schmidt Groupe's automobile-maintenance manager, notes:

- Robert Zobrist was the first driver recruited by Cuisines Schmidt and spent his whole career there. He would load up the vans and drive off until Friday. Other drivers joined later. On their return, the vans would be checked, cleaned, repaired and repainted ready to set off again.

The business was thriving; shows were opening all over: Meuropan in Lyons, the trade-fair in Lille... Heidi, Carmen, Herta, Marta, Sonja, Senta and Astrid models were transported over thousands of kilometres and entered thousands of homes... Lovely kitchen-cabinets with feminine names chosen by Hubert Schmidt and his team.

Meanwhile, over in Germany, the first kitchen units were being presented along with cabinets at the Cologne, Bavarian and Dusseldorf trade-fairs.



HUBERT SCHMIDT - KÜCHENMOBELFABRIK - TÜRKISMÜHLE/SAAR

The Hubert Schmidt "Schmidt Küchen" brochure



1970 - Robert Zobrist with Cuisines Schmidt's stand truck

# A certain Karl Leitzgen



28<sup>th</sup> January 1967 - family photo of the wedding of Antonia Schmidt and Karl Leitzgen

Antonia Schmidt married on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1967. She was the last of the three sisters "to take the plunge". She started work in the family firm in 1958; her two sisters, Adelheid and Hilde, married two brothers; all of them were involved in the firm. After studying at business schools in St Wendel and then Bad Pyrmont in Westphalia, Antonia took a one-year internship at the Volksbank in St Wendel before honing her skills in sales management, accountancy and staffing within the family business. But what she liked most was representing Schmidt Küchen at trade-fairs and various events where she excelled.



Karl Leitzgen and Antonia Schmidt cutting the wedding cake

In 1967, Antonia met her husband-to-be, Karl Leitzgen, at the Türkismühle plant where his parents, who ran a furniture, carpet and curtain business but were also wine growers,

had come to order some kitchen-cabinets. Love at first sight!

The man nicknamed Charlie seemed way off kitchen furniture; he came from the oil industry being a chemical engineer at Standard Oil with a promising future; there was even talk of his being appointed to New York. But Antonia didn't want to go to America. Hubert Schmidt offered his son-in-law the job of managing the Lièpvre factory in replacement of Walter Thiermann, Adelheid's husband, who was in charge of both plants and no longer wanted to keep dividing his time between the two.

- I spoke practically no French at the time, Karl Leitzgen recalled in a local press interview in 1980.



Karl Leitzgen

350 people were employed at Türkismühle and only 100 in France. The parent company remained in Germany; but that was to change at the instigation of the new CEO of Lièpvre.

From then on, in 1967, Adelheid and her husband, Walter Thiermann, were to manage Türkismühle under the eye of the patriarch, Hubert. Hilde and her husband were in charge of Sindorf, a wholesale and retail furniture company near Cologne.

Karl Leitzgen moved to France. Antonia preferred to wait until the flat on the first floor of the Lièpvre plant had been fitted out before joining him. She stayed on a year with her parents in Türkismühle. - I used to come once a month to Lièpvre, Antonia remembers.



One of the dinners organized by Antonia Leitzgen

In 1968, she moved there for good. She learnt French, looked after social and public relations. The factory employed some 100 people, mostly from the valley. Cuisines Schmidt organized a bus service for the employees.

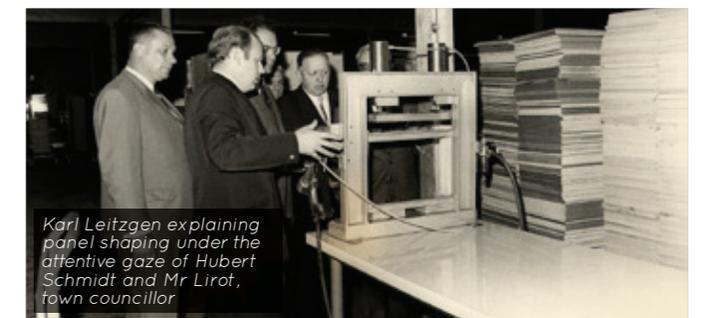
And what about the products, those famous kitchen cabinets? They were veneered in oak, walnut and ash. In 1968, Melamine-veneered cabinets were manufactured as well as 'Brigitte' and the celebrated yellow or blue Formica units.

Karl Leitzgen, the engineer, was brimming with ideas.



He took his job seriously; officially he was in charge of the technical side but he quickly learned to gauge the evolution of the market and trained himself up in highly specialized marketing and management skills.

His job, under the supervision of the parent company, was to ensure regular manufacture of furniture, the management of work materials, deliveries from suppliers and supplying customers. He was not expected to imagine the future, nor to revolutionize everything. But the time would come...



Karl Leitzgen explaining panel shaping under the attentive gaze of Hubert Schmidt and Mr Lirot, town councillor



## THE END OF THE DRESSER



The origin of the dresser is lost in the mists of time, but the concept has lived on: two cupboards, one on top of the other, front-opening doors and, sometimes, an open shelf space...

The design didn't vary much over time. If they sold well, the shelving was improved just a little and the worktop sometimes equipped with a bread-slicer (in Germany) or an all-purpose cutting machine (in France).

In 1959, whereas traditional dressers were still selling well in France, the first fitted kitchen units were being proposed at trade-fairs in Germany – and Schmidt Küchen manufactured more and more at Türkismühle.



The first L-shaped kitchens in the Schmidt Küchen catalogue

It was not until the 1970's that French customers started being attracted to this design.

The European market started evolving: sales of traditional dressers began to fall off, leaving scope for the attractive and functional fitted kitchens.

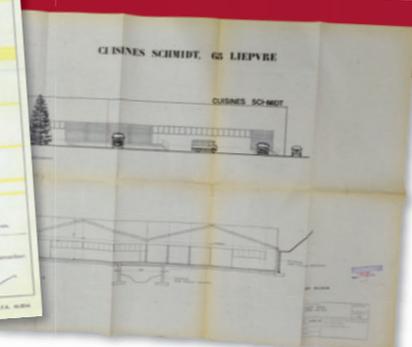


Prestige 150 – equipped with a lighted bar, mirror, thermometer, air-conditioner, bread bin, white cutlery storage, pepper and spice pot shelves in the niche. The facing and panelling are melamine-coated and the worktop laminated

## Change or die



The building permit and plan filed on 9th September 1969 by Hubert Schmidt and accepted by the town council 10 days later



The 1970's were marked by a complete transition in consumer buying. Kitchen cabinets were considered out of date, obsolete.

Mass-market retailers started to get established just outside the towns. Kitchen installers offering furniture units multiplied, proposing fitted units of four or five different brands in showrooms displaying various models from each manufacturer. They were to take over the whole kitchen market. The range of models expanded and required more and more space and stocks.

*- Ours is a mere family business making a fairly simple product with no clear policy and no well-defined structures. We are nothing but the subsidiary of a Saarland firm, Karl Leitzgen reckoned. We've three timeworn vans constantly under repair, old machines inherited from Türkismühle. If we don't change, we'll die.*



The production line at Türkismühle

The situation was getting tense in Germany. The firm was in tight straits.

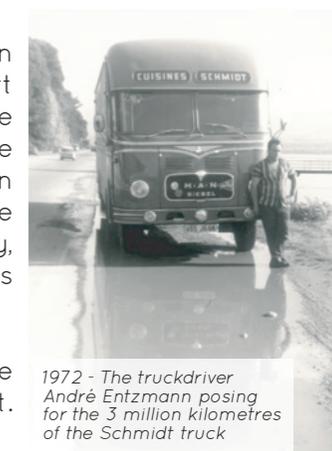
Karl took drastic action and, in 1975, when Hubert Schmidt handed on the firm to his daughters, he decided no longer to remain a mere subsidiary of the Saarland parent company, but to define in France his own industrial strategy.

Lièpvre was henceforth free to stand on its own two feet.

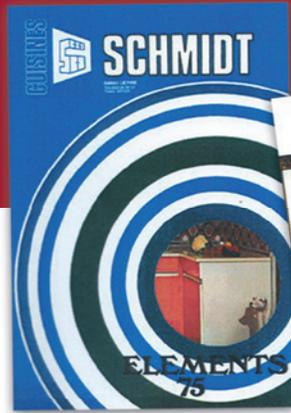
Karl Leitzgen undertook a survey to determine the popularity of the Cuisines Schmidt brand. The result was encouraging: the German-sounding brand-name symbolized technology, know-how and quality.

Good, but the firm had to exist.

At the time, Cuisines Schmidt was simply a product sold by kitchen installers, carpenters and in big stores: a recognized name, but only one hidden away among the many on offer to consumers.



1972 - The truckdriver André Entzmann posing for the 3 million kilometres of the Schmidt truck



1975 - The first full-colour catalogue illustrating the standard, classic and prestige ranges



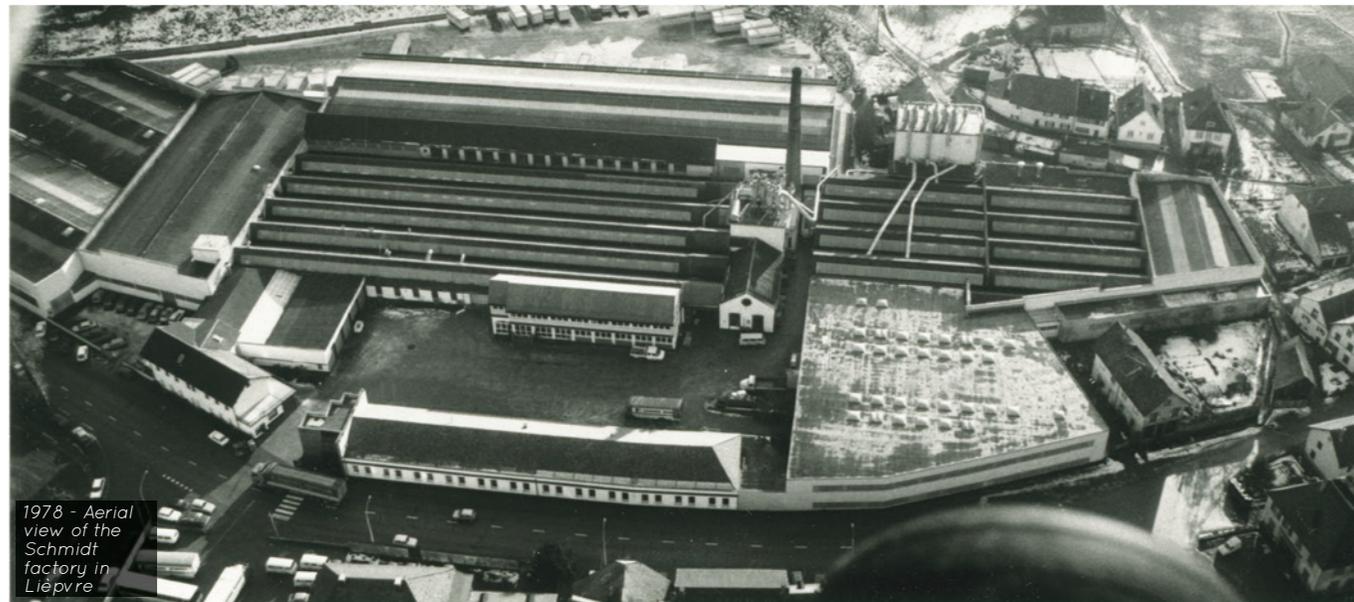
1979 - To celebrate its 20th birthday, Cuisines Schmidt dons red, white and blue

A quite straightforward but effective strategy was to govern the birth of the brand-name: being present everywhere and consequently having a wide distribution network. The exclusive sales- and showrooms were to be situated no more than an hour's distance from big city centres and were to have the same design inside and out. The first 8-page catalogue, in four colours, was printed and presented three models: Classic, Prestige and Standard which were obtainable in ten different colours.

60,000 kitchen cabinets were manufactured that same year. - From then on, explains Hubertus Kirchen, the sales representatives' job evolved. You had to provide advice and backing to the exclusive retailers to help them develop their turnover.



1977 - Anne 150 cabinet



1978 - Aerial view of the Schmidt factory in Lièpvre

“ BE THE BEST, RESPECT EVERYONE, SUCCEED TOGETHER ”

These few words were written in 1986 by Karl Leitzgen and the managerial staff of the firm. They are the essence of his business philosophy. He, a born fighter, was never so proud as when he beat a younger player at tennis, his passion.



1986 - Karl Leitzgen rewarding a champion.

But in business management, his creed was humanistic: in his eyes employees constituted the firm's best investment, its greatest asset.

These values are still pursued by his daughters, Anne and Caroline, and adhered to by all the women and men of Schmidt Groupe.

Patrice Casenave, the young head of the human resources department, joined the firm in 2013 and has forgotten nothing of her first contact nor of her amazement:

- When I was interviewed for the job by Anne Leitzgen, I thought it was a dream; too good to be true, this idea of a liberated enterprise...



Patrice Casenave



1988 - The Schmidt employees' football team. (Karl Leitzgen in the 2nd row in a blue T-shirt)

The legacy of Karl Leitzgen is still very much alive.



Visiting the Schmidt factory in Lièpvre at its opening in 1976

**K**arl Leitzgen pursued the changeovers. The production plant was expanded from 6,000 to 32,000 sq. m. in 1976.

He invested in a high-tech tool of which certain aspects are nowadays copied by the biggest manufacturers.

