DENTAVANTGART

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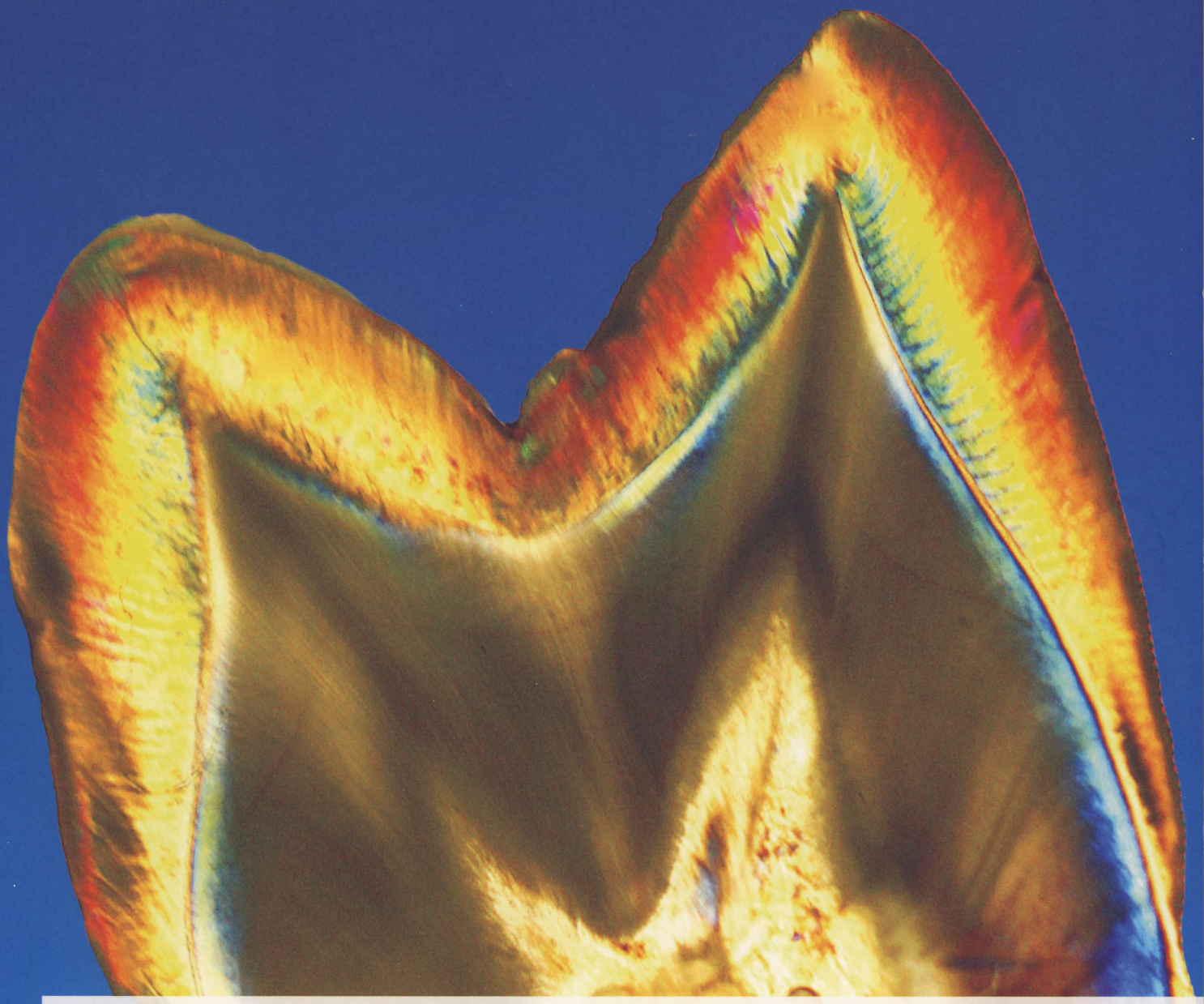


INTERVIEW

PERFECTER OF THE GOOD: KURT ZUBLER

DT. **ALEJANDRA SEQUEIRA** & DR. **JORDI MANAUTA**

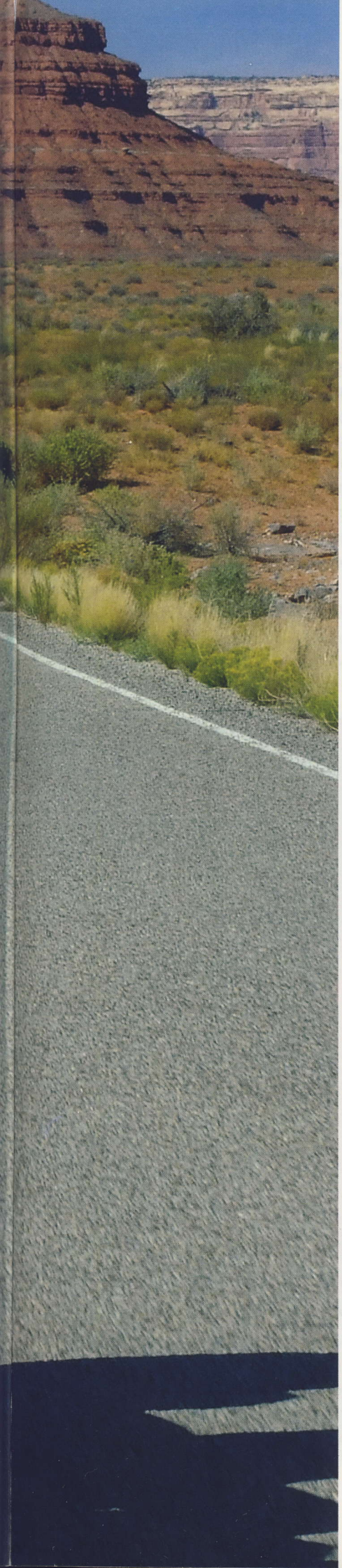
COLOR DROPS: PROGRESSIVE WAX-UP IN COLORS

DR. **IVAN C. MOLINA** & TPD. **ELADIO GONZALEZ** & DR. **PASCAL MAGNE**

ULTRACONSERVATIVE ESTHETIC REHABILITATION USING VENEERS

DR. **JAVIER VASQUEZ**

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE IN OCCLUSION



PERFECTER OF THE GOOD:

KURT ZUBLER

"What dental technicians do is perfect, but they see the world though a peculiar, narrow lens. One generally has to accommodate to them. I have tried..."

The Zubler Company has been involved in the manufacture of dental equipment since 1978. It is a very innovative company, at the forefront of the international market with its constant developments. The Zubler name is hallmarked by unique design, engineering bravura, new ideas, strict quality control, excellent materials and outstanding technical expertise.

But who is behind the brand name? What kind of man is the forever thinking Kurt Zubler, who lives almost every moment of his life in creativity?

If you are curious about who I am, then first of all I need to say a few words about my family. My great-grandfather was already working in this industry: he may not have been involved in dental technology, but he was really engrossed in the world of electric motors and transformers. It is also thanks to him that Zubler electric motors are world famous today. My father had the good sense to continue on this same path, and the name of the Zubler Company, which celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2019, rings true in the profession today, with its value system spanning generations, trained by traditions, and focusing on constant development.

CHILDHOOD

I am the child of a country farmer. Two generations lived together in a house in the twin town of Ulm (Neu-Ulm) on the right bank of the Danube, so I could spend the early 50s with my grandparents too. After the war, the building where the Zubler electric motor manufacturing company had formerly been in operation was rebuilt. My father was a very diligent, hard man; I have vivid memories of his consistency. Even in my childhood I aspired to independence, and I would have liked to have my own pocket money, which I could have spent in company with my friends. My father informed me that was no problem, but in return I would have to work at the company for 2-3 hours every day after school. He gave me simpler jobs, like handing out prospectuses to the customers or winding transformers – the latter so that I could find out how the electrical appliance worked which converts alternating current to different voltages. So starting at primary school age, I spent a good few hours every day at the company. And this also had a result, as I was the only boy in the class who earned the greater part of his pocket money himself. Why the greater part? My parents did not talk much about money, fortunately, so my grandma didn't even know that I was getting money for my work. Every day she would pack me a snack, and when my father couldn't hear she whispered in my ear: I'll give you a bit of pocket money, just don't tell your father! My father, when he paid me for my work, told me the same thing – so neither of them knew that I was getting double pocket money every week! At 12 years old I could buy each of my best friends an ice cream. They, of course, were constantly wondering where I got so much money from. Then I very wisely and responsibly told them: money doesn't just appear, you have to work for it. Then I studied the electrical mechanic's trade, as I thought I would always have the chance of working at the company. My elder sister had also got a job with the firm. Later I went to university and got a degree in mechanical engineering, with a qualification as an electronic engineer. After university I went back to the factory and by pure chance came into special contact with Schuler-Dent, who we were making electronic control panels for at the time.

SUCCESS IN THE FIELD OF EXTRACTORS

A specialist, who had just left Schuler round about then, approached my father with some really good ideas. He wasn't interested in dental technology appliances, so he left the decision up to me. He just had one proviso: if I take it on, then only after working hours. The onetime Schuler employee, Peter Holsch, was an extremely skillful, creative craftsman, and when my father saw how interested I was in what he was doing, he offered us an area of 4 x 4 metres. If I wanted to use grand words, I would say: everything began here. We wanted to make a burnishing machine, for which a dust extractor was then needed. We developed a simple extraction device, which we gave to a new lab to try out. We became affiliated with a place where they worked from morning till evening. The technicians said that this was much better than the Freuding extractors, prevalent on the market at that time. And to our no little amazement they rang up Freuding, to take back all 15 of their extractors. I hardly need say that from then on, business took off. The owner of Freuding approached us at once, to visit them as soon as possible, and to take a prototype with us. After our 2-3 hour presentation he went out, and brought back an order form for 500 units. When we showed it to my father, at first he did not want to believe his eyes, then he went off without a word. I didn't understand. We'll have time to be pleased when they've paid the bill – he said, then went off to the bank with the order, to get clearance on the firm. The next day they rang him from the bank to say that if we didn't go in for this deal, we would make the biggest mistake of our lives, as this is a very prosperous, stable and reliable firm. It was only after this that my father gave the production a green light. For this job, however, we needed more space so he made a larger building available to us, in one half of which we could make the extractors, and in the other half my brother-in-law carried out the production of traditional electric motors. With my associate Peter, I founded a new company in 1977 under the name Zubler Gerätebau. My father had 50% ownership in the new company, but he didn't do anything. On the other hand, his name sounded good to the banks, and at the beginning this was indispensible for us because of surety. In the first year we only produced extractors for Freuding, 2-300 items continuously, then we took the manufacture of the electronic units for the extractors into our own hands, so the number of our partners increased, with Schick GmbH for instance.

