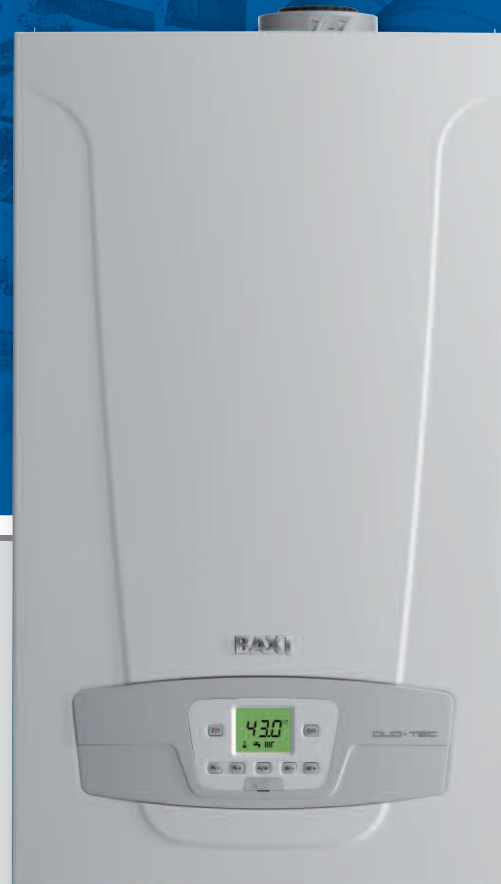


# BAXI

1925-2015

NINETY YEARS OF INSIGHTS AND CREATIONS  
ACHIEVED BY SUCCESSFUL SYNERGIES











# **BAXI**

## **from Bassano to the world**

*1925-2015*

*Ninety years of insights and creations  
achieved by successful synergies*

*Texts by Giandomenico Cortese, Vladi Finotto,  
Andrea Minchio, Giovanni Battista Sandonà*

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*We thank all people who have  
enthusiastically collaborated in the  
creation of this publication through  
reports, testimonies and loans.*

*The concretization of this cultural  
initiative is also due to their invaluable  
contribution.*

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with passion and determination.*

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*Coming together is a beginning;  
keeping together is progress;  
working together is success.*

**Henry Ford**

*Yesterday is but today's memory  
and tomorrow is today's dream.*

**Kahlil Gibran**

*Nulla dies sine linea  
(Not a day without a line)*

**Pliny the Elder**



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## A journey through time, amongst many people

To describe the experience of a company is never a simple thing: we can also add that the difficulty is directly proportional, or perhaps better said, exponentially proportional to the age of the same. It is our story that we tell you in these pages, the story of a company that has reached the age of ninety.

In this long period, we have acquired many testimonies: the quotes, products, photographs, memories and objects are so many that we are spoiled for choice. It is difficult, though, trying to condense this long itinerary in a single publication and allow the reader to understand the essence of this trip, which has seen thousands of people joining our reality since its foundation.

A selection has been necessary, but we do not want to forget the many protagonists of these first ninety years and is also to them, in equal measure, that we owe the growth of this company and the sharing of many moments, also difficult, which did succeed. However, our intent is just that: understand the social and historical moments that formed the company's development framing through the rereading of testimonies, but especially the intensity and passion that have always accompanied the working life of these ninety years.

Many are the episodes described, fruit of the experiences of each one, of what they lived within the company. The transferring of property and the commercial and industrial strategies that took place might make you

think of some sort of discontinuity between a historic moment and another. It seems, at times, than with a name change (the company has changed it four times) one finds oneself in a different company.

This journey through time must be looked at as that of a ship. This ship is our company. To sail, there is the need of an element of continuity, of a fluid element, represented by our people, the many people who worked or are working here: our sales agents, importers, clients, service centers and all our partners. Generational witnesses who have believed and continue to believe in this reality with a passion and a professionalism that knows no time and who have helped make it a protagonist, in many cases a pioneer one. They are the "Ariadne's thread" that links 1925 to 2015. Through the words of those who tell their personal experience or memories of an episode it will not be difficult to become co-protagonists and empathize with the intense life of these first ninety years.

To them, to you, thank you.

All the best wishes to every one for an enjoyable reading and a good trip.

**Alberto Favero**

*Managing Director*





## A company able to evolve and compete worldwide

**R**esilience: perhaps this is the most apt word to sum up the hallmark of *Baxi*: the inherent capacity to apply a creative, tenacious approach to coping with tricky or difficult situations and to turn them into winning opportunities. Throughout its ninety-year existence - as this engaging volume illustrates - the company from Bassano has often been called upon to put this talent to good use. The results are fortunately clear for all to see. A further essential - and equally significant - characteristic of the company emerges just as clearly from this book: the strong links that bind *Baxi* to its native Bassano area, that “little something extra” the various owners have been able to take advantage of. It is no coincidence, as has been noted, that Bassano - right from its foundation - has been a crossroads between the German and Venetian lands, between the North and the South, the East and the West; a trading centre of the banks of the Brenta River, close to the northern reaches of the Serenissima. This is a land with a natural vocation for doing business and for exchanges with other cultures, other civilisations, other worlds.

It is sufficient to consider the thriving Antonibon factories, in the ceramic sector, or the Remondini family, who in the 18<sup>th</sup> century owned the largest graphics business in the world.

So we might say that this is a place where people are born to do business. I believe it is with this in mind - and not only because it made sense from a logistical viewpoint - that in 1925 the Westen family chose this area to found and develop their successful *Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta*.

Since then, of course, the journey has not always been a smooth one. The company that for decades was considered synonymous with a “secure wage”, a place to “Work University”, ahead of its time in Italy with regard to important contractual and social agreements, has also gone through extremely trying times, especially during the Seventies, when all appeared to be lost, with dire consequences for local employment and linked business. Dark days indeed for the town, which still remembers the dramatic situation. It was these very circumstances, however, that highlighted the value of the relationship linking the company, the institutions and the representatives of the world of employment. Over many long years, their joint efforts have made it possible to safeguard over 700 jobs and offer new job prospects, through the reconversion of production, the focus on research and creativity and in active cooperation with other industries, together with the emergence of a close-knit team of young, courageous managers, allowing for an extraordinary turnaround of the company’s fortunes in the space of just a few years. Not only is *Baxi* of Bassano back on its feet: today it is one of the most competitive players in its sector, with a business culture able to come up with effective, winning strategies and offer new job prospects also for the generations to come. A business Italy can be proud of, with promising prospects for the future.

**Giuliano Poletti**

*Minister of Labour and Social Policy*



## The mettle that makes the difference

In a historic moment like the one that Italy is currently experiencing, heavily laden by bureaucracy that is very costly to companies and a worrying unemployment rate, working, furthermore in a context which, on several occasions has displayed a non-positive approach toward industry, I find it extremely rewarding to be able to celebrate the important milestone reached by this company.

A beautiful reality of the Vicenza province which, with great charisma and much determination, reached ninety years from its historic foundation. A success, that of *Baxi*, which draws its foundation from an unquestionable combination of values, authentic pillars on which *Baxi* has based its success, becoming a true industrial excellence. It is, in fact, worthy of note the “mettle” that over the years *Baxi* has shown, knowing often how to reinvent itself, diversifying production and reacting with pride and creativity during tough times. Talents, which many other companies in the territory implement daily with courage and a sense of duty. Also thanks to them, we are starting to breathe again air of confidence in the future: we are already feeling the first timid signs of a significant and gratifying breakthrough. *Baxi* represents an example of brilliance to follow with enthusiasm.

### **Giuseppe Zigliotto**

*President of Confindustria Vicenza (Association representing manufacturing and service companies in Italy)*

## Pride in our team

Fluttering high above the town’s main towers in the generous breeze of the Valbrenta, the lively red and golden yellow of Bassano’s flag immediately call to mind the colours of the Lagoon’s capital of yesteryear, as they stand out with vigour against the Grappa mountains and the Sette Comuni Plateau in the background. This flag is the symbol of our people: active, enterprising folk ready to rise to a challenge, accustomed to tackling even the most dramatic, demanding situations with a shot of positive energy. These immediately identifiable colours are also found on the shirts our home team wear with pride at every important competition. And Bassano, as this book clearly illustrates, is a very special team indeed, on and off the pitch.

I’m referring, with this sporting metaphor, to the Bassano company *Baxi*, which the locals - in honour of tradition - still insist on calling by its original name of “Smalterie”: an exemplary business, the largest in our area, which has been able to come through the darkest of days, thanks to a deep-rooted sense of belonging, the proven skill of its management and the impressive expertise of its workers. The jewel in Bassano’s crown, which has shown us how far-sighted choices and the courage to experiment can bring home a victory even in the toughest of matches.

### **Riccardo Poletto**

*Mayor of Bassano del Grappa*



# The Lion, the Eagle, the Brenta

## *Bassano in the mirror of history*

*But what town of such nice river, or river  
of what other town better adorns itself,  
and of the best arts and pleasure consents?  
What show of joy!*

Giuseppe Barbieri, *Il Bassano*, 1804

Bassano is a land of ancient industriousness. Influences interweave the area. Marked by tracing of frequent migrations from the northern German area, Bassano has as filigree a lively exchanging flow of people, with their knowledge, skills, technical expertise and commercial shrewdness. The human and cultural elements, as well as naturalistic and environmental, geographic and historical components nourish for over a thousand years the good life and the productive breathing of this happy piedmont section. In the look of thoughts, it appears as a land uninhabited by a multifarious genius.

The first gifts of Beauty are the wonderful nature, the enchanting scene of the mountains protecting the hills, of the wind that breathes wind, which animates the trees, the gardens and the villages. The theater of harmony inspires man who, energized by this wonderful place, builds a rich living for the beauty of arts and excellence in producing, trading and creating. Da Ponte canvases immortalize this innate vocation at producing.

Therefore, here is the tale of the *Mercato* (Market), where work and commerce are a festive confusion and the *Stagioni* (Seasons), to celebrate the working of the land, of



the harvest and of the herds. The *Noè* (Noah), who works at the Ark, makes of the bassanesi factories a representative context *en plen air* of the biblical Patriarch, the *Officina di Vulcano* (Volcano's Factory) portrays the interior scene of a blacksmith mallet along the laborious Brenta River. Along the river's banks, the *Pianta di Bassano* (*Bassano's Map*) by the Da Ponte, places eager and joyful working scenes in its disorderly enthusiasm: hardworking raftmen, mills wheels in full activity, frenzied river port workers, traders taking care of the market. The Brenta River is key and heart of the election to beauty, creativity, arts and the economical activities in Bassano.

The Bassano's culture, gathered at the feet of the mountains and by the river, lives and grows thanks to it: the Latin "Medoaco Padre" for the Romans, the "Brenta" in the subsequent prevailing term of Germanic influence. Bassano has a Romanic and Germanic matrix, even in the economical field. The river is "he" and "she" Brenta, father and mother. It is the conveyor belt, the assembly line, the trading emporium and exhibition space of the best producing of Bassano.

It allows Ponzio of Cluny in 1124 to build the "Monastero

*The Ezzelini's Castle:  
Bassano del Grappa  
presents itself this way  
for those coming from  
the north side.*

*On the previous page:  
the historic Ponte Vecchio  
(Old Bridge) designed by  
architect Andrea Palladio,  
on the background of the  
castle; an icon of great  
scenographic effect  
(ph. Andy Pozzobon).*



Jacopo dal Ponte,  
La costruzione dell'arca,  
(The building of the  
Ark), detail, oil on  
canvas, 1575. Private  
collection.

della Santa Croce” (*Monastery of the Holy Cross*) for whose building site, the first bridge is built. From here starts the economical development of the right bank of the Brenta River with its terraces. It enables the milling economy, the development of vineyards and the growth of a great wool district. It provides the decisive push for the boosting of the paper industry, printing engraving and book typography, cradle of *aquavita* (*spirit*) distillation, significant to the point of having the *spirit* in Venice, an exclusive warehouse and customhouse. Not to mention the timber industry which uses the rafting, lives on the water and of it. The account of sources, documents, texts and monuments confirms that Bassano is an aesthetic community based on work. The medieval walls of Bassano, enlarged in their radius over the mid centuries, are indicative of growth and expansion, demographic, economical and political: in times of daily struggle for life only a prosperous commu-

nity grows, which eats, produces and trades.

The Castle stands on the hill, well crouched, in a dominant position but not high, just above the River, where the riverbed is narrower, at the bottleneck where the stream ends and a broader and more serene water flow starts. Son of the Brenta River, it watches the death of the valley and the genesis of the plain, the end of the alpine continent and the dawn of the Veneto plains.

It is motor and guardian of community life: it has a big cellar that is conservation hold for agricultural produce; a high place of observation and a wall of defense for humans and animals; a custodian and dispenser of divine life, matryoshka that houses the parish church with the baptismal font; it is final resting cemeterial abode.

Soaring into the sky but well anchored to the rocky hill, from his pentagon corner tower-native nest of the last and greater Ezzelino, glory of the Da Romano, of ancient Germanic origin-start off the trunks and branches of the walls. An awesome fortification tree that Marin Sanudo the Young, aware by then of their military uselessness, will describe in awe as a fearsome mastiff crouched to guard the territory.

Beside the physical and military wall perimeter, the community finds itself in the political and statutory legal territory. Statutes are afoot of tasty economic news and offer a moving framework for the Bassano inhabitants being and doing at the beginning of the median ages. They photograph a border center, hinge on the river between Veneto and Germany, for position and vocation, place of transit and exchanges.

The Municipal life draws wealth from the River, from the countryside blooming nature, from the resale of local production processing. Center path, Bassano is also the road of pilgrims and merchants: has a first religious hospice in San Vito, and then in 1308 a second one for a pious secular initiative, with twelve beds. Passenger transits were ris-



ing along the Brenta River path, which also generated a growing economical volume.

The city is charming for the countryside labor: between the folds of statutory books articles, one reads about the intention to summon within the walls, individuals with manufacturing production skills and of high competence. The markets in existence in 1259 are two. One urban, reserved to the piedmont economic operators and the territories towards Treviso, is at the *plátea communis* in the heart of town. The second market is situated at the head of the wooden bridge, in *capitis pontis Brente* on the shore of Angarano: it is referred to the whole right side of the Brenta River. On the bridge transit merchants, travelers on foot or horseback, herds of sheep, cows and cattle, oxen pulled wagons, pigs, donkeys and their owners, small size birds, animals conducted by people of the company, the *bubulci de campanea*.

The animals and the products processing - “caci” (sheep milk cheese) and cheeses, breads, wooden products and wicker weaves product, “stroppe” (twigs of red willow tree), cloths, earthenware and pottery, wines - are traded in the two locations, although sometimes they are sold by peddlers. A seven-day fair takes place for San Martino, at the end of the annual earth cycle and of the harvesting. Different taxes are imposed on goods, including the so-called “pontatico”, tax for the bridge crossing, never free in the middle ages. You can sell goods from other territories, except for wine, local economy spearhead, of which the Bassano people are manufacturers and exporters. The regulations protect with strict disciplinary rules the local vineyards, the grapes, the taverns and the selling of wine: every barrel or bottle is stamped and taxed. It tends to establish a seal of quality and local typicality, a medieval D.O.C. (Denomination of Controlled Origin) or D.O.P.

*Francesco and Leandro dal Ponte, Map of Bassano, 1583-1610. Bassano del Grappa Civic Museum.*



*Giovanni Battista Cecchetto, Napoleon on horseback, great decorated ceramic dish, mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Manifattura Cecchetto, Nove.*

(Denomination of Protected Origin). Another important medieval economic entry regards the grain milling and the mill wheels on the River, not far from the bridge, of which news from 1209 already attest the existence.

While the bakers are citizens, the millers are for the most part from outside: they are hosted in mills, equipped with vicinity used for accommodations.

Some are in semi-servile conditions, others are skilled workers, and others finally are entrepreneurs and owners, these being citizens. There live in the town many weavers, to which are provided by statute there wool cloth measurements. There are some leather tanners, which are sometimes from the north part of the German area. Masons are amongst the common workers categories operating in the town. The figure of a hatchet teacher and partner in home construction is also mentioned, someone similar to a superintendent foreman. The statutes present also the high-end social workers. First of all, the moneylenders, mainly

Jewish people, whose activity is regulated by legislation, then replaced by the numerous usurers of Tuscan origin, predominant in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Their constant presence in the historical sources and their growing number speaks of a flourishing economy. Jewish people in the city are few and most likely non-residents. Present definitely even before 1404, a clearer and more extensive mentioning of their presence is found only in the Venetian period documentation. They are essentially lenders. Foreign doctors have their practice in town, supported by the municipality, which provides funds also for a good school, which prepares the future managerial class, then sent to the *studium* of Padua. The powerful notaries, in the mid thirteen century, are structured in a professional association or fraternity called "*fraglia*" - they control the power and regulate the economic life. They are, factually, according to the productivity report offered by the statutes of 1295 and 1259, the municipality of Bassano. Then the 14<sup>th</sup> century arrives, with the black plague of 1348 and the Visconti dominions, which promotes a statutory review in 1389 and attempts to divert the course of the Brenta River through a stone dam-bridge soon swept away by the river.

In 1404, the Bassano area also finds peace under the wings of the Lion. The mainland subjects are forced to accept the supremacy accorded to Venice to the waters-even of rivers or lakes-on the mainland. The main fluvial centers, including Bassano, will hold a crucial role for the "Dominante" (Dominant referred to Venice).

Bassano, "of Brenta" before and more than "of Grappa", already thinks as its new Lords therefore renewing and strengthening itself. Palladio will talk about it as a territory placed at the roots of the Alps, which separate Italy from Germany, on the border between the mainland Venetian state and the imperial Tyrol. It is not by chance that some maps represent the two dominions and their bor-





der with the animals symbols of their reference, placing Bassano on the back of the “Leone di San Marco” (*San Marco’s Lion*), where the Imperial Eagle claws reach: imaginative cartography rendering, pictorial account of several layers of frescoes on “Porta Diedo” and historical reality confirm this. With the plateau’s “Cimbri”, the valley inhabitants of the Brenta Canal, the Feltre area and the upper part of Treviso along the banks of the Piave River, Bassano shares the delights but also bears the crosses of a large zone at the alpine border of the Serenissima. The Brenta path along with the Adige Valley and their chief towns will be the most devastated by the Imperial Army in 1509: after the fierce resistance in Canal del Brenta, Bassano and its people will be torn apart. The hardship of those years will shock even the already lively economy of Bassano that was linked to the production of wool, to leather tanning process, to milling, to products of the land processing.

The Bassano territorial location made it a market emporium, an intermodal river station, commodities customhouse and a duty station in Valstagna, still part of the Bassano authority, which reached the *Kopfel* of Butistone at the border with Tyrol. The local economy revolved around some strongholds that were dear to Bassano more than to Venice, whose relationships were not always tranquil: protection of local productions, tax limitation, safeguarding of high quality brand. In any case, the connection between Bassano and Venice, abundant for political and military reasons, are especially intense on the economic front.

At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the town counts around 3000 people just in the urban territory.

At the decline of Venice, in 1766 the inhabitants were 8600. Applications for admission to citizenship in Bassano are kept on record: people request to live in Bassano for local amenities, good climate, wealth and the expectation of exercising a decorous profession safely and with benefits. There is an overabundance of shepherding abounds, which occupies a lot of the countryside. The grain production is not sufficient and Bassano must resort to imports.

Consequently the “*Fondaco delle Biave*” was born, a public warehouse where wheat, rye and millet were stored. In 1602, the municipality cedes ownership and land cultivation to private individuals, when before the municipality mainly predominantly owned it. The chief magistrate, during this time, was the noble Priuli, who rebuilt the municipal Loggia and built his Venetian villa on the river near the bridge.

At mid century of the nearly 14,000 fields, half belong to small owners, dedicated to grow corn; nine percent belongs to Venetian Patricians (*Venetian aristocracy*). The remaining in the hands of the local nobility: Angaran, Roberti, Compostella, Vittorelli and other families take on economic strength.

The local economy supporting structure in the Venetian

*The elegant Zodiac clock that crowns the loggia of “Municipio di Bassano” (Bassano Municipality Building); the mechanism was built in 1747 by the celebrated engineer Bartolomeo Ferracina.*

period is wool: to say Bassano for three centuries equal to say wool. Plenty of water, many pastures: the wool business explodes. Many wool and clothes manufacturers since 1432 ask to invest in Bassano; wool fulling, dyeing plants, drying rooms multiply and, in the city, the number of weavers, trimmers and combers dedicated to the wool processing grows. The municipality becomes active to prevent fraud and adulteration, defend the stamp of quality and maintain taxation at low levels, as had already happened for the wine. The finishing blow will come from a special duty, placed by the Venetians in 1672 on mercantile ships handling the wool business: suffocated by taxes and the economical crisis, the wool business, as that of the wine (glory of Bassano) migrates elsewhere. In 1743, as a symbolic passing of the baton, the wool factory Stahl and Conigh opens in Schio.

Another sector is leather one. If in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries the leather workers come from Germany, in the first part of the 1400's, they arrive from Gallio. Bassano was the optimal site, due to the abundance of water, pastures, animals and river stones for the production of lime. In the eighteenth century, the "*PELLI CAMOZINE*" (*suede*) come into fashion. In 1733 Bortolo Gionach (Jonoch) founds a specialized factory in the Bassano area. His descendants will have much input to the "Smalterie Venete" (*enamelling factory*).

Sericulture is flourishing for over a century when, in 1578, Bassano is allowed to be alongside of the cultivation with the textile industry: Bassano women will be famous in the entire "Serenissima" (*Venice*) as excellent in the "*far seda*" (*silk making*). Everything is booming until, in 1673, Venice exacerbates duties and taxes on silk stoves. The silk making families from Bassano, fiercely opposed, feel the blow, followed by the Brocchi, Roberti and Vittorelli families while others are lost.

