



25

◆ YEARS OF ◆

HempAge



Photo shoot summer 2012



DEAR READERS

Let us take you on a little journey through the history of our company and hemp textiles over the last 25 and 30 years.

HempAge was founded in the year 1999.

We started selling hemp with our previous company "Colour Connection" already back in 1994 and have been doing nothing else since 1996.

Have fun and some enlightening moments while reading!

Kind regards

Robert Hertel
CEO HempAge AG

HISTORY

In 1989, my best friend and I went on an adventurous round trip by bus and hitchhiking through Mexico and the US West Coast that brought us to Guatemala quite unplanned. While we were officially advised not to travel the country, which was plagued by civil war, and we got stuck in the mountains around Lake Atitlan due to storms and landslides, we met the friendliest people on our entire trip.

We then stocked up on lots of souvenirs and gifts for family and friends from the region's artisans. Back at home, these were so well received that we regularly fantasized at the Saturday campfire with other friends about how mega-cool it would be to import the colourful lucky ribbons, hacky sacks and the like to Germany and actually sell them - the world was colourful and strong as a grenade.

A good year later, when I was unable to work for a few weeks due to an accident at work and spent most of that time at a friend's house, the business idea and Guatemala came back to our minds. So, I checked it out. Two weeks later, the three of us - our heads full of ideas - were sitting in the car looking at exhibitors from Guatemala at the fashion fair in Düsseldorf. Probably it was mainly due to the beautiful models and trade fair hostesses that we decided on our way back:

We're doing this!

The world was
colourful and
strong as
a grenade

COLOUR CONNECTION

Three friends, 6,000 Deutschmarks each in the start-up fund, an empty attic room and a self-welded, demountable market stall - that's how it started.

We used the money to buy one of the first affordable fax machines on the market, an electric typewriter, a counting board, a tarpaulin and lighting for our market stall. The rest of the money was enough for a ticket to Guatemala and 5,000 US dollars in cash - which found a safe place inside my shoes.

I must have contracted amoebae from the very first snack at the guesthouse on the day of my arrival. My travel guide, the travellers in the guesthouse and my family doctor, whom I finally called, said that nothing would help except ten days in hospital.

But my return flight was in just eleven days, and my friends were counting on me. After a chase through clouds of tear gas, fleeing demonstrators, beating police officers and armed military on 1 May 1991, I found a small "pizzeria" in a side street. The pizza served as a base for a whole jar of salsa picante, which I washed down with Johnnie Walker.

When I woke up 25 hours later, the amoebas had lost.

And the "Colour Connection" took off on its maiden flight.



It all began in Herzogenaurach in 1991

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF “FAIR”?

The first step had been taken.

Our first exporter was a ninety-year-old Jewish emigrant whom we had found through the Chamber of Commerce and who had been in the business for a long time. Our goods were well received at markets and open-air events, and we were already trying to gain a foothold in the wholesale trade.

Lucky ribbons etc. in the respective club colours were sent to all clubs of the German football league, the Bundesliga. We became a supplier to some of them. However, former professional player and now football executive Uli Hoeneß sent us a warning letter because he believed any product in the colours red and white fell under the trademark rights of the FCB.

On my second trip to our manufacturers and suppliers, I met Hugo Calderon, the son of a former plantation owner. He was studying architecture in Germany and met his wife Hannelore there when she “crossed over” on the day the Berlin Wall was built. He had made it his mission in life to improve the living conditions of the indigenous people in Guatemala. When I met Hugo, the national association of Guatemalan artisans (in fact, all non-peasant, self-employed people of



indigenous descent) had awarded him the “Heart of the Craftsman” medal, which was established especially for him.

He was the first to teach me how to help the underprivileged the RIGHT way through trade. As a result, we were able to buy more expensive goods from then on, but by handling them through Hugo and Hannelore, we were also able to ensure that the manufacturers received what they needed so that their children could attend secondary school or even university.



THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM

When my friend and business partner visited Hugo the next time, he took him on a journey down the supply chain to the cotton farmers. It was a relatively short visit, as the crop dusters spraying their toxic cargo of pesticides and herbicides over the fields from dawn to dusk quickly made them both flee.

This made it clear that social justice in trade with the Third World was not the only challenge. From then on, we searched (initially in vain) for alternatives to cotton.

CONQUEST

Our purchasing processes in Guatemala were in trustworthy hands, and things went quite well at home. We had found a store in Herzogenaurach that offered an office and storage space in the basement in addition to the sales area. We were able to round off our range with silver jewellery from Mexico and Thailand, which we purchased from a German wholesaler.



Our store, Colour Connection, 1992

It was time to open up new supply markets and products. Our next destination: Bolivia. Long story short: It was not easy to find a reliable supplier among all the cocaine addicts. After a recommendation from “the gatekeeper of the German embassy” (in fact, he was the head of foreign investigations at the Federal Criminal Police Office - but I wouldn’t find out until years later), we found a family we could trust after a turbulent start: Ellen and Hans Kaczmarczyk.

The most popular alpaca sweater of all time

After some pathfinding we became one of the most successful suppliers of ALPACA in Germany together. Our famous Green-peace Troyer was probably the best-selling alpaca sweater of all time, and some customers still come to trade fairs wearing it after almost 30 years! :-)

Bolivia was followed by a stopover in Ecuador - with no results until we finally made it to Nepal. And then it wasn’t long before we set our eyes on India, because everything that was sewn together in Nepal came from India - but that is another story.



Photo shoot Winter 2000

KARMA?

Although I had seen a lot, no other country has impressed me as much as India - in both positive and negative ways. I am still happy today when I meet Navin, who has lived in Germany for a long time and runs a wholesale business for gothic clothing, among other things. The fact that almost the whole country knew him when I met him - because he was a successful player on the Indian national cricket team who had to give up the sport shortly before the World Cup due to an injury - was more than helpful.

Because we wanted to make everything better. We were super proud of our great products from a leprosy project. The WWF mail order company in Switzerland ran a campaign with us to ensure that one Swiss franc of the sales price went right back to the project. With the support of Greenpeace staff, we worked on a natural, non-toxic substitute for

pesticides before the word organic cotton had even been coined. According to Hindu rules, the tea tree oil derivative did not kill the insects but made them unwilling to reproduce.

And during my ongoing search for a cotton substitute, I temporarily stumbled across banana fibre ("Ois Banane" was to be the new label, which is truly Bavarian and roughly translates

as "Everything is banana"). Unfortunately, this proved to be insufficiently durable for a sustainable alternative.

It was an exciting time full of ideas.

I gratefully declined an offer from Bollywood to start a villain film career. What really gnawed at me and ultimately broke me was the fact that despite all the great social and ecological projects, there was one thing we couldn't change: the inhuman caste system of Hinduism and the big suppliers who took the most brutal advantage of it.

During a visit to a large spinning mill, from which our leprosy project also obtained its yarns, I saw and heard things that have stayed with me to this day and made me burst into tears. I could no longer bear the self-image that all these suffering people deserved their fate because they were a bad Hindu in their last life. I had to leave India behind to find the strength to look forward with revolutionary drive.

We wanted to
make every-
thing better



With Navin in India

CAN YOU SMOKE THAT?

It was just perfect timing when a long-standing customer approached me this time to say that he had “come across something” on his winter trips to Asia - it was HEMP from northern Thailand. Hand-spun and hand-woven on so-called “backstrap looms”. However, the narrow rolls of fabric were only suitable for small items such as purses, backpacks and vests.

Immediately impressed, I told him that he was now our new supplier.

When he came back to our church door a few months later (oh, I had forgotten: after the US troops had left Herzogenaurach, we moved into the former troop church and the troop cinema of the empty barracks - today the Adidas “World of Sports” is located on this site), he came with the news that the advance payment we had made had disappeared together with the producer in Chiangmai.