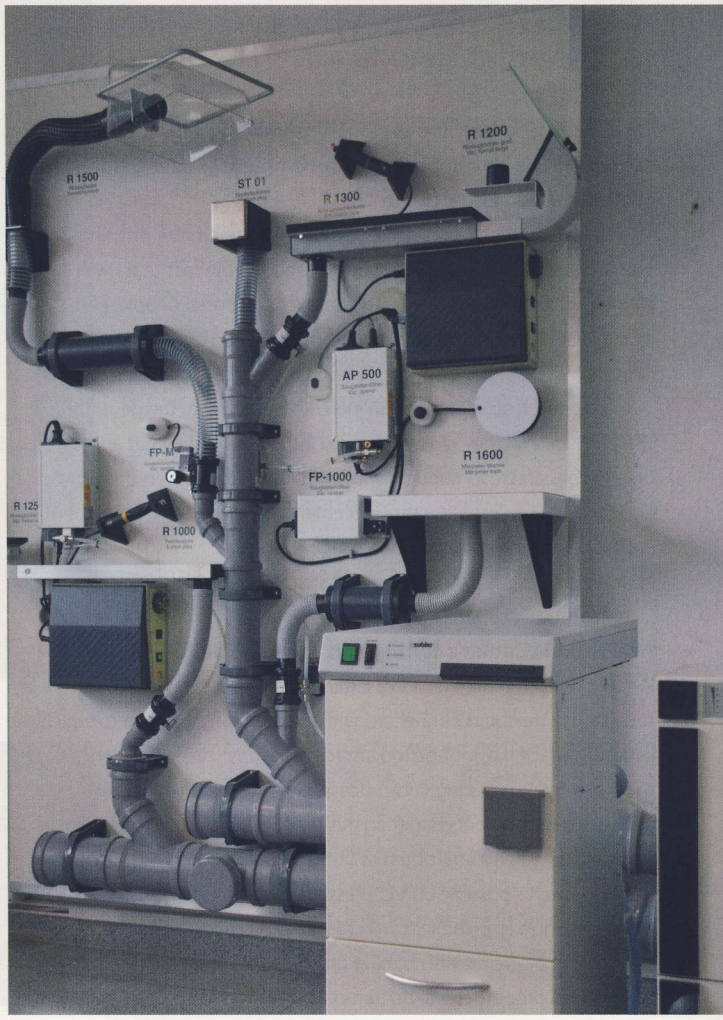
DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FIELDS OF MICROMOTORS

You always took great care to put appliances and instruments into the hands of dental technicians which are as practical as possible and easy to handle. Am I right in thinking that the success achieved in the field of handheld units is due to this endeavour?

I was always on my way, constantly visiting labs. I soon realised that 10% of the demand was still for the heavy, powerful handheld units for working metal, whereas a large portion of the market needed a lighter, but high-performance instrument without a carbon brush. Testing of the light handheld units was already in full swing when I visited Mr. Schick senior, the owner of Schick GmbH, with the notion that if we implemented my idea, then the market share of KaVo Dental, the leading manufacturer until then, would fall drastically. No one believed me of course, as KaVo was booming at the time. We quietly continued with the development, and the C2 appeared in 1987. This was our first handheld unit without a carbon brush, offered under a long guarantee. The market introduction was very successful and we got more and more orders – and of course I was proven right, because nice and slowly KaVo's handheld unit market collapsed. We were still not present in the USA, so I founded a new company, and we introduced this handheld unit there too.

But still under Schick's wings, if I'm not mistaken?

Yes, but building this successful market was the first step towards the independent manufacture of micromotors; in any case, it was significant for the future that we should not just be suppliers. Over 25 years, Schick sold several thousand handheld items of the appliances made almost totally by us, whereas the idea, the development and even the marketing was ours. At the end of 2010, control of the company was taken over by Mr. Schick junior, who 2-3 months before the Cologne fair had asked us for an appointment to inform us that from then he would have his electronic units manufactured by others. A huge amount of our energy had gone into this project, and unfortunately these efforts were not recognised by the new management. We were very disappointed. As whenever something in life comes to an end, this also provides the opportunity for a new beginning; we realised we had to take steps: now was the time to make a micromotor of our own, with a completely new handheld unit. We are not quite finished yet, but this development will come onto the market this year. The point is we made a decision: to market our own instruments under our own name. All the appliances we manufacture will run under the Zubler name in the future.



HISTORY OF CERAMIC FURNACES AT ZUBLER

We started to develop the furnaces in the second half of the '90s, but we were not yet involved in manufacture. We saw one in America which was suitable, so we bought the marketing rights for Germany: these came onto the market under the name Zubler VarioPress 100. This collaboration lasted until 2003, and during this time we sold a great many furnaces. Then the firm manufacturing the furnaces sold the marketing rights to the Whip Mix company; so 4 weeks before the Cologne fair they cancelled our exclusive contract with immediate effect, saying that henceforth they would not deliver any more furnaces to us. As our agreement, which was concluded earlier, fortunately, did not allow for this possibility, our business relationship continued, in any case this was a sign for us. We began the development of our own furnaces. This is how we got onto the furnace market too. As time went by, an increasing number remarked that alongside the extractor and the furnace, just ceramics was missing.

Did your colleagues and partners give you the idea of how to move on?