Mills are a true local proto-industry already for hundreds of



years. In the early fifteenth century from Primolano to the south of the Bassano's bridge, it was all about river mills: milling of grains, cloths fulling, carpentry and woodwork, iron and weapons work, olive presses. A productive landscape that will remain for several centuries. Equally tied to the river is the timber market, controlled by the families of Canal del Brenta (*Brenta's canal*) as Perli, Bosa, Zanchetta, Campesan. The firewood comes from the Colli Alti (*high hills*), the wood for factories comes from the Trentino woods and from the Altipiano (plateau) by utilizing a floating method called "menade". A wood barrier blocking the water was built that, when opened, the water would be released with force and carry the wood downstream.

Paper mills, printing industry, engraving and the production of spirit will characterize the Bassano economy from the 1700's becoming its new glory: the Remondini, along with other printmakers and smaller publishers released from their famous typographic workshops on Piazza dei Signori (*Lord's Square*), make the name of Bassano glorious across all of Europe. Their productions are fed by many paper mills, firstly the one on the Brenta River. Popular Remondini's prints are spread by the Tesino area's vendors

*Enamelled crockery, the characteristic red color, produced by Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta in the 1950s: a sort of reminder of the noble ceramic traditions of the territory.*

to the heart of the old continent, the book editions enter in the best European libraries, the engravings travel to become part of noble and royal collections and people come to Bassano to publish an entire Napoleonic battle. Napoleon had lived in the town.

The new century sees a fast economic recovery after the ending of the Venetian Republic and of the war. The nineteenth century is the century of Bassano becoming Italian in 1866, but also the time when homeland cultural requests of Jacopo Bassano and Canova continue to look to the north German and central European Hungarian territory. The first main *Storia di Bassano (Bassano's history)* presents in 1884, the signature of Otto Brentari, originally from Valsugana that was already part of the Tyrol, fully bilingual, principal of Liceo Brocchi (*Brocchi Highschool*).

The same tension is present in the economy and industry, continuing even during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. That is how Heidrich Helm builds the pen factory, bearing the same name, along the Brenta River, later renamed with the name of the mountain sacred to the homeland, where just recently the General Giardino and his army's standoff had taken place-celebrated in the city by the monumental statuary complex situated in Viale delle Fosse. It is because of this that August Westen (1878-1960) arrives in Bassano, founder of Smalteria Metallurgica in Bassano in 1925.

Browsing through places and times of other Westen Group production facilities, as they are remembered by the publication for the business 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the city, a picture that is completely central and eastern European is portrayed. Bassano is, by no coincidence, present as the extreme southeastern point next to four Austrian production sites, two Russians, one Romanian and one Hungarian. The Milazzo's factory, early example of delocalization, was removed. Beyond economic factors, contributing factors were the favorable environmental context offered by



*Ca' Rezzonico, the prestigious Patrician abode, testifies the constant presence of Venice in the city; a continuous stimulus to industriousness and to an undertaking spirit.*

the Brenta River city, its strategic location along the railway, daughter of the River and its Valley, which bound the Venice and German areas, land near the Friuli and Eastern Europe. Also for these reason, the “Commendatore” (*Italian title*) Westen placed its factories in Bassano. Therefore, the “Smalterie” (*Enamelling factories*) are of great importance in the story of excellence of a border in dialogue, full of economic promises made possible by a land “daughter” of the River and by its people. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Bassano, *Baxi* continues this tradition of productivity linked with the local territory and open to the global challenge.

SOC. PER AZIONI  
**SMALTERIA e METALLURGICA VENETA**  
BASSANO DEL GRAPPA



# Work University and Business School

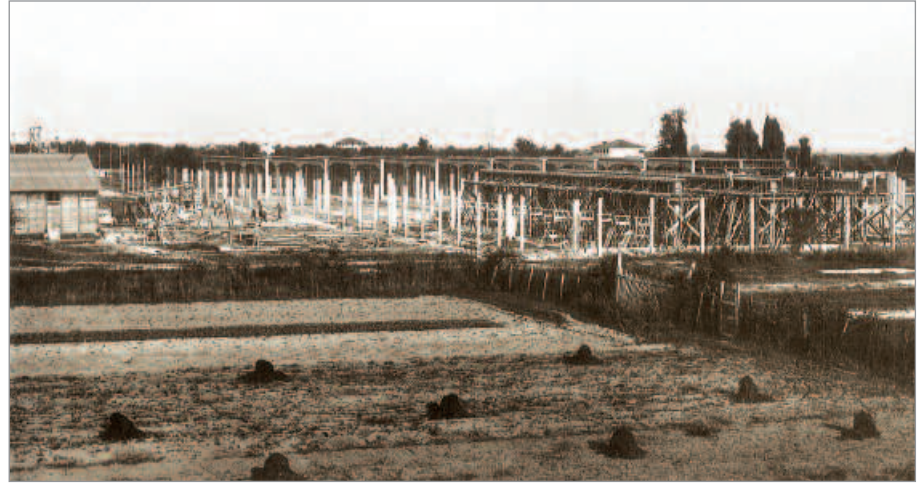
*With “Smalterie” the industrial  
development of an entire district begins*

Announced a few months earlier by the Papal Bull “Infinita Dei Misericordia”, the year 1925 was proclaimed a Holy Year by Pope Pius XI. Amongst the big themes proposed by the second Jubilee of the Twentieth century, to a human race still deeply scarred from the war devastations, were those of peace, unity amongst Christians and the function of secular people in the catholic universe. In the background, still being drafted, the agreements that would lead, in a short time, to the Lateran Treaty.

An opportunity to invite a world in great turmoil, not only political and ideological but also social and economic, to reflect on the epochal transformations that were affecting the most developed countries.

Not by chance, a few weeks later, the Scottish engineer John Logie Baird - perhaps not fully realizing the enormous implications - presented in London an invention destined, in time, to revolutionize mass media: the television.

Also in our Peninsula, however, signs of a certain entrepreneurial dynamism began to consolidate with growing intensity, clearly focused toward the develop-



ment of new technologies and intentioned to assert itself, beyond the domestic market, toward international markets. A progressive industrialization that brought Fiat, for example, to complete the productive plant in Turin just two years prior, in 1923, the year when Giovanni Agnelli was elected Senator of the Kingdom. Also in the 1920s was created in the Veneto region, the first industrial zone of Porto Marghera, validated by the settlement of numerous businesses and by the consequent employment of thousands of workers: a “personal” success, one might almost say, of Giuseppe Volpi of Misurata, president of *Sade*, *Società Adriatica di Elettricità* (*Adriatic Electricity Company*) founded in Venice in 1905: an entrepreneurial reality that represented the essential technical base for the region transformation from a predominantly agricultural district to an industrial quadrant with the declared objective of “the building and operation of facilities for the generating, transmission and distribution of electrical energy in Italy and abroad”. The enormous project, took advantage of the favourable geographical position, by the laguna

*The “Smalterie” yard  
in an extraordinary  
photographic document  
of August 30<sup>th</sup> 1924. The  
company was located in  
an area that, during the  
Great War, was occupied  
by the Italian Army’s  
Military Engineer Group  
(as a support to the  
military actions on the  
massif of Mount Grappa).*

*Previous page:  
The first company logo  
and an historical company  
gadget reproducing,  
scaled-down, a red  
enamelled bath tub.*

Bassano's urban expansion eastward, at the beginning of the twentieth century, is centered on the axis of Viale Venezia. In this 1919 map, the big arterial road is clearly visible on the left side of the exhibit; the railway station area is highlighted in green, while the red rectangle on the upper right (drawn at a later time) indicates the sector of "Smalterie".



In the aerial photograph, of that period Viale Venezia presents itself in all its grandeur. The plant in Via Trozzetti, not visible, lies beyond the left edge of the image.



(lagoon), to give life to an industrial area, powered by a workforce originating both from the insular context and the Venetian hinterland, constantly plagued by the lack of employment.

This central sector, whose development started in 1917 during the crucial phase of the Great War, prelude to a basic strategic industry with chemistry in the foreground, was counterbalanced in the Vicenza territory, by the wool-textile sector. A division that, unlike the recent lagoon experience, fruit of a whole new design and resulting from the converging of interests related to capital not exclusively from Veneto, drew from a variegated wealth of productive knowledge created in almost two hundred years of

proto-industrial activity and widespread manufacturing. Two, in particular, the reference companies, both amongst the sector's main industries in our country: *Lanificio Rossi (Rossi wool mill)*, founded in Schio in 1817, that in the first decade of the twentieth century was the main Italian wool business, with numerous plants in the Vicenza territory; *Lanificio Luigi Marzotto & Sons*, built in 1836 in Valdagno which, in the 1920s, underwent a radical renovation of the production facilities and a rationalization of the manufacturing processes by Gaetano Marzotto, according to the Fordism concepts. Such renovation allowed the company to reach in 1930 a workforce of about 3500 employees, doubling in just a few years the textile production and quadrupling that of yarns.

Viale Venezia, eastward, in 1909.

The detail of Parco Genio Militare (Military Engineering Park), south-east of the train station, in a 1920 map of Bassano.



Not far from Valdagno and Schio, always in the Vicenza's province, Bassano Veneto (the attribute "del Grappa" was assigned by the Fascist Government in 1928 on the tenth anniversary of the end of the Great War) could benefit-in the prophetic Jubilee's year-from an extraordinary development opportunity as well. Before discussing it at length, however, it should be recalled that, already from the



beginning of the century, some entrepreneurs (local and foreigner) had attempted to establish business in the Dal Ponte city, but were forced to give up as the landowners were unwilling to give up farming areas in favour of production facilities. At the end of the war, though, the matter seemed very different. A large area, south of the new road axis of Viale Venezia and east of the train station, hosted during the war (starting from 1916) an extensive warehouse complex by the Military Engineers: a complex of logistic structures intended for the supplying of the troops deployed on the Seven Municipalities Plateau and on the Grappa's massif. The land, cultivated before, had been covered and stabilized by a thick layer of pounded gravel to allow the building of some internal roads and several warehouses. To restore the status quo, once the military forces were demobilized, represented therefore an onerous and uneconomic endeavor: to return the land to agriculture would have been too costly. Moreover, companies operating in the Bassano area were few and of small or medium-size scale, not to mention that the war had exacerbated the unprosperous economical condition of the city and of its hinterland, creating a climate of



social distress and poverty.

Concerning parameters, therefore, that in 1923 led the Municipal Administration presided by Mayor Guglielmo Gobbi to contact an important German financial institution (with the participation of Italian assets), interested in establishing right in the Veneto region a large enamelling plant; moreover, parameters compatible with the industrial strategies of the foreign entrepreneurial group, even in the traditional vocation of ceramic manufacturing.

Already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in fact, in the area of Nove -beyond terracotta pots- copper dishes were produced. In more recent times, the technique of enamelled iron was introduced in the metal production. The district could therefore offer to its investor concrete favourable conditions, attributed both to a well-established dishware production and to the recognized artisan local skills in utilizing enamel. Without taking into consideration, finally, a certain ease in the supplying of the raw material.

Fortunately, after extensive negotiations, the City and the German entrepreneurial pool, came to an agreement of mutual convenience, approved unanimously in the Municipal Council of January 28<sup>th</sup> 1924. Bassano

*Manual workers and technicians proudly posing in front of the camera during the building of the first warehouses.*

was able, this way, to provide a concrete answer to the unemployment problem, particularly worrisome despite the resumption of emigration. The reduced presence of small and medium-scale industries, as mentioned before, could not allow for the absorption of work demand, even if amongst the active business of the time in the different sectors (wine producing, gold working, furniture, tanning, and mechanical) one could find illustrious names. Suffice to mention here, *Distilleria Nardini (Nardini Distillery)* founded in 1779, goldsmith industry *Balestra* (1882), *Mobilificio Bussandri* (furniture manufacturing) 1911, *Calzaturificio Gasparotto* (shoe factory) 1889 or *Conceria Finco* (Finco Tannery) 1921...

There was also a prestigious representation in the automotive area with *Carrozzeria Fontana*, active from 1871 to 1928: a domestic front rank representation, merged later with *Carrozzeria Pietroboni*, another significant reality which specialized in the

production first of motor coach and then of buses (whose headquarters were by the railway station, just west of the tracks).

The agreement brought therefore a breath of fresh air, bringing back hope in the future to the territory, as the Bassano's informative periodic "*Prealpe*" founded in 1906 mentioned, although in an argumentative tone: "The Bassano's rulers have been in these past one hundred years always against the flourishing of industries in Bassano, reason that cannot be comprehended unless we think of a narrow-minded selfishness. Only recently it seemed that this fatal tradition had been broken with the concessions which have allowed the starting of important Metallurgical plants" ("*Prealpe*" February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1925).

Once roughly analyzed the historic and geographical contest, with a quick look also at the social and economic situation, it is now essential to understand who were the industrialists that gave life to this company: called *Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta*, the company was founded in 1924 with an initial capital of three million gold lira, by the German August and Adolf Westen (who owned the majority of shares), by the Austrian Joseph Pfeiffer, by the Italians Dante Cernitz, Orazio Opiglia, Riccardo Pontil and by other minor partners. The most influential and authoritative in the company shareholding were the Westen brothers, August (Lüttringhausen, 1878 - Meran, 1960) and Adolf (Lüttringhausen, 1877 - Lienz, 1952). They were the ones to approve the choice for the plant location, preferring Bassano to Cittadella and Castelfranco Veneto (other possible locations previously taken into consideration) and to bring to the town at the feet of Mount Grappa serial production methods, modern technologies and highly qualified

#### It is easy to say "Enamel"...

In the common language with the term "enamel" it is figuratively intended a high level of performance; the word, therefore, in a widespread meaning is synonymous with vibrancy and brilliance. Not by chance it is said that it is important "not to lose the old enamel", meaning to maintain a recognized and appreciated efficiency. But what is really the enamel?

Simplifying as much as possible, we could say that it is a special glassy and waterproofing coating obtained by a mixture of basic components - feldspars (crystallized minerals of magma rocks), quartz, carbonate and sodium chloride -, to which flux, oxidizing, opacifying and coloring substances are added. Properly prepared, according to the different materials to be "enamelled/coated", this mixture is applied on the objects and then melted at high tempera-

tures according to the various methodologies.

A very ancient technique, enamel was already used by the Egyptians to finish off vases and stone ornaments. Particularly applied to goldsmithing, it produced later, stunning artwork. In relatively recent times -between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century- an admirable example of jewelry and enamel are the eggs produced by Peter Carl Fabergé for the Russian Tzars.



*A wonderful enamelled Easter egg created by Fabergé for the Russian Tzar. The famous jeweler created 52 of them between 1885 and 1917.*



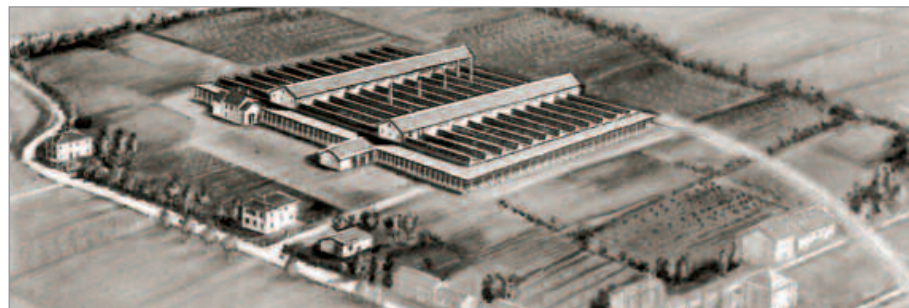
technicians. And it was their decision as well to give the assignment to move to Bassano already in 1922 to take vision of the territorial contest and, starting from June 1924, to personally supervise the plant building, to the Hungarian engineer Nikolaus Leszl (Csanad, 1885 - Bassano, 1952), a valuable professional belonging to the minority of German language. It was a happy choice, destined to generate excellent results. Not by chance, industry veterans, the Westen were also good men's connoisseurs. Their fortune had begun more than half a century earlier, in 1858, when - presumably by their grandfather Peter - a first plant dedicated to the production of enamelled tableware was founded in Neschwitz in Saxony. In 1873, when Saxony became part of the German Empire, the Westen (culturally closer to the Hapsburg's world) preferred to transfer the plant to Knittelfeld in Styria. In the meantime, however the family had given rise to other plants in several countries of central and Eastern Europe, thus creating a well branched, solid group. The sector, in strong expansion, required substantial chemical and metallurgic skills, especially in relation to the introduction of important technological innovations in the productive processes: pots, vases, tubs and containers in enamelled metal were quickly replacing, thanks to lower prices and greater efficiency, similar products in ceramic rather than in stone or other materials. Two were the fundamental factors in the choice for suitable locations, one practical and specialized and the other so to speak "political": the availability of low cost energy, essential for the use of continuous cycle ovens and printing presses, and the propensity to place the settlements in not very developed areas, and near small towns. Geo-social contests where the company could also exercise a certain influence, start-



ing from strength positions toward manual labor and local institutions. For Bassano and its territory, however, the presence of a company like *Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta* represented, as we have already seen, an opportunity not to be missed.

The big factory's inauguration, with its six hundred employees and its 16.000 square meters of covered area, was hailed in May 1925 as a real event for the city. An event that the press documented with due emphasis: "This past Monday, work in the *Smalteria*

*"Comm. Augusto Westen", founder of "Smalterie", in a commemorative medal coined on the occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. (December 25<sup>th</sup> 1958)*



*Metallurgica Veneta* has officially begun with the blessing of the building and of the machines imparted by the spiritual economist don Gio. Maria Conte who, once the ceremony was finished, in front of the plants' directors and of the employees, used beautiful words marrying religion which elevates to work which ennobles" ("Prealpe", May 24<sup>th</sup> 1925).

*The new Bassano's industrial complex in a perspectival drawing (1925).*



*Western pots and dishes of the collections Due Leoni (Two Lions) in blue enamel, Sansone (Samson) in red and Queen in green, from the 1925 corporate catalogue.*

The first managers' role was also unanimously recognized as an added value, the quid which made the difference and that gave to "Smalterie" (this was the common diction that to a great degree has been maintained up to the present days) a connotation of business school, a kind of work university.

Leszl's work was joined from the beginning by CEO Ugo Sostero (San Daniele of Friuli, 1883 - Bassano del Grappa, 1953): a profitable professional and human partnership, that decreed the company success in the two decades to follow, immediately characterized by an open and proactive mentality and by a very particular style. Significant characteristics that contributed (and not in small measure) to determine a cultural impact on the territory as well. Just think that, a month later, on July 1925, a representation of the city authorities, along with some merchants and

artisans, proudly led an Argentinian delegation, which was visiting Bassano, to see the factory.

Once again the publication "Prealpe" was covering the news: "In the big plant, recently built with all the modern techniques requirements, the CEO Ugo Sostero and engineer Sessel (Leszl, A.N.) accompany the visitors showing them the speed with which from the raw metal sheet, enamelled utensils are obtained ready to sustain the kitchen's fire" (August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1925). A climate that, even if in a pompous manner, is described in the publication published by the same company on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the plant's founding: "The news that one of the largest enamelled metal industries was raised in Bassano and gave employment to a host of workers, gives a glimpse of new and brilliant possibilities for Bassano's trading. By the restful countryside, in front of the mountains' circle forming an enchanting view, the scaffoldings opened the hearts to a hope of a better tomorrow" (Bassano, 1950).

Words chosen to commemorate the company's first quarter of a century, certainly, but of prophetic nature. In fact, although initially the factory was designed for the production of tableware, in the immediate following years the production became diversified and, other new products were added to the enamelled metal utensils (containers, milk cans, plates, etc.). Regarding the raw material used, from the catalogues it is deduced that in 1928, "Smalterie" began to produce tin articles, chromed or tinplated; in 1931 aluminum appeared, while, two years later, stainless steel did (whose formidable chemical composition had been detected only in 1913) followed by galvanized steel.

Already in 1929 the company, demonstrating an



intrinsic propensity to always reinvent itself producing new articles, began the production of bath tubs in porcelain stainless steel (from a single mold). The following year was the realization, first industrial reality in Italy to accomplish it, of steel radiators. Bold innovations, due both to the design department technicians' ability, prompted particularly by

Nikolaus Leszl's creativity, and to the staff work capacity, more prepared and professional with each and every day.

"Structural" features that allowed "Smalterie" - in just five years from its foundation - to bring the covered working area to 23,000 square meters but, above all, to express clearly what had always been a business success factor: the ability to diversify.

To know how to interpret the times, anticipating

Le vasci d'acciaio più confortevoli stampate in un solo pezzo e porcellanate con smalti di massima resistenza e lucentezza.  
 Los bañeros les plus confortables, emboutis d'une seule pièce. Des émaux brillants et à haute résistance sont employés pour l'émailage.  
 Highly comfortable steel bath-tubs formed from one single sheet. Glossy and high resistant enamelling.  
 Besonders die Körperform umschlossene Badewannen, in einem Stück gezogen und mit haltbarsten glänzenden Emaille versehen.  
 Las más confortables bañeros de acero estampado en una sola pieza y revestidos de esmaltes porcelánico de máxima resistencia y brillantez.

*A double page of the 1929 catalogue with the panoramic view of the Serie Favorita (Favorite Series) bath tubs stamped in one single mold and porcelain with enamel "of maximum resistance and shine".*

*The large rotary hearth furnace, assigned for the re-cooking of the stamped pieces (1928).*



*Below, from left to right  
The packing of chamber pots (1930).*

*Amongst the various activities between the 1920s and 1930s was the manufacturing of advertising enamelled plaques.*



changes and tapping into internal resources to transform oneself and maintain an undisputed competitiveness in the domestic and international markets, will be from that moment a peculiar characteristic of

the company, a form of resilience - so to say - that will allow the overcoming even of the most critical economic times. In simple words, to know how to turn problems into opportunities.