The office was installed in a Napoleonic chalet, a lovely residence with a wooden fretwork frontage, which had been imported directly from Switzerland and reassembled in Lièpvre in 1871. Turnover reached thirty-four million francs and the firm had 190 employees.

But Cuisines Schmidt was still not a brand name, just a small manufacturer.



The chalet now transformed into offices



In 1978, the CEO realized that he could no longer do everything on his own. He decided to recruit managers, technicians, engineers and sales-staff, all keen to move ahead and win.

*- With us, the thinking is not done by a single person but by everyone.*

Far-reaching challenges, the will to expand the business, the wish to innovate: to meet these, Karl Leitzgen had to gather round him new people, young and competent.

Among this young guard was a certain Jean-Marie Schwab:



Jean-Marie Schwab at his beginning with Cuisines Schmidt

*- That year, I was about to leave for Guiana where I had a parquet floor laying contract. My father was a carpenter and I'd just graduated from the Ecole du Bois (carpentry school) with a marketing option. I nevertheless answered an advertisement for a technical salesman's job at Schmidt's.*

*Karl Leitzgen was in the process of launching his bespoke kitchens. I fell under the spell. I cancelled my contract and joined the boss in his adventure. He liked being with young people and deeply trusted us all.*

Jean-Marie Schwab had just turned 22:  
*- For a year I worked in all the production services. I knew the product by heart. Then Karl Leitzgen asked me to set up the sales management service to check orders and ensure customer relations.*

Trust and involvement – the young man had met the boss of a lifetime.



Karl Leitzgen and Jean-Marie Schwab



# The irresistible ascent

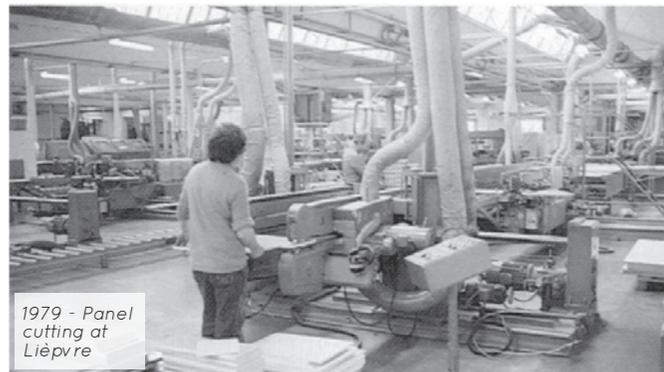


Bernard Muller

**B**ernard Muller, the production manager, recalls that:

- In 1978, we were nowhere in the world of kitchen units.

So Karl Leitzgen gave this new engineer the job of industrializing the manufacturing process. Cuisines Schmidt's mass-production required huge storage space. The units were assembled by frame-fitters according to the size of the units. For each unit size there had to be a frame-fitting machine! An entire production hall was taken up by the frame-fitters and the tools needed for assembling the units which were manufactured one by one then deposited on conveyor belts to facilitate transportation.



1979 - Panel cutting at Lièpvre

The production line was extended by very considerable investments. The dispatching service was moved into the yard where it still is; this move required bringing in 50,000 cubic metres of earth!



Truck park at Lièpvre

Little by little, custom manufacturing became possible on the production line. Type-written labels, numbered in chronological order, made it possible to follow a piece of furniture along the whole production line. Thirty or so units were thus produced each day by the factory at Lièpvre.



1979 - Preparation of custom-manufacturing



Custom-manufacturing labels



The first computers appeared and the "Mapics" system - software to handle variants and options - was installed. In this way, 36 variants could be identified with 36 colours.

- As a child, I discovered the first machines with digital controls installed at the end of the 1970's, recalls Anne Leitzgen.



When the French factory started to mass-produce bespoke kitchen units, Türkismühle viewed the innovation unfavourably. But Karl Leitzgen was undeterred and took all possible steps to improve production: a time clock was installed in the factory to enable staff to measure their working periods better.

In this way, between 200 and 220 shift workers clocked in at 6.30am and 5 pm. The firm further expanded the bus network to provide transport.

The leading enterprises at the time were called Mobalpa, Arthur-Bonnet, Teisseire, and Vogica.

But Schmidt was nibbling away at the market, catching up. The aim was to improve production and sales, to be known and no longer remain just another brand in the furniture department stores.

In 1979, Karl Leitzgen was restless. He knew that 75% of Cuisines Schmidt's turnover came from mass-marketing via Atlas and But, which in the long run could weaken the enterprise, all the more so since Conforama had gone into liquidation.



1975 - Cuisines Schmidt reception office

The remaining receipts came from the 2,500 customer accounts managed by the company's four sales-representatives. During a visit to an Atlas store in western France, Jean-Marie Schwab learnt that they were giving up kitchen sales - and that amounted to a quarter of Cuisine Schmidt's turnover.

As soon as he learned that, Karl Leitzgen decided to quit the central furniture purchasing bodies in order to develop a wide network of specialists.

He met in turn all the mass-marketing managers (Atlas, Global, Conforama, Monsieur Meuble...) and offered to associate them with his brand and create exclusive Cuisine Schmidt sales outlets.

Faced with the refusal of some and the divergent tactics of others, Karl Leitzgen brought in the revolution that was to change the brand's whole strategy.



Lunch with Belgian clients



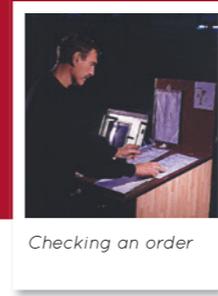
1980 - Visitors from Japan shown round by Karl Leitzgen

Little by little he withdrew from mass-marketing and set up exclusive shops. Karl also started moving onto the markets of Switzerland and Belgium, two countries close to Alsace. It was the beginnings of exportation. A jump into the unknown that was to prove terribly effective.

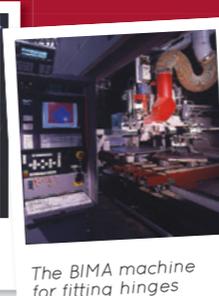
In 1983, Cuisines Schmidt made a complete turnaround, abandoning the manufacture of kitchen-cabinets. It was the end of an era. On 13<sup>th</sup> July, the last cabinet came off the production line. in Lièpvre.



Prestige 150 cabinet



Checking an order



The BIMA machine for fitting hinges onto doors



Quality control

From then on, the company started proposing two edge-band thicknesses and set up the first made-to-order frontage process, a European 'first'.



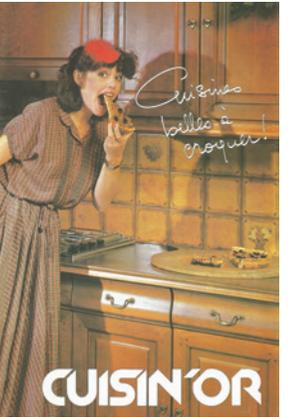
1987 - The Rhodos kitchen with thick-edge-bands

Two years before, the Cuisin'or brand had been created, but it was to be as short-lived as the product it launched.

- We created a new range just when we were abandoning the cabinet! I think the sole Cuisin'or left in the world is Mrs Leitzgen's kitchen, reckons Bernard Muller with a twinkle in his eye.

But Cuisin'or had enabled Cuisines Schmidt to gently withdraw from mass marketing and set up its own exclusive sales network without in any way penalizing or damaging the interests of the cabinet-makers who were still selling Schmidt kitchens.

"Cuisin'or - Cuisine et Décoration" furniture was identical to that of Cuisines Schmidt except for the handles and facings which were slightly modified; but they also proposed tea-towels, napkins and decorated, laminated facings...



Cuisin'Or, the new kitchen and decoration brand for the firm's exclusive network



## INVENTIVE RETAILERS



Denis Colot presenting a kitchen



The salesman's attaché case contains all that's required to make a model of the future kitchen

# SALM

Société ALSacienne de Meubles

Openings were often attended by champion cyclists and singers. Publicity campaigns were launched. But, two years later, the brand disappeared: its products were 7% more expensive than those of Cuisines Schmidt sold in department stores. The concessionaires were upset and protested.

In 1983, Cuisines Schmidt became SALM (Société ALSacienne de Meubles).

A few years later, Karl Leitzgen's vision of things materialized. The Cuisines Schmidt brand-name was born; it had its own distribution network and was no longer sold under a label via mass-marketing. Cuisines Schmidt had become the 5th manufacturer on the French market.

A year before, the firm had opened a subsidiary in England, a country where French products were greatly appreciated for their quality and hard-wearing.

*Vancel*

- Products under a blank brand were put out for mass-marketing and later under the brand-name "Vancel", after the name of the village of La Vancelle next to Lièpvre, Jean-Marie Schwab recalls. The company then had 270 employees and was achieving good results with a turnover of 19 million francs.

In Montpellier, Marie-Christine Vila used to sell furniture in kit form as well as Schmidt products. She had no stock when she opened her little 25 sq. m. shop, so she would make a down-payment when ordering and then, by paying the manufacturer within a week, she got a 5% discount: her profit! She developed her business into a franchise, "Promo cuisines"; the shops were bigger and well designed. A great success.

Cuisines Schmidt used it as a pilot scheme but, a short while later, these new networks – two franchise networks and another with independent shops – made up half of Cuisines Schmidt's turnover. This created a weakness for the company which didn't want to depend on a handful of clients.

In Epinal, Denis Colot took inspiration from her system and created "Eco Cuisine".

In 1988, Karl Leitzgen invested over 50 million francs in a wide brand policy. A crucial decision that led the firm into a new approach. The network of sales specialists needed convincing. Jean-Marie Schwab pleaded the case, even proposing help with publicity and training, thus endlessly reaffirming Karl Leitzgen's motto: "Together we are stronger".



As for Patrick Guyot, a former furniture salesman, he launched his "Go Cuisines" shop on 27th June 1985 in Audincourt, near Montbéliard.



The managing agents of Promo Cuisines, Go Cuisines and Eco Cuisine trusted him and joined together under the Cuisine Schmidt brand-name: quite a feat!... and the beginning of a great episode in the brand's history with its network.

**A l'heure européenne...**  
**Cuisines SCHMIDT U.K. :**  
**la filiale anglaise bientôt totalement autonome**

L'année 1990 sera l'occasion pour CUISINES SCHMIDT U.K. LTD de fêter son 5ème anniversaire. La société dont la SALM détient 90% des parts, fondée par Frank QUINN, est actuellement - et depuis 2 ans déjà - le plus gros importateur de cuisines françaises en Grande-Bretagne.

Notre Société a installé ses quartiers généraux dans un parc d'activités très moderne (voir photos), où un ordinateur est directement relié au central IBM de Lièpvre. Nous sommes maintenant capables de contrôler et d'enregistrer directement toutes les commandes et impressions.

hierait nous-mêmes nos propres confirmations de commande. Ceci est le premier pas vers la totale indépendance que nous aurons en 1991.

Claudine JONES et Claire MARTIN sont responsables du suivi de commande qui inclut également la planification du transport et des livraisons. Elles ont ainsi des contacts fréquents avec nos revendeurs et le siège en France.

Jan POWELL, outre le secrétariat, s'occupe de la comptabilité et travaille en collaboration étroite avec le service de Mme JACQUOT.

Quant à la force de vente, elle totalise cette année 6 personnes, dont le travail se répartit comme suit :

- Alex GREATWOOD qui a rejoint la société en 1985 et représente pour le sud-est de l'Angleterre.

- Bruce THOMAS, après avoir changé plusieurs fois de secteur, nous représente actuellement dans le nord-ouest.

European time... Cuisines Schmidt U.K.: the British subsidiary soon to be totally autonomous



1988 - The Vancel stand at the Furniture Trade Fair



1980 - Bernard Muller, Wolfgang Thorwart... during a management session



1985 - The first house journal

The exclusive network increased sales and called for innovations, so it was time to imagine new methods of creation conception, management and production.

Karl Leitzgen wanted to transform the entire business into custom manufacturing.

- Up to that time, stocks were made and then sold. The new idea was to manufacture exclusively to order, to reduce stocks and to respond to customers' specific orders placed at the sales outlets.



1988 - The technical crew at Lièpvre

Karl Leitzgen began innovating and, together with the sales and technical departments, imagined a new process, unique in Europe, for manufacturing facings.

He offered consumers the widest choice of modern facings on the market.

- That was the real revolution made by Cuisines Schmidt but it required huge investments, recalls Wolfgang Thorwart who was working on the development of the second production line in close collaboration with Bernard Muller, the custom-manufacturing artisan.

In January 1986, the company's 35 senior staff members held a brain-storm out of which emerged a motto defining the company's basic values:



1986 - The industrial management team at a conference in the Black Forest

"We want to be the best, to respect everyone, to succeed together", remembers Rémy Uhl, who was the company's financial manager.

13. A. 90

Les Hommes

## Karl Leitzgen: Bien dans ses meubles

L'est à la tête du « numéro deux » français de la cuisine intégrée... Schmidt (Lièpvre), près de 500 millions de francs de chiffre d'affaires... 650 employés... investissements en 88. Sa fringale européenne en 89. L'incité à racheter une usine en RFA, et à ouvrir une unité de production ultra-moderne à Sélestat.

Il n'aura fallu qu'un quart de siècle à Karl Leitzgen pour bâtir un empire: transformer le fabricant artisanal de buffets du Val d'Argent, en leader de la cuisine par éléments.