Dyed fabric panels, stretched out to dry

Three days later I was sitting on a plane to Thailand.

The company had disappeared without a trace

In Bangkok, I first met up with a freelance journalist who had published a multi-page supplement in the “Bangkok Post” a few weeks earlier about traditional hemp processing in the Golden Triangle. Equipped with all the information available, I then continued my journey to Chiangmai.

The company that was supposed to produce our goods had disappeared without a trace. An American, who exported other artisan craftwork and was also recommended to me by the journalist, was prepared to take on the job. Bob had arrived in Thailand by chance a few years earlier after a six-month bike tour through China. He went to a Buddhist monastery there and left his old life in the USA behind him for good. As an English teacher, he met his wife and set up a business selling local handicrafts.

Sewing and dyeing were both part of the women’s charity of “Queen Mother” Sirikit. The fabrics came from the villages.

I fell for two misjudgements at the beginning:

The fact was, however, that the young people from the villages all had well-paid jobs in the city and the fabrics were only produced once a year for a New Year festival due to religious traditions. However, because all the young people in the village preferred to wear suits, jeans or dresses instead of the traditional (and very uncomfortable) costumes, the fabrics were turned into cash at the nearest markets after the festival - without making any significant contribution to their income.

And then there was the matter of nature vs. chemistry. Yes, the production of natural dyes also produces high concentrations of toxic substances. Especially if they are used to dye plant fibres (the balance of plant dyes looks better for animal fibres). And anyone who has experienced traditional indigo dyeing with their own eyes and noses will understand why Mr. Bayer was awarded the Nobel Prize for synthetic indigo. The decisive

factors for people and the environment are always the handling and, above all, the water treatment. This is simplified and of course more complicated, as there are also huge differences in toxicity within synthetic dyes.

But back to the story:

“Can you smoke that?” was probably the most frequently heard sentence in our early years with hemp clothes.

And in the first “Organic raw material hemp” area at the then small – and now the world’s leading trade fair for organic food – the Bio-fach trade fair, the famous cannabis expert Ed Rosenthal shouted: “That’s not hemp, that’s MARIHUANNA!” as he admired our collection. How right he was ;-)

Jack Herer, Don Wirschafter, Eric Steenstra, Steve DeAngelo and the team from CIA (Cannabis in Amsterdam) - to name just a few - were supporters in those early years. And, of course, Mathias...

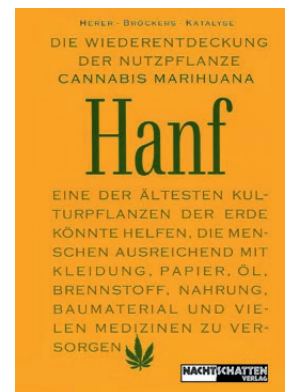


Our first trade fair booth at the 1995 Interjeans in Cologne

THE REDISCOVERY...

of hemp as a crop by Mathias Bröckers, was published in 1993 - shortly before my first flight to Thailand. Almost two years later, Mathias founded the “HanfHaus”.

The basic idea was a franchise model à la McDonalds. The founders had to fork out 70,000 Deutschmarks for the license to call themselves HanfHaus.



With the same amount in his suitcase, Mathias visited Anton Holler - the Hollerbeck from Deggendorf.

Mathias had read an article about him that mentioned hemp production in Romania (Anton was mainly concerned with used bakery machines for Romania and donations to church organizations).

Mathias told Anton to bring all the hemp textiles he could find in Romania and handed him the suitcase as a deposit.

Seeing the contents, Anton wanted to get into the hemp business as soon as possible :-). In his search for potential customers other than the HanfHaus, Anton quickly came across us and after the first samples, our summer catalogue 1996 was full of shirts, dresses and the like made from Romanian hemp.

It was my first contact with the industrial processing of the plant and my enthusiasm was barely contained.