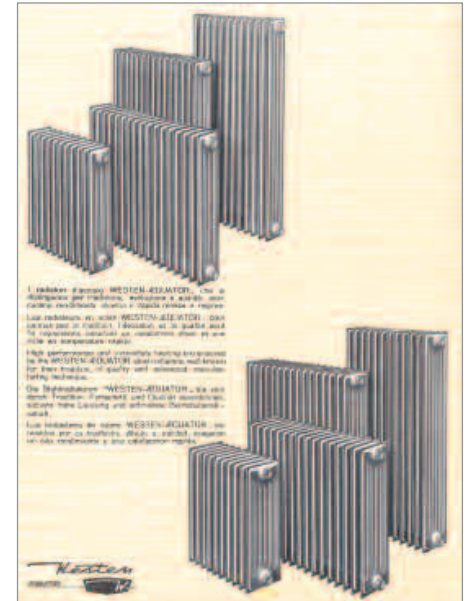
In respect to Leszl, it is undeniable that his dynamic concept of entrepreneurial activities - full of enthusiasm and imagination - had much importance. The manager, in fact, sustained the necessity of not sleeping on the laurels and to never stop, but rather to always move forward, constantly looking for stimuli and ideas. This was a way of thinking that stayed with him even during his times of relaxation and rest and that brought him, on more than one occasion, to assign to external technicians the assignment of elaborating solutions and propositions related to new products, not necessarily connected to the production in progress or the specific sector in which the company operated. During the 1930s, evident consequence of this logic, “Smalterie” produced cabinets and refrigerator’s bins, water heaters, appliances for the

#### Resilience, much more than resistance

The term “resilience” derives from physic and indicates a material’s properties, subject to loads or impacts, of absorbing energy elastically without breakage. In the case of a metal, for example, the ability to absorb an impact - even through a certain adaptation - avoiding cracking. We could say that *resilience* represents the contrary of fragility. In psychology, by extension, *resilience* corresponds to a person’s ability to confront negative situations, resetting and reorganizing them, so as to transform them into opportunities.

Finally, in biology, *resilience* is a material’s ability to repair itself after a damage, returning to its initial state.

The concept, to put it in the words of philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, can be summed up in the phrase “what does not kill us, makes us stronger!”.



pharmaceutical industry and for distilleries, tools for the dairy sector, for cheese factories and oil mills, but also sinks and shower bases.

True pride of the company, absolutely in step with the times and in direct competition with two aggressive “neighbours” - the Officina (*workshop*) Fumistiera Antonio Zanussi of Pordenone (founded in 1916) and Officina Zoppas Ferdinando & Sons of Conegliano (built in 1925) - were the so called “economic kitchens”. In the years when the country was struggling to revive the economy after the Great Depression of 1929, (only in 1935 the GDP returned to the levels prior to the crisis), launching in 1933 exceptional measures such as the creation of Iri (*Institute for the industrial reconstruction*) but also opting for a rigid protectionism that led to the Mussolini autarchy, “Smalterie” successfully launched their kitchens into the market, elegantly marked with the logo Aequator. A product that, in

*Above, from left: tinned steel articles (1928) and radiators Weston Aequator (1930).*

*Above, on the left: the trademark of the Due Leoni (Two Lions) is clearly inspired by the Bassano emblem, where are depicted two rampant lions and a tower.*





*Next from the left: an Aequator series economical gas stove from 1940: technologically advanced, it had four burners, an oven and an enclosed plate warmer.*

*The economic wood and coal kitchen model 900, with food warmer, was a good alternative to the gas type. In the 1938 catalogue it was advertised with the slogan: "Burning it cooks, cooking it saves".*

*On the previous page: the large continuous furnace for drying enamelled articles.*

those years, was experiencing a moderate diffusion in large sections of the population, thanks to the evident functionality and the relatively affordable prices due to the economies of scale serial production. In 1936, a year before Senator Agnelli - repeatedly urged about it by the Duce - inserted the Fiat 500 (also known as "Topolino" - "Little Mouse" and designed by engineer Dante Giacosa), "Smalterie" published the third edition of "A look in the kitchen". The book, consisting of one hundred and twenty pages and published by the company's Propaganda Office, constitutes a refined example of how the company gave importance to the marketing aspects, alternating the presentation of the Aequator kitchens and the tableware Saeculum with a series of recipes and recommendations addressed to the young brides. In the preface, Cav. Amedeo Pettini, chef by none other than "of S.M. Re d'Italia" recommended to the housewives to choose the kitchens produced in Bassano, excellent to obtain savory dishes. The wide variety of proposals, made possible by optimizing an



*The bold cover of the late 1930s catalogue. The "Smalterie" kitchens lend themselves perfectly "to the modern home".*



An image that was a true example in tradition and in the industrial communication: it is in the catalogue cover "Aequator: Kitchens and gas stoves" (1938).

A technician analyzes the performance of a stove.



### Aequator, "a beautiful Italian kitchen in every Italian home"

"Ladies today consider, in its whole, the kitchen as the living room and takes care of its properties and its elegance. A beautiful Aequator gas kitchen is not only a completion to the home environment, but also a basic decorative element. A kitchen is elegant if it is equipped with the excellent thrifty Aequator. With its brilliant enamels, the Aequator kitchen is the central point that attracts and is admired": words not much different from what we would use today to advertise a good product. Yet, they appear in a brochure for gas kitchens by *Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta* published in the 15<sup>th</sup> year of the fascist era (started on October 29<sup>th</sup> 1922, the day after the March on Rome). In 1937 the Bassano's, in fact, offered, in addition to the traditional economic wood and coal kitchens, also gas kitchens - definitely more refined - by the Littorina series.

It is interesting, not just for the technology fans, to list some of their main characteristics. Drawing information from a catalogue of the same year, it is deduced that "all kitchens and burners have the brand new, original Aequators economical burners, removable, equipped with air regulator, with mushroom and cover in stainless brass. These are high performance burners and not inferior than the best existing international burners; they allow for the for the gas flow adjustment according to the local pressure, avoiding back-fire". We also discover that the burners were "ingeniously" created so as to be very economical and that the design, simple and linear, allows for the disassembly and the easy cleaning. In fact, it seems that the Aequator gas kitchens correspond to "all the requirements requested by the modern house-wife, for their perfect construction and the unequalled aesthetic [...] They are made of white porcelainized steel and they are equipped with chromed hinges, faucets and gaskets. The plate, shelves and covers are removable and the special drip tray is removable also while cooking".

Ovens have high characteristics as well, "equipped with rotatory burners. With the simple use of a handle, it is possible to produce a high temperature in the upper part, for spit roast, or uniform heat in the lower part for the cooking of pastries. The walls are enamelled and removable for easy and accurate cleaning. The small door, double-walled, is self closing. The faucet is equipped with safety stop. On request, all ovens can be provided with thermometers and with automatic temperature regulator". It is really appropriate to say, as the cover headline underlines, that: "The saving you give is worth your cost".



**PER LA CASA MODERNA:**

**"AEQUATOR"**




**CUCINE E FORNELLI  
A GAS**  
IN ACCIAIO PORCELLANATO

**RADIATORI D'ACCIAIO**  
LA PIÙ GRANDE PERFEZIONE TECNICA NEI  
MODERNI IMPIANTI DI RISCALDAMENTO



**FAVORITA**  
VASCHE DA BAGNO ED ALTRI ARTICOLI SANITARI  
IN LAMIERA D'ACCIAIO PORCELLANATO

**"SANSONE" - "DUE LEONI"**  
ARTICOLI SMALTATI E STAGNATI

**"SANSONE"**  
BIDONI ED ALTRI ARTICOLI DA LATTERIA  
IN FERRO STAGNATO

**S. A. SMALTERIA & METALLURGICA VENETA**  
BASSANO DEL GRAPPA  
MILANO - PIAZZA CAVOUR N. 5

integrated system capable of covering the entire production cycle (from metal bars from the foundries to the finished product), corresponded throughout the decade prior to World War II to the construction of new departments and the continuous increase of the workforce. To the extent that, in 1940 there were 1,300 employees, i.e. about one third of the Bassano's working population and the covered area had reached 3,000 square meters. Not only that: in the margin of "Smalterie" was forming a moderate indirectly generated business, constituted largely by workshop that produced their own dishes and turned to the company in Via Trozzetti (this is the name of the street artery along which the company grew) to have them enamelled. An extraordinary expansion

that in 1941 led Westen to participate in the construction of an hydroelectric power station in Campolongo sul Brenta, in collaboration with Sade, to meet the company's energy needs; a development - should be noted - much higher than the national growth indexes, that between 1929 and 1939 never recorded more than one percentage point per year. The climate, however, changed dramatically - and for the worse - during the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Fascist era. On June 10<sup>th</sup> 1940, concerned about Germany's expansion push, now ruler of half of Europe (Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxemburg) and about to occupy Paris, Mussolini declared war on France and England. A risky move, perhaps due to the fear of finding himself in a marginal position in relation to the German ally in a future European and world order. An ill-considered adventure that did cost Italy nearly half a million of deaths. A huge price in human lives, to which was added a true economic catastrophe: between 1940 and 1945, GDP dropped an average of 10% annually, with a more marked reduction after September 8<sup>th</sup> 1943, when the war was fought on Italian soil. When things settled down, after the enormous tragedy of the greatest war the world had known, the GDP of the Bel Paese (Beautiful Country) had dropped back to the levels of 1906! According to the Duce, the conflict should have been "a phase of the logical; the fight of the poor and numerous people against the fierce starvers that hold the wealth monopoly and all the gold on the earth". Instead... Instead already in February ration books had entered into force, with the first rationing of sugar and coffee. Each Italian family member had more than one: for pasta, bread, tobacco, butter, milk (powdered formula milk for infants)... The situation in the factories

*The versatile production of "Smalterie" is evident in an advertising page of the 1930s, which markets kitchens, radiators and bath tubs.*



*August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1937: group picture of the department "Lattoneria e cucine grigie" (Tinsmithery and grey kitchens) workers.*

**"Secure pay and indoor job!"**

As testified by Pietro Piotta, at "Smalterie" from 1938 to 1975, already at the end of the 1930s to become part of this company was an ambitious goal and a security. The company,

in fact, was synonym with "Secure pay and indoor job!". Even in the following years, "Smalterie" represented for the territory job and retribution guarantee. This is what Eset Meheti, originally from Kosovo, who entered

the company in 1994: the hiring gave him tranquility, stability, regular pay. Invaluable qualities, even more valuable because they were a "sign of dignity".

was obviously dramatic as well.

In the Bassano's territory, as it happened for other companies, "Smalterie" sought to cope with the emergencies by converting part of the production for military purposes: baking cases, mess tins, large gas and coal kitchens, but also helmets and mine containers. In an insert of those times, the supply of Aequator steel radiators for the submarine Sakarya is advertised and other units for the Turkish Navy. In the nearby Carrozzeria Pietroboni (Car-shop Pietroboni), which had then one hundred employees, setting up military army vehicles had almost completely replaced the traditional production of tourist buses. With Teutonic punctuality, on September 9<sup>th</sup> 1943, while they were working on about forty chassis, a department of the Kriegsmarine, under the command of an officer, took possession of the factory, forcing the owner, later expelled, to lay off the employees (with the guarantee of liquidation); the staff was then immediately re-hired by the Germans and forced to produce trucks for the Wehrmacht. Fortunately things went better for "Smalterie". Leading the company at the time was a grandson of August Westen, Max Adolf (Graz, 1913 - Buenos Aires 1955), while the workers (about 90% of their total) were members of "Dopolavoro Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta" created on indication of the fascist authorities in 1928 and designed as a formidable control instrument over the working life in all its possible manifestations. It must be noted that the company, although it assumed a position of collaboration at the beginning (position rather common in the Italian industry and representing almost the norm), then came into contact with the Resistance and played an important role in favouring the German retreat from the city.



Two curiosities, both little known, regard the "Smalterie" during the years of the conflict.

The first one refers to the recruitment of its employees and their army destinations. Despite them being from the Bassano area, contrary to what might be

*The company shipping warehouse, connected to the railway network, in the years prior to World War II.*

#### **A very dangerous strike**

After the crucial September 8<sup>th</sup> 1943, a group of workers and employees bravely gave life to a clandestine committee inside the company, with the double intent of safeguarding the "Smalterie" industrial assets but also to sabotage its military production. From different ideologic backgrounds, from the moderate catholic area to that of militant communist, on Christmas Eve, this "resistants" organized a protest strike against the German interferences in the city's life and in the company itself: an initiative that could have had tragic consequences, as deportation or worse, without the providential intervention of Nikolaus Leszl. The manager, in fact, took full responsibility, declaring to the nazi-fascist authorities that it was a wage claim and not of political character. Fortunately, they believed him...



*Nikolaus Leszl in front of his office door.*

Next, from left: extremely sturdy, but at the same time “light and unbreakable” the radiators Aequators appeared also in very particular publications. As in this case, where the Turkish submarine Sakaria was mentioned.

The effect of American bombing on Ponte della Vittoria (Victory’s Bridge) in 1945. Just to the north, what remained of Ponte Vecchio (Old Bridge), definitely blown up by the Germans after the partisan attack of February 17<sup>th</sup>, which destroyed it just partially. At conflict’s end 285 homes were destroyed or severely damaged.

The first American tanks transit in town on April 28<sup>th</sup> 1945.



believed, they were not assigned to the alpine troops, but to the Regia Marina (Royal Navy). A practice due to their good technical preparation, this prerogative made them extremely suitable to undertake positions of responsibility on ships and even submarines. The second one concerns the construction of a bomb shelter under one of the corporate buildings. Given that the train station (practically adjacent to the industrial complex) and the company itself were sensitive tar-



gets, the management decided with great sagacity, to realize this kind of “bunker” for the protection of the staff. However, the American Flying Fortresses focused their bombing on the Ponte della Vittoria (Victory’s Bridge), which was shot down, involving the whole area, fortunately making the use of the refuge unnecessary.

After violent confrontations with the retreating German formations (formed mostly by paratroopers) between Sandrigo, Schiavon and Marostica, on April 25<sup>th</sup> 1945, the Americans of the First Battalion of the 351<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, entered victorious in Bassano. The population was at the end of a nightmare.

Montegrappa’s barrack was immediately used for the sheltering of the US soldiers, who then left them to a Scottish division and a Polish contingent. A short distance from the important military infrastructure, “Smalterie ”could finally restore its production to civilian use. Of fundamental importance to the subsequent corporate development, aid from the Marshall Plan (enacted in 1947) allowed further construction expansion of the company that in 1950 consisted of 42,000 square meters and the enrichment of the home items range. The years of Reconstruction, characterized by an urban development, would in the later Boom





*Above*  
Construction elements for the  
covering of the new warehouses,  
before the installation (1945).

*Next*  
The fire-fighting piezo metric tank,  
which became almost an ideal  
"campanile" (bell tower), symbol  
of the company (1945).



*The best of the production of “Smalterie” on display at the Milan’s fair in 1949.*

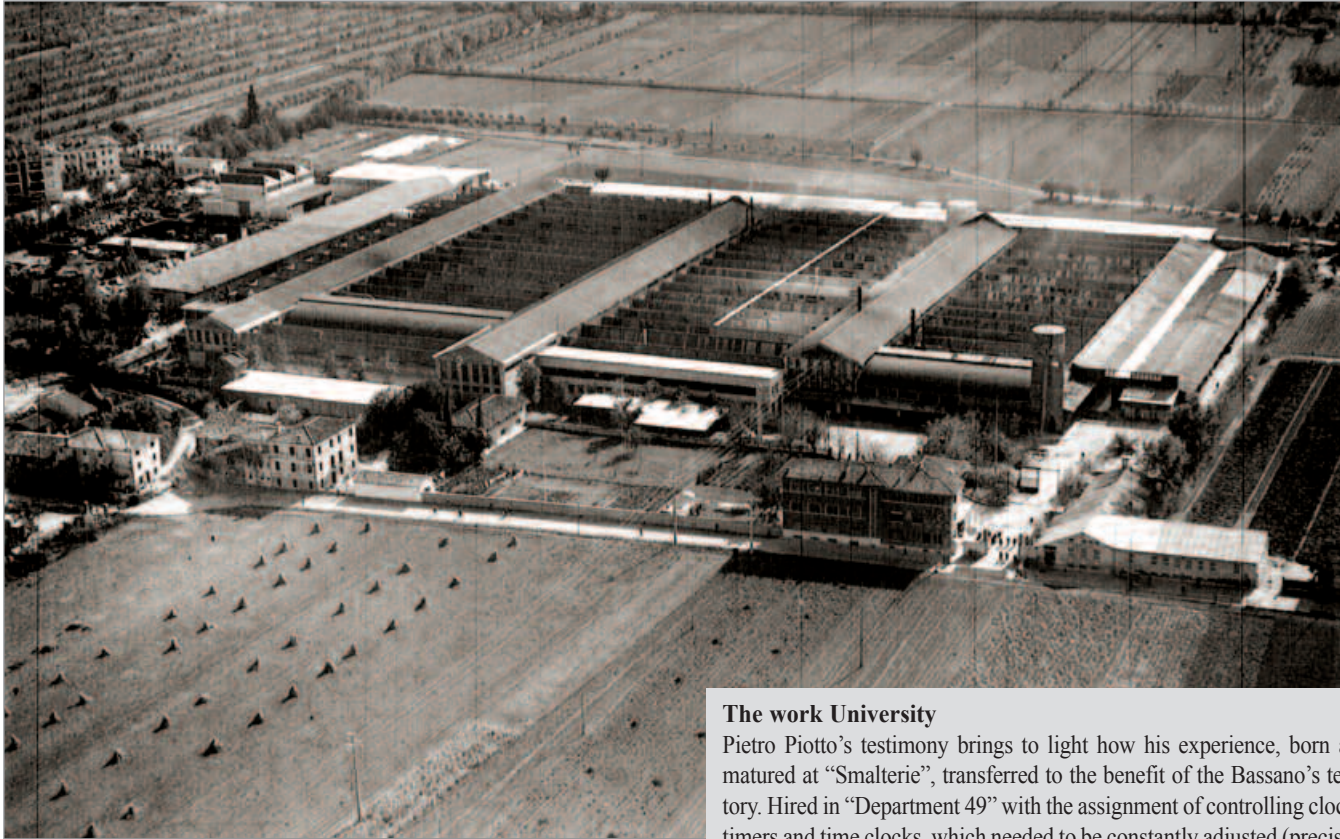


period be accompanied by further economic growth, saw the launch of new productions, such as those of convectors and industrial radiators. Also, in 1951, taking advantage of the tax benefits provided by Cassa del Mezzogiorno (Public effort created in 1950 to stimulate economic growth and development in the less developed Southern Italy), as a company initiative, Sicily Metallurgical Plant was formed in Milazzo, Sicily, plant dedicated to the production of bathtubs; it was, in some ways, a “budding” derived from one of the peculiarities of the Bassano’s plant. More important, though, and very significant especially for the strong bond with the territory, were the



spin-offs that were generated by “Smalterie” in the years following the deaths of Nikolaus Leszl and Ugo Sostero, who passed away respectively in 1952 and 1953: two managers who had been able to drive the company’s development with firm hand, both strongly missed by employees as well as by much of the local population.

It is not easy to describe the atmosphere of that era, marked by the advent of an “economic miracle” that swept the nation and that saw the Veneto’s transformation from peasant ground to industrial district (between 1951 and 1961, in our region, the number of employees in the primary sector literally halved):



*The factory in 1950 in an aerial photograph. In full Reconstruction, the company had reached 42,000 square meters of covered area.*

certainly, Bassano did its part in the Vicenza's province context, which was affected by a socio-economic revival whose productive status became, over time, an excellence in the Italian panorama, with strong brands and leading companies in the international markets. An historical phase that inaugurated a period of widespread prosperity, bringing the "Venezie" back to the commercial prestige lost in May 1797 with the fall of the Serenissima (ancient Republic of Venice).

"Smalterie" too contributed in fundamental ways to the territory's growth: business school and authentic work university, it produced a lead that formed the

#### **The work University**

Pietro Piotto's testimony brings to light how his experience, born and matured at "Smalterie", transferred to the benefit of the Bassano's territory. Hired in "Department 49" with the assignment of controlling clocks, timers and time clocks, which needed to be constantly adjusted (precision equipment that were for him "adventure's companions"), Piotto signed the last time card on June 30<sup>th</sup> 1975 at 12 a.m.: "Exactly at that time because I had to guarantee that the time clocks' tape was turned over!". After the conclusion of his experience in the company, Piotto does not abandon these tools so as to start a new activity which managed relationships with more than eight hundred different companies.

backbone of an emerging iron/steel and mechanical industry. In 1954, a few months after Rai (Italian state broadcaster) had aired the first television program "nationwide", Nico Moretto, a former designer at "Smalterie", gave birth to Alpes Inox, producing metal furniture for the kitchen. At the Via Trozzetti plant he had seen, for the first time, stainless steel that came from Sweden "packaged as a precious



### The city farewell to Nikolaus Leszl

On April 29<sup>th</sup> 1952, after a long illness that he had tried in vain to heal from, Nikolaus Leszl died. The news strongly impressed the city, to the point that thousands of people participated to the funeral and also the press gave great importance to the event, reporting faithfully the funeral chronicle: “A kilometer long procession crossed the city streets. There were about fifty hand carried large flowers crowns. [...] Between two thick wings of people, stretching over a distance of about two kilometers, the funeral procession passed through heading to the Abbey Church of Santa Maria in Colle (Saint Mary in the Hill). Here, most of the crowd had to stay in the church porch while the Mass and the funeral were celebrated. Once the ceremony was terminated, in the large front square several people spoke of the distinguished virtues of the deceased: Augusto Westen, president of “Smalterie”, for the managers accountant Agnesina, for the company commission Grammatica, for the seniors Campana, for the Vicenza Chamber of Commerce attorney Rumor and, in closing, the Mayor of Bassano, Professor Borin who brought the extreme goodbye on behalf of the city” (Il Gazzettino, May 4<sup>th</sup> 1952). With the passing of the Hungarian manager, a glorious era for “Smalterie” came to an end; Nikolaus Leszl, with his undeniable professional and human qualities, had left an indelible sign in the lives of many Bassano people.

metal”, before being pressed, welded, shaped, sanded and superficially finished. Only a year after, Aurelio Adolfo Agnesina, prior Director of *Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta*, founded in Romano d’Ezzelino the company *Samet* (metallurgical company), which took off in a very short time by exporting worldwide sinks and kitchen’s ovens and employing hundreds of employees. An expected success due to the coming into the scenes of *Faacme* (a metal furniture accessories company), company founded in 1950 by Agnesina with other partners just in the vicinity of “Smalterie” (Vicolo Parolini). Golden years, as it was said, that built, along with new factories, a real hope in the future. An atmosphere of great ferment, which allowed Walter and Baldassare Pedrazzoli, in 1948, to form the *Officina Meccanica IBP Pedrazzoli* (machine tools) or to the new partners Bruno Celi e

Giordano Veronese to start in 1955 in Valstagna, *Lametal* (boilers and water heaters): all people “related” by the common denominator of their previous training experience at “Smalterie”. Emblematic the case of Giulio Volpato: designer in the technical office and manager of the radiators’ department, he had followed the steps of Primo, his father, an employee of the historical company, to start his own company in 1962, *Warm* (radiators for water heating systems). The very long list, we could say endless, should perhaps look also at other realities, born in the territory without boasting of an offspring from “Smalterie” and often in competition with it: this is the case for *Elba*, founded in 1950 in Marostica by Elio Baggio. Initially a workshop producing economic wood and gas kitchens, it then grew and relocated to a larger plant in Bassano. Baggio also founded later (in 1968) in the disadvantaged area of Borso del Grappa, *Sair*, an industrial reality that produced water radiators for the home heating.

