

Fonderie Valdelsane: SPECIALIZATION IN CASTINGS; WORKING TO BECOME MORE DYNAMIC, FLEXIBLE AND COMPETITIVE

Fonderie Valdelsane CEO, Mr. Roberto Gerbi, speaks to us about its past, present and future – with the goal not only to strengthen its position as a reference name, but also to expand and consolidate at global level thanks to positive feedback regarding efficiency, life of the moulds, quality of glass, and reduced production times and costs.

Fonderie Valdelsane dates back to 1961, when the passion and commitment of its three founding members was concretised through the establishment of a small artisan enterprise in Colle Val d'Elsa, in the heart of Tuscany.

Given the intense glassmaking activity in the area, linked to the production of selected wine and oil, the company chose to specialise, since its very start, in the production of special cast iron and bronze castings for moulds used in container glass manufacturing.

Constant growth soon led Fonderie Valdelsane to go beyond regional boundaries first, fol-

lowed by national borders, and in the 1990s the Foundries became a reference point for all Italian and European professionals in the field.

The constantly developed and improved quality of the different types of cast iron, the use of state-of-the-art production methods, quick deliveries, and the consequent increased demand from an ever-expanding market have led to the need to invest in continuous extension works and automation.

The current headquarters, inaugurated in 1990 in Monteriggioni, have been enlarged and upgraded several times.

In the short time-span from 2013 to 2015, the covered area of the facilities increased by 2,000 square metres, reaching a total of about 8,000 square metres. Over recent years, the company has consolidated its leadership in the glass sector thanks to significant investments in new technologies, automation and human resources, as well as strong collaborations with its partners. ISO 9001 (since 1996) and the ISO 14001 certifications, numerous acknowledgements with respect to Quality, Safety and Environment, and daily improvements to the supply chain, are among the strong points of Fonderie Valdelsane.



HAVE YOU MADE ANY IMPORTANT INVESTMENTS IN THE PAST TWO OR THREE YEARS?

After having completed and automated our new cold-end – a covered area of 2,000 square metres – we have also made further investments aimed at increasing both quality and efficiency in various production areas.

First and foremost, we have seen excellent results in the production line dedicated to bronze. And now, Fonderie Valdelsane can guarantee accurate control of production parameters, which determine absolute stability and repeatability of this material when it is used in the production of glassware.

The company has developed a new lay-out in the Pattern Dept., which is now larger and equipped with new machinery and software, for the purpose of further improving accuracy and responsiveness from the order receipt.

Important investments have also been allocated in some areas of non-core services, which are essential to guarantee product

quality and production efficiency, from the preparation of casting boxes up to knock-out phases.

TWENTY YEARS AGO THE COMPANY GAINED ISO 9001 CERTIFICATION, AND MORE RECENTLY 14001....

Yes, but this was also quite a few years ago. With 14001 certification, Fonderie Valdelsane is committed to respecting the strict Italian and European regulations in terms of environmental protection – and much more. Our voluntary participation in the EMAS (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme) system represents a further step to constrain the growth of the next few years, leading to a continuous improvement of environmental efficiency.

Fonderie Valdelsane is deeply rooted in its territory and, right from the beginning, it has grown together with its area, contributing to its development and at the same time, deriving its benefits and resources. This is one of the reasons why we take special care to improve the quality of the environment in which we all live, and that is why we decided

to invest in technological progress that is combined with the constant improvement of environmental conditions. Protection of the environment and quality of life are two sides of the same coin, and we want to be the first to set a good example.

An example of this can be seen in the roof of our main structure, which was entirely replaced in 2017, using innovative materials that reduce environmental impact and improve air quality, while allowing staff to enjoy better working conditions.

CUTTING-EDGE CERTIFICATIONS AND SPECIAL ATTENTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT, THEN. DO THESE ASPECTS AFFECT THE DAILY WORK OF WORKERS?

Of course, each of us in every department must work together to ensure the achievement of environmental objectives we have set ourselves. This means paying greater attention to operations and focusing more on the details that characterize life in the company.





In this sense, Fonderie Valdelsane has a holistic vision of its organization. The ambitious goals achieved in the course of its history must be considered only as the result of the work of its team as a whole, where everyone has been able to contribute decisively to the growth of the company.

The environmental theme is therefore closely related to respect for the workplace and working conditions of all operators. This leads to a virtuous circle for which the staff feels an integral part of their company, growing with it and achieving the high degree of specialization necessary to ensure continuous progress.

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE PRODUCTION OF BRONZE FOR THE COMPANY?

In recent years, enormous efforts have been made to fine-tune the process of producing bronze moulds. In the past, this segment of production was mainly an artisan activity, following the considerable investments

of the last few years, a parallel production system has been created that is independent from that of cast iron. Today we have a casting line entirely dedicated to bronze, with related furnaces installed exclusively for this type of production and a totally automated casting plant, where every different task consists essentially in management control.

The satisfaction of our customers with regards to the quality of Fonderie Valdelsane bronze, has led to growing demand and higher production volumes, to which we are responding with further interventions aimed at increasing efficiency and production capacity.

