

# History of Dresdner Spitzen

## **(1) Founding (1884)**

At the end of the 19th century, German window dressing mostly consisted of plain fabrics such as linen, mull, estamin or madras. Only the upper class could afford delicate and versatile patterned curtains since these novel luxury goods first of all had to be imported from England at a dear price.

The merchants Georg Marwitz and Carl H. Siegel from Dresden spotted this market niche and, in the year 1884, founded the Dresdner Gardinen- and Spitzen-Manufaktur Aktien-Gesellschaft (Dregus) in one of Dresden's districts Johannstadt. With the purchase of English bobbinet machines, the merchants offered resistance to their respective export ban – as it already happened in Plauen. After that, nothing else stood in between the production of the popular curtain and lace fabrics anymore.

## **(2) Expansion (starting 1900)**

Ever since the very beginning, the main site profitably produced curtains, lace and tulle and delivered them all over the world. The demand for curtains was huge and could barely be covered, subsequently making investments in new buildings and machinery necessary. Soon enough, the factory premises became too small, and alternatives had to be found.

Dobritz, which is ten kilometers away from the main site and located at the rail line Dresden - Pirna, quickly became the new company's headquarters of Dregus and has remained so ever since. Whereas the finishing facilities, consisting of laundry, bleachery and dye-works, already moved to the new site in 1900, the weaving mill and its eighty bobbinet machines stayed in Johannstadt. Until the move was completed in 1913, horse-drawn vehicles commuted between the facilities to transport the raw materials from Johannstadt to Dobritz.

The modern factory made from ferro concrete and copper water conduits already called freight elevators, a company fire department and library, a canteen, washing rooms and a choir its own. Altogether, the factory premises bestrode more than 80.000 square meters from which about 18.000 were developed.

The Dregus developed healthy and – apart from its business years from 1930 to 1933 – achieved reasonable profits despite the harsh times it was facing. A high cotton price and fashion-related fluctuations in demand and sales marked the first half of the 20th century just as much as World War I (1914 - 18), the inflation (1914 - 23) and the Great Depression (1918 - 33), which has had partially devastating effects on the German economy and industry, did.

Countless collapsing sales markets and companies lead to a rise in unemployment and a constantly sinking purchasing power, which forced Dregus to bring their production to a standstill, introduce short-time working and lay-off part of their workforce. Out of 3.000 employees, 500 had to leave the factory. Nonetheless, the small company soon developed into a firm with several factories in Saxony and around the world. After constructing a curtain factory in Warschau (1898) and a lace factory at the east coast of the USA (1909), a weaving mill in Holland followed suit, but with the end of World War I, the branch locations in Warschau and the USA had to be abandoned.

After the crisis in the early 1930s, the economy slowly recovered. The decline in unemployment proved to be advantageous for both the purchasing power and the consumer goods industry, which benefited Dregus as well. Additionally to the main plant, every single of the other six branches worked effectively and profitably. In doing so, the payment of dividends could be picked up again in 1935.

In that period of upswing, Dregus was able to improve their working conditions significantly. In addition to a higher salary, these included a company doctor, a consultative council and modern sanitation facilities. Remarkable for their time were the reconstruction of the sporting field and the establishment of a work radio and cinema that made for an attractive leisure program for the employees.

### **(3) "Dregusgeist" (starting 1939)**

During the time of World War II (1939 - 45), Dregus primarily produced for arms. The departments for machine engineering and wood processing were expanded in particular, but twisting and textile finishing had to be shifted to war economy as well. Thanks to the employment of artificial silk and rayon, it was possible to sustain the textile production nevertheless.

The majority of employees was called up to serve in the German army. They received letters and parcels from their workplace at least three times a month. Naturally, thought had also been given to those who stayed at home: up to 600 lunches a day, modern therapeutic options, bathhouses, radiotherapy and diagnostic radiology carried out by the works doctor went a long way towards making the hard times at least a little easier.

The at the city's border located Dregus was luckily spared from most of Dresden's destruction. The work quickly became a rescue center for the nearby living people: there, they could clean themselves, obtain first aid and get something to eat. With the end of war at the 8th May of 1945, the occupation of Dresden by the former Soviet Union followed suit. This event marked the end of the company's arms production, which consequently shrunk the number of employees to 35.