Matrix and, at the same time, fly-wheel for the development of a large area, *Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta* continued, regardless, to distinguished itself for the particular attention given to the delicate relationships between company and employees. To enter into the merit, it must be noted that in 1947 the management formalized the proposal of linking a bonus program to the sales volume, creating the basis for a constructive relationship with the Company’s Board. This agreement, a non-negligible detail, largely anticipated the national legislation and, in the following years, was treated several times and updated with the Unions. Even the introduction of a range of internal services for the employees, amongst which stood out the canteen and the factory shop, gives an idea of how “Smalterie”





were well-advanced even in the social aspect. The establishment of a night school of arts and craft, designed for the professional training of future employees and in which the company's technicians were amongst the teachers was a flagship as well; until 1963, when the middle school was established, it gave many young people of the territory a professional basic training. Many other innovations were introduced after the death of Leszl and Sostero, when at the helm of the company were Mattia Leszl (Csanad 1899 - Bassano del Grappa 1977), younger brother of Nikolaus and technical manager of the establishment, and the managers Giuseppe Santasilia and Victor Kaspar, respectively managing director and CEO (both from

#### **Smalterie, forge of entrepreneurship**

As emerges from the testimony of Silvio Panaro (with the company from 1967 to 2001), "Smalterie" have been a true forge of much entrepreneurship, which then fed the economic fabric of the whole Bassano's territory. Panaro remembers the company's attention toward labor conditions, the environment and the people employed in the various sectors and department as well as toward the broader industrial relations that were opening up in those years.

other Westen's companies). A team that, while operating on a trail in line with the company's tradition, worked with great determination to innovate productive cycles, equipping semi-automatic assembly lines, creating specialized departments and rationalizing the various processes. An internal reorganization, characterized by the maxi-

*"Smalterie" provided a fundamental contribution to the growth of the territory: business school and work university, between the 1950s and 1960s they produced a commercial activity that was the nucleus of an emerging iron and steel industry in the Bassano's territory. Faacme, Samet, Lametal e Alpes Inox are some of the many companies born from "Smalterie Metallurgiche Venete".*

### Life at Smalterie

The story of Annamaria Ceccon (with the company from 1994 to 2011) testifies how it was perceived in those years (the father came into the company in 1949) to have employment at “Smalterie”: it was a matter of status, so much that when one thought about the workers’ categories present in Bassano, one spoke about bankers, teachers and employees of “Smalterie”.

“Smalterie” did not represent only a place of employment but also the abode of numerous workers. Annamaria’s dad initially started as worker and then became custodian’s manager. Their house was located inside the “company walls”: a really unusual situation, it almost was “a citadel in the citadel”. Homes were equipped with amenities that were not taken for granted in those years: in some cases, in fact, there was also a good heating system. Annamaria tells of having changed home multiple times inside the “Smalterie” residential complex”.

Until 1978, when it was decided to demolish these homes to allow for the plant’s expansion. She still remembers with emotion the house main entrance, with a big wrought-iron gate decorated with two lions’s statues that, at the time, looked like giants.

To live inside the complex was considered a privilege: a small microcosm had formed where one found space for leisure. Her father was also going hunting inside the company’s walls; there was also, for the little ones, a tunnel considered “a place of games”, reaching all the way to the current district of Ca’ Baroncello. In Annamaria’s memories are also the entrance to the trains for the materials’supply, the weigh station (and the surprise of having found underneath it a “library” probably set up by who had previously lived inside the “Smalterie”) and the sound of the bathtubs presses that had guests startle...



*Ugo Sostero (1883-1953), CEO of “Smalterie” during the years of the company’s great expansion. He was a friend and a colleague of Nikolaus Leszl.*

num efficiency, which allowed good economies of scale which brought, in 1961, also the definition of an agreement on a production bonus that was, at the time, an emblematic example of contractual agreement.

Very good years, great years, in which the national GDP grew record annual average rates: between 1951 and 1958 by more than 5%, in 1959 by 7% and in 1961 by 8%. A period marked by the completion of the Autostrada del Sole (Sun’s Toll highway) stretch between Milan and Naples (an asphalt’s strip 755

### Services on behalf of the workers

Numerous were, at that time, the services made available to the company’s workers: Annamaria Ceccon remembers that in the 1960s the “Befana” was organized for the smaller children (and she still keeps a box of *Monopoli*, received as a gift for the occasion); there were then the summer camp at Marzotto, the Saturdays showers, for those who did not have this comfort at home, the canteen for the distribution of food, fabrics, pots, shoes (which remained active until 1975 and situated in the area underneath the current corporate canteen).

Four people were employed at the store counter, amongst whom attorney Gabriele Ceccato’s father (member of the *Baxi* BOD).

From Ceccato’s report the store was something like a warehouse where one could find anything, such was the variety of offered products, at affordable prices. Particularly, he recalls a green raincoat, bought right at the store, “so big I had to go around with the belt twice to be able to wear it!”

The store, open also beyond working hours, allowed the company to create a sort of “loyalty” toward the worker; the relationship between the worker and the company did not finish at the end of a shift, but continued with the visits to the store, a very useful service considering the economically very difficult years.

Ceccato remembers also the teaching that his father transmitted to him at that time: certain results can be obtained only through great sacrifices. And Ceccato saw his father doing these sacrifices already from the early morning, when he left home by bicycle carrying his mess tin. Being located in the vicinity of the center of Bassano, “Smalterie” were able to establish a relationship with the townspeople which was almost belonging to a community: “The proximity to the workplace made this rapport closer, thus the worker was all work and home”.

kilometers long built between 1959 and 1964) and by the increasing subscription to Rai by legions of Italians (from 90,000 in 1954 to over two millions in 1959). Numbers that speak for themselves: for the first time in the millennial history of our Peninsula, the share of population employed in industry and services had exceeded that of those operating in the agricultural sector.

In a ridiculous lapse of time (a little more than a decade!) Italy had turned into an industrialized

*The promotion of an automatic pressure cooker in stainless steel "Ultra Saeculum" in a 1965 catalogue.*

**Western**  
ULTRA SÆCULUM 

***è assolutamente sicura  
ed estremamente facile nell'uso,  
tanto che anche una bambina la può tranquillamente adoperare!***

Country. So much that, in 1960, an international jury appointed by the *Financial Times* attributed to the Italian Lira the Oscar for the steadiest currency in the West. It should also be mentioned, speaking of health, that the per capita calories consumption was finally settled on appropriate indexes and the

Italians' daily diet had become more diverse. The serious problem of malnutrition had been almost entirely eliminated. All well, then, like in a dream... Unfortunately, what international scholars had rightly called "the Italian economic miracle", suffered, between 1963 and 1964, an abrupt halt: for the Lira

Next, from left:  
Comm. Karl Hermann  
Westen: ran the company  
from the beginning of the  
1950s until the end of the  
1960s.

The catalogue cover of  
Radiant Plates and  
Radiators of 1965 (with  
the logo of the 40<sup>th</sup>): an  
exceptional model for  
photographer Lino  
Manfrotto, the Bassano's  
actress Silvia Monti.



“Smalterie” in an aerial  
photograph of 1964.

it was a dramatic two-year period, affected by the worst monetary crisis since the end of the war, due to a series of political and economic contributory causes (which we will not analyze here). The big industry was forced to radically react, revising the strategies adopted during the Reconstruction and



Boom years. Even *Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta* had to restructure its future through new logics that led the company to reduce distribution costs and, above all, to establish, as explained by the elegant 40<sup>th</sup> Foundation Anniversary’s monograph, “its sales organization in a large commercial irradiation facility in Milan, giving birth to *Commerciale Smalterie Metallurgiche SpA*”. A forced choice that underlines, though, the company innate ability, so to speak, of knowing how to deal with emergencies utilizing its own resources. Because “if it is true that ours is a

### An enamelling history lesson with Mattia Leszl

In 1957 the number 11 of “Realtà Nuova” (New Reality), a prestigious national magazine published by *Istituto Culturale per Pubblicazioni e Studi Rotariani* (Cultural Institute for Rotary Publications and Studies), proposed a distinguished service by the title “Lo smalto nei millenni” (Enamel in the millenniums). The author was none other than engineer Mattia Leszl, at the time technical director for “Smalterie”. The text, still enjoyable today, takes inspiration from a conference that took place in Bassano during that year and it traces the history of enamel over time.

We have selected a couple of passages, both of great interest, which are also indicative of the personality of the author.

Here is the incipit: “The word *enamel* in his actual meaning, appears in the advanced Middle Ages, deriving from the German “schmelzen” (melt), from the high antique German “smelzan” or “smaltzan”, while before the generic Latin term “vitrum” was used. Enamel, a compound of opacified or colored glass, applied and fused on metal for embellishment purposes, was of very ancient use. What is considered the first metal object on which enamel was applied (17<sup>th</sup> century BC), was a bracelet belonging to the Egyptian Queen Aahotep, preserved in the Museum of Bulak, by Cairo”.

Regarding recent history, that relative to current times, Mattia Leszl wrote: “Enamelling industry expanded from the beginning of last century, when it was limited to tableware, to all fields of our lives. Because we come across daily with kitchens, stoves, washing machines, refrigerators, reflectors, sinks, bathtubs, we end up not noticing their enamelling any longer. In most developed countries you can find often fuel service stations, homes facades, homes covering, sheet steel enamelled gutters. Bright colors plaques are known; probably it will not be known that in the United States thousands of square meters of enamelled steel blackboards are used. Many are the barrels and other containers enamel lined, to avoid the contact with metals that could be harmful or ruin the taste and characteristics of liquids, which are used in the wine, spirits and chemical production, while it is known that the sheet steel enamelled exhaust pipes have a much higher duration”.

society that tends, with all its might, toward a free market condition, in which everyone is allowed to consume without limits, it is understandable how the big issue for all companies is to sell well what they must produce with ever increasing rhythms, if they want to maintain a fruitful relationship between pro-



*Mattia Leszl, technical director from 1952 to the end of the 1960s.*

duction, distribution costs, sales prices and revenues”. A clear indication, accompanying an even more explicit conclusion, in the belief that it is “a mistake to continue the projecting in the future of the difficulties in which we all struggle today” and that “Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta, besides owning the factory [...], owns also a market, a reason for which it can look to the future with the cautious confidence that has always characterized its industrial and commercial activities” (from the Monograph of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1965). A further effort to overcome the difficulties of the moment consisted in the company’s reformation of the productive structure according to logical Fordism drives: an effort that required

*The elegant stainless steel ashtray, promotional object created to advertise the products of the Saeculum line.*





*Open doors on the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the company's founding: it is in May 1965.*



an increasingly efficient internal organization and that ended with the creation of a brand new processing center by IBM project, in which the traditional Office timing and methods merged. In 1967, after the death of Victor Kaspar, the company (still represented by President Karl Hermann Westen), appointed Amedeo Cuminatti as CEO. A non-random choice as Cuminatti was from Pellizzari, an historical company in Arzignano (founded in 1901), which had given the initial impetus to the electromechanical industry in the Vicenza area, where the manager had recently accomplished a difficult restructuring. At the same



time, in order to lighten the situation of “Smalterie” whose budget was at a loss, it was decided to out-source part of the production: considerably lower. This policy, in conjunction with a series of new and substantial investments, gave quick results; in the years of young protest, when students occupied the headquarters of Architecture and of Accademia delle Belle Arti (*Academy of the Beautiful Arts*) in Venice (1968) and in Padua was born the Interfaculty, with the establishment of the first contacts between students and workers (engineers and chemical), “Smalterie” found new strength. From 1967 to 1969,



in fact, the productivity per employee increased significantly and hiring resumed as well. In 1970, probably not sharing the decision to assign significant resources to in a joint venture with Zanussi Elettrodomestici (Zanussi Appliances), the company Ibelsa was established in Fuenmayor, Spain. The factory intended for the production of bathtubs, utilized machines, equipment and technicians from the coun-

terpart department of the Bassano's plant and it applied its organizational system; the competitive advantage, though, was provided by labor costs, the Spanish branch, maybe interpreted as a possible attempt of disengagement by the company, Cuminatti gave his resignations, passing his assignment to manager Mario Emanuele Bianchetti. In a short time, he replaced the entire executive team, keeping for himself the financial/administrative part and delegating the control of strategic areas such as production, marketing and personnel management to a young team who had a good education in economics and business organization. It must be noted that right at that time, in 1971, the historic Venetian University Ca' Foscari, had joined the Bachelor of Business Economics to the one of Economics and Business (established in 1935), in response to the growing needs of small and medium- sized enterprises in the Triveneto area. Bianchetti's team intention, tackled with determination and courage was, from the beginning, to recover market positions in lucra-

*At the top, from left: the company's booth at the International Exhibition of Domestic Arts in Torino (1965). A customers delegation visiting the company (1966).*

*On the right: the speakers' table at Convegno delle Forze di Vendita (Conference of Sales Force), organized in 1967.*

*Below: a page of the Samet catalogue "Apparecchiature elettrodomestiche in acciaio inossidabile" (Stainless steel appliances) 1969.*





tive sectors: available resources were therefore employed to modify the product range with external acquisitions, amongst which was that of the exemplary Smalteria Abruzzese di Sambuceto (*Abruzzese Enamelling of Sambuceto*), situated between Pescara and Chieti and specialized in the production of bathtubs. The successful project, thanks also to a minority share by Zanussi, which contributed to limit the economic engagement for “Smalterie”, was significantly followed by the purchase of another company: Zarpa SpA of Pove del Grappa, which also produced bathtubs. The new strategy, including also precise agreements with the Labor Union (which forecasted a temporary slowdown in the hiring), gave positive feedback and in 1971-1972 the *Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta* could enjoy a moderate recovery, found for example in a growing annual sales volume report on the employee.

It was, however, a flash in the pan: serious cyclical factors were indeed taking shape on the horizon: an atmosphere of international precariousness affected the economy, due in part to the energy crisis of 1973, while the Peninsula was distressed by intense Union struggles. Heated atmosphere, made even more dramatic at “Smalterie” that same year, by the death of Karl Hermann Westen. His death, sudden and unexpected, brought his sons Peter, Carlo and Ruth to the company’s leading position. Still relatively young but determined to return the company to top positions, especially operationally, they did not follow the path traced by their father, who had assigned a decent administrative autonomy to his managers. In 1974 Bianchetti resigned from the position of Chief Executive Officer while the company recorded a continuous and concerning worsening. A situation that





exploded the following year, with Christmas around the corner, when “Smalterie” were liquidated and its employees laid off. At the end of the Holy Year of “Renewal and Reconciliation”, proclaimed by Pope Paul VI on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> Jubilee and on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its foundation, *Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta* closed its historic doors. The consequences of such an event for the entire territory were dramatic and painful: socially, the plant closing left more than a thousand people out of work, economically, the repercussions on the generated activities were nothing short of catastrophic. A calamity that marked the end of an era and, partially, of a school of thought. But not of the company.

Fortunately, many positive forces, expression both of the politic and of the business world, activated themselves rather quickly to identify new scenarios and possible prospects for “Smalterie”: amongst these also the Italian government, then led by Giulio Andreotti, in the person of Industry Minister Carlo

Donat Cattin, while in Bassano Mayor Sergio Martinelli was experiencing feverish hours and social tension moments in an attempt to provide an effective answer to the serious town situation, which day after day was risking the impasse.

The answer came from Zanussi, partner of “Smalterie” that, after a series of evaluations, took over the company and, in January of 1977, reopened the factory’s gates: wonderful news for the area and for the employees (for the most part reintegrated), corroborated by the group managers’ decision to transfer from Rovigo to Bassano the heat and sanitary production and to focus the activity on the heating sector, introducing - amongst the first plants in Italy - the first gas domestic appliances through the manufacturing of wall mounted boilers. A choice, as it is usually said, spot-on and in step with the times, since the extension of the “methanization” (natural gas) dates back exactly to those years, with the establishment of public natural gas distribution in a growing number of cities.

This specialization, well emphasized by the new company name, Zanussi Climatizzazione, caused also painful consequences such as the closing of whole departments traditionally associated with trademarks of *Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta*. But it was a necessary therapy, which gave positive results: the specialization in a particular type of production at the expense of the cessation of other accomplishments, marked a distinct philosophy. In other words, a strategic sign, in the light of that “resilient” attitude that, by overcoming the evident difficulties through the research for alternative opportunities, had already been, in the past, part of vital decisions for the destiny of the Via Trozzetti’s company. It should be additionally

*A phase of the Sale Forces Meeting Westen of 1973.*

*Opposite page from the top: the Westen booth at Mostra Convegno of 1968 and at Macef of Milan in 1973.*



**LA BATTERIA DA CUCINA PRONTA IN ELEGANTE CONFEZIONE REGALO**

*The promotion of a collection of pots and pans in porcelain steel Westen Rossana in bright red color: "with white decorations, white interior and armored stainless steel border, unalterable, solid, right weight, suitable for any heat source, dishwasher safe and brighten up the whole kitchen!" (1971).*

noted that Zanussi also moved to the Bassano's plant the production of Triplex boilers and that, thanks to the remarkable improvements made to the "Smalterie's" warehouses as a result of accurate design verification and the introduction of new construction technologies, this production turned out to be a real commercial success.

Of fundamental importance was the technical contribution of the employees, demonstrating how they were professionally prepared and how the technical culture gained by the staff over the years could lead to tangible benefits. A quality that was fortunately understood and appreciated by the managers who came to Bassano with Zanussi: led by Giovanni Cattaneo, new Managing Director and CEO of the company, they were quickly able to exploit that solid expertise, recognizing also some of their own limits that derived from the corporate culture from

which they came. The new path gained connotation - retrieving in this a consolidated practice of *Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta* in favour of the constant updating of the human capital- also for the organization of training courses for middle management, department heads and technicians and for the establishment of a climate of collaboration and mutual trust between management and workers. The good internal relations established, in 1984, the optimum prerequisite to deal, without tensions, with a new change of ownership, following the crisis that affected the Zanussi's group, sold that year to the Swedish Electrolux.

Zanussi Climatizzazione was, in fact, acquired by Officine Costruzioni Elettriche Angelo Nocivelli, better known with the acronym Ocean, perhaps initially interested in taking over other divisions in the appliances industry group. Assuming the name Ocean



Idroclima, the company maintained the previous layout essentially unchanged until two years later, when Ocean incorporated Samet of Romano d'Ezzelino (whose origin we have already mentioned) by transferring the assembly lines to Bassano.

The operation led to an increase in the number of employees and precious synergies which helped the following company recovery, thanks also to the strong growth on the market for wall mounted boilers. An exponential development, objectively observable also on a statistical and economic plan: in 1999, when Ocean sold the Idroclima division to the British multinational *Baxi Group Ltd*, the sales volume had significantly increased and the international market shares much greater than those constituted by sales in Italy. On December 24<sup>th</sup>, on the Eve of the year 2000 Jubilee, John Paul II opened the Holy Door at St. Peter's. A new millennium was about to begin.

#### NOTES TO THE TEXT

The writing of this essay was based primarily on the following texts:

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*The first wall mounted boiler, Triplex, produced under Zanussi brand, marked the beginning of a new era for the company in Via Trozzetti.*

# L'ESTATE NON FINISCE QUI

LA CALDRIA MURALE

## Solaria CHECK

TI FA SIVERE  
 IN UN CLIMA DI A S-  
 SOLTU RENESSERE.  
 E' SICURA, SEMPLI-  
 CE, INTELLIGENTE  
 E TE LA OFFRE  
 O C E A N

Indicatori luminosi segnalano eventuali malfunzionamenti e i corrispondenti simboli danno indicazioni sul corretto funzionamento della caldaia e del camino.

**OCEAN**



## The corporate evolution in the last thirty years

*A winning growth, based on diffused management and internationalization*

For an outside observer interested in economic and management facts, the company is of great interest. Its long history and its many transformations place it at the junction between two major themes that permeate the recent debate on the evolution of “doing business” in Italy: innovation and resiliency.

From one side, in fact, the ability to innovate, anticipate or even create new markets and transform entire sectors is seen by many as the key to maintain a competitive position, defensible on markets that are always more volatile, uncertain and threatened by new operators.