That's right! An Italian expert of ours, who we have worked with since the beginning of the furnace development, had an idea in connection with ceramics. We were looking for labs in the vicinity which would be happy to test our ceramics. Andreas Mayer who had been using our central extractor in his Stuttgart lab for years became our third partner. Together with him we set up the firm Ceramic Mayer, because we did not consider it expedient for ceramics to appear under the Zubler name alongside the furnaces. Fifty percent of the firm was mine, but at that time nobody knew that I was there behind the ceramics. I confess that today I would certainly have made a different decision. Since then 100% of the ceramics firm is mine, and it would have been more profitable if we had used the Zubler brand name from the beginning. But life is also about acquiring experience!

By starting to become seriously involved in ceramics too, you launched the development of a completely new field. What is worthwhile to know about that?

With the appearance of ceramics we did more and more pressing, and we gained huge experience in this area. In spite of the fact that I was the first to bring pressing onto metal into laboratories, several people, perhaps not exactly with goodwill, asked me what an extraction expert was doing in the pressing field. But this became my hobby. At first we had loads of problems with Empress. Ivoclar devoted an incredible amount to the development of the product, and they did a very good job. Actually, they put an end to the reservations and fears about full ceramics. With e.max, everything got easier and faster, not to mention simper cementation. And what happened? The "chair time" for the dentist has also been shortened. Nowadays e.max is everywhere, and this is thanks to Ivoclar's successful marketing activities.

And what is Zubler's connection with this field?

We discerned the drawbacks of e.max, which cause difficulties for the lab: for instance the faults connected with the reaction layer, due to which the ceramic surface may not be too attractive in some cases. We were sure that there is a manufacturing sub-process which would eliminate these faults, and with developments targeting this it would also become ideal for dental technicians. We also attempted to find a solution to how to form as small a reaction layer as possible during pressing. If I can make the time the ceramic is liquid as short as possible, it will come into contact with the matrix in a hot state, then the ceramic will not have time to react strongly, so the surface and the material properties will be better. This idea is based on a virtual sensor. We have already had this procedure patented. This actual pressing time lasts 32 minutes at Ivoclar, but with our new pressing technique it is reduced by more than half!

When I saw this, I thought it was a technical fault...

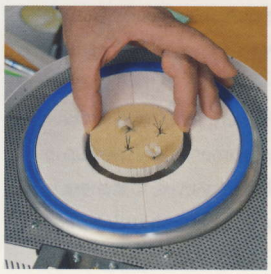
Our heating technology is also special, the goal is that the ring should heat up as quickly as possible, then when the heat has reached the centre of the ring we withdraw the heat, then starting from the centre of the ring the temperature equalises outwards, and at the moment that the ideal time for pressing has come, the pressing is started. This is the essence of the patent. We measured several hundred rings in this way, and we incorporated all these measurement results into this virtual sensor software. The sensor discerns the appropriate procedure, and launches it even without the dental technician. I wanted to share this idea with Ivoclar. I made the offer twice, for them to use my patent shared exclusively between the two of us. I did not want to sell the technique, but I offered them a sporting agreement, that in return for the usage of the new technical process, we could manufacture the press piston for them. Ivoclar did not accept this, in fact, they even contested our patent. This procedure is still ongoing.

Zubler has developed something very interesting in the field of heat technology for furnaces. They had an idea, with the aid of which convection only occurs where it is actually needed, so manufacture is much more efficient – as time, space and energy can be saved. Could you tell me about this?

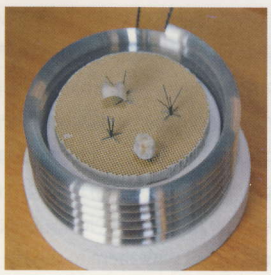
In every furnace, the temperature is higher where the job is close to the heating element. The temperature which the sensor measures is that of the central useful space. Everything outside of this is generally hotter. The Ivoclar furnace only fires well in the centre. This is the technology of the past. Furthermore, there is a tendency nowadays to produce furnaces of ever smaller size, for which there are also financial reasons, naturally. The lab needs an appliance which is able to create reproducible quality over the whole firing surface. But this is only possible if the furnace is made in a larger size. The outer region is overheated, but the whole surface of the firing tray stays in the even temperature region. Only Zubler furnaces can do this.

How did you get the idea?

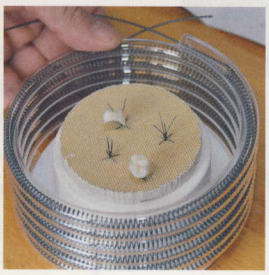
One of our foreign exporters came to visit us. I took him and my colleagues for a beer in a restaurant with a garden in the centre of Ulm, but at 9 o'clock in the evening it was quite cool, and so a pleasant temperature was provided by outdoor gas heaters next to all the tables on the terraces. The tables next to us were empty. A smallish group soon arrived, and we noticed how two of the ladies ran forward and quickly took the two seats closest to the heaters. This gave me the idea. The next morning we started to take measurements: we took the temperature of the furnace at the edge of the firing tray, proceeding inwards all the way to the centre. We determined that there was a 30 degree difference from the edge to the centre, but within a circle of 4 cm radius in the middle the temperature difference was only 2°C, so this latter could be said to be even. So we enlarged this opening, produced wider heating elements, and of course made constant measurements. We achieved a difference of 4-5 degrees over the full diameter of the firing tray, which is a fantastic result, that is, the whole area of the firing tray became useful space. Lately we have been visiting laboratories with this development. Approached from this angle, it doesn't matter what kind of furnace it is: how they are using it now is definitely not good, because the job is right there by the heating wire. If Ivoclar had had this idea at that time, everyone would