GOING FULL HEMP

Shortly afterwards, we also got to know “Ecolution”, who were producing hemp jeans in Romania in those days. But similarly to our first hemp from the Golden Triangle, a few days before Christmas Anton Holler called me and said: “Robert, my Romanian hemp company is now yours.”

When I asked him in disbelief why that was the case, Anton explained that he simply couldn’t do it anymore (yes, we were struggling with major problems with production and deliveries - mainly because a lot of things simply “disappeared”) and that I was the only one who had paid all his bills. Like the virgin to the child, we ended up with a hemp company in Romania.

My company is
now yours!

Three days later, I was on the train to Bucharest.

My first feedback to the office was: “It looks like India. The children walk to school barefoot - only through heavy snow.” On my first visit, I didn’t understand everything, but it soon became clear that the only employee and managing director of our company was not the solution, but part of the problem.

Ceaușescu had turned Romania into the poorhouse of Europe and corruption was omnipresent after the Securitate had unofficially ruled the country from behind the scenes since his execution five years earlier.

During one of my other visits in the summer of 1996 - I, just like Anton Holler before me, was on the verge of giving up everything - I was sitting on the toilet in the spinning mill in Falticeni when a note was slipped under the wooden door. “Meeting tonight at the guesthouse in Cornu Lunci” was written on it in English. The note was from Iuliana, Steve Logothetis’ employee, whose existence was kept secret from me by everyone.



Airport Iasi, Romania 1997
with Iuliana Cocean and Steve Logothetis

We met for dinner and sat together until the next morning. Steve was a lawyer and was sent to Romania by his friend and founder of Hemp-Basics to find and recover missing money and goods. It soon became clear that much of what had been stolen from us had been sold to Steve and vice versa.

From that morning onwards, we were only to be found in Romania together. We pooled our knowledge and efforts and soon things were going at least a little better than before. Steve is one of the nicest people - and the coolest co-driver - I have ever met, and I still count him as one of my best friends. Through our work together, our influence increased, and our conditions also improved.

Only then was it possible for me to put my thoughts on improving production - especially in terms of quality - into practice. Although I had no textile training and had seen such machines for the first time, it quickly became clear from observation that a lot could be improved simply by operating the machines more carefully.

My agreement with the factories was simple: We would pay by the hour or by the day for the machines and staff, as well as for the raw material, and if the trials were successful, we would get an 18-month exclusivity on the new qualities. This meant that HempAge was always one step ahead of all its competitors in terms of quality and value for money.



Our first own hemp cultivation in Romania in 1998

By 1998, we had our own hemp cultivation in Romania and the trials were no longer just in spinning mills and weaving mills, but also in the hemp scutches. Yet we were far too small to prevent one thing: the demise of the Romanian hemp industry.

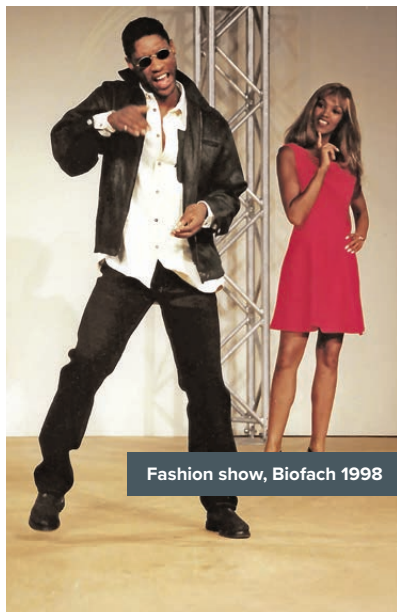


Photo shoot summer 2014

DOWNHILL WENT...

most of the hemp scutches in Romania and a large part of the downstream textile industry at that time. In our attempts to save at least important parts of it, we also came across representatives of the Western European linen “industry”, although “mafia” would probably have been a better description of our contemporaries.

What the former Securitate people had not already sold for scrap metal was deliberately stolen and destroyed by representatives of this guild.