Aujourd'hui, le patron se sent plutôt bien dans ses meubles. Pourtant rien ne prédestinait ce chimiste à la Standard Oil, à passer de l'autre côté de la barrière: celui des dirigeants. Rien, sauf son union avec une demoiselle Schmidt, et un goût certain pour les défis. A 52 ans, Karl Leitzgen est un battant qui ne s'ignore pas. « Lorsque je suis arrivé à Lièpvre il y a 23 ans, je ne parlais pratiquement pas le français. »

Aujourd'hui, son style est plutôt châtié. « J'ai appris à jouer au tennis à 45 ans. Et j'avoue que je suis assez fier, lorsque je réussis à battre un jeune sur le court. Mes employés prétendent que tout est pour moi: prétexte à compétition. »

Et le grand raison. Lors qu'en 78, des menaces pèsent sur l'avenir de l'affaire Schmidt — « si personne ne reprend, on arrête » — Karl Leitzgen, alors responsable technique, se jette à l'eau et prend le risque. « L'entreprise familiale, peu élaborée, n'a pas de produit clair, ni de structure de maison sarrisoise. Sa reprise en main consistait à challenger avec handicap, pour Karl Leitzgen, à ignorer tout de la gestion, de la comptabilité, du marketing. En revanche, de sa formation d'ingénieur, il a gardé une méthode de travail, d'analyse des problèmes, et un remarquable esprit pragmatique... K. L. vient du pétrole, et il a des idées pour développer sa société dans un créneau porteur: « Des études de marché révélaient que 25 % des ménages français seulement sont équipés d'une cuisine intégrée. »

**Miser sur les hommes**

Résultat: en 78, le nouveau patron affranchit Schmidt de sa tutelle allemande. Son joker: une foi inébranlable dans l'énergie humaine. Karl Leitzgen commande par s'entourer d'experts: spécialistes dans les domaines qu'il ne maîtrise pas: gestion, commerce, marketing. Et surtout, il sait déléguer à temps, une partie de son pouvoir. « Il y a 12 ans, lorsque l'activité a pris de l'ampleur, j'ai vécu un cap difficile. Le produit devenait plus sophistiqué. Et je faisais trop moi-même. Alors j'ai décidé de m'appuyer sur une équipe de collaborateurs jeunes et motivés. » Les hommes, le PDG affirme, sont le meilleur investissement de l'entreprise, sa valeur réelle.

Ce contrat de confiance passé avec les salariés, gouverne la marche de la société, à tous les niveaux. Karl Leitzgen y a instauré les codes de qualité, une charte signée par les 35 ca-

Photo DNIA

des de l'entreprise. Sa devise se veut percutante. « Être les meilleurs, respecter chacun, réussir ensemble. » Au niveau de la distribution, Karl Leitzgen a opté pour le partenariat avec les 220 centres-conseils de la marque Schmidt.

Dans toute sa stratégie, ce décideur privilégie la matière grise, le facteur humain. « Chez nous, ce n'est pas un seul homme qui pense, mais tous. » Il n'est pas bon d'ajouter: « Comme chez les Japonais, Karl Leitzgen n'en néglige pas pour autant l'outil de production, les impératifs de rentabilité. » 85 millions y ont été consacrés en 88. L'information des chaînes de fabrication est une réalité dans les usines de la société.

Le plus difficile dans le parcours du chef d'entreprise aura été de changer de priorité. « Devoir raisonner en commercial pour le technicien que je suis », Karl Leitzgen reconnaît quelque peu à sa mesure dans le cadre d'un public-relations. Il la passera à sa mesure de l'investisseur Schmidt, viennent d'investir 20 millions dans la communication. Et leur PDG veut proposer: « Dépasser les fabricants européens de la cuisine intégrée, à la mesure de la mesure de sa carrière de bâtisseur. » Isabelle NASSOY

This conquering policy was accompanied by the opening of a new factory in Sélestat, called U1, which was opened on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1989. U1 was a modern factory, semi-automated with digitalized controls. It began by sub-contracting the Lièpvre manufacturing and later specialized in furniture facings by means of a unique finishing workshop. A new era had begun.

1988 - The construction of U1



Bernard Muller following the construction of U1



Mounting furniture

Custom manufacturing is also an adaptation, a flexible way of meeting customers' specific needs.

The choice of colours, materials and design all takes place between the customer and the designer-salesman, by means of a computer.

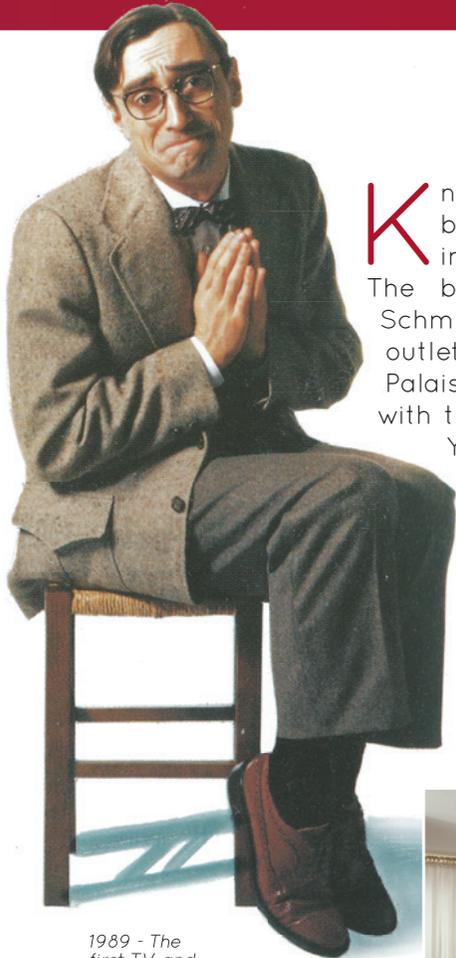
Cuisines Schmidt is truly expert in personalizing its products and meeting individual requests!



Digitalized stock management



# The Cuisines Schmidt brand puts on its show



**K**now-how is useful but getting known is indispensable. The brand-name, Cuisines Schmidt, with its 200 sales outlets, was launched at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris with the star impersonator, Yves Lecoq on 23rd January 1989 and backed by the first TV adverts. Three months later, the network had taken in 50 new outlets.

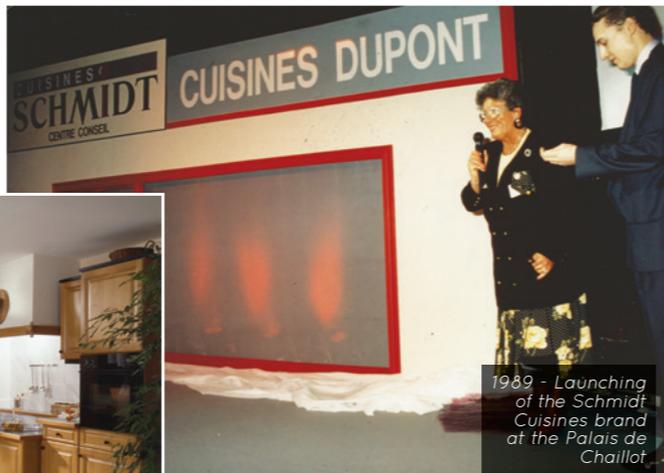
1989 - The first TV and national press magazine campaign is launched



The kitchen model presented in the TV adverts



1989 - Karl Leitzgen presenting the Cuisines Schmidt brand at the Palais de Chaillot



1989 - Launching of the Schmidt Cuisines brand at the Palais de Chaillot



In September that year, the first open-door days were held to enable the public to discover the factory in Sélestat, called U1. Over 5,000 people crowded into the plant.



September 1989 - The inaugural procession: Karl Leitzgen showing local elected representatives around the new factory in Sélestat



1989 - The Open Days in Sélestat receive over 5000 visitors



Hubert Schmidt presided over the celebration for the last time.



1989 - Antonia Leitzgen with her father, Hubert Schmidt and guests at Liépvre



1989 - The whole Leitzgen family at the Open Days in Sélestat

Karl Leitzgen listening to employees





1990 - The NF Ameublement (furniture) Quality trophy



Michel Siaud

- In fact, we industrialized bespoke furniture knowing that custom-building is considered a fine art, considers Michel Siaud, purchasing manager, who joined the company in 1995.



1990 - Inside the U1 factory

The challenge can be summarized in a few words: how to industrialize a traditional craft process to respond to a personal, individual order and satisfy everybody's wishes? "I should like one purple door, one blue, and pink panels", the customer says.



The U1 factory

It's then up to the factory to design and manufacture this unique kitchen. And yet the job won't be done by a traditional craftsman, but by an industrial craftsman.

- When we recruit new employees, they need time to get used to our custom-manufacturing culture. It's based on different principles and it's unique, explains Anne Leitzgen.

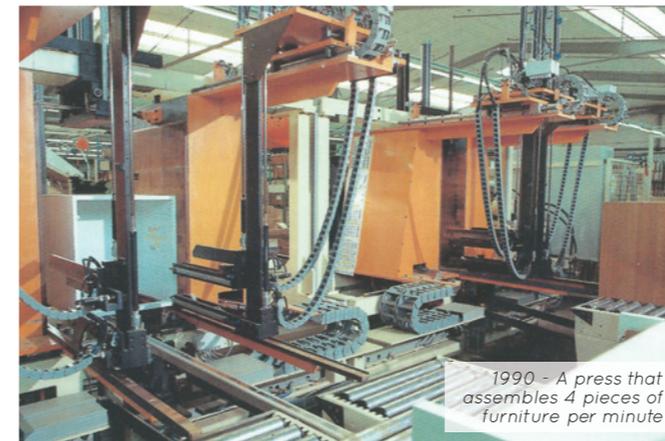
Wolfgang Thorwart explains it in this way:

- Our approach is greatly inspired by the motor-car industry, where cars are always mass-produced with optional extras offered to the buyer.

But the similarity stops there, because with Schmidt everything is made-to-measure.



1990 - A CAD post for designing products



1990 - A press that assembles 4 pieces of furniture per minute

In 1990 growth was well under way. Custom-manufacturing had replaced run-of-the-mill and costly stock production. From being the fifth manufacturer in France, the SALM group rose to second place in 1990, increasing its number of employees from 270 to 650.



1991 - Karl Leitzgen posing with SALM drivers

SALM again diversified its products and brought out a new bathroom range. This was an overall concept of the bathroom based on installing furniture and integrating all the sanitary appliances without touching the walls. They were bathrooms that retailers could design, propose and install with the same know-how they had already mastered for kitchens.

Production labels





A 4 x 3m poster campaign

A pilot outlet was opened in Colmar. Laid out over two floors, it could proclaim its competence both in kitchen and bathroom fitting without penalizing either. The first catalogue of Schmidt Bathrooms was launched.

Other innovations would follow, notably in custom-built shelving.



The bathroom moves in with Schmidt

Over the years, and being better and better informed about what they could ask for, customers became more and more demanding. They wanted their own kitchen, not their neighbour's, and quality became a 'must'. Having been subjected to the antics of certain kitchen fitters, fake discounts, bluff sales, they took care to seek out a quality service. And that's precisely in line with what Karl Leitzgen and his teams were seeking to provide at the beginning of the 1990's.



A Schmidt catalogue page



Bruno Gutierrez, Cuisinella development manager, France

In 1991, the Vancel brand was losing ground in furniture mass-marketing and among the multi-brand kitchen installers. To remedy the situation, a new network to attract the average, "middle-range" consumer had to be worked on.

A brand study was undertaken which resulted in the adoption of: Cuisinella, a brand-name sounding young, Italian and more approachable...

Karl Leitzgen was at first reticent. The Schmidt network was working well, yielding good results and the Gulf war was causing a period of uncertainty... Nevertheless he launched into the adventure with his team.



1992 - Opening of the first Cuisinella shop

A year later the results were disappointing. Cuisinella's growth was too slow.

- One day, Jean-Marie Schwab explains, I opened my heart to my sales manager, Bruno Gutierrez. He answered: "Give me a team and I'll build you a network".

1997: Success! Bruno Gutierrez had managed to convince new kitchen retailers to take on the brand. Nowadays, Cuisinella sells more kitchens in number than Schmidt... After a study trip with his sales clients and Mr Périgot, the accessories king, SALM launched Cuisinella 1000 (each sales outlet having a surface of 1000 sq. m.). The brand offered the whole kitchen range from A to Z, including accessories. But it didn't catch on. SALM reverted to its initial concept.

- Bruno succeeded in opening out the Cuisinella network. The 52 outlets in 1998 had grown to 219 by 2015, making it the second specialist network in France. He was able to anticipate the changes and transformations in the trade and work them into his action plan.

Bruno Gutierrez died on 23rd September 2013 at the age of 55. In a heartrending tribute, Anne Leitzgen said of him:

- We have lost our sales and marketing director and we have also lost a faithful, devoted and professional colleague. For many of us, Bruno had become more than a colleague; he was a friend, a mentor, an accomplice. He left his mark on the history of our company and of our family. We shall remember him with affection and gratitude.

## THE CUISINELLA RECIPE



The sales force on the Cuisinella stand at the Franchise

In 1993, the Cuisines Schmidt brand became Schmidt. Karl Leitzgen passed away two years later.



The mark he left is still closely felt today in the factories. Those who knew him speak movingly of "Monsieur Leitzgen" or "Charlie", the others feel they knew him.

