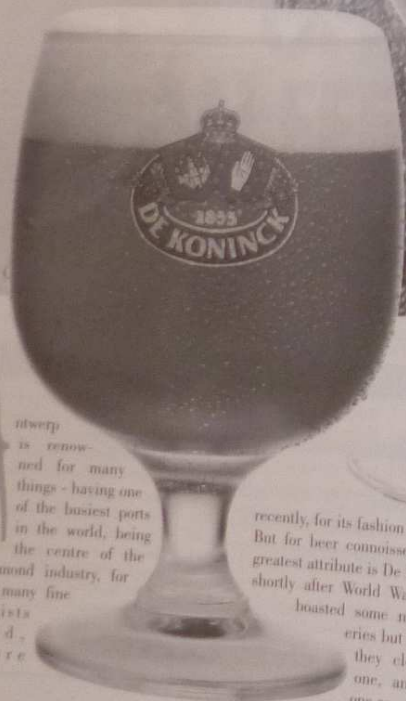


DISCOVERING NECTAR

Master brewer
Modeste
Van den Bogaert
reveals why a bolleke
of De Koninck is
such a memorable
experience. Dick
Suter sips and listens



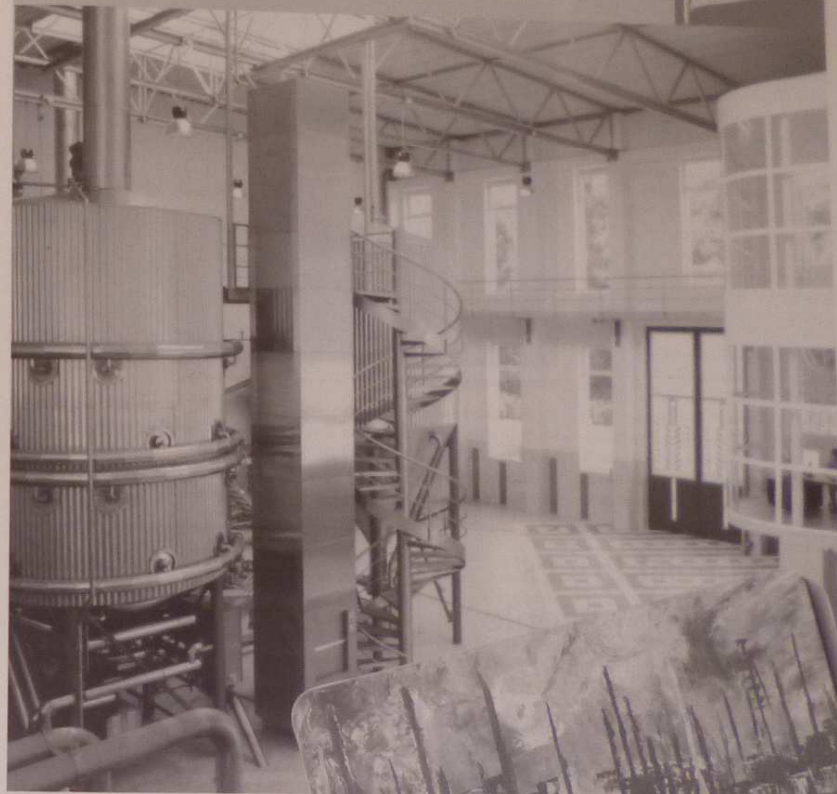
Antwerp is renowned for many things - having one of the busiest ports in the world, being the centre of the diamond industry, for its many fine artists and more

recently, for its fashion designers. But for beer connoisseurs, the city's greatest attribute is De Koninck. Until shortly after World War II, Antwerp boasted some nineteen breweries but over the years they closed, one by one, and today just one remains.

Fortunately, De Koninck has not only survived but is flourishing under the leadership of master brewer Modeste Van den Bogaert and his two sons Bernard and Dominic.

De Koninck's commercial origins go back to 1817 when a family of that name ran a coaching inn in Antwerp, De Plaisante Hof. After her husband's death some years later, the widow De Koninck remarried and her new husband started to brew beer. The

Enterprise
in Action



The company invests heavily in state of the art brewing equipment

brewery that he built in 1833 is still in use today. Although the De Koninck family was involved until 1919, a limited company had been incorporated in 1912. One of these new directors, Florent Van Bauwel, ran the brewery during the 1914-18 war while Mrs De Koninck lived in The Netherlands. On her return, she decided to sell the company and gave Van Bauwel first option. Not having sufficient funds of his own, he invited one of his friends, Josef Van den Bogaert, to join him in the enterprise. Together, they acquired the brewery and a number of pubs in 1919.