Fashion show, Biofach 1998

The privatization authority was made to believe that there was genuine interest in the factories, and they were then given to them on the basis of investment promises for a symbolic euro (still ECU at the time).

The machines that could perhaps still be put to good use were then dismantled and the rest was expertly turned into scrap. The contracts were signed by straw men who were completely indifferent to the subsequent Romanian arrest warrants, as Romania was rather unpopular as a holiday destination.

Then the pistol
was put
on the table

The boss of an Italian company we visited during this time put a pistol on the table during the conversation. Steve, a US-American and former lawyer who also worked for the New York mafia, remained calm, while I almost wet my pants.

The former best scutch in Romania, in Oradea, was destroyed in this way. It came in handy that the German “Treuhant AG” was looking for investment opportunities in Romania, targeting the - not nearly as good, but large and close to the border - scutch in Arad.

Our Romanian hemp qualities had made a name for themselves in the meantime and our research and development had reached a point where we could no longer pay for it out of our own coffers.

But the possibilities were still unlimited.

PERSONALLY...

I found myself in the difficult situation that my partner and “best friend” had made his own plans and had used our joint company as a vehicle for this without letting me in on it. The shock was profound and when I unintentionally continued the company on my own, I missed having a partner with whom I could discuss ideas and plans.

And so it happened to be that a friend pointed out to me that a friend of mine from kindergarten and primary school also had a hemp company. “Hanfzeit” was in financial difficulties, but I was impressed by my former classmate’s knowledge and wealth of ideas. I could write a whole book about it now, but let’s stick to the essentials: Due to the wealth of ideas and lack of necessary capital, this classmate introduced me to an investor with an “ethical-ecological network”.

I was impressed by the presentations and suggestions and a short time later HempAge Aktiengesellschaft was founded - a merger of Colour Connection and Hanfzeit as well as the main investor with his numerous finance companies, all of which were somehow called something with “Merlin”.

A step that I like to call the biggest mistake of my life.

In the meantime, I also had a new friend: Stefan Mörtel, a specialist lawyer for customs law (in addition to other specialist lawyer titles that Stefan collects like stamps).

He stood by me in a little war with the southern German customs authorities and is one of the most intelligent people I know. He had clearly warned me against taking the step of setting up an AG, the German equivalent to a public limited company or company limited by shares. I didn’t listen to him though. I had just received an award from the European Patent Office for my first patent application, but I needed money for nationalization in the individual countries - and time was ticking.

There was still so much to explore!

And then there was the possible merger of Treuhand with one of the Merlin companies to take over the scutch in Arad and perhaps save crucial parts of the Romanian hemp industry after all! Heart before brain is usually the right decision in love life, but I would advise against it in business.

The money collected from trustful investors (also from our family) went almost entirely to the scutching company in Arad, called Carin S.A., which was supposed to pay us with hemp fibres in return. However, the money continued its journey to other companies in which the main investor was also invested and in most cases was a member of the supervisory board or chairman of the supervisory board (as in the case of HempAge).

Until it simply disappeared somewhere.



Photo shoot summer 2013

BLEAK YEARS

...were to follow. No money for the patent, no fibres from Carin S.A. Our main investor and chairman of the supervisory board and the trustees tried to pull the wool over each other's eyes. Other companies in the supply chain disappeared and in the end, we didn't even have the petty cash we used to finance our developments.

Friends and even many investors advised me at the time to simply let HempAge go down the drain and start a new company. But there were the trusting investors. We're not talking about a few super-rich people who gambled away a bit of money, but about people and their savings. Including Franciscan nuns - and not the rich order itself, but the retirement savings of sisters who had toiled their whole lives in hospitals and retirement homes. I swore that I would try everything to save HempAge as long as I saw the slightest chance.

I didn't expect it to take almost ten years.

In the meantime, the remaining producers in Romania had appointed me honorary director of the Romanian Hemp and Linen Union, as I had successfully warned them about some of the machinations of the Western linen industry and about corrupt development aid workers from the German GTZ (the German Society for Technical Cooperation), but with the Carin, the last significant hemp scutch disappeared and with it the necessary raw material. Those who could not switch to linen - or Chinese hemp yarns - perished.