No greater tribute can be paid to a captain of industry.

*- When my husband was carried to his grave, the whole village turned out to pay their last respects. Even the workers from the Türkismühle factory came to the funeral. It was very moving; a tribute to his decency, says Antonia Leitzgen. Not being very up in business matters, my daughters were too young to take over the family enterprise so I decided to take the chairmanship and rely on the existing managerial team.*

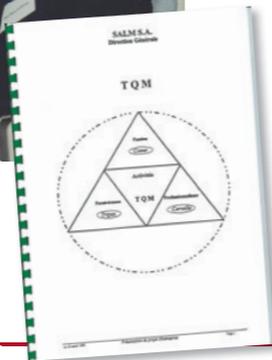


Karl Leitzgen



Antonia Leitzgen takes the wheel aided by Jean-Marie Schwab

Karl Leitzgen's enterprise project written in 1995



The EMK team celebrating their 10th anniversary

In 1998, SALM sought to move into a fast-growing market which it had not explored, that of kit kitchens.

It set up EMK, l'Européenne de Meubles en Kit (European Kit-furniture Company) which deployed an industrial conception of a product totally different from the fitted kitchen.

An innovative range of 57 units was proposed to department stores deliverable in the record time of one week.



The EMK plant at Bergheim...



... used today for storage in addition to kit manufacturing



But EMK was not only distinguished by this competitive offer, it further guaranteed services adapted to customers' requirements: in-house training for sales staff, support in setting up shop displays, catalogues...



A training session

Difficulties which had arisen within the business of one of its main clients brought about a considerable drop in turnover and the erosion of several years' cash flow and put an end to EMK in 2015.

Schmidt Groupe decided to revert to the heart of its trade: running the network and the brands.



Rear view of the digitalized and computerized U2 factory in Sélestat

### 3. *The adventure goes on*

When someone who has left a deep mark on an enterprise disappears, the business can become unstable; a crisis of governance can arise and endanger its continuity. But regarding SALM and the disappearance of its chairman, this would be to forget the deep belief in the value of human beings that filled Karl Leitzgen. He had given the firm solid roots and left it in a perfectly healthy condition, robust, and with a force directed towards its objectives; towards the place he wanted to bring it to.



1992 - Karl Leitzgen is awarded the Knight's medal in the Order of Merit

In an interview in 1990, "Charlie" said his aim was to be among the ten most prominent European businesses in his field, with over 1,000 employees and a turnover of one billion francs. In 2004, these goals had been

achieved with a range of custom-built furniture and cupboards. And more than ever, it's the "Leitzgens" who are at the helm of this amazing, both family and industrial, enterprise. Antonia Leitzgen took the helm in September 1995. She pursued her husband's work, relying notably on the support of Jean-Marie Schwab, one of the pillars of the enterprise. In his view: - *She is a woman with character, generous and convivial. But she can impose her ideas with authority. She courageously put the keys of the business in the hands of people outside the family. She trusted us. I remember the day I told her that we had to invest 35 million francs in the industrial plant in Lièpvre...*

- *You have my full confidence, she said.*



2006 - Antonia Leitzgen and Jean-Marie Schwab

That same year, the elder of the two daughters, Caroline, took on the job of marketing director at Turkismühle. Her younger sister, Anne, after working in several publicity agencies where she rubbed shoulders with the advertising world, came back into the family preserve where she would begin by discovering and learning all the various trades in the business.

SALM stepped up its development: in 2000 it bought up a chairs and tables manufacture. A year later, to respond to strong rising demand, it expanded the U1 factory which, within its 34,000 sq. m., housed one of the largest manufactures of worktops in Europe. In 2003, the Schmidt Kitchens concept was exported to Spain and Italy.



1997 - Caroline Leitzgen at the Euroforum.



### Des investissements colossaux : Doublement de la superficie du site de Sélestat !

P our maintenir sa position de leader en France et se placer dans le peloton de tête des fabricants de cuisine européens, le groupe Salm doit être en mesure de répondre aux attentes des différents marchés. Or on sait que l'obstacle principal à la diversification de l'offre ne réside jamais dans le trop peu d'imagination des équipes marketing mais dans le manque de flexibilité de l'outil industriel, la production tenant la bride de la création. La réponse de la Salm est magistrale : le groupe vient effectivement d'investir 50 millions d'euros dans son outil



Antonia Leitzgen, président directeur général

2001 - Article in the "Courrier du Meuble" (furniture magazine)



A letter from SALM employees in support of their new "captain".

## Karl Leitzgen's legacy is still very much alive

All the lights were green; Anne Leitzgen was appointed Chairwoman in 2006. - *Ah, yes, already ten years at the wheel, she says with a little smile.* Having joined the company at the end of 1999, she began in the marketing department, moved on to sales management, worked on the development of the network in French-speaking Switzerland and finally in the human resources department. - *I then progressively took on my directorial functions.*



Anne Leitzgen

After a short, thoughtful pause and with a lively and mischievous look behind her glasses, she continues: - *If it had to be done again, I'd do it the same way but spend even more time at it. One has constantly to be in training...It's not a luxury, it's essential.*

She asserts these words with the calm certainty brought by her experience of working "on the job". Anne Leitzgen is not at all like those frosty and pitiless "executive-women" obsessed with power. She could quite naturally adopt the exhortation of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy to every American citizen on his election to the White House in 1960: "Don't ask what your country can do for you; ask yourself what you can do for your country" - simply replacing the word 'country' by 'enterprise'.

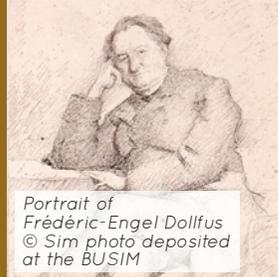
She can talk endlessly about the company, is unquenchable when it comes to detailing all the trades within the 'extended Enterprise' and the challenges it will have to face, but she is much more discreet when it comes to talking about herself. She refuses to consider that she embodies the Group. The founder's granddaughter will never exclaim: "Schmidt Groupe is me!". - *Schmidt Groupe, she forcefully proclaims, is made of those who make it. It is they who give it its identity. We live here, there's no gap between those who work for and in the company. My mother lives opposite the factory and my house is 5km away. I've been told that shaking hands, smiling, knowing the people you work with, is not the case in all businesses. But that's how it is here!*

Which Patrice Casenave neatly sums up as: - *The DNA of the company's values is Anne! Anne Leitzgen embodies and gives life to the values passed on by her parents, the first of which, written in gold letters, is: respect for other people.* Her sister Caroline concurs completely when recalling what her father and grandfather used to say: - *Respect all the employees; it's thanks to them that you eat every day.*



2nd December 2006 - Article in "L'Alsace" on the changeover of the CEO in SALM

## MATERNALISM ? NO, RESPONSIBILITY !



Portrait of  
Frédéric-Engel Dollfus  
© Sim photo deposited  
at the BUSIM

In the nineteenth century, several company directors adopted a paternalistic approach towards their employees, providing care at all the levels of their lives: training, housing, schools, hospitals, pensions... Based

on human motives, these social measures were designed to further social life. "An employer owes his workers more than a salary", declared Frédéric-Engel Dollfus of the Dollfus-Mieg Co. in 1857.

Sometimes inspired by Saint-Simonism, some Alsatian employers did not hesitate to introduce measures far in advance of their time, like granting their workers a savings account after five years' employment.



2006 - Antonia Leitzgen  
with her two daughters at  
Illhausern for the award  
of the Legion of Honour

For Anne Leitzgen there can be no question of maternalism at Schmidt's:

- It's simply a question of responsibility. Many people depend on us, on our decisions, and vice versa. There's a first feature that gives meaning: I represent the shareholder family. It is indeed a reassuring function, the assertion that we wish to remain an independent and a family enterprise. But if I do anything amiss, the other shareholders and the Supervisory Council are there to call me to order.

And with a grin, she adds:

- If that happened, the teams I work with wouldn't let me wander off for long. They'd quickly point out the risks they could spot or the opportunities not to be missed...

## Not coming off the road

- Some businesses are disembodied; the family side is not necessarily a guarantee. They are so totally focused on profit-making that they lose their values along the way and risk coming off the road, Anne Leitzgen explains. I hope this will never be the case with us. In many businesses I have dealings with, the directors' philosophy is: "I set the course and we'll find the right people to attain our goals!" Personally, I prefer to have the right people already on board and collect all our forces in order to set the course. Together! In such shifting times it's better to have agile talent around one. The life of a company is sometimes made out of powerful encounters, shared passions. Such was the case with Jean-Claude Armspach:



Jean-Claude  
Armspach

- I met Anne at the Trade and Management Institute. We were both getting our training and were working on the same case-study. In 2007, she offered me a job in her company. The choice wasn't very easy for me having spent 30 years working in a different sector, but I agreed to join this new world.

That same year, SALM was classified as the first manufacturer in France and the fifth in Europe, with 1,300 employees and a turnover of 295 million Euros.



Construction of U2,  
the second factory  
at Sélestat

To become leader, the company had to adapt in order to respond to new trends and customers' expectations.

He was struck by the pride of all his fellow employees. Everyone was recognized for their skills and their place in the firm and contributed to improving performance. A huge dream team...He quickly understood that their pride was the fruit of a culture. You either took it on or you went your way. Jean-Claude Armspach stayed on...

- In this place the undying search for excellence is in the blood- I was put in charge of piloting the launching our new U2 automated factory in Sélestat. It opened in 2007. A year and a half after bringing in the first excavator, the over 25,000 sq.m. site was operational. The first orders were rapidly delivered enabling the Group to generate a growth close on 10% over the next two years. Furthermore, the steps taken to adapt the production processing took account of the proposals of the staff both in terms of the ergonomics of their jobs and reducing day-to-day costs.



## U2, an industrial cathedral

Visiting U2 is to enter a fascinating world; a world of robots, a sort of cathedral where the organ music would be replaced by the sound of the machines. But nothing is dehumanized. To be guided through the process of manufacturing a customized kitchen, ordered in Strasbourg, London or Madrid, is really enlightening. Colour, size, weight, finishing, shape... it's all there. The concert can begin.



The employees are at the heart of the system

You come in via the wings. The manufacturing lines are set in front of you. Many machines and robot arms twirl in a harmonious symphony. Some answer the name of "Lucky Luke" or "Ma' Dalton" (French comic-book characters).

The various elements are assembled; everyone brings in their added value, both the men and the machines. The process begins with the laminated panel, of various thicknesses being cut to shape and the edge-band glued into place. Further on, a water-jet cutter, unique throughout the world, cuts out the back of the casing.

After going through the "jukebox", the panels of the casing are assembled with hinges, everything being checked by a specialist. Once packed, the units are taken away on a small automated trolley; a gigantic robot arm seizes hold of the different sized packets and deposits them in a huge stock area under a 15 m.-high roof. A few hours later, the same arm transfers them in precise loading order onto the bay.

The trucks arrive and the whole kitchen, in 30 packets, is loaded onto them in the order corresponding to delivery. It will be installed on schedule under the vigilant eye of the designer-salesman.

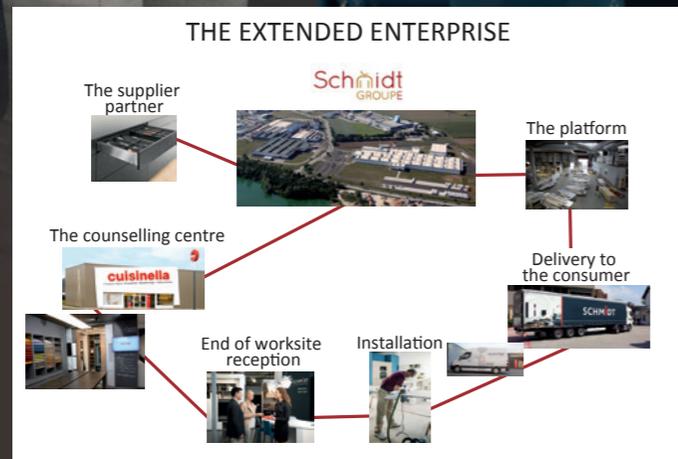
A mere six weeks will have passed between the moment the consumer chose his new kitchen and its delivery.



A view of the factory showing the dance of the robots



The designer-salesperson listening to customers



## The human stakes: “H to H”

The concept of industrial customized furniture is based on a technical feat and the management of data. But also on human beings: all the operations are meticulously controlled; the workers assemble and assess the job.

Jacques Haas



- They are answerable for the robots' work, explains Jacques Haas, financial and administrative director and currently associate managing-director of the Chinese subsidiary firm, who joined the firm in 1990 and knows the business inside out :

- Piloting our machines has not been handed over to robots. Factories rely on the skills of the workers.

- I have the enviable luxury of being able to rely on people more competent than I am, declares Anne Leitzgen. The perfect mastery of all the necessary skills and a systemic vision of things are essential at Schmidt Groupe.

Bernard Muller



Bernard Muller recalls:  
- In the 1980's, when all the new installations were brought in, we would show the operators how to assemble furniture. It took about six weeks for the process to be assimilated by everyone.



The Bergheim plant team

Starting from the customers, anticipating their needs, understanding and carrying them out for their happiness: the whole business can be summed up in this way. It also includes the retail agent commercializing the Schmidt or Cuisinella brands.