THE FIRST RECIPIENTS OF YOUR CASTINGS ARE OBVIOUSLY THE MOULD SHOPS. HAVE YOU MADE ANY IMPROVEMENTS TO SUPPORT THEIR WORK?

Yes, it's true that our product is used by glassworks, but it is equally important for Fonderie Valdelsane to make the operations of the mould shops easier,

faster and then, cheaper.

In fact, there are specific advantages that our castings determine in the mechanical machining in mould shops.

The ease of welding of K250 series cast irons, for example, is highly appreciated by mould manufacturers. This feature, in addition to determining greater stability in glass production, also enables them to operate more quickly and efficiently, with consequent optimization of production times and costs.

Particular attention is also paid to the microstructure and hardness of our castings, which maintain constant parameters in each area of the design. This is very important as it drastically reduces the possibility that tools can be damaged during processing and at the same time, allows more linear and constant milling and turning operations, also decreasing tool consumption. The absence of micro-hardness and internal resistance to the material is even more important when carrying out vertiflow/axial cooling drills, ensuring compliance with

the minimum tolerances required by our clients.

WHAT ARE THE TRENDS AND PROSPECTS OF THE MARKET?

Today, there is a common goal for glassworks to become each day more dynamic, flexible and competitive in the market. They are carrying out different types of internal restructuring to develop their own tools to control the performance of their plants, trying to improve response times and quality to offer to their clients, who are increasingly sensitive and demanding. The reduction of production and management costs is part of this common trend, in Europe as in America and in Asia. To give an example: the constant monitoring of indicators such as pack-to-melt and pack-to-cut are now considered essential to ensure the real control of efficiency in the glass factory. Everyone has, in fact, understood that to be competitive on the market you need to be efficient where costs have a greater impact in production.

On numerous occasions in which glassworks have carried out comparative tests between

Fonderie Valdelsane and others, we have always had the satisfaction of receiving very positive feedback, which has helped us to significantly increase our presence also in distant countries. Thanks to the investments mentioned, aimed at meeting the growing quality requirements of the market, we have also significantly increased our daily production capacity and responsiveness to order reception. The technical time for the production of a series of moulds has been further reduced. To give you an idea, today we work with delivery within five working days from receipt of order.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE THE REQUESTS COMING FROM NON-EUROPEAN COUNTRIES? IS TRANSPORT TIME A PROBLEM?

In fact, we often face transport times that are longer than those for production. So we have developed various solutions to overcome this type of difficulty. But by programming work together with the glass factory, delivery time can become a secondary aspect. In addition, the reactivity and operations of our commercial

offices, together with the availability of a fleet of trucks and stable relationships with the most reliable shipping and air transport agencies, enable Fonderie Valdelsane to offer its partners any type of incoterms conditions.

IN RELATION TO THE NEW MARKETS, DO YOU INTEND TO CONTINUE THE EXPANSION PHASE OF THE LAST FEW YEARS?

Yes, of course this is what we are aiming at and working for. It is the same exceptionally positive feedback that we receive from customers who encourage us to offer our products in markets where Fonderie Valdelsane is less present.

When significant percentage increases are found in the main efficiency indicators, mould life, glass quality, with significant reductions for production times and costs, it is natural for glassmakers to give priority to the use of specific materials for their glass moulds, such as those from Fonderie Valdelsane.

Furthermore, we believe it is strategic to be able to offer our products to different countries, also in consideration of differ-





ent seasonal consumption, as the production capacity of the company has increased significantly and is able to respond to the increased demand for cast iron and bronze for glass moulds of high quality.

Our offices are well organized and structured in order to provide immediate assistance to all clients, from a technical, commercial and administrative point of view.

WHAT ARE THE UPCOMING EVENTS OF FONDERIE VALDELSANE?

We are evaluating various events that will take place next year. For the moment, we have confirmed our participation in the Glassman Fair to be held in Brazil and Mir Stekla in Russia. We care in a particular way about Russia, where we are dealing with important and experienced partners that appreciate very much the quality of our alloys.

HAS THE INTERNATIONAL REACH OF FONDERIE VALDELSANE DETERMINED FURTHER COMMERCIAL ACTIONS TO PROMOTE THE BRAND?

Honestly, we have had the pleasure to see that the FV brand is, today, an internationally recognized reference name for quality of cast iron and bronze for glass moulds. On the other hand, this aspect has determined the need to protect the glassworks that use our material, since in several cases they buy the moulds already machined by the mould shops.

Unfortunately, there have been cases – also very recent – in which some glassworks with production problems caused by low quality moulds have come to us to find out why, and the answer was very simple: the mould supplier declared that the cast iron

came from Fonderie Valdelsane, but in reality it had been produced by another foundry!

Fonderie Valdelsane has therefore decided to protect its materials from any attempt at fraudulent imitation, registering the various brands internationally in order to prevent the occurrence of these undesirable actions.

Secondly, we always provide our clients with unique certificate of analysis for every single mould set, with specific reference number and code, so that the glass factory can check if the material is original, at any time.

A way to protect Fonderie Valdelsane of course, but also in the interest of all the glassworks and of the excellent technicians and engineers who work there, for whom the use of our mould castings is essential to ensure high standards of quality and efficiency. ■