Contrary to all the great stories you can find on the Internet about Romanian hemp, one thing is unfortunately a fact: Since 2001, no textiles have been produced from Romanian hemp in Romania since 2001.

STAYING ALIVE

There was only one thing that saved us from immediate ruin back then: our hidden reserves. Our stock was regularly devalued, as is usual in the fashion industry. But our relatively timeless products were still able to achieve high sales prices after several fashion waves had swept over us.

Our main investor and Chairman of the Supervisory Board had not expected this. He had already promised our goods to others and had twice sent an auditor to our company to declare insolvency.

We were able to avert this, but due to the blocking minority of our main investor - who in the meantime had to step down as Chairman of the Supervisory Board and was no longer elected to the Supervisory Board - we were unable to accept offers from investors or take out new loans.



The HempAge brand over the course of time

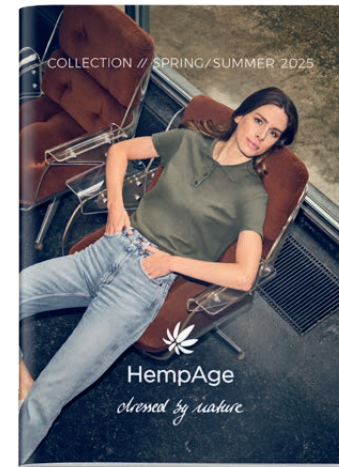


CHINA FROM THE OUTSIDE

...was a relatively red rag to me up to that point. Although we had met almost all Chinese producers and exporters over the years, there were two fundamental problems:

Firstly, everything related to the - at that time still 100% state-owned - production was treated as a big secret and secondly, we had had many samples of hemp fabrics from China tested. The result was that none of the alleged 100% hemp fabrics consisted exclusively of hemp - but more on that elsewhere.

When I received a letter from Barbara Filippone one day - we knew each other from Romania, where she worked as a designer for Ecolution - I was



very surprised. It contained pictures from the production by a Chinese factory - from the hemp fibre to the finished fabric.

I called her immediately and asked her if the Chinese were having an open day. In the meantime, Barbara had been working as a representative for a Chinese producer and knew from me that only part of the fabrics - which she also sold – consisted of hemp.

She told me that she had met a representative of this company by chance and that the factory was not on the official list of Chinese hemp factories at all - and contrary to the usual secrecy, they openly showed and explained everything.

I asked Barbara to send samples of the fabrics immediately, as we wanted to send another batch of samples for testing. And lo and behold:

For the first time we had Chinese samples made from 100% hemp!

(HEMP) FOR REAL?

China wasn't the only player at the time that couldn't be trusted when it came to the authenticity of hemp textile - in fact, the whole world was. At Biofach and InNaTex, there were plenty of labels whose "hemp collections" were clearly made from other fibres, including even pure coarse cotton advertised as Bulgarian hemp. Our friends from Ecolution had to learn from us that even their Romanian hemp was only half hemp fibre, and even the legendary - because the very first - exhibitors from Hungary turned out to never have managed without a good deal of polyester.

That's why we started testing hemp samples very early on. Of course, it was safest to know the spinning mill and the flow of raw materials, but this is hardly feasible when looking for new potential suppliers.

There was a total of seven textile institutes in Germany that offered such tests, and over the years we "tried" all of them at least once. One day, when I was carrying out tests in the spinning mill in Romania and saw that other fibers had just been delivered, I had the idea of testing the textile testers. Three different samples, of which I knew exactly what they were spun from, were sent to each of the seven institutes.

All but one of the institutes got the results wrong.