The debate over industrial issues places the emphasis mainly on the explosive character of innovation: new technologies or new ways of serving the markets, destroy the prior order, create spaces for new companies, agile and innovative, and transform the production geography and the creation of value. On the other hand, however, both economic facts and management experts as well as the public opinion, fall in love with the “resilient” companies, those able to withstand adversities and respond to the technological and industrial revolution retaining their own individuality.



*The water heaters enamelling line in 1983.*

The debate, in other words, now turns toward the necessity of renewing, in a radical way what is done and the face of the actors that do it; now it focuses on the resilience and persistence of companies able to adapt to the big economic, technological and social transformations, while maintaining a strong bond with traditions, community of origin and places of birth. *Baxi* has been able, over time, to balance innovation and “resistance”, by double tying itself to a place: Bassano. The establishment in Via Trozzetti has been the container of a peculiar alchemy made of innovation and tradition, of an ability to change without sacrificing history and culture gained in the past. More: thanks to this compound, the company, which changed ownership and property, has been able to keep steady feet in a territory and preserve a significant share of employment, maintaining crucial functions such as production, research and development. What was born in 1925 as a plant for the production of enamelled objects is today the largest plant in Europe for the design and production of wall hung boilers, part of one of the largest international groups of the sector, *BDR Thermea*.

*Next page:  
the wall hung boiler  
Solaria Check, branded  
Ocean, and an advertising  
page that publicized it  
(1985).*

*The wall hung boiler  
Secura, Ocean brand  
(1984).*



The more I listened to the *Baxi* protagonists of yesterday and today and I gathered documentation and data to rebuild history, management styles and critical moments, the more an adjective to describe it and frame it was coming to my mind: obstinate. In dictionaries, the term obstinacy has two meanings: the first one refers to the rigid and stubborn attitude of who does not budge from an idea deliberately, despite evidence to the contrary and common sense. The second meaning refers to someone who perseveres, even with humility and kindness, despite the adversities because he is sure of the goodness of what he does, of his ideas and his capabilities. *Baxi* is obstinate according to this second definition.

Within the boundaries of the Bassano's plant, several generations of managers, employees and workers have been able to keep alive and renew, when necessary, a solid corporate culture, they have renovated and reinterpreted skills and knowledge, they have built and renewed a strong identity. The deep awareness of these elements is the obstinacy's engine with which Bassano's *Baxi* has managed to find new markets, adapt the skills to new challenges and demands, to constantly improve processes and managerial styles. To make Bassano's *Baxi* interesting is not only the balance between innovation and tradition, but also the way this balance was achieved, the set of choices, practices and managing philosophies where this obstinacy is substantiated. The following pages want to provide a reading of the company's management in the last thirty years, identifying some "red wires" that run along the evolution from 1984, the year of the passage of the company to the *Ocean* group of Luigi Nocivelli, until today, starting from the testimonies and the stories of the management team that led the company during this period. The red wires are particularly the peculiar approach to the product innovation, based on the ability to read the market and rearrange internal and external competencies to devise advanced solutions quickly; the openness to the international markets supported by the consistent ability of providing customer service and support; the attention to the consolidation and renewal of an organizational culture through of internal career paths and the supporting of young members. The chapter is based on interviews with the management team that lead the company in the 1984-2010 period - Dino Boesso (human resources), Tonino Vettori (operations), Bartolo Bavaresco (administration), Giusto Mario Taglia (sales Italy), Lamberto Del Grosso (research and development)



and to the current Managing Director, Alberto Favero. The reconstruction of the history of the last 30 years of the company availed itself of secondary sources and previous reconstructions.

#### **1984-2014: from Ocean to BDR Thermsea Group**

The debacle of *Zanussi* and the simultaneous expansion that involved Ocean of the Nocivelli's family played in favor of the latter that, in 1984, acquired the Bassano's plant - then *Zanussi Climatizzazione* - and had the opportunity to introduce its brand in the thermo-sanitary sector, using the prestige of the acquired brand. The operation was successful especially for favorable

conditions that presented themselves to the Nocivelli's: the acquisition of *Zanussi Climatizzazione* was at 40% of the company's real value (estimated at about 35 billion of lira and purchased at 15) and allowed Nocivelli to gradually absorb Zanussi's prior losses, lowering the overall gain, obtaining therefore a significant tax benefit. Although initially attracted by the tax incentive, Nocivelli regularly visited Bassano and he gradually got to know the company, its competences and its specifics. According to narrations of individuals who saw the transition from *Zanussi* to *Ocean*, Nocivelli fell in love with the company and gave up his original plan: eliminate the production of boilers to maintain that of

*The Ocean's booth in 1994.*

radiators. The design, the production flexibility, the manufacturing knowledge of the Bassano's plant persuaded him to persevere and contribute to the company's growth supporting it by the entry into new markets. The Nocivelli's acquisition was followed by an intense effort to rationalize the plant. In March 1984, a Union agreement was stipulated, that provided for a profit-making reshaping and a reduction of the Bassano's workforce (from 297 employees to 240) and of the Sambuceto's (from 121 employees to 107). Lastly, to distribute the fixed costs of the Bassano's structure, the Nocivelli's group introduced new productions to the plant with the intent of obtaining better economies of scale, in particular through the acquisition of *Samet*, company that produced stove tops and ovens, and the transferring of its production to Bassano. Starting from 1986, the results of Nocivelli's management became evident and the company achieved the first balanced budget in 1988 and increased profits in the following administrations. The Nocivelli's acquisition was an important transition for the Bassano's company even for a different aspect: the opening to international markets.

Starting from 1994, the boilers' sales volumes in the international markets began to reach the same levels of those of domestic sales, surpassing them the following year. Nocivelli, as said, convinced of the boilers' potential, saw the international markets as the main

#### **Information's benefits**

In the testimony of Maurizio Tagliapietra (with the company since 1988) the fundamental importance of the company's computerization in those years is confirmed: in a short time great results had been achieved. "Thanks to computerization - Tagliapietra remembers - all working and accounting had been rationalized, brought to equilibrium".

way for the company's consolidation. The expertise of the *Ocean* group on several export markets, allowed for Nocivelli to bring the company outside the domestic bounds.

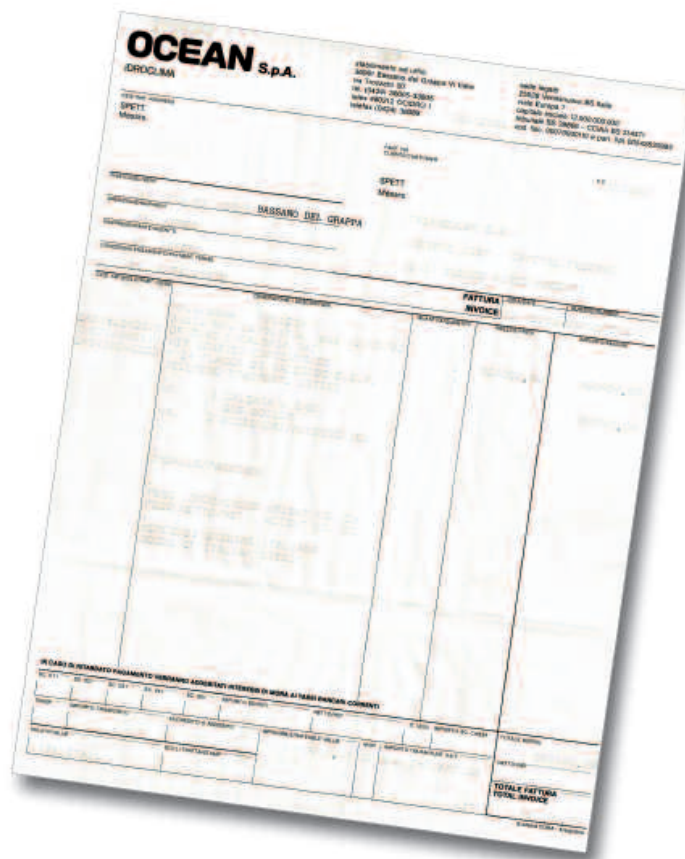
The first market was Austria, followed, after a few years, by Great Britain. The latter was the true key for the company's transformation: the challenges posed by the boilers' design for the British market allowed the company, on one hand, to put to good use the skills matured in the previous decades and, on the other hand, to deal with new demands and the development of new competencies. To design and fine-tune boilers for the British market, which means the product's study and the approval from the gas distributor, took years. The necessary certifications were complex and required the company to learn how to serve a new market. To go into international markets for the company meant to learn how to deal with diversified requests, product's specifications and regulatory systems. In other words, not only did the company start to export, but it also learned how to produce more sophisticated and complex items, continually innovating its products. The *Ocean* period was full of relaunches: rationalization, automation, logical management geared to efficiency and openness to the international markets have been the distinctive characteristics of the Nocivelli's fourteen years of management. Contextually, in 1998, within the company, a workers' association started with the intent of developing social, cultural and sport's activities which derive from the company's reality. An entity that favoured the exchange of ideas and experiences, and the getting to know each other amongst the members. Regardless of the positive results achieved by *Ocean*, in 1998 the Brescia's group deemed appropriate to sell the Bassano's company, which it did not consider part of its



## CRAL

The words of Fabio Pegoraro (with the company since 1995) and Vasco Nicoletti (with the company since 1989) recount the origin of the actual CRAL (Company's Employees Recreational Association). The idea took form in 1998 on the occasion of the annual inter-company amateur soccer game between the team *Ocean* of Verolanuova and *Ocean Idroclima* of Bassano, where Vittorio Merlo, active in this type of events, became aware of the Association present in the Brescia's branch with benefited, in addition to the enrollment shares for the registered members, also by a share provided by the company itself. After discussing the initiative both with the company and the Union in 1999, CRAL started with the Statue's drafting and the announcement to the employees of the enrollment opening, which in 2000 reached right away 437 members. The very first activity was organized on January 19<sup>th</sup> 2000: a snow trip on the "Alpe di Susi", which was an immediate success. From 2001, the activities grew in a very important way, generating in the various typologies 30-35 propositions every year (tourist and cultural trips, recreational and sport's activities): simultaneously the subscriptions grew in number, which will bring the Association, nowadays, to reach 700 members (including a significant number of previous employees). The spirit that permeates CRAL is authentic: the Association is lived as a value, it is sharing, sometimes it is also difficult, but it is surely acquaintance if not friendship, it is a way to know the person that works by you or that you don't even know, which you discover has the same interests, expectations or simply the desire to give a meaning to the being together every single day, and the days are many, in the working life. It also becomes a sharing moment with your own family as the advantages are extended to them as well.

core business and it gave in to the advances of a British group, *Baxi Partnership Ltd*. For *Baxi* the acquisition of the Italian company was accompanied by the concentration on the activities of design and production of the wall hung boilers in the Bassano's plant. Additionally, *Baxi* halted the production of radiators in 2000 and stopped the production of bathtubs in the Sambuceto's plant in 2001. The excess resulting from the plant's reorganization in Bassano, were reabsorbed thanks to the increasing shares in international market, conquered by the wall hung and floor standing boilers by *Baxi SpA*. In 2009 *Baxi Group* and *De Dietrich Remeha* merged



## The international market and the belonging to a big Group

Giovanni Pilichi (with the company since 1996) confirms the company's ability in all its functions to promptly follow the different market needs for products and services. The market has been in a strong expansion (1985-2005), therefore the company's flexibility, rapidity and responsiveness were key factors for conquering market shares. The company found then in the reference Group *Baxi* first, then *BDR*, the right strategic support to be able to maintain the competitiveness, especially when markets, from the initial expansion phase, became more mature and structured in their demand. The latter one has become always more complex, demanding, regulated and segmented, requiring an always increasing attention to innovation and industrialization rather than speed and flexibility.

to create one of the most important group in the sector, *BDR Thermea*, present in more than 70 markets worldwide, with over 6,300 employees and sales volume of more than 1,7 billion Euros in 2013.

*The invoice of the first boiler sold in Argentina (12.05.1992).*

La novità è  
che non abbiamo cambiato niente.



Tranne il nome.

### **OCEAN idroclima diventa BAXI s.p.a.**

Visto la differenza? Quattro piccole lettere che rendono queste due nostre caldaie completamente diverse, solo nel marchio. Infatti, per riscaldare le case di tutta Europa ora c'è Baxi, un'azienda internazionale leader nel settore del riscaldamento domestico, che ha posto il suo marchio su tutti i nostri prodotti, dalla famosa caldaia LUNA fino alle vasche da bagno. Un grande cambiamento, che del cambiamento porta solo il nome.

**BAXI** Sp.A.  
Progetti di vita comoda.

*The efficient communication of the change of property from Ocean Idroclima to Baxi in an advertising page of 1999.*

### **The changes of property and the continuity**

The history of “Smalterie”, from Westen to BDR Thermea, is marked by the alternation of different properties. For the workers, the managers and the communities where the companies are located, acquisitions, sales and merges are connected to true concerns relative to the maintenance of employment, to critical functions like production and design and especially to the preservation and renewal of the know-how.

When acquisitions are by foreign groups, the concerns increase. In recent years, for example, in our Country there has been much debate about the acquisitions of prestigious brands of the made in Italy as *Bulgari* or *Loro Piana* from the French group *Lvmh* or of *Gucci*, *Brioni* and *Bottega Veneta* from the rival *Ppr*. The fear in front of these waves of acquisitions is partially link to the fact that Italy risks to leave to others the value generated by its manufacturing savoir faire. Secondly, there is the concern about the dilution of the made in Italy DNA in the case in which the acquiring parties would like to exploit the Italian companies' brands, but, at the same time, for cost reasons, have the production moved elsewhere.

Opposite to this prospect of gradual emptying of competencies and of the consequent job losses, another perspective looks at the acquisition by foreign groups, solid and well positioned in the international arena, as a development opportunity. This is what seemed to have happened to the Bassano's plant. Despite the alternation of different ownerships, the genius loci of the Via Trozzetti's establishment has had the opportunity of expressing itself to its best in the last thirty years thanks to the opportunities offered by the various groups that maintained its control. The managers I interviewed underlined on several occasions how the

different acquisitions along the years can be both a misfortune - cause of slowdowns, complex reorganizations and restructuring - and a fortune: with each ownership change, the company and its human resources had to demonstrate of being able to do better than others, of being able to bring value to the realities assuming control of the company. The incentive to innovate and renew itself, in other words, was never missing thanks to the new acquisitions. As Nocivelli, first cautious, then “fell in love with boilers” and learned to appreciate the Bassano’s plant design and manufacturing skills, so the different managements of *Baxi Group* and of *BDR Thermea* acquired the company appreciating its experience and its potential. For example, amongst all the affiliates of *Baxi*, that of Bassano was and is the one with more experience on the international markets. For the group leader, the competencies of internationalization and penetration in foreign markets, the service culture and the responsiveness to demands, were of fundamental importance to the internationally opening of the entire group. The Bassano’s distinctive skills, in other words, were spread to the whole group and have increased its ability to efficiently serve a variety of markets.

Sophisticated manufacturing skills and speed in the studying and realization of innovative technical solutions are two of the assets that this company has been able to make available to the different realities that held its reins. An episode of the *Ocean* period is particularly significant: one of the many small challenges posed by the patron tells a lot about the ability to activate a quality know-how on innovative projects. One day Nocivelli showed the design team the handle of his car and he asked them to make one alike to be inserted in a bathtub produced by the company. Taking on the chal-



*The new wall hung boiler Luna 2000 in an ad: compact and powerful, it achieved immediate success under the headline “Comfortable life projects”.*



From left to right: convention of 1999 and the Baxi Group booth in 2002 at the Milan trade show.

Above, the logo for the wall hung boiler Luna launched in 1994.



lenge, they proceeded with the first version, which was, however, soundly rejected. The second version, installed on the bathtub and obtained by replicating exactly the handle of the car, was finally accepted and Nocivelli commended the entire team.

Nocivelli's involvement in the daily operations of the company was frequent. It was not uncommon to see the entrepreneur and his collaborator, Renato Ripari, walk around the plant with work tools. Often one would find them filing three-way valves. Even if this strong presence could often result excessive, it is also thanks to this involvement in the property that the company found the stimuli to get back on its feet.

Competencies related to the design and production or the speed in the elaboration of innovative solutions, are not the only factors convincing the buyers about the quality of the purchase and of the necessity of supporting the Bassano's plant in the expression of its potential. On the management and administrative side, the

discourse is similar. After the acquisition by the Nocivelli, one of the options on the table was to relocate the administration from Bassano to Verolanuova, in the province of Brescia, for the reduction of personnel. The option was immediately discarded: the Bassano's leadership and *Ocean* itself realized that the peculiar blend of management and operational skills would be weakened, a damage to be avoided. To some extent, the Bassano's plant represented an interesting test bench for unique and innovative management choices, which allowed the Bassano's management to provide services to the whole *Ocean* group on restructuring and managerial innovations. For example, the merging between *Zanussi Climatizzazione* and *Ocean* was amongst the first ones in Italy: the Bassano's management team, at the time, was unfamiliar with mergers, however, the need to complete the process led them to study the specifics and the technicalities of the mergers' processes and to elaborate an optimal solution. The



*The Baxi Group's booth in Frankfurt in 2003.*

skills matured in this situation were then reversed on several partners of *ElFi* (*Elettrica Finanzia* - financial founded by Nocivelli brothers in 1973, Editor's Note).

**The innovation: combination of knowledge, competencies and market signals**

The rediscovered energy followed by the acquisition by *Ocean* translated itself in a decisive investment on the product's innovation, culminated in the *Luna* series, connected to the passage from *Ocean* to *Baxi* and, more recently in the design and realization of niche products as high output cascade boilers, cabinets, built-in boxes and hybrid systems.

The innovation process at *Baxi* is not necessarily driven by pure research, by technical and engineering technical development which need applications and markets research. Rather, it is a process based on the ability of incorporating a range of ideas, information and feedbacks that originate from markets and partners, combining it with the solutions and the competencies present both within the company and at the suppliers.

A recent anecdote helps make this philosophy concrete. In 2003, due to the introduction in England of new regulations regarding boilers' efficiency, *Baxi* had to design new heat exchangers. Originally the

designing of the new heat exchangers was started in Great Britain where *Baxi* had access to a foundry, in which *Baxi* thought to be able to realize the component. The work on the component went on for a year without any result worthy of note. They achieved an aluminum block that presented various problems. Moved by the necessity of resolving the malfunctions, the British design team visited Bassano and asked the local designers to contribute to the project. Amongst the different *Baxi's* suppliers, one had recently developed a building process on aluminum, an alloy bonding derived from the production of heat exchangers for aircrafts, helicopters and motorcycles. Not only did this supplier have advanced skills on this process, he also had an adequate oven to execute it and he did already produce heat exchangers for various clients in other sectors. The *Baxi Italy* design team contacted the supplier about the request, communicated the specifications and obligations and started a co-design process that resulted in the new component's production. This ability to rapidly mobilize competencies within the company and in the suppliers' network to promptly serve the customer - external and internal - was one of the factors that increased the Bassano establishment's consideration in the course of the years. Even the planning and development of the first *Luna* boilers series, in 1994, is a testimony of *Baxi's* integration ability and rapidity in formulating new solutions, often drawing from knowledge and solutions matured in different areas. The constant attention to product updating and increased functionality offered to the market is the engine of the continuous partnership research that *Baxi* leads, in order to co-design innovative solutions. Drawing from abilities and competencies

already present in other companies, perhaps in other branches or sectors, is the main reason for the time reduction in the development of innovative products. A process whose length - and time to market - would decidedly be longer if the company developed the solutions autonomously. In 2006, at the peak of the production's capacity, in Bassano, the third generation of the *Luna* series, *Luna 3*, was developed. A product that incorporated innovative solutions and concepts, the first to introduce a microprocessor electronic control. To do this, the company reached out to a giant in the electronics, yet very culturally far from the heating sector. The agreement materialized in a co-participation of *Baxi* in the application of electronics to the heating sector and of this company in the design and production of specific microprocessors. The outcome of the collaboration was positive. It is one thing to know which solutions are available in the heating's area, in contiguous sectors or in your own suppliers portfolio. Another is to access it and start fruitful partnerships with the holders of the know-how necessary to develop new concepts and solutions. A recurring feature in *Baxi's* history is that of starting relations with partners and suppliers where the human dimension and the respectful rapports facilitate the collaboration, co-design and co-development of innovative solutions. The co-operation with the electronics' supplier is significant from this point of view. It was not easy to have yourself listened to and even less to ask for collaboration to a sector giant so structured and important. A second important factor in creating this relation with the German giant was *Baxi's* history. Often Italian companies, at the eyes of German ones, are looked upon with a mixture of respect and concern:



on one side the creativity, competence and quality are appreciated; on the other side, there is the concern about the Italian's reliability regarding quantities, delivery times and punctuality. *Baxi's* long history allowed the overcoming of the first difficulties and skepticism. The Bassano's management, in other words, had developed a "story" to be told and to use as leverage to start these relations. It was not about cosmetics. On the contrary, the long history from the Westen to *Baxi* enabled the capturing of the partners' attention. Once the attention was captured, the space to discuss products, projects and processes opened up. In the maintenance of these relations, the main adhesive is represented by good and cordial personal relations with the interlocutors of the partner's companies.