The production of curtains and laces didn't get picked up straight away since first of all, there were more important things to do. Those departments that formerly worked for the armament now produced consumer goods for home and garden, and just a short amount of time after that, the core business was permitted to resume work – although exclusively for the Soviet trade.

In the October of 1945, the victorious powers of World War II decreed an expropriation of every Nazi war factory without compensation, including Dregus. Its repair claims were redeemed by the USSR through a complete disassembly of the works: not a single machine or screw was left behind. In addition to that, the branch works started to become independent.

In the face of hunger and hard winters, Dregus still prevailed. After the disassembly, a reconstruction of the now nationally owned enterprise (GDR) ensued in July 1946, completed with the help of reserve machines from Vogtland. Every department was in need of new employees, so that a total of 1.000 people soon found work in the colloquially called "Gardine" (curtain).

Thanks to the company's abilities to deal with whatever life threw in its way and to master difficult situations with improvisation and an inventive mind, the term "Dregusgeist" (Dregus' spirit) emerged in Dresden. During and long after the reconstruction, Dregus was considered to be the pioneer in innovative products of its line.

#### **(4) Prime & Fall of the "Gardine" (starting 1953)**

In 1953, Dregus was merged with both the GDR Leipziger Spitzenfabrik and the GDR Tüllfabrik Flöha. The new large concern with its central in Dresden then got the name GDR Tüllgardinen- and Spitzenwerke Dresden, VVB Deko for short. Although the work in Leipzig already became independent in the following year, the company developed into a successful export business with full order books.

When the construction of the machinery – which consisted of bobbinet machines – was nearly finished in the middle of the 1950s, a new material took over the textile industry: synthetic silk. The polyamide fiber became famous under the trade name Dederon. Dedicated to follow time's latest trends, the processing of the elastic and artificial silk was soon put to the test. While the bobbinet technique proved to be rather unsuitable, the synthetic silk was easy and productively processed via knitting technology and raschel machines to produce tulle, lace and even fabric for curtains.

Both the increase in productivity and growing demand for raschel laces led to the decision to shift both works - Dresden up to 1968 and Flöha to 1973 – completely to knitting technique. The modern machines were manufactured by the company Karl Mayer and corresponded with the latest state of technology. Consequently, Dregus took the lead in the development of tulle, lace and curtains made from synthetic silks on warp knitting looms, and due to the modernization, only 600 out of the 1.100 former employees were needed anymore.

The economic reform involved an additional innovation that merged firms which manufactured the same products to produce larger ones, increasing their productivity. At the 1. January in 1970, the GDR Tüllgardinen- und Spitzenwerke Dresden was integrated into the GDR Plauener Spitze as Werk Dresden. Moreover, the works Auerbach and Leipzig also belonged to the new firm, which employed approximately 3.000 employees.

The work in Dresden was the most efficient one and developed into a showpiece for international guests. With only 20 percent of the employees, it was capable of producing more than 50 percent of the shared profit. In 1976, 8.1 million square meters of lace and 3.9 million square meters of lace curtains were manufactured on 107 raschel machines. The fact that in 1982, the world's first electronically controlled raschel machines were stationed in Dresden and therefore involved the work into the development of electronic raschel technique proved it's high ranking in the particular trade.

Starting from 1982, Dresden's work dabbled in the fields of wall decoration: it adhered delicate and colored textile yarns to aesthetic wallpapers to create different patterns. Since the lace wallpaper unfortunately wasn't able to prove itself on the market, its production had to be canceled in 1988.

The work's focus in the 1980's was definitely on the production of curtains. Up until 1985, it produced 21.5 million square meters. Nevertheless, the economic problems of former East Germany led to an unrealistic increase in planning and the cancellation of salary bonuses in spite of countless extra hours of work. The once so very good working atmosphere changed into discontent, which brought about numerous applications to emigrate and employees that resigned from the party.