Ivoclar furnace



VITA furnace

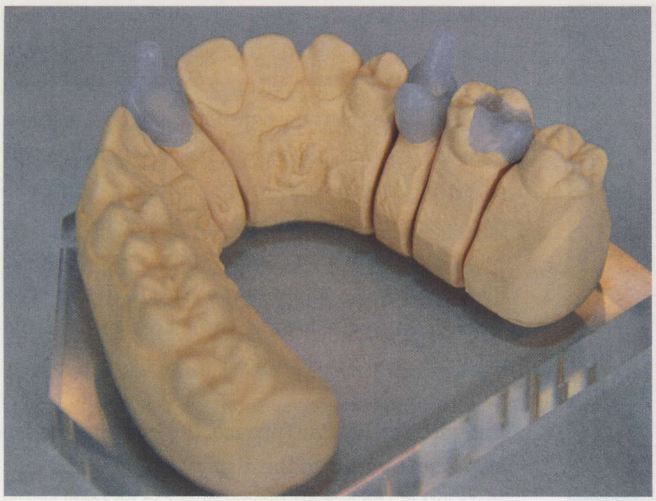


Zubler furnace

still be only buying their furnaces. Now, however, the Zubler furnace is the only one which can do this. Our furnace can provide perfect, linear cooling for zircon too. With zircon, as we know, you can't open the furnace at once, because it cracks. Thanks to the perfect cooling system, the next job can be put into our ovens much more quickly, because the furnace maintains the tray at the same temperature with the aid of the virtual sensor, and as soon as one job is finished, you can get the next one ready. This technical trick speeds up procedures, as the furnace controls the pre-drying temperature automatically.

But with the Ivoclar furnace, the interior temperature can be seen on the display.

That's just it! The highest temperature can be seen! Ivoclar does great advertising, they have incorporated a camera into the furnace to measure the temperature of the hottest crown. And of course that's important, so that the drying temperature will not be too high. Our furnace is the only one in the world where the technician does not need to wait for the furnace to cool down! The next job can be started almost at once. For the time being, Ivoclar has better sales indicators, which in part, is due to marketing. We expect a lot from the remodelling of our online marketing strategy – it's no good, we have to adapt to the expectations of the times – besides this we are reworking our whole web appearance, so we can provide enquirers with information in the appropriate format. This is the 21st century: lengthy searching means death for a website. We have plans to present our products with many more pictures and less text, so when people are browsing our pages, they will soon find the parameters with which they can compare two appliances or products. It isn't certain they will believe the numbers, but perhaps they will be inspired to try us out. This is what we expect from this strategy. We have half a second to win a customer over. This is that "eye catching" online marketing, which grabs the attention in the first moment. The focus has shifted nowadays, and because of that the strategy has altered too: when someone opens Zubler's new prospectus, he sees the furnace immediately. Previously the history came first, followed by the rest of the information – "measured out" rather too slowly and intricately from this perspective. From now on our chief goal is for the client to get a full picture at once, to see the difference, and to want nothing else but to try out the Zubler furnace immediately! We react instantly to this demand from the lab, by installing a demo furnace. But this is not our only endeavour. We are also shooting a YouTube film, there will be no filler texts in our prospectus, but we are preparing a brochure with a distinct image, also including traditional information. In any case, our new appearance will have a striking and expressive image, raising awareness and easy to distinguish from others. From now on every picture, logo, frame, format and graphic will send this message to the world: THIS IS ZUBLER, who develop, manufacture and market everything themselves!



Zubler DC5
Milling System

LITHIUM DISILICATE PRESS CERAMICS

The importance of personal experience and "practical" communication between colleagues is illustrated by the following little story: one weekend a very famous ceramist who gives courses on e.max, paid a visit to master dental technician, László Németh, the proprietor of Labline magazine. When Mr. Németh asked him if he was familiar with the Zubler disilicate, all he said was that he had some at home, but he had not tried it out yet. Mr. Németh showed him the Zubler pressing he had produced, at which the colleague was visibly taken aback, then he said that he now had the motivation to try out the Zubler product himself as soon as he got home!

That's a nice, edifying story. When I set up the company with Andreas Mayer, we knew and felt that Empress was a very good material, so we created our own from this too. Authentic and Pulse were the first competition for Empress. We later noticed that labs were increasingly working with e.max. The market for Authentic was falling. We had to think through what we should do. I felt ever more strongly that we needed lithium disilicate. During the developments, which were done jointly with another firm, we provided all the appliances for proper testing; it goes without saying that these were our own, Zubler instruments. The process was not simple, and it did not go very fast, but we kept our eyes on one goal: the labs should get a product of impeccable quality. Our test results were getting ever better, but we had to wait with the market launch, until the expiry of the patent deadline which was linked with the name of Ivoclar. So we only began to introduce our lithium disilicate to the market in 2013. We made changes to the colour technology and the translucence compared with the Ivoclar material. We now have a great disilicate fund, with which we can carry out excellent quality work. Its solidity properties are also outstanding, and the dental technicians who are already working with it, and are also familiar with the other product, claim that it is no worse than that. Dentists still recommend e.max almost exclusively, because this is all they hear from the dental technicians. Well, this poses us with a challenge: we have to arouse the dentists' interest in our product. I think it is very important that a lab should present its own skills and special services, and not serve the industry directly. What is happening on the market now? E.max CAD Blocks are being pushed at full force, the production costs for which are three or four times that of a pressed crown. Of course, the machine does it. But in order to make a CAD Block, expensive milling machines are needed, though it's also a fact that a lot more money can be made with it. It's our job to demonstrate that with our products and our instruments, work of perfect quality can be supplied to dentists quickly.