100% hemp
was usually
not genuine

But even the institute that was right later openly admitted that they were probably lucky, as such tests are very difficult and it is almost impossible to find employees who are experienced in this field. One test that I had heard a lot about over the years assumed that the fibres of hemp and linen have different twists when they are moistened. However, the German institutes all said that this was "humbug". It wasn't until I read a book by Git Skoglund in 2023 that I realized that the test itself actually works. Today, almost nobody can extract an elementary fibre from the fibre bundles - and this test does not work with fibre bundles.

But back to the tricky situation with the institutes' meaningless fibre tests. We received help at just the right moment from our old friend Prof. Dr. Jörg Müssig, now professor at the first German Chair of Bionics at the University of Bremen, then still at the Fiber Institute of the Bremen "Cotton Exchange". He had been commissioned by the Mongolian embassy to develop a DNA test for cashmere - the most counterfeited natural fibre of all. Jörg was also aware that fibre tests for hemp and other bast fibres posed a problem.

We quickly agreed that we should simultaneously co-develop a test for bast fibres such as linen, ramie and hemp and that HempAge should provide the raw materials from different countries at various stages of processing.

Impetus Bioscience from Bremen developed and perfected the tests.

Today, all German textile institutes recommend a DNA test for these fibres.





Photo shoot summer 2019

THE ORIGINAL

Barbara's fabric samples were made of 100% hemp (DNA-tested) and I was eager to find out more. The "representative" of the new Chinese hemp factory was planning a first trip to Europe soon and I was of course happy to help with the visa formalities to find out more about this factory.

The exciting part of the story was that the directors knew for a fact that they and many of their employees were suffering from various rare diseases because they had been processing highly contaminated cotton from Kazakh cultivation for decades.

Museum-worthy machines of a paper factory

In "self-defence", they therefore set up their own production from regional hemp - all under the radar of the central government in Beijing - when a nearby hemp paper factory was shut down. There they found the machines they needed to break down the fibres - even if they were already almost museum pieces.

The "representative" was called Ding. And because "Ding" is a much-used word here in Franconia for a lot of things whose real name we can't think of, we still affectionately call him "the original Ding". His personal story and all the information about the factory and his small export company were real eye-openers and it quickly became clear that this was no typical Chinese businessman visiting us.

Ding quickly came to the point that he would like us to represent him in Germany. I explained our current situation to him quite openly and that I could not pay for an order at the moment. He replied that he had already heard so much about me that he would be happy to supply us on account (unthinkable in international business at the time!), and if we did have payment problems, he was sure that I would do everything to even personally settle these debts.

I would never have expected that - and neither would our main investor. It was only a few years later that I found out that Ding had taken out loans from extremely dubious sources.

So, he was not just risking his fingers to make our business relationship work.



Our partner factory in Shandong, where the finished clothing is made

CHINA FROM THE INSIDE

Once business with our Ding got off to a successful start (and our main investor was annoyed that we had gotten our way together), it was time to pay a personal visit to the Middle Kingdom.

Even though a lot has changed since 2001, I recommend that anyone who has never been to China should do so as soon as possible. My traditional first email from the new country this time was: "There is no rice and no bicycles here - we've been totally screwed".

On the production side, everything was so surprisingly good that I (and major customers like Hess Natur at the time) almost couldn't believe it. Of course, in a country that has had a strict one-child policy for decades, child labour is not an issue. But the fact that, for example, wastewater treatment and monitoring is a bigger issue there than in most EU countries was a huge surprise.

Such facts could easily be documented with photos etc., but consumer mistrust of China was already very deep-rooted at the time and how can you prove that there are no migrant workers or similar in the partner company, which is regularly disseminated in the media?

The answer came in the form of the Fair Wear Foundation (FWF).

HempAge became its second official German member and had "leader status" until the end of its membership. If you would like to find out more about this specific point, I recommend the three-part interview on our YouTube channel or the PDF about our withdrawal on our homepage.



SLOW FASHION WITHOUT COMPROMISES

Up until the 1990s, environmentally conscious people often openly showed their ecological lifestyle in their choice of clothing. If you wanted to live sustainably at the time, your wardrobe was a visible expression of your organic and ethnic ethos.

