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Opening picture: Alufinish headquarters in Andernach, Germany. The aluminium profiles of the façade have been treated with Alfipas 7816 chrome-free product.



## HIGHLIGHT OF THE MONTH

SPECIAL ALUMINIUM & DESIGN



# Alufinish: Built on Trust

Nicole Kraus **ipcm**<sup>®</sup>

**A**lufinish's wide range of chemicals for the surface treatment of aluminium, steel and galvanised steel (**ref.**

**Opening photo**) has been on the market for forty-five years and it is being used on many plants in the world for both immersion and spray applications. The company has developed, formulated and marketed metal treatment products since its establishment in 1972, initially focusing on aluminium and, in particular, on the anodic oxidation

**“Alufinish's wide range of chemicals for the surface treatment of aluminium, steel and galvanised steel has been on the market for forty-five years and it is being used on many plants in the world for both immersion and spray applications.”**

process. Over the last forty years, its range has diversified to include products for the surface finishing of different types of metal substrates, such as steel, hot galvanised metal and coils.

This company, based in Andernach (Germany), was among the first to develop chrome-free passivation systems: Alficoat 748, the first chrome-free passivation product able to achieve the same quality standards as chromating processes, was launched in

1998, and its spread has increased year by year. For this issue of *ipcm*<sup>®</sup>, focussing on the finishing of aluminium, we have interviewed Stephan Zegers and Nils Monreal (fig. 1), both Management Assistants of Alufinish, to talk about the company's history, evolution and innovations and to discuss some "hot" topics related to the surface preparation issue in the aluminium industry.

***ipcm*<sup>®</sup>: Let us begin with Alufinish's history, market dynamics and evolution trends over the last ten years, dominated by the global financial crisis.**

**Stephan Zegers:** The firm was established in 1972, which means that it has been operating on the market for forty-five years. Initially, our sales focus was our region. Later, thanks to its trust in R&D and the availability of a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility and of internal laboratories, Alufinish's products have spread across Germany, then in Europe and finally all over the world.

**Nils Monreal:** Alufinish has always been able to grow every year. We were not heavily affected by the crisis, because having customers in many areas of the world has enabled us to compensate for the decline of some of them with the growth of others. In the last two years, we have started to prepare the new generation of our management and to improve our sales force more internationally than nationally. Now we have a good team with several young people, and we are ready for the next forty years. Our motto "built on trust" means very much to Alufinish.

**Stephan Zegers:** Another success factor was the choice to invest in people to be ready to seize the opportunities that always arise during and after a crisis. Over the last ten years, we have steadily increased our market share,

penetrating new regions and new countries. Being a family-run and private capital company was another key strength.

***ipcm*<sup>®</sup>: What is the market strategy of Alufinish?**

**NM:** Clearly, increasing our market share, but above all following the evolution of international law to guide our product innovation process.

***ipcm*<sup>®</sup>: What are your main markets, as far as aluminium is concerned?**

**SZ:** We have a very strong position in Europe for both the anodising and coating processes in the architecture and automotive markets. The latter includes all the build on parts of a car, such as window trims and roof racks.

***ipcm*<sup>®</sup>: How is Alufinish organised in terms of global sales network?**

**SZ:** We do not like to talk about "distributors": we prefer to define them as "partners", a stronger term that best conveys the existing collaboration between us. The German and Benelux markets are followed directly by our

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headquarters in Andernach, whereas in all other countries we rely on partners that can ensure a precise and accurate local distribution as well as available engineers to provide a customer assistance service. In 2002 we also opened an office in Dubai, the main hub of the Middle East's architectural aluminium industry.

***ipcm*<sup>®</sup>: What are your latest product and technology innovations?**

**NM:** As for anodising, Alufinish is launching some renewed electro-colours such as the Terra, Copper and grey shade ranges. We are focussing a lot on the sealing technology, both the cold technique with nickel-based or nickel-free systems and the hot one with products featuring anti-mark properties. We are also improving our

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Figure 1: Stephan Zegers, on the left, with Nils Monreal.

etching systems, especially in terms of better rinseability and decorative finish properties. As regards our pre-treatment systems, on the other hand, chrome-free products have been available for over twenty years and they proof themselves every day.

**SZ:** We are also further developing our degreasing products' portfolio in line with the ever-evolving regulations. In the last two years, the chromating processes have been increasingly often replaced by chrome-free techniques, although the deadline for the banning of Chromium VI has not been defined yet.

**Ipcm®: What is Alufinish R&D department's focus?**

**SZ:** Our goal is to follow the evolution of regulations and, whenever possible, to

be a step ahead of the current legislation. In general, our research activity goes fast but takes small steps, without any major revolution, especially to ensure process stability and standard compliance.

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**Ipcm®: How does Alufinish see the replacement process of chromium with chrome-free systems?**

**SZ:** In architecture, I do not see why one should still work with chromium since chrome-free systems have been available

since 1998, when Alufinish got the first approval of its product Alficoat 748. In the last few years, we have treated millions of square metres of metal without any major problems. As regards the automotive sector, the transition will clearly have to take place due to the introduction of the End of Life Vehicles Directive. The aerospace industry is the most critical one, because the OEM's approval is required, but we are well prepared also in this

field. We like to emphasise that we do not need to use chromium, but we are not against it either: if requested, we will continue to supply it until the last available moment. ○