NO FUTURE WITHOUT CAD/CAM

In Germany, the future is definitely unimaginable without CAD/CAM. Two or three years ago we realised this too. But what can we do for the dental technicians who are not yet using this technology, so that they do not lose work to those who are now doing everything with CAD/CAM? When the development of the new products began, I had to learn the dental technician's profession step-by-step. Our main profile in the USA was still the matrix pastes market, but problems were always arising, so I spent a week in the largest lab in the USA, where more than a thousand people were employed. I saw how many furnaces were working in the pressing department: they used up several hundred press rings every day, I couldn't believe my eyes, that there was so much work. The dental technicians were working two shifts, sometimes three; at times I went with them to the lab at 3 o'clock in the morning.

We analysed the problems, and I finally managed to help them reduce the intrinsic faults to a minimum, so we continued to purchase the matrix from them. Meanwhile, of course, I got lots of new ideas. I ascertained that in the dental technician's training, the young people don't learn what they should. In every journal they can only read about CAD/CAM, but they don't talk much about the standard, traditional techniques, one or two perfect pressings, waxing, and for instance, what faults can occur during preheating. Because at times you do have to change preheating practices. Of course the first reaction was always that the furnace, or the technology, or the product was at fault. The faults are never due to the matrix paste. The matrix is fine! It is the same with the (plastic) wax blocks milled with CAD/CAD. In order to be able to mill the CAD/CAM wax block, it has resin (plastic) reinforcement in it, which does not burn away completely and it causes damage during pressing! That is why you need special wax when making the blocks. One of our new products is a wax like that, which can always be milled perfectly.

TRAINING PACKAGE – WORKSHOP

Couldn't the possibility of blaming the fault on the technology or the product in the lab be elegantly forestalled?

We have decided that when we sell a furnace in the future, we will provide training to go with it. We offer this course here, in-house. It is not obligatory, but advisable, and we don't call it a course, but training. If a lab buys a press furnace, it could work with various kinds of methods, manually, with CAD/CAM, etc.. We demonstrate how to insert pins, and the milled section must also match the sample model. It is embedded, and pressed, and we also demonstrate which matrix should be used. At the end of the course we also present real dental technology, they can see and touch the accurate final result, the perfect match. Those who have done manual preparation up till now may want to try out CAD/CAM after this. When this one-day training is over, the customer will know everything. We don't just speak, the content of the training is also written down. Previously, the labs had no idea what problems could be caused by print and milling wax. Extreme examples can also be presented, how one wax or another is put into the same muffle. Let the customer become familiar with the procedure. Pin insertion, embedding, firing – correctly. We are launching the first training sessions in America. I'll give the written material for this training to you first, so you can think about it.

DC5 CAD/CAM

Recently a dental technician friend of mine asked me in amazement: does Zubler have CAD/CAM too?

That's instructive. When we saw that CAD/CAM was forging ahead, we felt we would have to do something too. The first and most important thing was that preferably we shouldn't have too steep a learning curve. I thought it would be best to have a go in America first, rather than in Germany. We have an old contact, who used to work for a major CAD/CAM firm, then retired and made a milling centre. He told us his plans, and of course his requirements: he would need a lab, 2–3 machines, an extractor, etc.. I supported his idea, but I had my conditions. I thought, at least we can learn how a CAD/CAM is set up, and what is more in Atlanta. More and more problems arose every week. First, there was a problem with the scanner, then with the mill; there was always some fault which had to be overcome. The machines were installed and adjusted in a year, that's how much time was needed for us to learn everything. Tally-ho, the project can get started at home! We negotiated with an old, reliable contact of ours, a CAD/CAM software production firm. It had to be tried out and tested on an industrial scale, to see those faults which may possibly arise after six months. We got to know material problems, zircon material too, the differences between production series, translucencies (translucency: the amount of light which an object transmits and scatters – a material of high translucency is brighter, in contrast to opalescence). This market did very well in America, but in Germany zircon material manufacturers appear every two months, with materials of ever higher translucency. The price is falling rapidly. 90% of the milling centre is mine today. If I had waited for another 2 years, then I would be here in the same place with a lot more knowledge and less investment. We have started marketing the newly developed software in America too; I am convinced it is the best CAM software on the market. Its huge advantage is that it can be used on all kinds of brands of machines. So I took it to America: we showed it to the customer, but we had no success with it because the manufacturer of the existing machine said that if they used different software on their machine, they would cancel the servicing agreement. They really liked it, though. The lesson to be learned from this case, is that if we want this software to work, then sooner or later we have to make the machines as well. So we have to manufacture mills, scanners, furnaces, and our own raw materials. There is no way we wanted to make the CAM software, as there were already outstanding development experts for this, with whom we even set up Dental Concept Systems, and this firm deals exclusively with CAD/CAM technology. The DC 5 is the flagship of this project. This machine may be of interest to both smaller and medium-sized labs, because it knows all the techniques.

DC5 MINI

And the DC 5 Mini? Is it really portable?

It's portable, but it can hardly be called a toy, it's a very accurate, 5 axis, outstanding quality machine. We are still working on it, but we can introduce it in September-October. The DC 5 Mini will conquer a larger market than ever before. If a dental lab is constantly under stress because it cannot produce its orders in time, if it wants a full replacement, or if it just wants to make a small crown, and besides all this it always needs differing thicknesses of material, then the DC 5 MINI, with its holder for 5-6 blanks, is the best choice for solving all these. It stores blanks of varying thicknesses in the holder. It always mills the job from the block which is the most ideal. In this way, the milling time is also reduced. It uses less milling material and less electricity, it will be a very economical appliance, besides looking good, and being reliable! We are building the market now. We have also learned that you can't sell the machine to every lab, because they think that if they buy a DC 5, then it will be able to do everything immediately. This is not so, everything has to be learned. Unfortunately this mentality leads to a lot of mistakes – and furthermore, they think that the machine is to blame for these.