I'm sure many of us still remember Jesus slippers and jute bags. That was our primary target group back then: colourful slip shirts, patterned tribal accessories and airy pants for festival-tested old-school hippies and alternative organic disciples. Nowadays, we would probably call it boho style, which 30 years ago served to define - sometimes also political - identity.

Society having become more modern, more diverse and more enlightened with regard to future ecological challenges - not just in terms of clothing - our niche product "sustainable clothing" suddenly became a hot trend that was also becoming increasingly popular outside the now outdated eco-subculture.

We have had to reinvent ourselves in terms of fashion to take this into account and inspire fashion-conscious customers: on the one hand, to reflect the latest fashion styles and, on the other, to design timeless products that can be worn for a long time (while conserving resources).

And this is where our designer Andrea Zehendner comes into play, mastering this balancing act season after season. Since 2005, she has been creating great outfits with contemporary yet seasonally independent styles. She also has a knack for technical subtleties: Due to the specific properties of the raw material hemp, unusual design adaptations are sometimes required. For example, our buttonholes are usually very different from the usual ones and our jeans have double seams, both on the outside and inside. A lot of know-how for high quality, even in the details.

Every team member has a say

Fashion design at HempAge stands for a look and feel that is true to the line and unconditionally subject to strict conditions. In addition to environmentally friendly materials, washes and dyes, the willingness to implement and comply with social standards and fair wages in production is a basic prerequisite for the development of a collection in cooperation with our suppliers.

Incidentally, the final decisions on a season's collection are made by the entire team at HempAge! Every team member has a say. But we all agree on one thing: no fast fashion, only sustainable clothing that can still be worn years later.

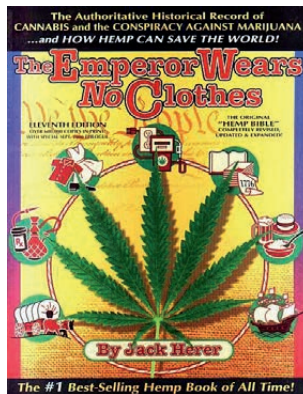
NAKED FACTS?

Finally, just the most important thing I would like to share with you from thirty years of hemp experience:

“The Emperor Wears No Clothes”

... is one of the first and most important publications about hemp since the Second World War. But whether in the original or the translated and expanded version by Mathias Bröckers, much of what was presented as fact has been refuted today. No matter which publication you read - even if it comes across as highly scientific - none of it is without error. Anyone who claims the opposite (like my friends from the Higg Index years ago) will quickly be proven wrong - if necessary, by me personally. One of the main reasons for this is language barriers, local restrictions and translation errors. There are terms that are correct for one processing method but completely misleading for another. Others that were correct in one era are no longer correct today. This applies equally to the German-speaking world and to all others. So it is not always malicious intent when something incorrect is written. But you should be doubly careful on the internet, and even more so if the source is commercial (like this one ;-). The internet is full of supposedly Romanian hemp, but no hemp stalks have been processed into textiles there since 2001.

So don't be fooled!



SCIENCE FICTION

Anyone who has finished reading this little book will think to themselves: “Oh dear, it’s always been downhill with hemp!” And, overall, this is unfortunately true.

But even in the bad times, there were always positive approaches and developments. Even if these never became real “game changers”. Regardless of whether they were too insignificant or the time was simply not yet ripe - something has always been done, and people have not lost hope despite all the negative developments.

Today, however, there seems to be more movement in hemp than in the last 25 years combined. Our industry and its gifted engineers just need to stop trying to change the fibres to run on any machine available (yes, cottonization - you’re meant!) and just build the right machines for this fibre.

Our business and economists simply have to consider CO₂, the lifespan and end of life of products, as well as the health of our soil and everything that lives in and on it. Then the right solutions are obvious. Of course, if we continue to put our entire planet at risk for short-term profit maximization...

then I will smoke my shirt.





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