If Schmidt Groupe works out a real “B to B to C” marketing strategy, it is currently moving towards the “Human to Human” approach thanks to its “extended Enterprise”, where everything is to do with real people. The “H to H” approach is based on a relationship that is professional, attentive, accountable and even emotional.

Jean-Thierry Catrice



- We are lucky enough to be on a growing market and to be able to master the whole chain of values right up to the enthusiastic satisfaction of our consumers in the privacy of their homes, reckons Jean-Thierry Catrice. The Schmidt and Cuisinella brands must live up to the consumer's trust in the sales agent.



# IN THE BEGINNING IS THE CLIENT

“Please, Sir, draw me a kitchen”

At one of the numerous Schmidt shops, the one on avenue Parmentier, in the 11<sup>th</sup> District in Paris, the reception is pleasing: five or six different models are on show, dozens of others are to be found in the catalogue. Take a quick look around the showroom, at the description of the materials, the styles and the functions of the various units. One pleasant detail: the salesman doesn't steer you into the most expensive solutions. He describes the quartz, the laminate, the wood, the lacquer or the ceramics.



At least 2 hours discovering Schmidt products

He shows you the colour schemes, the handle fittings, the cupboards, the extractor hoods, electrical appliances, placing possibilities. Then he'll inundate you with questions about your ideas, what you fancy, your needs and your budget. After this first encounter, he'll start building your project. When you return he'll set out before you all the possible simulations in 3D. Then you can make your choice and he'll draw up an estimate for you. Naturally, the installation and after-sales service with the Schmidt Excellence Warranty are included in the price.



3D presentation of the project by the designer

Delivery takes about six weeks. Meanwhile everything will be checked down to the last detail. The company will faithfully carry out the customer's instructions set out by the designer salesman. Co-creation is and always will be. That is Schmidt's secret: by personalizing our manufacturing, our work has to be leaner and smarter. Your kitchen thus becomes, following the beautiful expression coined by Jean Cocteau, a mirror reflecting yourself.



All the documents concerning the kitchen are stocked in the clients' personal files



The 3D plans are worked out by the designer-salesperson trained at the Schmidt Groupe Academy.

NOTES

Votre motivation

Votre électroménager

Votre mode de vie

Votre investissement

Quels services souhaitez-vous ?

Concurrence :

Les incontournables

Détail d'installation :

Date de décision :

NOS RENDEZ-VOUS

Chaque consommateur a un dossier 'découverte' qui permet au designer-vendeur de connaître ses goûts, ses attentes et ses souhaits.

## WORKING WITH BLUM, OVER 20 YEARS OF INNOVATION



Wolfgang Thorwart

But then, the products and services have to be available, as well as distinctive to live up to our slogan: “Schmidt, made-to-measure is no longer a luxury”.

- We’ve taken our stand on what’s called “mass-tige” i.e. prestige products available to all, explains Wolfgang

Thorwart, before continuing

- “Adapting oneself to exist”, that’s what makes all the difference between Schmidt Groupe kitchens and the others. The consumer is bound to be more demanding with a brand-name product than with an anonymous one.

His job as product and services development manager was created to meet this requirement. Innovation and quality, such is the challenge. Kitchen furniture is no high-technology product, so service and quality have to be marked. Every two years, at the Euroforum, an important collection of new products and services is launched and the salesmen receive appropriate training:

- That too is where we are streets ahead of our competitors who provide little or inadequate training for their personnel!

The Group is well aware that it’s the consumers who ensure the life of the whole chain from conception to production, from delivery to installation, not forgetting, of course, suppliers and partners.

What about the suppliers of materials? Michel Siaud, the purchasing manager, explains his approach:

- Precise requirements don’t deter respect and vice versa. It’s the basis of our supply-purchasing policy. We work under long-term engagements in a relationship of trust and maximum transparency. We share common objectives: competitiveness, quality, innovation, constant progress, Corporate Social Responsibility. Our fidelity to the partners who accompany us in this ethical approach enables them to benefit from our growth.

Supplies represent over 70% of the company’s turnover: 2000 suppliers, of which 250 are directly linked to production.



**Schmidt Groupe**, being one of the first companies to engage in a responsible relationship with its suppliers, obtained the “Responsible Supplier Relationship” label along with 34 other big businesses. Respect for suppliers’ interests, the impact of supplies on economic competitiveness, integrating environmental and societal factors in the buying process and the quality of the relationship with suppliers are the four criteria of the label. In a “Lean and Green” approach with a local ESAT (establishment providing work-assistance for the handicapped) called Tournesols (Sunflowers), environmental wastage has been cut back and the organisation’s competitiveness improved. Accompanied over 4 years by the Group’s supply-purchasing management, the ESAT was able to transform its processes and achieve an exponential growth of its activity.

- We enabled them to create 84 jobs, stresses Michel Siaud, the Group’s supply-purchase manager.



Michel Siaud signing the Charter in the presence of several suppliers



They are indispensable for the quality of Schmidt Groupe products

Blum, an Austrian firm, specializing in drawer hinges systems, has been supplying Schmidt Groupe since December 1993, i.e. just two years after the opening of the French subsidiary. In May 1993, Blum presented

its Intrabox drawer system at the Interzum trade-fair in Cologne. Four months later Karl Leitzgen, Jean-Marie Schwab and Detlev Güntler – products manager – visited the Blum factory and its new products showroom in Austria. It was then that Karl Leitzgen decided to incorporate the Intrabox metal drawer system into his kitchen units. Over time, a relationship of trust was established. After Karl Leitzgen, the Blum company pursued its close collaboration with the Schmidt Groupe teams.

- Together, we have developed new products, created new services and taken part in publicity campaigns, asserts Gerhard E. Blum, the company’s CEO and son of its founder.

Their teams of experts are in constant contact with Schmidt Groupe’s marketing and product-development teams. Together, they exchange ideas and innovate, enabling new customers to be gained each day. The Blum group thus brought in brand-new tools like Ede, (Electronic data exchange), VMI, ensuring just-in-time inventory control, Ecopack, environment-friendly packaging that is quicker to open when the drawers are being assembled, Tandembox antaro, a more efficient drawer concept, *Dynamic Space*, a more ergonomic drawer design ensuring clever storage...

- Trust, integrity and reliability in terms of quality are values we share with Schmidt Groupe teams, emphasizes Gerhard Blum.

Over 6,000 employees work on ten Blum plants worldwide.



Gerhard E. Blum



Blum's head office in Austria

# Waltzing data



Automation, piloting, personalizing, production capacity...., Wolfgang Thorwart affirms that:  
*- By diversifying our offer, we've got beyond the teams' mental capacity, but things have to be piloted through and the machines kept under control.*



Olivier Offner

Olivier Offner, associate industrial manager, launches into mind-boggling calculations: *For example, custom-built casing can give rise to 16,500 components per day, multiplied by 50 different colours; custom-built facing involves 10,000 pieces a day in 260 different colours, drawing on more than 200,000 references.*

This is where, Franck Ostertag, the organization and data systems manager (the ODSM), comes in. We clearly state "information" and not "digitalization". The point is not to put computers on line but to inject data into them:



Franck Ostertag

*- Our information system is very sophisticated, the digital side has long been vital for the business. Just think: to manufacture a single piece of furniture 40,000 data are injected into the system! For each piece of furniture is unique, made-to-measure for the requirements of each customer. We don't mass-produce, nothing but made-to-measure.*

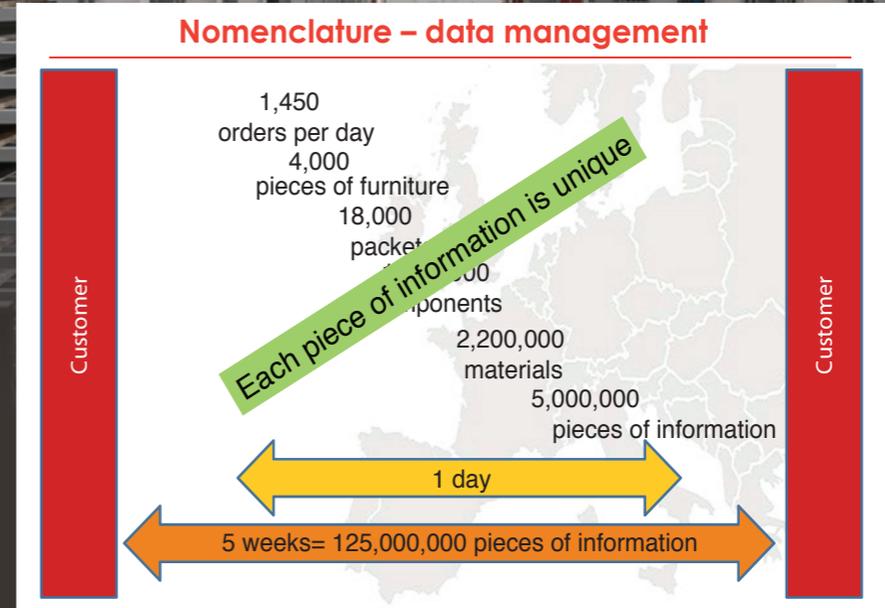
Figures that make you dizzy and require solid nerves to keep the pace.

*- Zero defects is a must. U2 constituted a complete break with the past. Nowadays, data is injected every 12 minutes. The slightest error has to be paid for.*

Whence the importance of another trade: maintenance. At this sustained pace, industrial installations have to be totally reliable; each stoppage costs time, endangers quality and, in the end, causes disappointment for customers. One can better grasp why maintenance has become of the utmost importance, whereas other traditional sectors are receding:

*- We train fewer and fewer cabinet-makers because the whole trade has become too dependent on a series of industrialized processes, explains Caroline Leitzgen.*

All the employees efforts have borne fruit: **Schmidt Gruppe** is the sole manufacturer to have obtained six certifications for quality (ISO 9001), safety (OHSAS 18001), environment (ISO 14001), sustainable forest management (PEFC Wood), energy (ISO 50001) and the quality norm for respect for the environment (NF Environment Furnishing).



A U2 storage area

# Schmidt training or the Academy of new talent



2001 - At the close of each training session each participant is congratulated by the Managing Director, Jean-Marie Schwab

Operators, quality supervisors, delivery drivers, sales staff, concessionaires (employers, designer-salesmen, assistants, installers), administrative staff... what a collection of professions! Schmidt Groupe gives pride of place to training and integration. Apprenticeship trainers take care of young people who join the enterprise. But receiving teaching is not enough: you also have to stay on the top level.



Relaxation breaks punctuate the intense rhythm of the training sessions at Schmidt Groupe's training centre

That's why in-house training is ongoing, enabling the employees to progress in their career. What about those who join Schmidt Groupe? Each one goes through an integration process, can have access to tutors, including the managerial staff who are all placed under the mentorship of a member of the management team. More than 3,000 designer-sales staff, shop managers, installers are trained at Schmidt Groupe training Academy.

- We conceived our own sales technique, a real added value compared to our competitors. Nowadays, we provide all the necessary tools for commercial success with the priority objective of satisfying the customer and making him an ambassador.



The Schmidt Groupe training centre

The training Academy hall



Fabrice Lalzace with his team of shelving products promotion



An installer on the job

the installers, explains Fabrice Lalzace, who is in charge of training the retail network.

So we train our technicians in sales, and sales-staff in technical capabilities: improving knowledge of the products, in particular the new ones, a commercial argument which incites them to sell bespoke fittings for homes. We accompany shop managers who feel the need and back their management policies and means of achieving their aims. We certify the installation of our custom-built furniture

To reach all of the sales personnel, we have invented on-line training. E-learning modules considerably reduce travelling. But we also provide training in the use of software over the phone, through 'virtual classes'.

Ever and again, the same principle: "the greatest asset of any business is the people who belong to it"... and not merely all those figures in an accountancy balance sheet.

## The certification of installers reinforces the quality of the network

2,500 installers trained by Schmidt Groupe: the installers are the brand's ambassadors. For this reason, consumers must be made confident by guaranteeing quality installations. The installer has to join the Network Quality System (NQS), specifies Michel Armbruster, Schmidt Groupe's NQS auditor. At the training centre in Sainte-Croix, 300 installers obtain certification of their installation quality, the cleanliness of the work-site and their know-how.



Information about e-learning

# Pursuing the Work



2014 - Anne Leitzgen

- Nowadays, Schmidt is a recognized leader, ahead in design, quality and innovation, asserts Wolfgang Thorwart. Maintaining and consolidating this triple advance is the first aim.

To give itself all the means to succeed, the Group is building the new site in Sélestat, U3, a 17,000 sq. m. factory that will become operational in 2017 and will manufacture bespoke storage furniture.

What of tomorrow? What is the first French kitchen manufacturer aiming for? What projects has a company heir of two visionary leaders? The reply bursts forth: more and more mastery, more quality for an enterprise like ours which is internationalizing and digitalizing! The Schmidt ship has to be directed towards the consumer: that's the reference point of the "Work", going from desire to product, from the buyer to the manufacturer. A product cannot be imposed, the buyer and the seller, both have to be listened to. For this reason, the Group describes its mission in the following way:

**"Why":** we contribute through our products and our services to the wellbeing and lasting pleasure of consumers in their household;

**"How":** by becoming the Group providing consumers' with their favourite European brands of bespoke house-furnishing;

**"What":** by offering enthusiastic consumers bespoke products and personalized services, via its worldwide network, in Europe and in China.