"Josef, my father, was a brewing engineer and was one of the first such engineers to have come out of the Brewery School at the



Amanda Jordaens
www.dna.be/antwerpen

University of Leuven, receiving his diploma in 1901," explains Modeste Van den Bogaert. "Leuven had the most efficient and best professor and beer scientist, Professor De Claerq. We owe much to our brewery

Enterprise in Action

schools and especially to him. He was a fantastic man," he enthuses.

DEVELOPING THE BREWERY.....

After demobilisation (see page 3) and like many other young heroes at that time, Modeste Van den Bogaert realised that he didn't have any qualifications. "I had to go first to the Jury Centrale to obtain my diploma in humanities," he recalls, "then I went to Leuven University to study brewery engineering. And in 1949 I joined this company. I was here exactly 15 days when my father died of a heart attack."

"The brewery was in a rather derelict state at the time," he continues. "The first thing I did was to call in my professor, Professor De Clercq, as a consultant and I explained the situation. We could make good beer but it was not always good and so we had to take strategic decisions about what to



Masterbrewer Modeste Van den Bogaert puts quality above everything

do and then I realised that this brewery had acquired quite a lot of workmen's houses, which were very much in demand at that time. So each time I invested in new brewery equipment, I

sold a house," he chuckles. "That's the way we did it and we succeeded!"

At the time, there were some nineteen Antwerp based breweries and De

Enterprise in Action



HOPS IN THE FAMILY

Like their father, Bernard and Dominic Van den Bogaert know the brewing business inside out. Bernard, a master brewer who concentrates on the production side, learnt his craft at the Brewery School of Leuven University, while Dominic, who has an MBA to his credit, focuses on the commercial side of the business. The brewery, owned 100% by the Van Bauwel and Van den Bogaert families, has some 48 people on its payroll and is a member of the CBMC, the Confederation of Brewers of the European Union.



Koninck was about the fifth largest. One by one the others disappeared but De Koninck survived. How was this achieved?

.....AND ENSURING TOP QUALITY

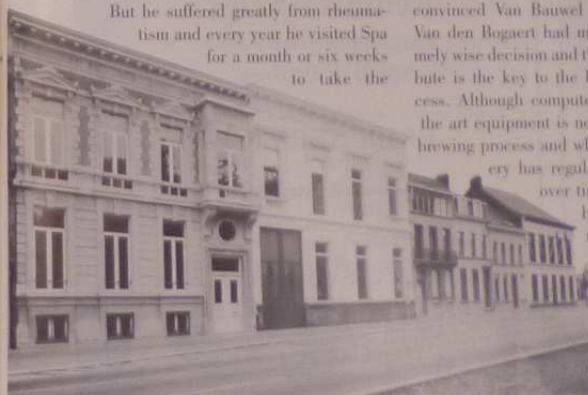
"It was my hobby and my job to make a very good beer," he replies. "It was one of our main strategic decisions to concentrate on quality. But the old Mr Van Bauwel was a very conservative brewer and when I was a very young brewer here, he didn't want to change anything, so I had quite a few problems with him. The only real thing we needed, to improve the beer, was the centrifuge. I wanted to buy a filter but I couldn't convince him to buy one. But he suffered greatly from rheumatism and every year he visited Spa for a month or six weeks to take the

treatment. And in 1952 or 1953 he left for a long stay in Spa and, when he returned, the first thing he did was to visit various pubs to taste the beer. He tasted it for one week and the next week he came to congratulate me."

"Mr Van den Bogaert, what quality in your beer!" he exclaimed. I remained very quiet and after three weeks he said, 'the quality of the beer is fantastic' and made the same comment the next week. Then in the fifth week I said, 'Yes, Mr Van Bauwel, I must confess something! And when he asked what that was, I told him that I had invested in a filter."

The consistent high quality of the beer convinced Van Bauwel that Modeste Van den Bogaert had made an extremely wise decision and that same attribute is the key to the brewery's success. Although computerised state of the art equipment is now used in the brewing process and whilst the brewery has regularly expanded over time, traditional brewing methods are retained. Strictest hygiene standards are maintained through all

stages of production, which is why the brewery is closed every Friday, year after year, to guarantee a thorough clean-up, leaving the entire installation in a pristine state.



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