

The Hotel Story

The history of the “Parkhotel de Wiemsel” is also the history of entrepreneur Henning J. Claassen.

H. J. Claassen (HJC), the son of a fourth generation baker’s family in Lüneburg, completed training as an industrial clerk in Hamburg and then boarded a freight ship bound for the United States. After studying Economics and Psychology in California for three years, he returned to Germany, where he started his own business and became an agent for an American machinery manufacturer for adhesive applications.

A few years later he founded “Meltex GmbH” and began designing and constructing hot melt adhesive systems. The company grew, establishing branches around the world, including a facility in the USA. Customers and agents visited the headquarters in Lüneburg regularly. Since Lüneburg did not have a suitable hotel for business travelers, HJC decided to build his own, collecting ideas from other hotels he visited in the course of his travels around the world.

The final tally was 1000 points that contributed to the design of the “Meltex Hotel.” The ultimate goal was for the guests to feel at home, no matter where they came from, regardless of whether tourist, business traveler or conference participant. And the name had to be fitting too: appealing yet neutral. As chance would have it, HJC spent the night at a hotel in the USA named “Bergström.” This was to be the name. To be able to found a company named Bergström, there had to be a shareholder of the same name.

It took some effort and a respective fee, but the Norwegian Oynfried Bergström agreed to lend his name and become a shareholder for a few minutes to establish the company “Bergström GmbH”. To make sure everything was done properly, the respective documents on his joining and leaving the company were signed at the German embassy in Oslo.

There were no more obstacles in the way. HJC already had his eye on property in the Lüneburg harbor district, a parcel of land with dilapidated, uninhabited buildings, right on the banks of the Ilmenau river. When he showed his mother Greta what he was planning, he opened the door to a building, where she promptly stepped on a rat’s nest and exclaimed: “Henning, don’t do it! You won’t be happy here.” But her son Henning was not to be deterred: In the existing complex, he





HJC restored the charm of Lüneburg's waterfront district with numerous renovations.

built a small, very nice hotel with 65 rooms. At virtually the same time as the grand opening of the hotel, he sold his machine factory, "Meltex GmbH", which had grown by then to 300 employees in Lüneburg and Atlanta. The headline in the local newspaper: "Claassen sells "Meltex" and opens a hotel."

But HJC had other plans. He discovered niches in the hotel business that needed attention too. He soon founded "Ciscom Hotelcommunications" for the technology, "CMC Hotelausstattungen" for interior furnishings and "Direct Leasing" for financing. And all the while the "Bergström" was being expanded. After "Ciscom" became Germany's largest provider of hotel pay TV and "CMC" furnished over 100 hotels, HJC sold both companies and detached himself from "Direct Leasing".

What does a thoroughbred entrepreneur do when he feels like he has extra capacity? He starts a new company. HJC had business friends from around the world dating back to his "Meltex days." He convinced them that they should join him in investing in "surface

technology," the branch of the future. The result was "Impreglon SE", a company listed on the Frankfurt stock exchange with 37 plants in 14 countries and 150 million Euro in revenue, the leadership of which HJC passed to the Dutch corporation "Aalberts Industries B.V." in 2015.

And HJC gave the Lüneburg water district back its charm with further elaborate renovations of historic buildings such as the "Abtsmühle", the "Lüner Mühle" and the "Altes Kaufhaus". Thus, the hotel developed into a 4-star superior location with more than 200 guest rooms, 4 restaurants, spa, wine bar, bakery "die Backstube", where bread and rolls were traditionally baked in a stone oven, "Palais am Werder" with a large ballroom and "Forsthaus Rote Schleuse", a popular restaurant destination.

In 2010, the "Galerie im Alten Kaufhaus" was added, where HJC exhibited part of his collection of contemporary art, which he had gathered in over 40 years on business trips all over the world.



“Seaport Spycy,” the perfume created by the enthusiastic sailor HJC.

Last but not least, as an avid sailor, HJC discovered a small perfumery on the Gulf of Mexico, where he created “Seaport Spycy”, a fresh unisex Eau de Cologne, for his hotel guests.

And this is where the de Wiemsel story begins...

HJC and his wife Helga had a favorite hotel in the Netherlands, where they went for a short vacation every year: “Hotel de Wiemsel” in the small artist town of Ootmarsum.

When they tried to book their vacation in 2014, they were told that the hotel had closed. HJC looked into the reason and discovered that the hotel had filed for insolvency but that it had been sold to a new investor who intended to reopen it soon. So the short vacation just had to be postponed. But that did not happen.

Four months later, HJC received a call from the insolvency administrator, telling him, “The buyer of the de Wiemsel failed to pay!” He then asked, “Are you interested?” It was a tempting proposition. HJC was already planning to hand

over management of the Impreglon group in 2015, and now he was given the opportunity to start something new. The result: The “Restaurant de Wanne”, built in 1968 and expanded to “Hotel de Wiemsel” in 1978, became the new “Parkhotel de Wiemsel”.



Helga and Henning J. Claassen, owners of “Parkhotel de Wiemsel”, 2022.



"Space for art" – created by HJC, at the Parkhotel and in his hometown in Lüneburg (www.kunstsammlung-henningclaassen.de).

In the meantime, with 56 suites and guest rooms, it has become a hideaway for guests from around the world. And of course the love for art pulls its red thread again. In spring 2019 HJC opened the "Kunstgalerie Parkhotel de Wiemsel" in the park of the hotel.

Since his children have chosen other professions – Björn is a professor in the USA, Sönke runs his own health management consulting company in Australia, Sibylle lives in Stuttgart with her husband and three children, and Britt is an architect in Lüneburg – HJC sold the hotel properties in Lüneburg to a new operator/investor in 2016.

More time for art: In 2022, the "Kunstsammlung Henning J. Claassen" found its place in the heart of Lüneburg. The cubic new building impresses with a facade of natural stone and the inviting large glass surfaces. The open and spacious interior provides the perfect "canvas" for the multifaceted exhibition of contemporary art from around the

world, and a small café in the lobby invites visitors to stay. Pianists from all over the world play at the Red Piano in the „Music Meets Art" series of the Kunstsammlung. In the meantime, daughter Britt has given up her job as an architect and joined the foundation as board member and managing director.

At the end of this story, HJC's personal commitment is worth mentioning: The initiative he founded in 1997, "Schützt die Opfer e.V." ("Help the victims"), which especially helps women and children who became victims of violent crimes or find themselves in need through no fault of their own. Since the initiative was founded, people in need, help groups and approved organisations have received 500,000.00 EUR in support.

In recognition of his numerous diverse achievements the Council of the City of Lüneburg awarded HJC the Honorable Citizenship on April 1, 2017.