WORK MUST BEEN JOYABLE

What motivates you, Mr. Zubler?

There are two or three things which are important, for which I do all this. One foundational thing in my life is: the reason I work is not to earn money. The most important thing is, I enjoy it! If people love what they do, results will not fail to appear. And the company is not there so the boss will be satisfied, but so that the employees will be. I have an employee who will retire in 3 years; he was an apprentice here, and since then (incredible to say) he has worked at Zubler for 50 years without a break. I also lay emphasis on the personal side of the work: if a problem of a personal nature arises for someone who has worked at the company for 15–20 years, then we spare no time or money to help him, because only then will he be capable of concentrating on his work to a full extent again.

FINANCIAL TRAINING FOR FAMILIES

We also see young families getting into difficulties; many get into the situation that when the children are born, they run out of money. We run training sessions for families like these. This is a little economic-financial instruction: together we write down how much they spend in a month, and how much is left. At times interesting things come to light! Then we talk to the wife about not spending beyond their financial means, or to the husband about not devoting too much to the car: he takes out credit for tyres or wheels, though they already have 5–6 different kinds of credit – and I could list more examples taken from real life. Running the training sessions is also part of our work. My father introduced this at one time, so we could utilise a certain percentage of our revenue for social purposes each year. Now we are sponsoring diabetic children, who are learning to live with this disease. Besides this we have a division which employs those living with disability, the press piston manufacturing division, where we have 20 severely disabled workers. We plough back the profit from their activities into sponsorship for them, as well as giving it to other socially needy people.

DOG RESCUE FOUNDATION

We have a foundation, the A.C.E. (**www.ace-tiere-in-not.de**): this is an international dog rescue service, which rounds up dogs which have been shot or wounded. An operation centre is now under construction in Greece, with a quarantine section, where the dogs can live in safety before being brought to Germany. My wife is president of the foundation. We are present throughout Europe, and we have already appeared on television with this project. We also have a rescued dog, Lola, living with us, and we love her dearly. My wife and I are both very socially sensitive, and we feel it is important to help those in need.

HOBBY

You can't just be having ideas, developing, manufacturing, doing market research all the time...

You shouldn't just work. You can do lots of things alone, but I was fortunate enough to meet a woman while skiing in 1975, who I have loved very much ever since, and is my companion in everything. I will never forget that day! I had brand new ski equipment (beautiful and costing an arm and a leg), and I was very content that I could finally afford it. In the break between downhill runs I went into a restaurant, leaving the equipment outside by the door. When I went back out, only the two sticks were there. In my initial despair I started yelling, had they seen anyone going off with some skis – which in retrospect seems rather funny, after all the scene took place in a skiing paradise. However, a girl spoke up at once, that she had seen someone. I called the owner, who suggested I should go to the police immediately, especially if the skis were insured, but for this I would need a witness, who had seen the theft. I went up to the young girl and asked her to come with me, as I would need her evidence. I was very pleased when she did come along, in spite of the gorgeous weather. The policeman made out a report, and I then heard that the chance witness had the same birthday as me, December 23rd. I was so pleased about this that I invited her for a coffee, then we spent a few more days together. Right then there was an avalanche accident, so we both helped with the rescue. Four years after we met she moved to Ulm, and started to work for my firm in the office. She helped with all kinds of work processes, even sewing filters for the extractors. Besides many other things, it is thanks to her that I can get on a plane, as she helped dispel my fear of flying. The two of us thus went first to Vienna, then to Stuttgart. We are still living together today, she helps out at the company, but mostly she is involved with the foundation. One of our hobbies is travelling. And Harley-Davidson biking is my other major passion. This love affair originally started with old bikes. I used to collect motorcycles and I was always fixing them: I have pre-war bikes with sidecars, as well as Muray, BWM R71 and M72 makes. We also organise old-timer tours.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON FEELING À LA ZUBLER