Beginning the building of U3

2015 - Anne Leitzgen laying the first stone in the presence of local elected representatives



The U3 building in Sélestat



2002 - Recalling the "5 S's" policy in the house journal "Performance"

- Sustainable development is in our genes. Anne Leitzgen is the prime example, exclaims Yann Favry, Q-HSE manager. Under her guidance, the entire staff is mobilized and develops the triple Quality, Security and Environment certification at all the plants and also throughout the network.

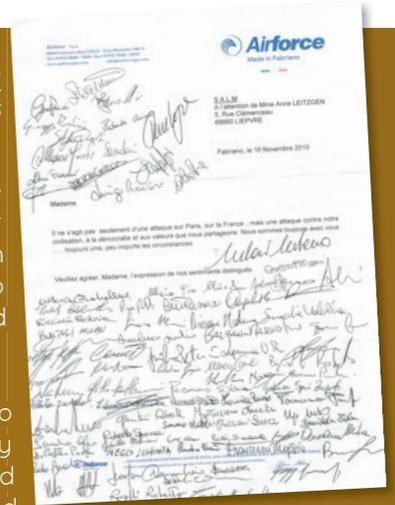
- We are forerunners in the field. Take all our wooden units, including our particle panels: they have obtained the PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification) over many years!

At each work station, waste is sorted and ergonomic work conditions to facilitate day-to-day operations have been incorporated. Nowadays, new "one-way" logistic platforms have been installed to avoid bringing the trucks back empty. Robots have replaced workers in tiring and repetitive activities.

Quality is omnipresent: in product control, with suppliers, in deliveries and customer relations. The 5S's (sort, straighten, shine, standardize, sustain) are applied in all services.

# SCHMIDT GROUPE, PIONEERS IN ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIETAL ACHIEVEMENTS

A letter of support from a supplier following the attack of 13/11/15



In addition, in-house training throughout their careers enables each and every employee to improve their skills and move on in the firm.

Schmidt Group also plays a social role by employing the disabled (between seven and eight percent of the employees) and doggedly pursues its policy of in-house promotion. It also provides financial support to SOS Villages d'Enfants (child care) and material support to the EMMAUS charity organization.

The Group further funds Strasbourg University's "Creativity Management" Chair to develop creativity in finding new products and services, creativity in managerial innovation and creativity in the 4.0 enterprise.

Last but not least, in close co-operation with its clients, Schmidt Groupe is among the too few businesses endeavouring to maintain employment in France and Germany.



# Diversification? The new challenge?

Schmidt ceased being one single brand name way back in 1992, with the launching of Cuisinella.



1992 - The first Cuisinella poster campaign

But diversification extends beyond that.

Schmidt proposes bathrooms, timeless and contemporary bespoke storage units, where practicality, ergonomics and attractiveness offer unique and personalized comfort. New, off-line and on-line publicity campaigns, both in France and internationally, accompany these constantly renewed offers.

So what is the new challenge? To make Schmidt more than a kitchen builder by becoming a leading bespoke home furnisher, a true specialist in planning living-space in the service of the art of life.

**SCHMIDT**  
Made-to measure is no longer a luxury

A new logo, new shop-fronts, new publicity campaigns create a fresh drive and consolidate the Group's leadership in the market. And "made-to-measure is no longer a luxury" confirms the will to offer products designed down to the last millimetre.

Schmidt trumpets the good news in France and abroad, publicizing through all available means: blogs, Twitter, Facebook... the whole range!



An example of a Schmidt bathroom



An example of Schmidt shelving



Presented in the Schmidt collection 2017 at the Euroform, Sésam is quite ingenious : a switch-operated double bottom makes it possible to raise and lower the teacup shelves, for example.



The Cuisinella stand at the Franchise trade-fair in Paris

Cuisinella, leading brand in its field in France, pursues its dazzling development, and remains a favourite with clients. The brand principally supplies affordable design kitchens but also invests heavily in attractive home organization solutions that reflect the consumer's own personality. In 2016 Cuisinella became international with the opening of its first outlet in Belgium. Cuisinella is the brand that listens to the wishes of its customers.



Cuisinella - New in 2017: a brushed metal and glazed model

## Actualité Alsace centrale

### Économie Les placards de Cuisinella changent de bain et s'agrandissent



Le magasin Cuisinella de Sélestat a déménagé dans la zone Industrielle Paradis. Avec à la clé un agrandissement de sa gamme aux salles de bain et aux meubles de rangement.

1277 Denis Huber, un sage de l'industrie du meuble Cuisinella, est devenu Fabienne Huber. Elle a rejoint son mari à Sélestat, en Alsace, pour ouvrir son propre magasin Cuisinella. Elle a rejoint son mari à Sélestat, en Alsace, pour ouvrir son propre magasin Cuisinella. Elle a rejoint son mari à Sélestat, en Alsace, pour ouvrir son propre magasin Cuisinella.

Le magasin Cuisinella de Sélestat a déménagé dans la zone Industrielle Paradis. Avec à la clé un agrandissement de sa gamme aux salles de bain et aux meubles de rangement.

Le magasin Cuisinella de Sélestat a déménagé dans la zone Industrielle Paradis. Avec à la clé un agrandissement de sa gamme aux salles de bain et aux meubles de rangement.

## AT THE HUBER'S\*

\*Cuisinella shop in Sélestat

In Sélestat, being the daughter and the wife of cabinet makers, Fabienne Huber quite naturally took her turn in supplying kitchen furniture. She already knew Vancel but was bowled over by Cuisinella after visiting a pilot store in Epinal. With her husband, she opened her own 160 sq. m. Cuisinella shop on 12th June 1992. Her very first sale was a red Verona kitchen, in those days presented in a little 12-page catalogue.

### Cuisinella crée l'Événement

Le thème "TEST QUALITE", avec un véhicule 4 X 4 monté sur 4 meubles BT 40 Cuisinella, est celui qui a été retenu par cette enseigne pour sa communication du printemps 1992.

Cette campagne coup de poing et spectaculaire a pour objectif de construire l'image de l'enseigne, renforcer le concept et créer du trafic dans les magasins.

L'objectif de ce test est de démontrer que vendre à des prix nettement inférieurs à ceux de nos concurrents ne se fait pas au détriment de la qualité.

Hormis les outils traditionnels de communication : affiches 4 X 3, dépliants, annonce presse quotidienne... nous avons voulu attirer l'ensemble du magasin en proposant de :

"Créer l'événement sur votre parking"

Un jeu-concours a été spécialement conçu à cette occasion, un rédacteur presse, reprenant le thème de la campagne, a été fourni aux magasins afin de pouvoir communiquer dans la presse locale et régionale.

À l'aide de leur 4 X 4 et de ces outils, nous souhaitons à tous nos partenaires de franchir les étapes qui les conduiront à la réussite.

H. BOSSERT

Demonstrating the robustness and quality of the casings

- We had no computers. All the quotations, the orders, the tracing... we did by hand! It took us three times longer than nowadays. And before the fax came in we sent every order by post. Just imagine...

But SALM quickly provided us with software: "plantif" for kitchen designing, "maqbar" for quotations and "gestor" for management.

Fabienne and Denis Huber are among the clients who grew up with the development of the brand. Living close by the head office, they are full of admiration for the Leitzgens' skills and very sensitive to their conviviality. Fabienne Huber remembers the ancestor of Euroforum: a meal at the Pommeraie restaurant in Sélestat; three or four tables to accommodate most of the network collaborators, but in a warm atmosphere, Karl Leitzgen would go round from one guest to the next to take stock of events and inspire confidence.



- Every single day, it's a pure joy to be active in a healthy competitive environment. Over the past 23 years we've experienced constant evolution, Fabienne Huber exclaims.

Recently, Fabienne and Denis sold off their concession to their store manager. But they've stayed on with Schmidt Groupe, accompanying and training new dealers.



# Digital Innovation, a priority



An obligatory maintenance operation to avoid breakdowns during production

- Our aim is to develop all the information tools to help the performance of our employees and our machines. We want to facilitate the work of our sales staff to limit the risk of mistakes and automate all the jobs that have no added value so that staff can concentrate more on performance tasks, explains Anne Leitzgen.

Millions of Euros have been injected into these digital innovations. It's a priority measure to meet consumers' expectations more and more.



The last production line set up in Lièpvre; the robot selects panels to match the order being manufactured

The Group is pursuing its digital transformation and is setting up a totally integrated information system.



The Schmidt truck mutually feeds the four Alsatian plants

It is continuing, too, its development policy and investing in other information tools like the "Traceability" project, which references all the logistic streams from manufacture to delivery to the consumer, Store Manager, SM2, software, which pilots the whole organization and customer follow-through in the shops, Customer Relationship Management, CRM, a software interface between prospective customers, concessionaires and consumers that manages and optimizes lasting interrelationships. These tools provide resources for responding more rapidly to the needs of each consumer, facilitating relations and increasing their satisfaction.



Staff supervise the data and manage installations

Moreover, new tools, indispensable for transforming a kitchen plan into digital data for use by the machines, are being strengthened.

Two hundred staff-members are working on this intelligent mechanism capable of limitlessly multiplying made-to-measure offers.



The loading bay. All the units in the order are scanned before being loaded onto the platform

## SAP (Scientific Assessment Panel) Quality Gold Award - category "business transformation" 2014

For ASCENT, the Group's traceability project: from the factory dispatch sites to logistics platforms and then on to the consumer's home. The aim is clear: to improve customer satisfaction through real-time monitoring of any dysfunctions, the better to remedy them. 700 shops are covered by this traceability process and 160 terminals are mobilized for 14 logistics platforms.

## Digital enterprise and digital factory of the year awards 2014

Reinventing ourselves, re-thinking our organization, improving the competitiveness of our industrial and logistics processes: these are the moves that have enabled us to achieve our digital transformation.

- Here, with us, digitalization is not a prop but a strategic function, exclaims Franck Ostertag.

The firm also obtained the Digital Factory Award in 2014 for conceiving a system unique in Europe, as well as the Digital Enterprise Award, both awarded by Usine Nouvelle (New Factory).



# Expanding abroad

The Schmidt Groupe concept applies all over, especially in the target countries: Benelux, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom.



Opening a new shop in Belgium

The Group also seeks to encourage Schmidt concessions with the support of a Master Franchise agent in Scandinavia, Russia and the Czech Republic.



A Schmidt shop in Samara, Russia



A Schmidt shop in Wimbledon, United-Kingdom

Since 2015, it has opened more outlets abroad than in France: over 460 Schmidt counselling centres amounting to 60% of the Group's turnover.

In 2015, Cuisinella also went over the border with a first outlet in Belgium, at Tournai.



The opening of the Cuisinella shop in Tournai, Belgium

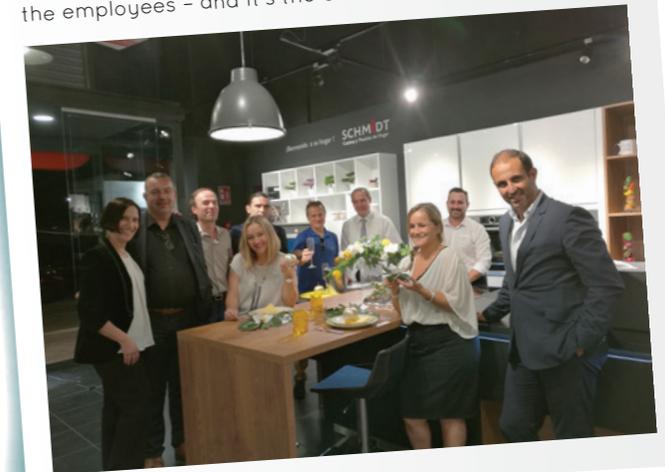
International development is well under way.



*- It's a lever for strong growth enabling us to limit the risks of being in a single market. Above all, it encourages us to respond better to customer requirements in all countries, and that sharpens our capacity to innovate, comments Anne Leitzgen.*

In this way, the Schmidt brand hones the design of its collections in Italy, services in Holland, the quality-price ratio in Germany and product quality in Switzerland. When products and services internationalize, they have to be adapted to meet each country's language and cultural requirements, with, of course, the support of a local team close to the brand. This means being both global and local.

**"Our excellence knows no frontiers"**  
The Spanish "Schmidt" network was awarded the title of "Best Chain of Shops 2015-2016" in the Kitchen and Baths category. A reason for pride in work well done among all the employees - and it's the consumers who vote!



### "The pleasure of working"

Stéphanie Binner, 24, saleswoman at Gaudin Schmidt in Granges (Switzerland)

Having tired of her job designing buildings, Stéphanie decided to launch into interior decoration and furnishing.

Since May 2014, she has been a technical sales agent at Gaudin Schmidt in Granges, a small village in the Valais canton where she was born. A new professional life was to open for her: designing plans for new installations and choosing bespoke products. She quickly found her feet. The pleasure she finds at her job is appealing to customers and the word gets round: « Go to Schmidt's. They provide a wonderfully warm welcome and an unequalled offer in kitchen and storage solutions! »



Thoroughgoing studies of segmentation, the customary noting of consumer preferences and habits, information relayed by the network and trade-fairs, all help define the needs of consumers in different countries. Press relations, publicity and being on the web enable the brand to assert itself. Partnerships with Scandinavian and Italian designers, with Universities like Strasbourg or working with INSA (National Institute of Applied Sciences) enable Schmidt to present a well-recognized innovative offer.



