



An interview with Julian Utz and Philipp Utz

Philipp and Julian Utz (both 36) began their careers in the company in 2011, Uzin Utz AG's centenary year. Today, they shape the destiny of our subsidiaries as Managing Directors of PALLMANN and Wolff. Following on from their father Dr H. Werner Utz, this makes them the 4th generation to develop the company into a successful full-range provider of flooring systems as well as to chair the Supervisory Board.

Have you both always known that you would join your father's company?

JULIAN UTZ: No. The company has naturally always had a seat at our family table and has been part of our lives since childhood, but we had enough freedom in our education to go our own ways in the future if we wanted. It was only during my degree that I started to consider working for the family business.

PHILIPP UTZ: When planning our careers, the option of joining the family business was naturally always there. Really, it was more a question of when we'd join – which ended up being the year of our company's centennial anniversary.

Did your parents have certain expectations of you that played a role in this?

JULIAN UTZ: I believe that all families and family businesses want to be able to pass their company or business down to the next generation. I'm sure that this is also true of our father. However, we weren't put under any pressure to fulfil this expectation and make everything else secondary to it.

PHILIPP UTZ: Our father showed a great deal of foresight and gave us the freedom to pave our own way from our studies to the point of us joining the company. During that time, our parents' expectations were simply that we made the most of our potential. If this had led to us opting for a different industry or career path over the medium or long term, our parents would naturally have accepted that. Our sister is a good example of this – she decided at a very early stage that she wanted to work for the diplomatic service and is now employed by the Foreign Office.

You both bear a great deal of responsibility at our sites in Ilsfeld and Würzburg. Can you tell us a little more about that? What characterises each of the sites for you?

JULIAN UTZ: I've had the pleasure of getting to know Wolff at three different sites. When I first started at Wolff in summer 2011, we were still WOLFF and Frank GmbH, with sites in Vaihingen/

Enz-Aurich and Oberderdingen. These two sites, the structural fabric and their physical divide were key to my first task at Wolff: "What is the best way for the two companies to head into the future? Still separately or together under one roof?" We decided to merge the two companies and selected a new site in Ilsfeld. We've now been in Ilsfeld since October 2014, where we've got a great, modern site, motivated and committed employees and still a little room for future increases in turnover. This new environment, the state-of-the-art production facilities and the proximity to transport links have given us a real boost both internally and with regard to our external image among customers and suppliers.

PHILIPP UTZ: In my role as Sales Director for Germany, I naturally see the main part of my job as working with our customers and am only at the office itself on occasions. Despite this, it's important for me that the departments like Customer Service, Laboratory and Application Engineering optimally support our market activities. I therefore regard it as my task to act as the link between the departments on site and the market. With regard to the sites themselves, it is very clear that each of the sites and the companies associated with them are completely different in terms of what they require from us, the production technologies and, to some extent, the markets that we serve with them. Our Würzburg site and the associated subsidiary PALLMANN GmbH are characterised by flat hierarchies, short decision-making routes and a high level of identification of all employees with the company.

How do you master the balancing act in the Uzin Utz Group of preserving what your father built up while also incorporating new things into the company?

JULIAN UTZ: I don't regard it as a balancing act. We are a listed family business and want to remain that way. Our employees' outstanding performances create the foundations of our company's success. New innovations are possible and essential with regard to our products, services and the digitalisation of Uzin Utz AG. However, our 100-year history has already shown that we are open to new things, transformations and change.

PHILIPP UTZ: German historian Michael Richter once said: What stays is change; what changes, stays. It is therefore important for us to continuously develop our company and adapt to not only new market conditions and trends but also the changing needs of our employees. I have no doubt that we'll have to focus more intensively on the topic of digitalisation in the coming years. This will primarily task

us with no longer just thinking in terms of product innovations but rather in terms of business model innovations. As a result, the strategic orientation that my father defined for the company will have to change.

What have been your biggest challenges?

JULIAN UTZ: A major challenge for me was familiarising myself with the Uzin Utz AG product world; I'm still learning something new every day. A further challenge is that of identifying the diverse needs of the different markets and covering them with our (Wolff) product range. Unfortunately, that's not always possible.

PHILIPP UTZ: One of my biggest challenges to date was definitely the project in the USA. I always like to compare the initial situation with an expedition. You have a clear destination in mind but it's only at the end of the expedition that you know how to successfully reach each of the interim destinations and what actually awaits you at the end. In view of the great importance of local production for our growth plans in the USA, the expectations of everyone involved were extremely high. Equally, we were all filled with pride when we successfully commissioned the factory in May 2015. This showed me that no matter how great the challenges, we can master even the most complex of tasks through passion and perseverance.

What expectations/desires have you picked up along the way?

JULIAN UTZ: There is already a strong tendency to get things done with increasing speed. Innovation cycles are becoming shorter and markets are moving ever more quickly. I'm not saying that this is something I underestimated, but it's certainly something that has made an impression on me and an area in which I can also see our customers' expectations and desires. As a manufacturer, we have to make a mark in this regard and impress with our developments and innovations. From my perspective as an employee, I want Uzin Utz AG to be a stable and reliable employer.

PHILIPP UTZ: In addition to my career, it goes without saying that my family is extremely important to me. As a result, I always want and try to strike as good a balance between them as possible, even if it's hard to do at times.

Imagine that you were able to see the future. How will the Uzin Utz Group have developed in 10 years' time?

JULIAN UTZ: We currently have a fixed roadmap with our GOLD growth strategy. In addition, the manufacturers that can deliver the most sought-after technologies for the retail sector and customers will establish themselves. If I look 10 years into the future, I see Uzin Utz AG as a leading international company in the construction chemicals industry with a complete range of products for the flooring sector.

PHILIPP UTZ: In 10 years' time, we'll have further enhanced our leading market position, especially in international markets. We'll also have focussed strongly on innovative services and digital platforms, which enable us to serve our customers – and I'm intentionally not restricting that to trade customers – faster, more holistically and more efficiently.

Can you describe your floor of the future?

JULIAN UTZ: My floor of the future is made from a recycled material. As a result of advances like smart homes and the Internet of Things, flooring will also have to be more intelligent.

PHILIPP UTZ: The floor of the future will be multipurpose. For example, in the same way that we are currently seeing the convergence of multiple services and functions in the IT sector to form single products, the flooring of the future will perform several simultaneous functions. Driven by a holistic smart home concept, such functions could include supporting the networking of wireless connections. However, I can also imagine that flooring in high-footfall areas such as exhibition halls, conference centres and the like could become part of a security concept through the use of integrated sensors.

What skills do you particularly value?

JULIAN UTZ: As an athlete, I love competition – you'll never become world champion from your armchair.

I therefore believe that our joint success depends on traits like enthusiasm for what you are doing, teamwork and perseverance, but also on the ability to critically assess things.

PHILIPP UTZ: I believe that it's important – and this applies for both me and my employees – to regularly take the time to reflect on our own actions and the decisions we have made, and to allow ourselves to amend things if necessary. It will also become increasingly important in the future to have the openness and willingness to leave well-trodden paths and confidently deal with countries, products, technologies, sectors and competitors that are not directly relevant from today's perspective.

— Tanja Peter, Central Marketing & Operations