The innovation's culture based on the prompt answer to the new needs expressed by the market, especially by the international markets, as the company gradually opened abroad, is the result of strategic choices matured during the transition from *Zanussi* to *Ocean*. During the *Zanussi's* period, in fact, the strategic orientation toward innovation, at least initially, aimed at the introduction of radically new concepts in the world of boilers, importing solutions, from aesthetics to functionality, typical of the home appliance. *Zanussi's* strategy was to do what other did not. The company wanted to produce boilers close, in concept and aesthetic, to the home appliance. Still today, in the company's showroom in Bassano, the first square boiler is on display, which utilized tempered glass used for the kitchens. According to many, it was a

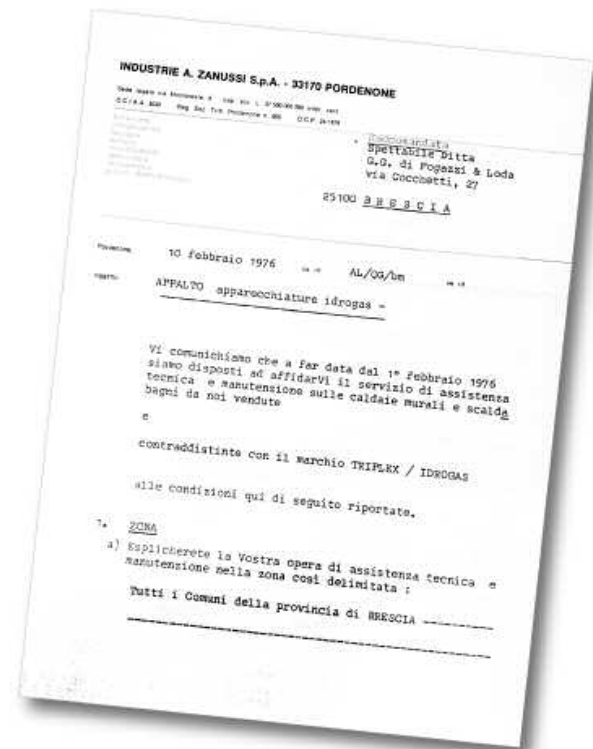
*The wall hung boiler Luna, branded Baxi (1999).*

*Luna Platinum, boiler of the Luna range in its fourth generation and the concept "THINK intelligence within", the exclusive system that makes it think "in an intelligent way" (2010).*



The trade show booth maintained by After Sales Service Center Idrogas where the Triplex boiler is displayed and the assistance mandate awarded to Idrogas.

good project. However the concretization of this hybrid between boiler and appliance proved to be difficult. In those years *Zanussi* was engaged in an international exchange with the Spanish *Cointra*. *Cointra* produced components and wall hung boilers: it was amongst the sector's main players and it purchased refrigerators from *Zanussi*, which forced *Zanussi Climatizzazione* to purchase components from Spain. The boiler revealed itself to be a failure: the Spanish components proved to be problematic and the market did not appreciate the revisiting of the boiler according to the style and concepts of an appliance. This failure was responsible for a substantial revision of the company's strategy: rather than making radically new products, the company focused on the construction quality, the durability and on the technical performance of the product. It is from this company's redefinition that was born the range that adopted the name "Luna" in 1994.



### The internationalization: from Bassano to the foreign markets

Since the *Ocean* period, and in an increasing measure in the period followed by the *Baxi* acquisition, the growth style of the Bassano's company was its ability to broaden its activity's radius to markets culturally close to the Italian one, or very distant, as the emerging markets. In this sense the company's history is very similar to that of the reality of the made in Italy: the quality of the workers and the density of manufacturing and design competencies have been the most effective business cards for the Italian product abroad. In this situation, one can recognize a specific orientation by *Baxi* toward new markets as well.

The company's approach is not focused on imposing a product thought for the specifics and the requests of the domestic market, but rather on the "translation" and the adaptation of its abilities and solutions to the specific requests and obligations manifested abroad.



Since the *Zanussi's* times, the Bassano's plant distinguished itself for the quality of its workers' skills. When the boilers' production was transferred from Rovigo to Bassano, the issues encountered with the product were resolved. *Zanussi* quickly realized the guaranteed difference of the competencies at the Bassano's company, particularly of the workshop and welding workers. Nevertheless, the *Zanussi's* period was troubled and things, especially in the last years, turned for the worse. In this situation, what saved the factory, maintaining the same employment levels and re-launching the company, was the decisive orientation abroad that began with *Ocean* and that continued in the following years.

In the specific, how did the Bassano's *Baxi* open new commercial markets such as in Turkey, Russia, China, the USA and the other 50 markets in which it operates? On one side, as it was mentioned, quality of the product and innovative rapidity played a fundamental role. On the other side, the groups that acquired the Bassano's company contributed, from time to time, from a financial or commercial point of view, to the expansion of the company's activities. However, to actualize all opportunities requires to be able to "learn" from the places where one goes, from the ability to read the explicit and hidden needs, capitalize all the information on the new context in which one operates.

From this point of view, the landing on the US market is explanatory. When *Baxi* opened itself to the American market, it found a difficult situation. First of all, Americans did not know the product: wall hung boilers were not widespread, the American people were used to the floor standing type, of old design. They did not even know what regulations needed to be applied. *Baxi* undertook the task of studying and codifying, with the US authorities, the standards and the specifics for



the approval of wall hung boilers.

Initially, the American certification entity, in the absence of a specific legislation, wanted to apply that in force for nuclear power plants. In particular, they wanted to know and certify the entire production chain, from the raw materials to the finished product: copper, steel, everything. The low voltage was an element that received particular attention: it presented, in fact, various risks of malfunctioning. Also in this case, however, thanks to a the trials and tests done internally, the Bassano's company was able to recreate all the opera-

*On the wall of an elegant kitchen, the wall hung Luna is the protagonist in this advertising page for the foreign markets. As the slogan says "Design and power for a full range".*



From left to right  
Installation of high-efficiency Baxi's boilers at Biddeford Ice Arena in Maine (2005).

Brand and product promotional actions in Hungary with the "Baxi van" in 2008. The Baxi roadshow with the van set up with products and communication material started in 2005 and reached the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria.

A moment of the celebration for the twentieth year of Baxi's presence in Hungary (September 2014).

tional conditions that would be present in America, reducing the risk of the components' malfunctioning to the minimum. Always in the USA, another issue was the heat exchanger: on each individual piece a plaque had to be applied certifying the component, but for space issues, this could not be accomplished. An agreement was reached, thanks to various communications and travels to the US by the *Baxi* team, and the positive outcome of the negotiations avoided later problems. In general, the boiler concept in America was understood: the company put itself in the position of someone who needed to understand what the market wanted at the

#### **The birth of a new division: Baxi International**

Paolo Pesavento's words (with the company from 1996 to 2014) are a testimony of the reorganization that happened in the years 2000, due to the expansion that was happening in that period: "At the beginning of new millennium markets in East Europe have grown, in particular in Romania and Hungary: it was the beginning of the following big opening in Russia, where, still today, *Baxi's* brand is the market leader. *Baxi International* was then born, wanted by Salvatore Basile, Managing Director at the time. The winning strategy? The quality of the Made in Italy and the courage to make a move also before every single move was planned".



end, without imposing solutions. *Baxi* said to the partners: "make us understand, we will do the right product for you, help us serve you to the best of our abilities". Americans were captivated by this way of doing as they were not accustomed to the idea of "service to the market" starting from production.

More recently, the company has acquired always more consolidated positions in new markets, difficult to serve, at least in the initial phase. In the last 8 years, the company had to explore a series of markets both in virtue of opportunities that presented themselves and in virtue of a total group reorganization. In 2006 in





Bassano were produced over 500 thousand boilers, 50% of which was intended for the British and Turkish subsidiaries. These two markets, in the last years, have gradually contracted: today the company produces 450 thousand boilers, considering that in five years, the quantities required for this markers have decreased. Despite the crisis, and thanks to an intense analysis and exploration's activity on the emerging markets, the backlash was reabsorbed and a capillary presence has been developed in over fifty markets.

The importance of the orientation context, the ability of listening to the market needs with the intent of orchestrating design and production processes able to produce suitable answers, has been of fundamental importance for the landing on the Russian and Chinese markets. Every country has its set of difficulties. First of all, one needs to identify and understand them, also because often the information are fragmentary and from different sources. Once the needs, the obligations and the criticality of the markets have been understood, it is of essential importance to connect the whole with the design and production, to incorporate all of these information in the

#### The production processes innovation

As Luigi Bianchin (with company since 1986) remembers in his testimony, the reaching of prefixed objectives in the domestic market and especially international ones was obtained through great changes, actualized also in productive processes, applying innovative concepts as the "Lean Production" method, which is based on a series of actions and principles aimed at reducing waste up to its elimination (*Zero Defect*). It is not just about cutting excessive costs and operations at not-added value, but to totally rethink the company and guarantee the maximum production flexibility, having as focus the attention to the client.

Another concept introduced and applied in the plant is the "ergonomic" one. The ergonomic approach has as objective the work simplification, protecting the employees' safety and health. To this end, work stations have been revisited, technical precautions have been created to reduce the difficulty of some types of production, accessory elements have been realized to lift weights and, thanks also to the *R&D dpt.*, the *Production dpt.*, many other departments and the employees themselves, the utilization of some elements rather than others has been studied so as to make the product's assembly easier.



*Great celebration in 2006, on the occasion of the 500 thousandth boiler produced by the plant in Via Trozzetti (29.11.2006).*

product, from its very first development. Afterward, every project deviation can become a problem for the production. To speed up the process and to make it as fluid as possible, *Baxi's* design includes the production department from the very beginning. This integration allows to be fast and to put your own abilities at the service of new clients. For example, when the company arrived in China, it learned a lot, also in relation to the commercial structure of the Country. One of the main issues in the Chinese market was represented by the several types of gas: there were 50 types of city gas. For each sale's area, *Baxi* had to adjust its approach, giving particular attention to the type of nozzles used. The experience, matured over time, the Bassano's plant dedication to trials and tests and an in depth analysis of the destination market, allowed the company to design the right products in very short times. In Russia, on the contrary, the problem comes from the very low temperatures. In homes, with functioning boilers, the external chamber can freeze in extreme weather situations. The company had to work on boilers that were able to operate at temperatures even close to minus 40 degrees. In particular, a problematic component was substituted utilizing the electronics. Once an innovative solution was found, the company had to face the issue of the new solution's certification, convincing the certifying entity that the introduction of electronics would not impact the safety of the boiler. To execute the tests on site would have been excessively expensive: for this reason the company developed an internal testing center that, today, has its own certification, which ensures that tests executed in Bassano can be approved by several international certification entities.

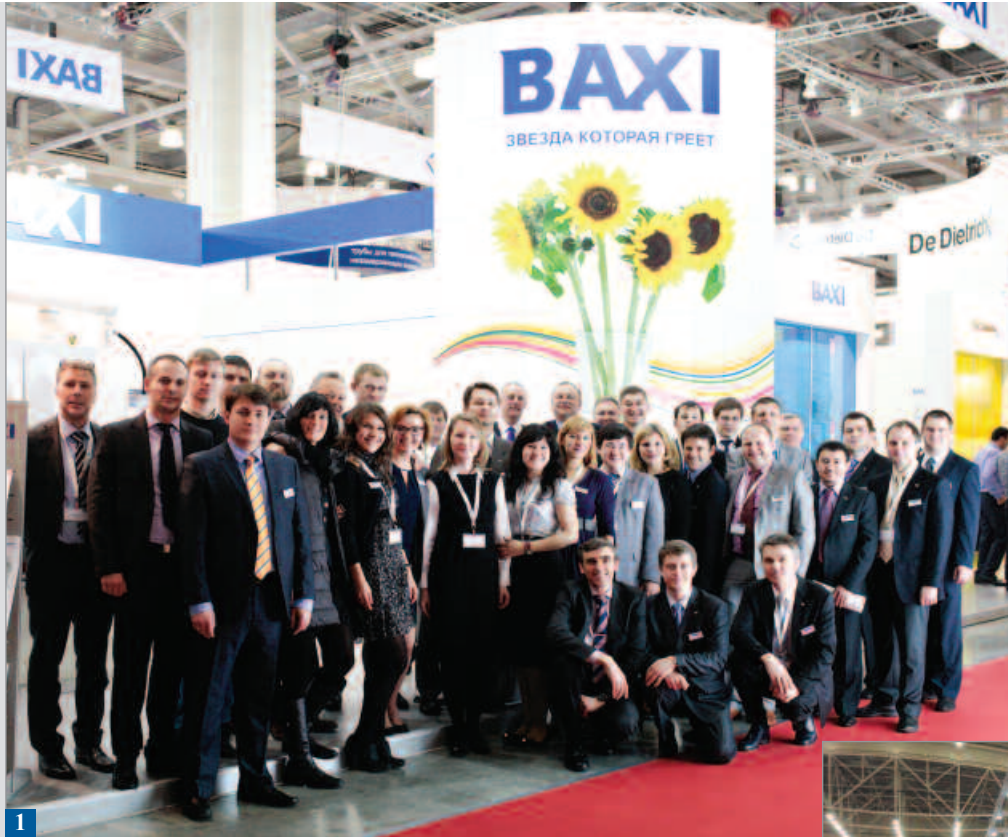
On one hand, then, the opening to international markets, provides the company living matter to initiate

#### **The commercial prospects in Asia and Russia**

As Paolo Pesavento remembers in his testimony, the commercial prospect in Asia, where the Bassano's company already sold bathtubs and electric water heaters, was in those years, interesting: "I found an importer in Beijing and we started to export our wall hung boilers to China at the end of 1998!" In this statement one understands the great satisfaction in achieving the first sales in a market that had no certainties due to the difficulty in comparing and understanding each other, in presenting services offered in addition to products. It was the China of the great Boom. Hong Kong was still British.

Giovanni Pilichi instead recounts how the leadership in Russia was achieved. In the first years of penetration in the Russian market, the wall hung boiler was not known and standardized as a product in the country. There did not exist defined regulations for the use and installation of such innovative products, both on a regional and national level: "To be able to sell and install boilers, we had to implement a remarkable promotional work by the local and national government authorities, until we reached together the reference rules for the regulation of a safe installation".

innovations that become a fast reality thanks to the ability of reading context information and frame all elements able to influence the product functionality. The company internationalization, in other words, has been a key engine for powering that particular innovative culture, based on the re-combination of solutions and information agility that distinguishes *Baxi*. On the other hand, to establish a long lasting presence on these markets, requires strong focus to the service and product dimensions. As Favero efficiently synthesizes: "The presence in fifty markets is not born by chance or luck. Imagine twenty years ago, when one began to think at what the markets could be, categorizing them by climatic areas. We went on site, trying to understand who could represent *Baxi*, we looked for the first contact, the first trade shows. Today, I don't keep count anymore of the trade shows we participate to, but at that time it was crucial. After the trade shows, what happens? There are a myriad of tune-ups, recog-



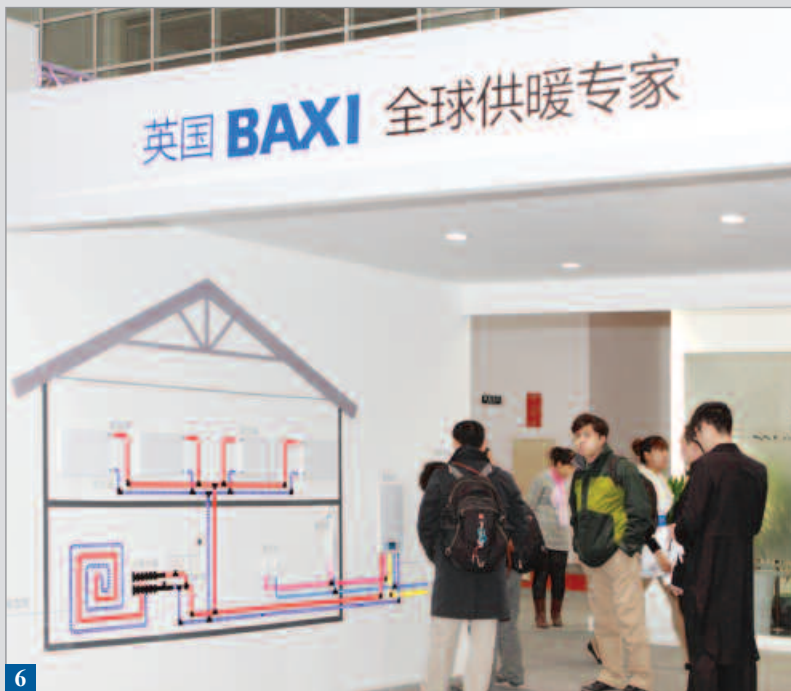
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5

*Different types of Baxi's presence in the whole world.*

- 1) Baxi's booth at the trade show Aqua-Therm in Moscow in 2013 with the entire staff of the Moscow's office.
- 2) Baxi brand advertised in large format at a client in Russia.
- 3) The Bridge Campaign realized in the Czech Republic starting in 2000.
- 4) Baxi's booth at the trade show Aqua-Therm Kiev in 2010.
- 5) One of Baxi's point of sales present in Russia.
- 6) Baxi presence also in China, at the Beijing trade show (2014).

nized, linked, smoothened with production, with phone calls, with service, the technical assistance. The entire *Baxi* chain, very well organized, has been able to open all these markets, and will continue to do so, thanks to the service, without prejudice that the product is a fundamental part. The attention to the service part, is clearly visible in the investment we have made in the building dedicated to installers and partners' training here in Bassano”.

### ***Baxi* culture and identity: the glue**

As a result of different passages of property, the company has always been a melting pot of “ethnic groups”: the *Zanussi* team, the old workers of the former “*Smalterie*”, the employees of *Zanussi* of Rovigo and the new hires. In the years between the acquisition by *Zanussi* and those of the leadership by *Ocean*, the company's management has always put considerable efforts to integrate them under the banner of a share and legitimized culture. It was not an easy task. For example, the *Zanussi's* team were greeted initially with a certain degree of mistrust. However, during time, the integration of the different souls (*Zanussi* and employees of former “*Smalterie*”) and to develop for the Bassano's plant, a common identity and culture that are still present today.

The obstinacy, which I allowed myself to say in the beginning, is the distinctive trait of *Baxi* that jumps to the eye of an external observer. It is an obstinacy anything but senseless: it is strongly rooted in a culture and identity which permeates the company and that is learned and internalized by anyone who comes into the company. It is an awareness of the strength's points arising from the long history of the business and by the sedimentation and combination of the different knowledge,

### **The importance of relations**

Bruno Zanon's words (with the company for forty-three years, since 1958) are a convincing testimony of how relations amongst people, whether they are occupied or employed in different roles, if they have as objective the common good, can build important results for the well-being, not just economic, of the people.

In his memory, Bruno Zanon highlights the importance of relations and fertile exchanges amongst various realities, the work and production improvement also through the introduction of the “ideas box”, a tool used to facilitate the communication between employees and management. An opportunity that allowed the important enhancement in the work posts, but especially to improve the products' quality, with important economic benefits for those who cultivated the ideas, obtaining projects and results.



each taken from the different people that have characterized the life of this plant: the savoir faire and the manufacturing excellence of “*Smalterie*”, the managerial culture of *Zanussi*, the energy of *Ocean*, the rigor and precision, the international orientation of *Baxi* and *BDR Thermea*. To be aware of your own identity, to have a strong consciousness of your competencies and values, is what allows an organization the approaching of the new - whether it is a product or a market - giving a sense, a readability and a particular inflection.

The group of managers I interviewed underlined several times how this very strong culture has been the catalyst of *Baxi's* potential and what has allowed the continuity, despite adverse times, market uncertainty and abrupt changes of the global economic scenario. Anecdotes, as it often happens, help to understand in depth the essence of things. One anecdote impressed me in a particular way as it transmits the ability of the management team of collaborating on innovative projects

to give a specific “identity” to their products and projects, convincing even the skeptics. I am referring in particular to the presentation of the *Luna* project to Luigi Nocivelli.

To the proposal of the designing team to call the boiler that name, in 1994, Nocivelli flared up. He was by vocation a technician and the name *Luna* had no technical connotation. The design team, however, was coherent in supporting the name. They adopted a strategy of effective presentation to persuade Nocivelli: they explained the reason for this name and they reported to Nocivelli that there already had been a non-technical name’s success in the appliance sector with *Margherita* (Daisy) by Merloni. They told him that a study was conducted and that the name’s choice deliberately wanted to exploit “the synesthesia, that sensory effect that makes you bring an object to a positive image”. Nocivelli did not have the courage to reject the idea and, at the end, he embraced the proposal. The name was a success: a success for the design team, but especially for the company. In fact, when the company changed emblem to become *Baxi*, it did not encounter rebranding issues: the product, *Luna*, was recognize and recognizable much more than *Baxi*, and it was not necessary to spend significant resources in

#### **The new *Baxi* management**

As Maurizio Tagliapietra remembers, the new and young management takes *Baxi*’s helm in Bassano confirming its consistency and productive ability, opening it to new markets, guaranteeing a broader prospective. It is the winning philosophy that expresses itself in the ability of courageously innovate and, at the same time, if situations require it, tighten the belt. To be a company with a diffused management, brings certainly some challenges, but it can become a resource, it can allow a more rapid innovation when the “executive committee” that directs it demonstrate the ability to fully utilize the youth that characterize it.

#### **Luna: a great shared project**

As it can be deduced by the words of Matteo Chenet (with the company since 1990), the *Luna* project determined a very significant involvement from all parts of the company: for the project/product fine tuning there was a sharing amongst technicians, laboratory and production. The development of this new product determined a relationships strengthening inside the company. Chenet remembers: “It was in that moment that the driving force of thinking, building roles and investing in following generations expressed itself”.

advertising and communication. *Baxi* culture, then and now, is the glue which makes sure that the management has responsibilities in its specific area, but that it is also competent and able to advise the co-workers in other areas. For example, the company was able to absorb with any shock, the introduction of the *Samet* stove tops in their production. In the course of the years, the different functions and people of the company have collaborated and integrated their competencies. If the particular vicissitudes experienced in the 1970s and 1980s have perhaps facilitated the building of a culture and of an identity strong and shared, it is interesting to understand how these are transmitted and communicated to the new recruits. Careers at *Baxi* unravel along mainly internal lines: the new generation of executives and managers was placed side by side to the previous one. From it, it has learned not

#### ***Baxi*’s human potential**

In the testimony of Silvia Bordignon (with the company since 1995) comes to light that the daily challenge for a company like *Baxi*, is that of conciliate the business demands and the variability of the markets’ request with the productive needs and the employees’ welfare with the perspective of appreciating the individual through the motivation and creation of a company’s atmosphere of well-being that “engages” all employees. Constantly motivate individuals to innovate themselves, to convince themselves of their own capacity and potentials, is of fundamental importance as only with a staff motivated and involved in the growth and change processes, it is possible to obtain an efficient organization.