# WITH SCHMIDT SUOFEIYA KITCHENS (S.S.K.), SCHMIDT GROUPE IS OPENING OUT TO THE CHINESE MARKET

**SCHMIDT 司米**  
整体橱柜 · 法国 1934

To talk of China in industrial matters is to expose oneself to reproaches and worries. The first word that comes to mind is relocation, for example. But Anne Leitzgen energetically refutes this:

*- There's no question of relocation! That would present no interest for logistic, human and quality reasons! Our ambition is totally different; we aim to become a worldwide operator in our field; and the market is gigantic...*

It is true that gaining a foothold in the Chinese market, with its high growth and in the absence of a dominant offer in kitchens, is more than tempting.

The potential for development is five times higher than in the whole of the European market.

Jacques Haas, thrilled by this new challenge, went off to settle in Canton where the Group's subsidiary was set up.

The new, 65,000 sq. m. factory, which opened in June 2015, is less automated than the European sites – but it started out with 250 employees.



The shop in Lifan (China)

The factory manufactured 36,000 casings in its first period. In 2017, that figure should increase to 1,200,000. A second identical factory will reinforce the first as soon as the volume has materialized.



Inside a Schmidt shop in China

Suoifeiya franchise shops, Schmidt Groupe's partner and leading manufacturer for individual consumers in China, has a network of franchise shops ready to sell Schmidt products adapted to local tastes: flat-packed in kits. 500 shops have so far opened. Some 1,800 counselling centres will be set up between now and 2022.

French life style is catching on more and more in China.

The Schmidt brand already stands out through the quality of its products and European design at an affordable price: a unique and innovative positioning in China.



Anne Leitzgen and her Chinese clients

Franco-Chinese synergies are under way. Some of the Group's suppliers, like Blum, have joined in.

Software, brought in to develop production, by piloting manufacturing processes, designing kitchens and running information systems, ensures considerable savings of scale. In this way, little by little, Schmidt products will be personalized. French style made-to-measure!

Schmidt's governance in China is Franco-Chinese, both in the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee.



Inside the 65,000 sq.m. factory in Ningxi



The Ningxi factory

*- Spreading our know-how over there is a good textbook case for our development in each country and becoming the first truly worldwide kitchen furnishing group, considers Anne Leitzgen on her return from China.*



2015 - A Schmidt advertisement on a bus in Canton (China)

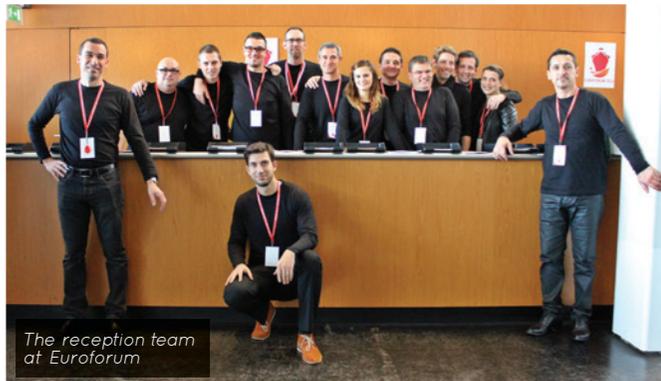


# Hoisting the sails



The cruise liner of a Euroforum

Back on board the cruise liner between Marseilles and Genoa. On the stage Anne Leitzgen and Jean-Thierry Catrice, the associate managing director, perform a finely-tuned duet. Witty lines stream forth.



The reception team at Euroforum

On the screen, a film shows the testimonies of salesmen and trading partners from all over, proclaiming their pride, revealing their expectations, defining their philosophy and work-lines. With a broad smile, one of them, Marc Boudoux, a Schmidt dealer from Bordeaux, says: "Selling is great!" The whole audience applauds.

True to form, the associate managing director remains the driving force everyone knows. Except that, for once, he's not convincing the troops about a new project but calling them to attack.



Jean-Thierry Catrice, the Bold, at the Euroforum

He's doffed his suit and tie to don the black moustache and costume of a pirate: Jean-Thierry Catrice the Bold, the Terror of the High Seas.

He's decidedly superb as a one-off buccaneer, ably playing his part in the evening theme game.

His appearance in the big saloon is greeted with peals of laughter:

- *Oh Jean-Thierry! Whatever you do, don't change anything!*

Jean-Thierry Catrice bursts into laughter and brandishes a toy pistol.

- *It's my first intervention at a Euroforum, so I had to mark the occasion!*

A few days before, the managing-director had revealed a decidedly more serious side of himself when presenting the "Human-to-Human" policy. Schmidt Groupe has to change its methods of governance and management. Soon, leadership within the 'extended Enterprise' will be more collective: both within the firm itself and in the network.



The entire Schmidt Groupe network discovering new developments and products

Under the "Be Schmidt" and "Employer Pact" projects a human charter will engage each part and consider each profession.



A Cuisinella kitchen

In this way, the teams will grow, leaving everyone the possibility of enhancing their skills and contributing more effectively to the overall project. Schmidt Groupe must constantly attract skilled employees to ensure its development, share its vision and its ambition to make everyone an ambassador, but it must also identify future dealers and accompany them as they take over their shops.

Consumers, collaborators, suppliers, sales-personnel, all embody the Schmidt and Cuisinella brands. Cross management, trust, listening, initiative, the right to make mistakes, daring, creativity, pleasure at work, the emergence of new talent: such are the new challenges facing Schmidt Groupe.



## BE SCHMIDT

“Be Schmidt” is the concept forged by the Group to strengthen its managerial culture and good life together.

This approach mobilizes the whole firm and underlines all the initiatives likely to enhance an essential aspect: pleasure at work.

Think-tanks naturally emerged on the themes of management, ways of encouraging collaborators to become aware of their responsibilities and the recognition of individual and collective successes.

“Wall of success”, “Living my job”, “Breaking new ground”, “Coffee Club”, are all means of giving day-to-day life to our Star: trust, co-operation, agility, responsibility, kindness, performance and pleasure.



## PARTICIPANTS



*Becoming a totally fulfilled employee, happy to join Schmidt Groupe*



## AT “BE SCHMIDT DAY”



*Encouraging and congratulating one another*



*All the participants at a “Be Schmidt Day” gathered around Anne Leitzgen*

## CONQUERING THE WORLD FROM THE FORCE OF OUR ROOTS

To carry on its development while preserving its roots and its identity as a firm having strong human values, Schmidt Groupe has to recruit fresh talent, new collaborators and concessionaires. To foster its reputation as an employer, the Group deploys a corporate website, a film about the firm, press links and presence on social media.



*Evermore kindness, agility, trust and co-operation to share daily pleasure*



*Breakfast chats*





Shop managers and Schmidt Groupe teams ready to bring in the Employer Pact



### AT SCHMIDT GROUPE, THE DIFFERENCE IS IN WHAT IS HUMAN

What constitutes the strength and the character of Schmidt Groupe is the commitment of every manager, sales-person, installer or deliverer. To spur along this exceptional team spirit, attract the best people and retain their loyalty, there is a secret: the Employer Pact.

Its aim? Guaranteeing consumer satisfaction by developing that of the sales teams.  
 - Enabling all the shop-owners to keep on improving the management of their teams, explains Patrice Casenave, Human Resources Director of the "Extended Enterprise".



Creating new products and services, allowing everyone to fulfil their potential and skills: these are the keys to the Group's success and sustainability.



Human qualities and personality are the guarantees of excellence in client relations



# Home Schmidt Home or the art of living and storage

The presentation, scenography and staging of Euroforum have all the ingredients of big American conventions. Only the spirit is not the same, nothing is feigned.

“Wow!” Smiles and cheers greet the presentation of products, custom-building and the new Cuisinella ranges. But when Delphine Pfeiffer, Schmidt’s marketing manager, reveals Schmidt’s new concept: the “perfect fit”, true bespoke units at no extra cost, a huge explosion shakes the room. “Now, that’s really great!”, “That’ll be a big hit!”



Delphine Pfeiffer

- Schmidt’s revolution is under way, exclaims Delphine Pfeiffer, raising a clenched fist with a large smile. The consume(ctor) is at the heart of our project.

It’s difficult to attribute this motto to any particular person, the notion of an extended enterprise being adopted by all. Chief among all the big projects under way and consumers’ ‘great expectations’ is storage: with smaller flats, making the best use of all available space is of paramount importance. Competitors are all pushing in the same direction, so the challenge is open. That explains the launching of two new concepts catering to lifestyle and opening storage-space: “Schmidt Home Stories” and “Schmidt made-to-measure Cupboards and Furniture”.



Highlighting “made-to-measure” in a Schmidt shop



The Schmidt shop team at Epinal

“Storage space is a major asset for attracting and retaining consumers”

Arnaud Hulbach, Schmidt shops sales manager at Epinal (88)

From the very beginning of the Schmidt Kitchen network, Thierry Beaumont realized the strength and durability of the brand. In 2012, he opened “Le Placard” (Cupboard) next to the Schmidt shop specializing in kitchens. He rightly reckoned that this new venture would prove advantageous and immediately registered his first orders for storage cupboards. “Le Placard” enabled him to retain his customers.

- Sliding doors, TV stands, bookshelves...attract customers. But you have to change the approach and convince the designer-salesman that storage-furniture is a promising market. So when people come into the kitchen shop, we talk about storage. Three employees run “Le Placard”, explains Arnaud Hulbach, a colleague of Thierry Beaumont.



Presentation of made-to-measure storage at the “Placard by Schmidt” shop



Home Schmidt Home displayed at the Euroforum



# The combat network

On the liner, Gabriel, a young marketing agent is dumbfounded:  
*- I've only been with the firm for a few months and, a moment ago, as I was boarding the ship, I saw Anne Leitzgen. She interrupted her conversation to come over and shake my hand.*

He smiles, looking at the sea rolling by:  
*- In what other group employing over fifteen hundred people does the boss do that? It's incredible!*

Denis Morel, one of the network mobilizers agrees with him: *- Anne is an exceptional Chairwoman. She knows everybody. We all have a strong relationship with her.*

The fact that he's wearing an eye patch and carrying a cutlass in no way detracts from the seriousness of what he says. But what does Madame "Chairwoman" herself think?



Anne Leitzgen at the Euroforum

*- We rely on two mainstays: on the one hand, the manufacture and logistics, and distribution on the other. I tell our teams of network mobilizers to be kind and watchful. There can be no question of letting anyone down or ignoring the difficulties encountered by a shop, a marketing agent or a regional manager, explains Anne Leitzgen.*

In Genoa, groups of people move from one stand to the next listening to the explanations given about the products. Visits to the three floors of the Magazzini del Cotone are almost non-stop. On each floor everyone talks endlessly about kitchens:  
*- Ah! That's a great idea!*  
*- Customers often ask for drawers with cutlery trays. I always provide them and I think we should take on the idea...*



A Schmidt specialist explaining the advantages of this new storage space

Pierre Tanghe goes by carrying a little flag and is followed by a group of dealers. He's in charge of the legal department:  
*- You can manufacture the best product in the world, but if you don't know how to promote and sell it, it's useless.*  
 The regional director for the whole of the south of France, Mourad Bouamana, agrees. He's a warm, easy-going man, but quite determined:  
*- Our job, in the commercial line, is to look after sales. We're all a bit red-faced and pushy. Sometimes we*

*have to put pressure on the factory, but then we're simply passing on what the shop managers tell us, in other words what the customers have asked for. And the head office of course pays attention to their remarks.*

It's a unique network in the kitchen world. Schmidt and Cuisinella dealers are not merely franchised like elsewhere; their contract with Schmidt Groupe is more than a partnership:  
*- In fact, in the space of a single day, they move from being shop owners to becoming Schmidt Groupe clients, partners, sales managers, and then back to being clients, Mourad goes on. If a problem arises no one else can do what we*



An attentive audience at the presentation of new Schmidt products

*do: within less than twenty minutes the commercial management is at the helm.*  
 Mourad chats with a shop manager about customer expectations. He's well aware that the network is placed "between the hammer and the anvil".

*- The network is the prescriber.*  
 He sips his « ristretto » coffee and picks up two sugar sachets:  
*- If I tell the factory that customers want brown sugar rather than white, they'll have to react. Sometimes they start grumbling but that's part of the game. Our network is unique in that longstanding members are very considerate towards newcomers.*

Schmidt Groupe attributes its broad success to everyone's commitment:  
*- from the captain to the ordinary rating, regardless of the consumers' tumultuous new expectations and the market headwinds, asserts Anne Leitzgen, thanking the entire audience, filled with energy and motivation.*

The ship docks; participants on the first trip to the Euroforum disembark. Two men remain seated: Messrs Waechter and Uhl; they're among those who welcome the hundreds of other Schmidt and Cuisinella "militants" preparing to embark for the second session:  
*- We're on the supervisory board. Of course we're retired but we're here to help guarantee the preservation of our values.*

The passengers having arrived on the quayside, take their leave, promising to call one another and meet again soon...



The interior of a new Schmidt shop



# 4. Horizon 2025



The Schmidt shop concept

SCHMIDT LE SUR-MESURE  
AU CŒUR DE LA MAISON

de créativité  
c'est  
SCHMIDT

Placard  
CO  
= ESS  
+ Plans  
+ Portes  
+ Armoires

TIEL  
mi 30 colors  
grande 15 cm

24 coloris de caissons  
100 coloris de portes  
30 décors de placards  
110 décors de façades coulissantes  
60 décors de bibliothèques

Imaginez l'intérieur qui vous ressemble !