With the turnaround, the work in Dresden got independent again, transferred into trust in March 1990 and renamed into Dresdner Spitzen GmbH. At that time, the demand on curtain and decoration fabrics started to decrease distinctively and on a long-term basis. In May 1990, the curtain production had to be abandoned completely, too – with a net cost price of 2 Deutschmark/m<sup>2</sup> and an acceptance price of only 1,08 Deutschmark/m<sup>2</sup>, it was then a losing bargain to keep up manufacturing. Then, when the production of tulle had to be abandoned with respect to profitability as well, the entire main building stood still. Machines were sold and dismissals and short-time work couldn't be avoided.

### **(5) A new beginning (starting from 1995)**

After the German reunification, the former model company continued to develop at an alarmingly poor rate. Both trade partners and markets were lost, and price conditions couldn't be met anymore. In 1994, the production almost came to a complete halt. Because of that, the trust actively sought a buyer, who they found in 1995 in the entrepreneur Manfred Schröder from Berlin. Alongside his son D.Eng Sascha Schröder, he rebuilt Dresden's traditional company step by step and led it to new success.

Since the 1. September of 1995, the corporation now bears the name “Dresdner Gardinen- und Spitzenmanufaktur M. & S. Schröder GmbH und Co. KG”, inspired by the year 1884 – or, for short: Dresdner Spitzen.

A complete renovation of property - inside and out - was mandatory to restore the 50.000 square meter building to its initial polish. As it had always been, everything from the production halls to the office space of Dresdner Spitzen is located under one roof. That way, the short distance provides fast communication and transparent working methods.

Dresdner Spitzen is especially proud of its 14 E-Machines – the only ones on Europe. These rare warp knitting looms from the house of Karl Mayer allow the manufacturing of remarkably expressive laces with prominent structures for outerwear.

In 2002, the high tide of the century wreaked havoc, especially in the company's yarn store. A hole in the dykes let the masses of water advance freely into the work, where it swamped the entire site and its numerous basements. With the energetic support of the employees and one week of clearing work, Dresdner Spitzen could take up production after shortest time again, and in turn, the company recovered rather quickly from its setback. When in 2013, floods hit the city anew, the work was fortunately spared further damage.

## **(6) Today**

Today, Dresdner Spitzen ranks among the leading producers and suppliers of the lingerie and clothing industry. Year for year, the company produces up to 200.000 kilogram lace - certified to OEKO-TEX® Standard 100 - which are exported to countries all over the world. Its famous customers include well-known brands as Dolce & Gabbana, Triumph, S. Oliver and C&A.

The latest technology of the company Karl Mayer moved in with Dresdner Spitzen with the expansion of the machinery in the year 2012. The Jacquardtronic® Lace- and Textronic® Lace-Models enable not only the processing of elastic and inelastic lace ribbons and fabrics, but also the manufacturing of functional shape-wear embroidered with lace.

At the large trade fairs for apparel fabrics like the Première Vision and the Interfilère in Paris, the Milano Unica in Milan and the Munich Fabric Start in Munich, Dresdner Spitzen is always present. Interested parties are able to examine the products directly at the trade-show booth or schedule a future appointment with one of the company's numerous agents. A visit of Dresden's lace manufactory, too, is always possible.

As innovative, traditional company, Dresdner Spitzen continually works on the further development of lace fabrics and ribbons. Therefore, a cooperation with the Dresden University of Technology, the Textilmaschinenfabrik Karl Mayer and the Dorlastan® manufacturer Asahi Kasei Spandex Europe formed in 2012. In collaboration, the complex manufacturing of bi-elastic lace is being researched. A possible field of application is shape-wear, which can be made more attractive with the processing of bi-elastic lace applications.

Dresdner Spitzen invest in training and the further education of their employees. For example, young people who are enthusiastic about technology are able to learn IHK certified professions like the production or manufacturing mechanic in just three years of training. Furthermore, the company functions as practice partner of the Berufsakademie Dresden within the scope of the cooperative study program in economic sciences. Also, students with different fields of studies are encouraged to write their Bachelor or Master's thesis under the roof of the company. The regular costs for the further education and qualification of employees are also paid for entirely by the company.

D.Eng Sascha Schröder, executive partner of Dresdner Spitzen, family man, Saxon Triathlon Champion and three times Ironman finisher, commits himself to charitable institutions from Dresden, for example the city's triathlon club. As in his own company, he steadily focuses on innovations and encourages young people with great ideas by advising and supporting promising start-ups.