Next page: *Baxi presence in the world.*

### **The most “precious” capital**

In Giovanni Baron’s testimony (with the company since 1991), Fiom Cgil Union representative, it is underlined which one is the most precious “capital” in a company, that is the men and women that enrich and animate every day, with their work, with their strength and the ideas courage, with intelligent hands, with the character and determination that are theirs, with the limitations and the values they bring.

only the techniques and the operating modalities, but the “Baxi’s method” of doing things, the specific observation lens that needs to be utilized to tackle the daily managerial choices, from the most critical and important ones to those seemingly less relevant. According to the managers I interviewed, the luck of the team that led the company from the *Zanussi’s* years to 2010 was that of starting together as young people. For this, one of the responsibilities more felt in the company is that of properly form, also making them responsible, the new recruits.

The human resources are selected, in the first place, on the basis of character and predisposition. They are helped and, as they learn, they receive higher delegation levels and more autonomy. The company tries to select individuals that have a genuine desire to learn, giving them the assurance that they will grow in responsibilities and perspectives. Neo-graduates are preferred, because the company intends to actively contribute to their training and it aims at forming the new recruits in the culture of the company.

### **Conclusions**

The re-reading of the last thirty years of *Baxi* and its many transformations is far from simple. The company has apparently changed skin on a variety of occasions and has experienced a series of ownership’s changes that intuitively could have undermined its continuity. In

### **Toward the future**

Alberto Favero (with the company since 1995) reminds us of the future company’s challenges.

“To sail toward the future, one needs to make the dynamics his own and be ready to set out and face also turbulent waters, if necessary. In 2015, beyond being our foundation anniversary, it will also be the year in which the European legislation has imposed that new energy efficiency criteria must be adopted for products introduced in the market. They are important challenges that will bring turmoil in our sector with repercussions to the strategic profile of the company: it is necessary to interpret, grasp the trends but also to take risks. The world of heating from where we come will tend to merge toward the one of cold where, now from some time, we have taken our first steps and seized the challenges. Agility, linked to flexibility, to the ability and willingness of comparing yourself becomes always more essential. The change of gear goes through, more and more, the demolition of paradigms even inside our companies”.

reality, the attentive analysis of the most recent company’s history, efficiently testifies how all the actors that have been at the helm of the company, have been attracted to Bassano for the potential that today is *Baxi SpA*. With the Nocivelli’s arrival in Bassano and the subsequent revival culminated with *Baxi*, the strength points accumulated in the previous sixty years integrated with the grafting of new skills have given life to a company’s culture which has been able to express efficient strategies. A resilient identity and culture and a clear awareness of its own means and its own abilities that have enabled the company to look to the future to new products and new markets, giving value to a soul that seems to be enclosed inside the walls of the Bassano’s plant. The attention to the market and its needs, the rapidity and agility in responding to these needs with new products, the collaboration with suppliers and partners, the ability of combining product and service, constitute an expertise that allows to look with confidence and ambition to the future.







## Polyphonic memories

*The company is told through the protagonists' testimonies*

An idea of Europe, built in the factory, yesterday at *Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta*, today at *Baxi SpA*, in a city, Bassano, that has matured unique experiences of relations, a natural international vocation. Maybe because of its location in the North East, a territory favourably swept by a wind of innovation, at the mouth of a valley that leads the eye beyond the natural boundaries, maybe because of the environmental fabric, the humus that generates desire for enterprise, the fact remains that in this perspective, protected by the massif of Grappa, the historical company of via Trozzetti, being 90-year old, is strongly launched towards its first century of life. A bastion for the occupation. A forge of ideas for the design. A history made of many individual and collective stories, at times even tormented ones, that have shaped entire generations and that was and is unequivocally a reference point.

A history capable of collecting life adventures, original and unique, as it is described by the protagonists of yesterday and of today, beyond the economic value that man's work induces and produces, beyond the sacrifices that whoever enters the company's gates manages



to do for himself and others, for the “project” that intelligent hands and fervent minds have been able to cultivate and nurture, transforming them into useful and precious products for mankind.

Thousands and thousands of people, in ninety years have lived most part of their days within the walls of the factory, the eyes of entire families have been on this source of work and support, entire generations have listened, as if it was the beating of their hearts, the rhythm of the production's chains, have felt legitimized the dignity of their performance, interpreting with courage and consistency their role, in the different tasks or occupations, living and breathing the air of “Smalterie” first, and of the various names then, after the great crisis of the 1970s, up to the current *Baxi*.

Listening to them, the men and women of this company, we find a widespread sense of pride, of belonging, of strong dedication, of tranquil belief that the factory is very intimately a big part of them. We retrace these feelings, these attitudes, listening to the protagonists, having them talking directly, hearing those remembering facts, episodes, anecdotes, feelings, impressions,

*The cliché made of zinc, perforated in the center to insert a set of movable characters, utilized for the stamp of an advertisement of Saeculum's dishware.*

with the vibrant and emotional participation that the dispelling of the memory's haze allows.

It took just one meeting with today and yesterday's protagonists to hear bouncing dates and memories, to recover the joy of reviewing and rethinking of faces and intelligent hands that, in the course of time, have generously given vital energies in and for "their" factory, never getting disappointed. It was the deep sign of an attachment to an idea, even before an attachment to a brand, in the true and deep meaning of work, condition of dignity and life, in the evolution of times, of ways and methods, with the awareness that the worker has the strength and talent of using the material, the materials to improve, in that search for equilibrium and harmony that motivates everyone's life.

Also, in those who had and have matured experiences derived from a longer presence in the factory, there is the recurring indication of how the company, in the last fifteen/twenty years, has marked its most decisive transformation. Men and means have made it a leader in international markets, up-to-date and open to the most advanced needs, able to go, without hesitation where the demand and the new needs required its presence. Times and methods, resources and character of its work force, of every order and degree, have determined and continue to offer, the success of this factory placed and inserted with full rights, in a Bassano's tradition of excellence. The personal events of managers, workers and employees intersect meetings and reality, lived with the awareness that to share a position, yesterday at "Smalterie" and today at *Baxi*, is a great experience and a definite adventure.

The results achieved, in the dynamism and excitement of the succeeding economic seasons, are another vital component of this emblematic history.

A kaleidoscope of events, names, work-life episodes and more, able of forging a community, appear in all their facets, to the eyes and minds of those who seek the signs of an evolution, to those who want to understand the purpose of a factory's history.

All those who have occupied and occupy a role, a position, from the warehouses to technical centers, to administration and human resources, to "assembly lines", become the components of a mixture that represents man's Wisdom, the celebration of human work, the transformation of a large dignity's project. Technique and economy become complementary factors, even in their essentiality, streams of intelligence, never the end of the common activity.

In recalling, as management did with insistence in retracing days and developments of the current *Baxi*, days and decisions, comparisons and resolutions assumed, a recalling has been constant: the individual's responsibility and the sharing of choices. Winning strategy, given the results. A sign that, while projecting the development in all possible directions, to follow the cardinal points of humanity has been of fundamental importance. Even when "drawers were opened", in several passages of ownership over the decades, great values in human relations have been recovered, in the desire of renewing the products, never neglecting the acquired experiences. An invaluable continuity.

Could the new company be called other than "Baxi", since its systems originated always from the "Fundus Baxianum"?

Intelligence, foresight, courage, passion, are other words valued, experienced, chosen and developed, always safeguarding "the entity" of Bassano del Grappa.

When executives speak of a past, base, pillar, to generate future, they recount, even today, that one must focus on

productivity, which includes the agility, efficiency and service to the market, innovation that goes from the realization of a product to the management of a system, to quality (“whatever we do in the near future, the important thing is how it will be done” has become the common thought).

Another fundamental feature, in the passing of time, has been the ability of this company to pass the baton, in different roles too, but with the same awareness, from fathers to sons, from mothers to daughters, amongst family members, with a spirit that has never been of a natural succession but always of commitment to growth.

Many collected interviews confirm this concept. A couple, amongst many others, in the narratives of Giovanni Tessarolo and his son Alain or in that of brothers Eset and Refki Mehmeti, originally from Kosovo, speaking of desires and aspirations, of welcome and availability, of a tolerant climate, of generous and strong sharing. Almost parallel stories in essence, lived in days and situations definitely different.

Giovanni Tessarolo becomes part of the factory in 1969, soon after the “hot autumn”, he remembers. He will experience the closing of “Smalterie”, but he will be amongst the first ones to return after the company’s gates reopening and he will mature, until December 1996, great experiences and responsibilities in sectors that spanned from production lines to testing and quality control of the manufactured boilers.

In 1990, his first real job, his son Alain becomes part of the company, when he was just 18-year old. The company was growing and manpower was needed.

Alain starts from zero. Hard days. The “old teachers” are strict, demanding, they ask and obtain, willingness and humility. A real apprenticeship school. “To have the job explained”, Alain Tessarolo remembers,

“was essential”. And, when a job was learned, the transferring elsewhere came, another hard road, uphill, to be travelled. So, he worked in production for years, next to legendary figures like “Teo” and the “Kid, come here!”, which frequently was heard. There was the relief at lunch time, where there was something different to learn, because it was shared with his fathers and other co-workers. A happy “migration of communication, knowledge and competencies”. During those times, 180 boilers per year were produced. We have come a long way since then, when we reached a production of 500,000 boilers! Alain’s path in the company has been intense: from the production lines to the spare parts warehouse, to testing, then to what is today called “service department”. Now in marketing, he is living his “silver wedding anniversary” with the company. The dialogue with the father continues even today. The curiosity of knowing the new “adventures” of the company is widespread amongst retired employees. Life at “Baxi” has changed in the years. Then you had to reduce the production errors to a minimum, today the waste margin is almost non-existent. The jump in quality has been enormous. The technological evolution has helped, the invested resources massive.

Of these working conditions, improved in the years, the two brothers from Kosovo speak as well. Arrived here at different times, Eset Mehmeti as clandestine more than twenty years ago, Refki Mehmeti recently. Eset remembers the human solidarity of the Bassano’s people: it was in 1994 and many helped him inside and outside the factory. “I was a foreigner - he says - but they offered me their friendship. The hiring had given him tranquility and regular pay. Priceless qualities that he remembers



*Above, from left: the enamelling department in the 1930s.*

*The economic gas kitchens' assembly at the beginning of the 1940s.*



defending with other fellow countrymen he met periodically. He does not forget that one million two hundred thousand lira he brought home the first time: a sign of dignity. He tells of his experiences in the factory, the work in the “B Division”, of the production line co-workers, of his experience as technical operator, of how he saw the company growing and changing, of the hiring of his brother in 2000. He speaks of a “Baxi mentality”, shared and appreciated also by Refki and other dozens of foreign workers, many non-European, who in their new adopting land were able to find that stability that offers horizons of tranquility for themselves and their families.

The following interview is really unique: we had the opportunity of getting to know and re-live the moments

of the first “Smalterie” through the narratives of Pietro Piotto, born in 1919 (“But I was born on the last day of the year, the 31<sup>st</sup> of December”, he likes to highlight). He transmitted us, with freshness and enthusiasm, how the working experience was lived at “Smalterie”, the sacrifices, the commitment and passion: literally a flooding river of memories, testimonies and anecdotes. He joined “Smalterie” at the end of summer in 1938, after a training course at the “Scuola di Arti e Mestieri” (School of Arts and Trades) in Via Piave, on suggestion and presentation of the then Director Costa, that had given him a... recommendation: “You need to work, to bring home a contribution, accept any employment they offer you. I will present you to the executives of Smalterie”. And so it came to pass, the call, the employ-



ment as “fumista” (oven operator), eight hours of work, eight hours off, then eight more, to achieve the forty weekly hours in few days and have more time for other occupations. This was the spirit with which people handled work. Additionally, to complete the schedule, there was the possibility of “filing the tips”, of adding experience, of doing useful works to facilitate the production. “Smalterie” was “secure pay and indoor job!” An ambitious goal, a security. A few more months and the military service would have come, then the war, dramatic years arrived, amongst the Alpini (Italian Alpine Soldiers). The frontline of Montenegro, the one in France, the imprisonment, two endless years of confinement in Kassel, Germany, until the Liberation by the Americans. The fortunate return home on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1945 (at home, on

the table, an empty plate, reassembled on the pieces, kept together by three “grappe”), the bitter surprise: to the fathers of the young employees of “Smalterie” who had left as soldiers, that did not have a stable job, employment in the factory was guaranteed. But this did not happen for the Pietro Piotto’s father and he says “to think that my father had worked at “Smalterie” twenty years earlier”. He remembers, in fact, when as an adolescent he and his brother, from Santa Croce, where his family lived, would bring lunch every day for his father, in a terra-cotta bowl, during noon break, and they would eat it together, sitting, when they could, on the edge of the nearby railway road, in front of the “Magazzino Petroli” (Petroli’s Warehouse), near the quarry from which the gravel necessary for the enamelling work was extracted. Still tormented memories

*The large foundry of  
“Smalterie” between  
1940 and 1950.*



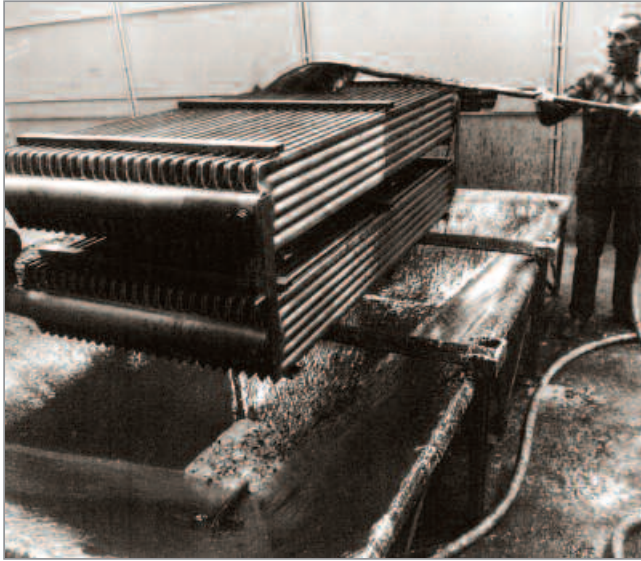
*The evolution of the company's technical Office: from the two draughts men of 1950 to the organized structure of the following decade.*

when, around September/October 1945, Pietro tries to get back in the company, where “many, wearing a different shirt” had found their job reconfirmed, even if “Smalterie” then, did not have either orders or raw materials to work anymore. The tough negotiations, conducted also on behalf of the hundreds of confined and veterans, who had come back from the frontline, to contend for an employment place in the company, up to mobilize even the Carabinieri (Italian Police), managing a meeting between the city administration and the company’s executives and negotiating the “shares” even with the partigiani (partisans), managed to have a first portion hired, about seventy workers. With the re-hiring that finally arrives for him too, comes a position in the workshop, in “Department 49”, controlling clocks, timers and time clocks, which needed to be constantly adjusted, the training courses (at Boselli in Milan, for which he self-financed himself) to maintain constant the updating of many precision equipment. Piotto does not forget the uneasy relations with the direct superiors, his commit-

ment in the social, in the association sector. Another thirty years in the company of Via Trozzetti, living all the vicissitudes of “Smalterie” during the Boom years, until the end of his experience in the company. The last time card, signed at 12 a.m. on June 30<sup>th</sup> 1975: “Exactly at that time because I had to guarantee that the time clocks’ tape was turned over!”. And exactly these precision instruments would have been his adventure’s companions, even at the time of retirement, in the starting of a new activity that has seen him handle new relations with even more than eight hundred different businesses. Another experience born and matured at “Smalterie” and then transferred to the benefit of the Bassano’s territory.

Silvio Pianaro arrived at “Smalterie” in 1967 and remained until 2001, after some working experiences that brought him also to Switzerland. His testimony speaks of a hiring proposal in the technical office of “Smalterie” that takes him back to Bassano and opens for him a good life and work perspectives, leaving him





time to cultivate his great passion for soccer, a passion that he continues to practice and nurture (he remains amongst the promoters of competitive, amateur and company's tournaments, with challenges between departments, intercompany in the city and in the Bassano's territory). He soon becomes responsible for the "workshop", the pulsing heart of the company, in close connection with the "mind", the technical and design office. Always available, including Saturday and Sunday, to avoid the interruption of the production cycle. Pianaro speaks with enthusiasm about his co-workers, generous and trusted men, "masters" of work, like Bepi Bonotto, "his" trainer, in soccer too, and Luigi Pallaro. The "workshop" was the school of life as "Smalterie" was the "factory" which gave time to all people who wanted it, to grow, to be valued, knowledgeable, to become that "human resource" which allows the person to love the job, to stay connected with colleagues. Pianaro remembers: "Time was given to "calibrate" desires and preparation, to allow the



employment at its best, to be placed in the right position and find exactly the proper appreciation".

Let us now take a look at what emerges from the Union side. Eloquent and significant are the memories of Bruno Zanon, trade unionist for Fim Cisl, who became part of the company in 1958 (and will remain for 43 years) in the workshop. "Smalterie" were, naturally, his "home": both father and mother were employed in the company, the factory just a few steps from his home (at least until his wedding), he has literally "breathed" the company's air of Via Trozzetti. Zanon repeatedly underlines the "values" of "Smalterie", the great sense of belonging, the pride of being employed by this company, the great friendship, the strong sense of solidarity and the desire to live together (even after work in the four osterie - taverns - and locande - inns - of the area, playing cards, bocce and dancing), which has generated a bond amongst all the workers, regardless of the ideologies, colors and political beliefs.

*From left to right: the painting of the radiators for transformers (1950s-1960s). The enamelling of bathtubs in 1960.*

Thanks also to the strong unionization of the workers at *Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta*, many important conquests have been achieved - like the half hour lunch break - ten years before Fiat. Bruno Zanon is one of the historical memories of the company, of which he lived the Boom and the crisis years, the recovery and launching, always as a protagonist and interpreter of his co-workers needs. And it was during the recovery time, he remembers, that in reorganizing the personal employees' lockers he made a discovery that still touches him. He finds amongst the personal effects left in a corner, a "holy picture" of his father, right amongst the papers of a fellow worker that he believed was an opponent for the different political ideas: they were divided by ideologies, united by a great mutual respect conquered at work, and a strong friendship. It is all a flow of names, memories, vibrant encounters and clashes with the new and different corporate staff, with the sole objective of giving back to the company and its employees, strength and dignity. What Zanon recounted remains a convincing testimony of how relations amongst men, occupied or employed in different roles, if they have as objective the common good, they are able to build important results for the well-being, not just economic, of people. Another fascinating story, personal and collective, is found in the words of Pietro Ennati, who came into *Smalteria Metallurgica Veneta* in 1964 as an electrician and remained with the company until the beginning of 1995.

His passion and responsibility for the Union (he was an activist with determination and commitment in Fim Cisl) involved him right away, so, once gained the deserved trust, he became the co-workers representative already in 1966. In his memories there are many company and Union battles, a constant commitment to

indicate needs, to claim rights, to compare himself for the enhancement of human resources.

It is important for Ennati to emphasize the classification with which the employees were considered by the various leaderships, who worked on the production line and was responsible for the production demands and who had different tasks, but also the shared commitment to keep all employees united, to avoid people losing their job and guarantee a respectable present and a dignified future for all workers.

One of the executive group's voices is that of Maurizio Tagliapietra, Master Degree in Economics at Ca' Foscari, member of the Board of Directors of *Baxi SpA*, who came to the company in 1988 as Management Control System Supervisor, after experiences in the Marzotto Group. He immediately committed himself to give a substantial contribution to the company's computerization. "In six months, he remembers, we put the system back in order and drafted the income statement. It was sufficient to have the first personal computers come into the company, with the appropriate software package and the relations' system changed".

Today, Tagliapietra is the Finance Director at *Baxi*.

1998 was the first year in which the new company was able to put the accounts back in order and to close with a positive balance, generating the first gain. Over time, starting from 1995, what had been only the "Heat Division" conquered its autonomous budget in the group. Of fundamental importance was the year 1999, with the acquisition by the Anglo-Saxon group *Baxi*. They are years of transformation, of the overcoming of difficult times for the company, of redevelopment, in a new dimension that brings us, in 2009, to a new structure. In the last years of the last decade, with Salvatore Basile,

G. Mario Taglia and Tonino Vettori leaving, new competencies formed and were growing, which, as Basile wrote exiting his role on February 19<sup>th</sup> 2009, did “fight with generosity and determination for the well-being of the company”. The experience of the *Baxi* reality is even more enriching because it is a diffused management company, which allows for a more rapid innovation when the group of executives that leads it, demonstrates the ability of fully exploiting the youth that distinguishes it.

Giovanni Pilichi, after a Degree in Business Economics, joined *Baxi* in 1996 as Export Area Manager. After other work experiences, he re-enters the company as Export Sales Director and currently holds the position of MD International - *BDR Thermea*. In his testimony, he describes what were the drivers that determined the internationalization of *Baxi* and the development of the Export area, such as speed in entering emerging markets due to the gasification development; the trade policy based on long term partnership research, which has brought to the acquisition of many partners (Turkey, Czech Republic, Joint Venture with

Argentina); the ability of being a flexible company, fast and reactive and the belonging to a multinational Group. Belonging to this Group, has allowed access to the necessary major investments to maintain the competitive established leadership and in particular the access to industrial product platforms and to strong investments in innovation, research and development, which have been key success factors also in foreign markets, allowing to always propose cutting-edge heating solutions, preserving profitability. “We can definitely affirm that the *Baxi* brand has become a leader in the international scene, especially thanks to the Bassano’s company system which is strongly internationalized, true strong competitive point, recognized both by *Baxi Group* and *BDR Thermea*, that have made it the strategic base for the international activity of the entire group”, remembers Pilichi in his testimony.