- Governing means foreseeing...  
Foreseeing is also having  
objectives. By 2025, Schmidt  
Groupe aims to be consumers'  
favourite European brands  
in made-to-measure home  
furnishing.



# A talented Armada devoted to the art of life

Schmidt Groupe wishes to boost its recognition, fill its customers with enthusiasm and put them at the heart of its concerns, ensure the continuity of the very important notion of an expanded enterprise - leading from the establishment of a sales outlet right up to consumer relations management - in which everyone works together in the same direction.



A warm living room, from the 2017 collection

To achieve these aims, Schmidt Groupe needs the skills and the commitment of everyone. This is the basis of the "Be Schmidt" concept.

In Jean-Thierry Catrice's view, innovation and being attentive to the consumer are both necessary:

*- What new product and what service can we supply to ensure the development of a shop in a climate of ever-increasing competition? What strategy can we devise for the best welfare for the consumers, to make them happy and give them pleasure?*



Jean-Thierry Catrice

**« This collective asset is unique »**  
Jean-Luc Klein,  
chief financial manager  
of Schmidt Groupe

*- From the minute of my arrival in 2015, I was struck by the strong cohesion among the employees. An unusual dynamism. An enterprise like no other. People are trusted, given autonomy and a sense of responsibility. There is kindness, no hierarchy, a sharing of information.*

*Profitable examples are proudly shared. Everyone asserts happiness at their job. But equilibrium needs to be watched, not only because of the firm's atypical functioning (everything is reinvested) but also owing to its moving onto an international level. Things have to be carefully supervised day by day. We must remain vigilant and preserve this collective asset. It is unique.*



Some innovations in 2017: coloured drawers, the monolith, the jumbo.



A graphic style Arcos kitchen

## LA GARANTIE EXCELLENCE SCHMIDT OFFRE LA SÉRÉNITÉ



Schmidt Groupe prône la sérénité pour séduire toujours plus le consommateur, motiver le client et les salariés du Groupe. Comment ? Par une idée de génie :

- *La Garantie Excellence Schmidt : un nouvel engagement du Groupe et du réseau qui porte sur une offre globale de services, explique Sylvie Heinis, responsable de ce nouveau service. Et c'est la première fois que Schmidt Groupe réunit quatre cents responsables de magasins en même temps !*

La marque passionne. Le service attire.

Si la marque Schmidt est reconnue par la qualité, le sérieux et le sur-mesure, il ne lui manquait plus que le service pour faire la différence ; la Garantie Excellence Schmidt va faire des envieux. Une offre unique, sans frais supplémentaire qui fait déjà chavirer les clients et le cœur des consommateurs :

- dix ans pour les meubles et les pièces métalliques,
- cinq ans pour la plomberie liée au raccordement de la cuisine en cas de fuite,
- cinq ans pour l'électroménager avec remplacement à neuf sans application de vétusté.
- un numéro unique, dédié aux consommateurs qui pourraient rencontrer des problèmes au cours des dix ans.



- *Notre volonté est d'avoir durablement une belle histoire d'avance sur la concurrence, souligne Jean-Thierry Catrice. Et la Garantie Excellence Schmidt est une offre audacieuse qui dépasse le rêve du consommateur. Elle complète les huit autres engagements Schmidt :*

- un interlocuteur unique ;
- le devis gratuit sur-mesure après un rendez-vous au domicile ;
- les prix les plus justes (avec remboursement s'ils sont plus élevés qu'ailleurs) ;
- le respect de la date d'installation ;
- la garantie du matériel ;
- la garantie d'achèvement de la pose et de la livraison ;
- la réception de l'aménagement par le vendeur dédié ;
- Schmidt à votre service.



- *La marque reste dans la continuité par l'innovation ! Et cela me conforte dans le choix de représenter Schmidt près de Lyon, confie un directeur de magasin ravi de ce nouveau booster.*

C'est un fait : le consommateur a besoin de rangement sur-mesure : en France, une cuisine sur deux s'ouvre sur le salon, en Allemagne, c'est une sur cinq, en Angleterre, le concept d'énorme cuisine prédomine. D'où le pari d'ouvrir des magasins consacrés aux placards et rangements sur-mesure tout en respectant la règle de base : chaque consommateur est unique !



L'équipe de Schmidt Groupe reçoit à nouveau le prix du service client en 2017



Un magasin dédié aux placards et meubles sur-mesure Schmidt



La cuisine est ouverte sur le salon

« Le champ des possibles est considérable »

Patrick Fabre, directeur commercial Europe de Schmidt Groupe



Immédiatement séduit par la personnalité de la Présidente, devenue son mentor, et enthousiasmé par le nouveau challenge et la notion d'entreprise étendue, il n'a pas réfléchi longtemps pour rejoindre Schmidt Groupe.

- *Ensemble tout est possible. C'est incroyable comme je suis déjà porté par la passion de ce groupe de femmes et d'hommes, tous heureux de travailler et de s'investir pour satisfaire toujours plus le consommateur. Le Groupe se remet en question, s'adapte, innove. Deux nouveaux prix en témoignent : « Services Clients 2016 », « Services Clients 2017 » et « Meilleure Chaîne de magasins 2016 ». Le potentiel de développement de nos produits et services est énorme. C'est ce qui me motive. Porté par ce monde émotionnel et relationnel, il est prioritaire aujourd'hui d'essayer notre réussite hexagonale sur les marchés cibles que sont l'Espagne, l'Italie, la Grande-Bretagne, l'Allemagne, le Bénélux et la Suisse, pour les marques Schmidt et Cuisinella.*

# Schmidt Groupe in figures\*

- **1,534** employees ;  
**7,500** collaborators worldwide
- **€472 million** turnover
- **€1.5 billion** turnover for the whole network
- **5<sup>th</sup>** European manufacturer
- **15%** of the turnover from exports
- **667** shops in our target countries, Spain, Germany, Italy, Benelux, Switzerland, United-Kingdom
- **More than 40** shops in other countries (Overseas French Territories, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Estonia, Russia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Turkey, Lebanon, Mauritius, South Africa) and one shop in Australia.
- An export turnover growth of **25%** in two years with significant increases in Spain (+40%) and the United-Kingdom (+140%)
- Soon **6 factories** (Lièpvre, Sélestat (U1, U2 and U3), Bergheim (EMK) in Alsace, Türkismühle (Germany))
- **175,000 sq. m.** roofed work surface
- **718** shops
- **30,000** data per kitchen
- **100,000** kitchens per year
- **120** trucks per day
- **2,000** suppliers
- **More than €40 million** invested annually
- China:  
**500** shops;  
**1,200** employees;  
registered office Guangzhou (Canton), factory at Ningxi (65,000 sq. m.), 300 kitchens per day

\* 2016 figures.



1. Alexis Bevilacqua, foreman
2. Anna Paula, manageress, Customer Service ADV
3. Anne Meyer, facilitator and Quality technician
4. Arnaud Da Silva, project leader
5. Aude Kubiszyn, Cuisinella publicity manageress
6. Boris Herrmann, production manager
7. Delphine Pfeiffer, Schmidt products, marketing manageress
8. Fanny Neubrand, forklift operator
9. Frédérique Czaja, supply buyer
10. Guillaume Kempf, machine operator
11. Jason Lehmann, electromechanical engineer
12. Julien Heidmann, Customer service manager
13. Laure Gigleux, head of Industrial Control management
14. Luis Jimenez, national director Spain
15. Patrick Viry, Industrial supervision and automation manager
16. Philippe Faltot, organization and information systems manager
17. Philippe Uhl, network manager
18. Pierre Débenath, projects leader
19. Géraldine Andres, Employment and Skills manageress
20. Guillaume Ambiehl, machine operator
21. Yann Favry, Hygiene, Safety and Environment manager
22. Yannick Balland, Apprenticeship manager and Loïc Kopp



The Management Committee: 1. Anne Leitzgen, Chairwoman, 2. Jean-Thierry Catrice, deputy managing director, 3. Jean-Claude Armspach, head of management control, 4. Patrice Casenave, human resources director, 5. Patrick Fabre, commercial manager, Europe, 6. Jean-Luc Klein, financial manager, 7. Bernard Muller, industrial manager, 8. Franck Ostertag, organization and information system manager, 9. Michel Siaud, supply purchasing manager, 10. Wolfgang Thorwart, product development manager.  
Not present on the photo: Jacques Haas, Executive deputy general manager SSK et Olivier Offner, deputy industrial manager.



Caroline and Anne Leitzgen receiving The Patrimonial and Family Enterprise Grand Prix

2016 - Schmidt Groupe wins the "Ambitions d'entrepreneurs" Trophy



The Iref (Institut de Recherche et de Formation de la Franchise), nominated Anne Leitzgen "Woman of the Year 2016"

# Anne Leitzgen "A great adventure"

## Are your father's principles still applied today?

If I think of the very first principle: "the asset is human beings", I can say that nothing has changed. It's still true today. But we must stay vigilant, maintain the links between the teams and know how to remain humble in a group in constant mutation.

## How can one remain the best in a constantly moving world?

By trusting the teams. It's up to all our collaborators to take the right decisions. We have to remain agile, straightforward, daring, taking pleasure and being enterprising.



The Schmidt teams at the "Grill Party" in July 2016

## What background do you want to leave your daughters?

I would like them to understand that the life of the enterprise is also the history of a great adventure. One has to be enthusiastic and manage with pleasure; if not, it's better to do something else. There's no question of it becoming an obligation.



The 3 generations of the Leitzgen family © Henri Kugler

## Being a leading woman in the business world?

That's not the point. One has to try to keep time for oneself, family and friends.

# « Yes we Cannes »



Anne Leitzgen

**M**ore automation, more personalized products and innovative services. Schmidt Groupe proposes the best offer on the market, recalled Anne Leitzgen at the last Euroforum. We aim to promote French art of living throughout the world and that of living and working happily together in the Schmidt Groupe 'extended enterprise'.

The Group is pursuing its strong investment policy. In U3, which will be the highest automated furniture factory in the world. In the exclusive manufacture of products designed to maximize space. In customer relations, with 3000 sales-staff and as many installers.

The 3 factories in Sèlestat: an exceptional industrial tool



Schmidt Groupe takes a further step towards customers. "Good Services is Marketing" meets the expectations of the network (Employer Pact, Consumer Connect and Client Service Management).

The range of products and services is enriched.

Cuisinella proposes 4 styles inspired by contemporary life-styles: Archi Graphic, New Nature, Bohemian Folk and Industrial Workshop.

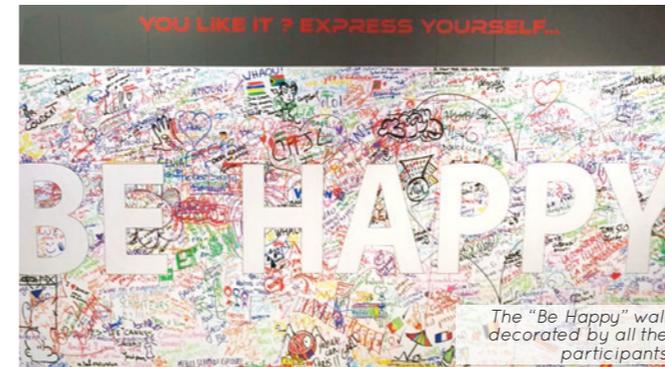


A Cuisinella "industrial workshop" style kitchen

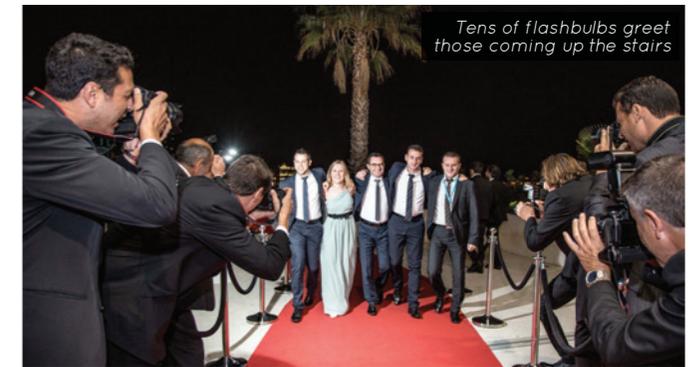
And Schmidt is maximizing space with its design ranges: Modern Nature, Elegance and Country Spirit.



A Schmidt clean-line bathroom



The "Be Happy" wall decorated by all the participants



Tens of flashbulbs greet those coming up the stairs



Discovering new products



An attentive assembly



A real discovery of Schmidt and Cuisinella innovation



After the vision of 2025 and the good figures it's time to relax





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Since its conception, in 1934, Schmidt Groupe has seen itself as an Extended Enterprise. Now one of the world's leading manufacturers and suppliers of furniture, Schmidt Groupe is a unique ecosystem, giving its wealth of experience to customers, from conception, through manufacturing and delivery to installation of the finished product, both at home and internationally.

Since the beginning, Schmidt Groupe has grown by combining industrial and commercial excellence, building up sales networks comprising both partners & dealers, and thereby developing exceptionally close relations with its clients. The whole network is geared towards the consumer, and is driven by their passion for the business. Everyone involved is an ambassador of the brand, with expert knowledge and training. With over 7,000 colleagues throughout the world, Schmidt Groupe is first and foremost human energy.