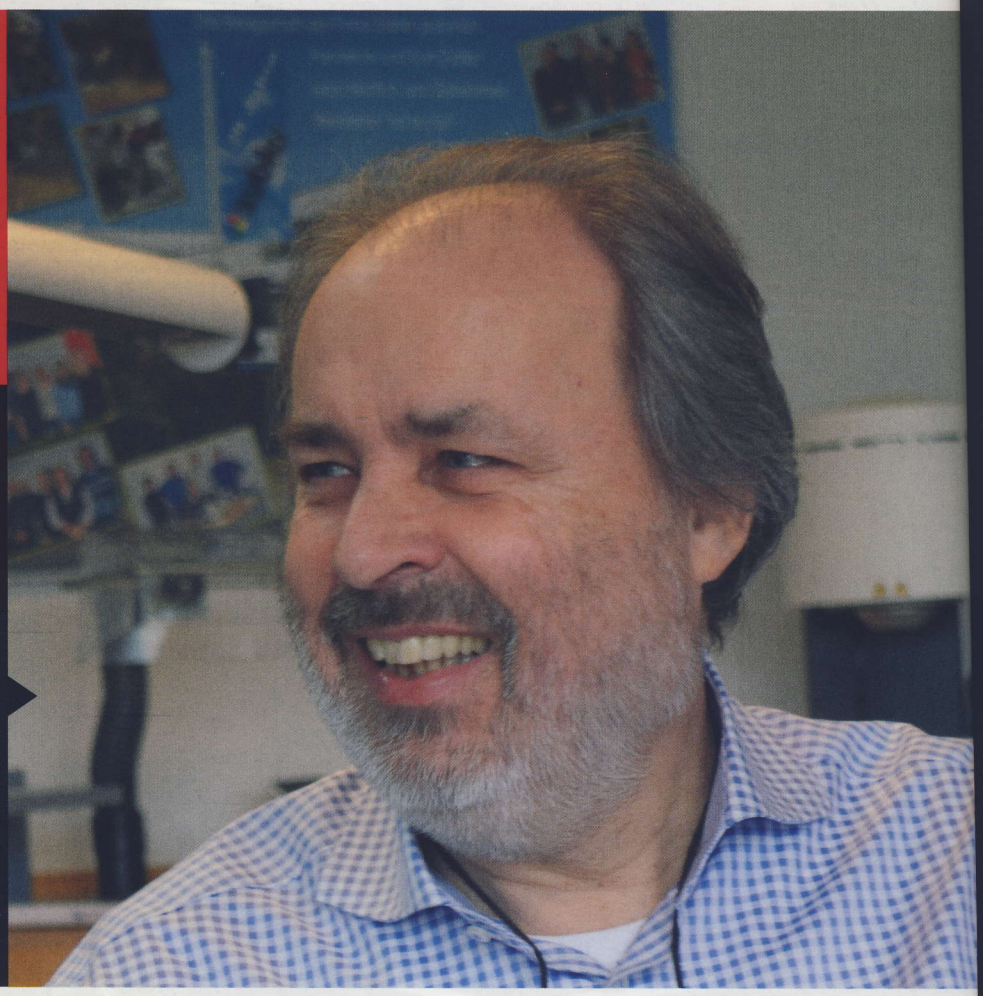
Based on what you have said so far, I assume that if you have the choice, you prefer to stay on the ground than be in the air. Perhaps you can really live out the passion you feel for motorbikes where you can enjoy the greatest freedom on the roads...

Yes, quite precisely, in America, in New Mexico, on Route 66. The Harley tour runs through the territory of the Comanche and Tucumcari Indians. These tours are linked with an old friend of mine, and we decided that we would make this trip twice a year. Since then we have done a lot of tours in America. I managed to purchase new Harley Davidsons from a Harley dealer, so I now have six machines. I use them once or twice a year. Biking in America is good, because the roads are lovely and long, I can merrily lumber though the Wild West, I can trample J. R. Ewings's land in Texas, ride across the Mississippi River, I can see an ice-cave in the desert and sleep in an Indian wigwam. We already know the nicest places in America. My wife rides bikes too. My American friends organise these tours, generally with 6-8 participants. It's often the case that everyone knows everybody. Last time we went to Cuba – it was a fantastic experience!

Further information about the tours and application conditions:
www.ridethedream.com

CULINARY PLEASURES

Besides biking, I go in for culinary pleasures: I spend a great deal of time and money on this passion of mine. I particularly adore Japanese, Spanish, Italian and "who cares what it is, if it's superb" cuisine. Goose liver is my weakness: I feel this is a delicacy that I cannot do without. Our circle of friends consists of five couples we have known for a very long time.



> **You always have to be able to smuggle a bit of buffoonery into life.**
>
> **You can't do without it.**

The husband of one of our friends in a chef in a Michelin star restaurant, and he runs proper courses for us. We also travel a lot together – at such times we link business or collective adventures with gastronomic pleasures. Last weekend, for instance, the group went on a two day excursion to Zürich. After the thrills – the day began by us spending three hours in an aeroplane simulator – in the evening we had dinner in the Michelin two-star restaurant of a schloss, tasting divine wines until two in the morning. We go to Vienna soon, then to Belgium.

WINE

For me, the enjoyment of wine is also part of gastronomy. I have a very fine wine cellar, with superb wines. There is a nice little story associated with this too: one day my wife told me that the Animal Protection Association was in need of financial support. "No problem", I said, "I'll sell a bottle of wine." "That's not enough, I don't need 100 euros, but a lot more!"– she replied somewhat indignantly. "So how much?" – I asked. She mentioned an amount, at which I reassured her that the money would be available in a week. I could have given it to her at once, but in this way there was a little game involved. I put a bottle of wine up for internet auction, and by the second day there was already a response. The bidding started at 800 euros, and we were up to 2,000 euros when I felt that the party had gone crazy for this wine. He asked me to take a photo of the serial number. The origin of the wine was clarified, and in the meantime the price stood at 2,700 euros. One minute before the deadline expired he raised the bid, and my wine finally went for 3,400 euros. I handed over the money to my wife who was suitably shocked. Along with her, many did not understand how anyone could be so crazy as to pay so much for a bottle of wine. My customer was a wine dealer, but he bought this bottle as a private person. The story continued: a few days later I got an e-mail from him in which he told me he had sold this '89 Chateau Petrus for 1,000 euros more. Since this happened, I have put a bottle of wine up for auction on occasions. When I sell them, I hand over the proceeds to the Animal Protection Association.

Besides work, you collect motorbikes and wines, ride a Harley-Davidson, and get involved in culinary adventures. Is there anything else?

Perhaps some advice to finish with: you always have to be able to smuggle a bit of buffoonery into life. You can't do without it.

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