“Also - Pilichi continues - one of the markets that has provided the greatest satisfaction to *Baxi* in recent years, is Russia, where we have not only conquered a significant share in the market of wall hung boilers (today *Baxi* is the market leader) but also to have con-



*Baxi's advertisement in Russia in 2007 and 2008: from wall posters to dynamic advertisement on public transportation.*



*Baxi has consolidated his leader position in the Russian market: the Baxi's banners increase in the territory.*

tributed in a substantial way to the creation of the market and of the demand, by interacting with the government authorities to define regulations that, at the time, did not even exist.

Another management's voice is that of Matteo Chenet, Mechanic Engineer and Italy Sales Director. He expresses all its satisfaction in dealing with this market. Entered in the company in 1990 to prepare a graduation thesis relative to the study of a plates' production line programming, he soon understands to have a commercial soul. The company offers him a technical and commercial responsibility. "It was a downright company investment - he admits - to aim at the service to the customer. Our assistance and technical support to the commercial direction, brought immediate results, from the pre-sale to post-sale. Today we focus more and more on having our

customers getting to know our reality, bringing them to our company. The people who had the opportunity of visiting our plant, are surprised when they walk around the different departments. Here they find the strength of a large plant, equipped with great added value".

"It is to the park installed 10-15 years ago (approaching its replacement) that we focus our attention to, to that segment that has chosen to rely on our product with the guarantee of its own comfort and that wants to find it again in a new *Baxi* product. Another development opportunity is the high output market, that of large commercial and industrial installations, relatively new for us as we entered it six years ago". "This is the DNA of our company: innovation, technological evolution, ability to seize all opportunities coming from the market. We have been talking about "hybrid systems", in close collaboration with marketing, for over five years (and today we are followed in this by all our competitors), we are well prepared for the battle in the market, we are ready for new challenges. We have another excellence at *Baxi* - concludes Chenet - which consists of the people, from the management team to the workers, an extraordinary resource, that makes the difference".

The vision of *Baxi*, collected from some of the historic customers of the Bassano's company appears interesting. Elio Bastoni, owner of the *Sogecom Agency*, dealer for the Emilia Romagna and Marche regions, worked first as an agent for *Zanussi*, then for *Ocean*, developing the heating markets, endorsing more and more the Italian brands. The refinement of the offered products allowed the overtaking of the French and German offers, overcoming them in the price/quality ratio, offering products with a price of great balance. Surely, one of best cards, the winning one, is the maintenance simplicity



and having being able to contain costs and inconveniences for the installer and the final user as well.

“We had feared - Bastoni says - the passage from *Ocean* to *Baxi*. We were confronted by more structure and greater statue. It was challenging to have the new brand known and recognized, but the product facilitated the task. The future now engages us in other challenges, energy upgrading, updating the obsolete products, compatibility between consumption and resources. Of course the crisis is looming, we have reduced the volumes, but the products we offer are innovative, avant-garde, a guarantee, they have anticipated the times and the regulations”. If it is possible to make a wish to the *Baxi*



*The Baxi's branded hybrid system, pioneering combination in this particular segment.*

*Sogecom's award ceremony as best selling Agency in the year 1999.*

of the 2000s Elio Bastoni adds: “That it continues to give us a very high content of service products, distinguished by simplicity and ease of use, easy to read. Simply put, always the best product!”.

Tancredi Casalecchi, awarded with the “Cacciavite d’oro” (Golden Screwdriver) from *Zanussi*, where he was an appreciated technician before moving to the sales area and take on, on his own, the Agency for Milan and Lombardy, led until December 2014 his own company with about ten employees. Of the *Baxi*’s products, he appreciates their solidity, the reliability, the fact that, once produced, they have very little issues, the durability and the few spare parts necessary for their maintenance.

“Our attention must increasingly turn also to the complex systems so as not to risk to lose important dimensions or leave room to the competitors. It is necessary to communicate the brand more and more, to let the market know what the company can offer to the customer, what it does well. Not everyone knows, for example, that the heat exchanger in a *Baxi* boiler can be changed in less than a minute. This information gives value to our brand too”.

Significant is also the recounting of another executive, Luigi Bianchin, who was hired in 1986 with the first training contracts of the then *Ocean Idroclima*. Twenty eight years later he is the Manufacturing Director of the *Baxi SpA* plant. His staff includes more than 400 people, covering different areas of the productive process: the departments of operations, quality and maintenance workshop and especially, of production. “When I came to at the then *Ocean Idroclima*, I was fascinated by the opportunity of working in a company so rich in history.

Already at that time, there was a perception of innovative vision, a company with a deep organization and, for a young graduate like me, it was a strong attraction’. “My adventure started in the Time and Motion department, where I gained a strong experience in the production area thanks also to the teachings of my first manager, Danilo Gai, sadly recently passed away. His style in having his staff work, making everyone involved in the issues that we encountered every day, has allowed me to gain an enormous amount of experience. Danilo used to tell me “Learn as much as possible, keep it as a treasure and put it aside. You will see that, sooner or later, it will come useful at work or in life”. The year of the strong productive change is 2005, when the company decides to reorganize the production, based on a large production system of large batches to embrace the Lean Production method. ”They were years of radical changes: we literally turned the company around and redesigned the production lines, with the goal of reducing the non-created added value and ensure the maximum flexibility in production. In terms of costs and investments, *Baxi* had to make great efforts, but this allowed the company to remain a leader in Europe, even during an extremely difficult economic moment, like the current one, so that the projects of improvement do not stop even now, and, this year, the installation of a new production line is forecasted, the 14<sup>th</sup> one, which will give life to a new product. Lean production, ergonomics, zero defects, are projects that allowed us to understand that you cannot reach a Lean production, without defects, if this is not supported by a continuous improvement process. Above all, the improvement does not exist without the involvement of people”.



Paolo Pesavento, Degree in Business Economics at Ca' Foscari in 1995, Marketing Director until 2014, entered *Ocean* at the beginning of 1996 and for about six months is part of the staff of Sales Management Italy to promote the *Ocean* brand at events and at the distribution's points of sale. In September of the same year, he was offered an interesting opportunity, that of following the Export Department. The company was booming. "I moved to the Export Department, to follow countries with difficulties in culture and vocation (East Europe, Middle East and Far East) - remembers Pesavento. It was a significant experience. During those years I learned a lot, not only from my colleagues but also from my customers". The export team has always had this characteristic. "We were pioneers; from small occasions, with a market analysis done on site, to great opportunities. A form of commercial entrepreneurship". Bringing a Bassano's company to the global world is, after all, a challenge. The technical entrepreneurship of our area, combined with the desire for pioneering, is an Italian northeast trait. In 2004, other strategies, new challenges, other vision



on markets and important changes inside the company took place. Basile decides to put hand on the organization, with the collaboration of the Commercial Directors, he created synergies between the Export and Domestic departments. Pesavento goes from being marketing client, as commercial, to become responsible for it in first person. A transverse team is created and the synergic project is developed across multiple experiences, toward a single marketing: "I consider myself a market manager. We are, after all, sowers, soil preparers, others water it. Market researches, analysis, interviews with customers, creativity to achieve the development of an idea which becomes an operative project. The new heating technologies, condensing boilers and high power, solar energy, heating hybrid boiler-pump systems constitute our future. Technologies on which we need to invest. "To evaluate the results, I would like to mention the efforts we did and the recognition we have had in the last ten years, in knowing how to offer the *Baxi* brand in Italy and abroad in a modern way, appreciated for the product's quality and the people. Our competitors themselves recognize our innovation steps in products and services, which

*From left to right: the award ceremony of the Tancredi Casalecchi's Agency (1997).*

*Group picture at the first Baxi Expo event (Bologna, 2013).*

*The new format, designed by the company allowed the company to meet over 10,000 sector's professionals.*



*From left to right:  
the radiators assembly  
line in 1960.*

*Column radiators'  
elements (1962).*

have amazed and continue to amaze. They are, beyond obviously our customers, the neutral and unbiased judges of the quality and integrity of our work". Let us go back to the experience of a worker's representative, Giovanni Baron, hired at *Ocean* in 1991 as laborer in the plates department, in charge of the assembly work, then supervisor at the varnishing ovens, dust exsiccation and then always employed in the plates sector until the department closing in the late 1990s, when he transferred to the wall hung boilers and kits pre-assembly.

Union delegate first for the plates department, then in the RSU, in the Factory's Board from 1994, he has, still today, the role of workers' representative and is part of the province and regional board of Fiom Cgil. "In the last two most recent internal contracts - Baron remembers - we constituted the figure of the social delegate, with the task of communicating with the workers and activate an informative assistance service for who has family problems, to give life to a sort of food bank, to



start small but significant social initiatives, in collaboration with the company, always ready to support when we launch special collections. The social care has become a constant commitment, both inside and outside the factory's walls".

"In these 25 years of presence in the company - Baron says - Union relations have positively evolved. We have to deal with management, we have in front of us people who really care about the factory. We live relations that can be, at times, tense but in sharing a common design, to continue to sail the ship and keep it away from the shallow waters. I would like to say, though, that the respect between us has never decreased". "Here we live well together. Seasonal workers do not want to leave and there are even those that wait for several months to be called back". We cannot even complain about our production bonus: that of *Baxi*, in fact, has been compared to the bonuses that were achieved at Ferrari or even in Germany, where the earnings are higher than ours".





Silvia Bordignon, a woman at the head of Human Resources. She is the first female manager in the long history of this company.

A graduate in Political Science, she came to Ocean in 1995, even before presenting her thesis. When she was hired, she had in her pocket a one-way ticket to the United States, but the job offer in “her” Bassano made her change her mind and the adventure in Via Trozzetti started.

Employed immediately in the Human Resources Office, she has handled recruitment, organization and management of relations with Trade Unions, growing gradually in managerial responsibilities and competencies.

She came to Personnel Management recently and today, she leads the *Baxi* human resources formed by two-thirds of men and one third of women, with a workforce that varies between 730 and 860 employees depending on the season. The employee’s average age is 44 years with a working seniority of 15 years.

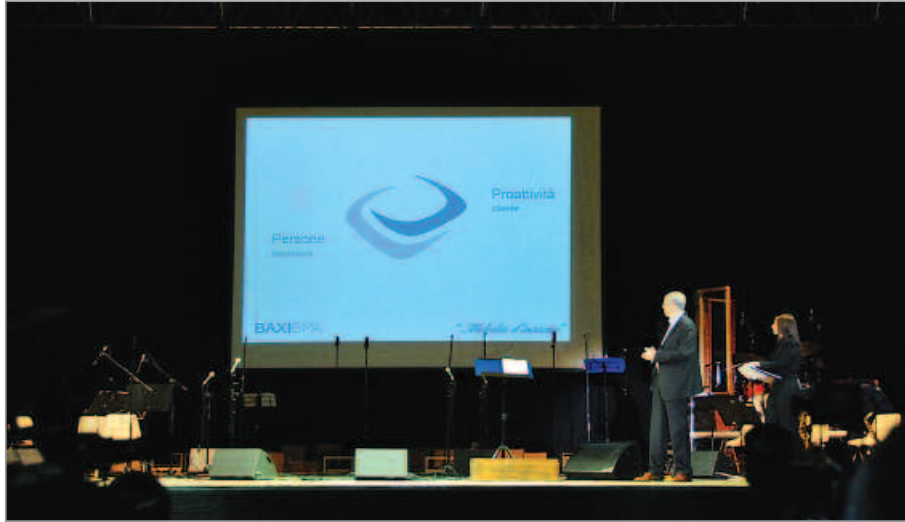
The appointing of Bordignon, has given confidence to

a female leadership definitely capable of opening new gender horizons.

“For me, today - clarifies Silvia Bordignon - the great ocean liner, as *Baxi* was called some time ago, must learn how to surf like a sail boat that passes through international waters, maneuvering with flexibility and professionalism, guided by a shrewd and harmonious crew. The cultural background and the acquired technical competency must be put to the service of the market, without asking ourselves too many questions on “what we were good at”, but rather on “what we can do to grow and improve”. To join the individual needs of hundreds and hundreds of employees with the demands of competition, flexibility and innovation is not an easy task. But having assigned the management of human resources to a woman is certainly an important signal for the *Baxi*’s family.

Finally, the opinion of the man called, after various long experiences, to coordinate and direct the large family of *Baxi* in Bassano: Alberto Favero, Vice

*Two special moments in the company: the activity “Costruisci la tua caldaia” (build your own boiler), linked to Baxi Expo Bassano (September 2014) and “Green to work day” (June 2014), initiative aimed to awake employees on eco-friendly mobility.*



Company convention  
 "Melodie d'insieme"  
 (January 2011).

President and Managing Director of *Baxi SpA*, began his journey in the Via Trozzetti's company when the brand and ownership were Ocean-Nocivelli in 1995. A graduate in Mechanical Engineering, his first appointment was as responsible for the Operations of all that world, which starting from the product concept, has to bring it available to the market. Then the responsibility of overseeing all the investments and the production organization. Production, logistics, offices and, at the beginning, purchasing. When *Ocean* become *Baxi* and joined a British financial Group, whose property were investment funds, the horizons change for Favero as well. "We were in the mid-2000 - he remembers - when they asked me to take care of an aggregation, of a Spanish company division, *Roca*, a brand that in the Iberian land came even before the Coca Cola one. I accepted and I was called to be part of an international team of integration, which had to take care of organizational aspects, logistics, of synergy. I stayed with the colleagues for a year. In 2006, I was offered to oversee the activity

of logistics, production and implementation at the group's level. An occupation that lasts until 2010, with the objective of encouraging the integration between different companies, of creating reference standards for costs, define indicators to make interpretable and comparable the different companies' performances. And, again, costs control, interchanges, study and development of the dynamics linked to the various markets". "We were an international team, prevalently British and we were a reference point for companies located in England, Germany, France, Italy and Turkey. In 2009 a further corporate evolution: the *Baxi Group* merged with the *De Dietrich* and *Remeha's* corporations, giving birth to *BDR Thermea*, ranking as the 4<sup>th</sup> European Group in the sector, with a sales volume of 1,7 billion euros and strengthening its presence in several European markets. After Vettori resigned, at the end of 2010, I came back to Bassano as Managing Director and Vice President of the *Baxi's* Board of Directors". "Certainly, the international experience - continues Favero - must be experienced. It was invaluable, I would say crucial for my vocational training. With all the concerns and reservations that it induces and produces. I remember the first concerns when I was in Spain, but it enriches you in terms of measuring, of experiences, of ideas. To put ideas in motion is crucial. It takes away as slag our encrustations, it forces you to confront with others, to appreciate stories and matured experiences, different methodologies. It is an experience to be encouraged: in our company, we insist for other people to leave the factory, even if for short periods, to face other realities, to face the comparison to return with wider visions. In England these comparisons are particularly developed. I found them

precious”. Favero recalls and emphasizes the different dynamics, the cultural and economic assessments accrued in these exchanges, which produced, sometimes, confrontations: you always need to keep them into account. Undoubtedly a useful experience, an overall vision that was helpful to understand what the demands could be, the visions, the strategies of one group, to develop individualities able to relate to a team. It is obvious that in each reality, each society tries to defend its hinterland, its local interests, also from an historical point of view.

“We must, though, learn to take into account the group’s interests, put on the scale the different needs - Favero notes. It is not a simple thing: every day you must arbitrate, encourage to look forward, but think and take decisions that must be addressed from different angles”.

How was the situation of *Baxi* in Bassano before your departure for Spain and then England, and how did you find it at your return?

“It is not possible to make direct comparisons. The macro-economic framework, the quality and frequency of trade have changed; there has been and there is a vibrant dynamic that compresses more and more the reaction times. To take pictures of the company without considering that the frames are not the same anymore, could provide a non-objective vision”.

I can say - adds the Managing Director - that here I have found an always dynamic situation, capable of great flexibility. I found a company that needed and still needs to change skin. In terms of industrial profile, it has taught and created a lot and it has been a reference point on a national level, starting from the contractual aspects where it led the way. The company is known for its industrial profile, for the product



innovation and also for the ability of knowing how to interact with great agility and synchronism under each profile, technical, productive and service: this needs to be acknowledged, thanks also to a constructive relationship with the Unions, past and present. We know how to make good, reliable products, we have creative ability. But it is not enough: we must interact more and more with the end user, continuing to synergistically work with the distribution. Ours is a rather long chain: the distributor, the installer, the end user. We should shorten the communication toward the installers and the end users as well, essential detail to have us recognized and to know the market better. Here we can and must work on, to understand as soon as possible the market trends. The need can generate trend. In a world that speeded up the demands, we have to capture with greater immediacy the needs, and for this reason we need to be able to get closer to the customer with all the instruments made available from technology.

Furthermore, we need to make sure that the interac-

*Maurizio Sacconi, Minister of Labour and Welfare visiting Baxi in 2011, welcomed by the Managing Director Alberto Favero and by the Mayor of Bassano, Stefano Cimatti.*



*The new Training Center  
Baxi L@B (2015).*

tion is adequate on the professional and relational profile, and for this we need to continually invest in the preparation involving our staff, our agents, the after-sale service centers that represent us, the installers. The new location, totally dedicated to the training, the *Training Center Baxi L@B*, recently inaugurated, is composed by eight classrooms, completely dedicated where the teaching staff, selected and adequately trained, will provide technical, legislative and administrative information to all the technicians and sector specialists coming from all over the world. We are sure that thanks to this important investment of resources and structures, and continuing on the product and service we can reach other heights both in the Italian and foreign markets. Nowadays the market is quite different than a decade ago, when it was focused mainly on contracts. With the re-organization of the new buildings, the

world of replacement has taken over. Now we are setting a change of route. It is not a simple thing. We tend sometimes to remain linked to the past, to our habits, to the markets that have given great satisfaction. The strength point is the many loyal people, extremely involved in what they do, in what they spend their time with, passionate people and aware of the many goals achieved. Surely they created history, but this awareness cannot prevent to dare, to get involved: sometimes history should be forgotten and it is necessary to find the courage to embark on new roads. People determine the success of a company, before even the investments, whether they are the worker, the employee or the executive. This is the strength of a company, of our action". Finally the bond with the territory: for Favero it can be an advantage, but not always. "With us collaborate - he says - many small and medium-size companies.

They are a reality mirror too. They own an innovation instinct, continuous research. Adaptation capacity. In our “Triveneto” (North-east of Italy) there are still many pioneers, even if time has changed for everybody and the most virtuous are those who looked beyond the borders of their territory and of their history. Together with them, I believe, we can look to the future, with the hope of being able to celebrate the 100th Anniversary that this company will soon see. I believe that in a world where work and market conditions have changed, many are the factors that come into play. We must learn to go toward the future. We are working more and more on services. All this means to change skin”.



*A room in the Training Center, equipped with avant-garde equipment.*

#### **Thanks for the testimonies of**

Giovanni Baron

*in the company from 1991, Trade Unionist Fiom Cgil*

Luigi Bianchin

*in the company since 1986, now Manufacturing Director*

Silvia Bordignon

*in the company since 1995, now Human Resources Director*

Gabriele Ceccato

*company's attorney since the end of 1980, member of Baxi Board of Directors*

Annamaria Ceccon

*in the company from 1994 to 2011,*

*General Services/Human Resources Manager*

Matteo Chenet

*in the company since 1990, now Italy Sales Director*

Pietro Ennati

*in the company from 1964 to 1995, electrician*

Alberto Favero

*in the company since 1995, now Managing Director and Vice-President of Board of Directors*

Eset Mehmeti

*in the company since 1994, department “B”, technical operator*

Refki Mehmeti

*in the company since 2000*

Vasco Nicoletti

*in the company since 1989, now Personnel Administration Manager*

Fabio Pegoraro

*in the company since 1995, now at Quality Control department*

Paolo Pesavento

*in the company from 1996 to 2014, Marketing Director*

Silvio Pianaro

*in the company from 1967 to 2001, Workshop Manager*

Giovanni Pilichi

*the company from 1996 to 1999, returned in 2004,*

*now MD International BDR Thermea*

Pietro Piotto

*in the company from 1938 to 1975, oven operator; workshop, “Department 49”*

Maurizio Tagliapietra

*in the company since 1988, now Finance Director*

Alain Tessarolo

*in the company since 1990, now Product Manager*

Giovanni Tessarolo

*in the company from 1969 to 1996, production, testing, quality control*

Bruno Zanon

*in the company from 1958 for 43 years, workshop, Trade Unionist Fim Cisl*



1925



1900. 800. 1000. AZIONI  
**SMALTERIA METALLURGICA VENETA**  
BASSANO DEL GRAPPA

1977



1984



**OCEAN**  
IDROCLIMA

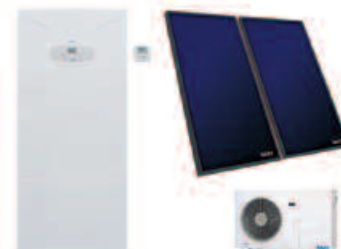
1999



**BAXI**

**BAXI GROUP**  
delivering the spark

2009



**BAXI**

**BDR THERMEA**



**BAXI**















# Contents

A journey through time, amongst many people <i>Alberto Favero</i>	p. 3
A company able to evolve and compete worldwide <i>Giuliano Poletti</i>	p. 5
The mettle that makes the difference <i>Giuseppe Zigliotto</i>	p. 7
Pride in our team <i>Riccardo Poletto</i>	p. 7
The Lion, the Eagle, the Brenta <i>Bassano in the mirror of history</i> <i>Giovanni Battista Sandonà</i>	p. 9
Work University and Business School <i>With “Smalterie” the industrial development of an entire district begins</i> <i>Andrea Minchio</i>	p. 17
The corporate evolution in the last thirty years <i>A winning growth, based on diffused management and internationalization</i> <i>Vladi Finotto</i>	p. 49
Polyphonic memories <i>The company is told through the protagonists’ testimonies</i> <i>Giandomenico Cortese</i>	p. 71



**BAXI**

**from Bassano to the world**

*1925-2015*

*Ninety years of insights and creations  
achieved by successful synergies*

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