



ON THE SPOT... Sushil Kumar Jhunjhunwala

La Opala Managing Director, Sushil Kumar Jhunjhunwala exclusively updated *Glass Worldwide*, preferred international journal of AIGMF, about the latest developments at the specialist Indian producer of opal and lead crystal tableware

GW: What are the recent investment highlights in Uttarakhand, the newer of your two plants?

Having already significantly invested in this state-of-the-art facility in Uttarakhand since its opening in 2007, we doubled capacity in 2015 from 8000 tonnes to 16,000 tonnes by installing a new electric furnace. Two more lines were also added, making the current total four in Uttarakhand.

GW: What was the motivation for such a significant increase in production?

It enables us to give even more focus to the market. Also, an upscale in production helps to reduce costs in the long-term because we believe in volume. In Uttarakhand, we can now produce cups and mugs in opal glass, which were previously made only



AIGMF committee members at the organisation's recent conference.

at our original plant in Madhupur. So now we can offer even more flexibility to customers.

All new products take time to become established and we were well prepared for this but our new range of cups and mugs are being well received.

GW: Are any further developments planned at Uttarakhand?

We have plans to increase capacity by a further 20% by the end of 2017. We will increase the size of the furnace and add one more manufacturing line to make five in total. The potential is there to sell more glass and we will create demand. We will also be able to introduce new shapes into our existing range of products.

Beyond 2017, further plans depend on market conditions... but we have ample land available for expansion in Uttarakhand if required to meet customer needs.

GW: How is the Madhupur plant performing?

Having been the first company in India to convert to an electric furnace in 2012, the plant is still benefitting from quality improvements and the environmental advantage of

lower pollution. With the assistance of leading suppliers, we are in the process of a modernisation programme at Madhupur - more machine-made products are being introduced and we are converting to more automatic machines instead of manual. We are already at 80% automatic production, with the aim for 100% within two years.

GW: How has La Opala identified its suppliers of technology to assist with the latest investments?

Within the company, we have such a passion for the products and the industry and we always feel we can do even better. We can produce more products because of our increased capacity and to survive and >



Sushil Kumar Jhunjhunwala with a copy of the recently published 2017 edition of *Indian Glass Directory*.



maintain our leadership position, we have to innovate continually. So to remain competitive, we have to look to improve technology continually; there has to be constant development and we are looking for new ideas all the time.

This has led us to work with leading European suppliers that have long experience and knowhow in the glass industry... but the main point is the quality of their products. For our imminent investment, we are currently evaluating all suppliers and are finalising our plans. We always find attending the glasstec exhibition in Germany to be very useful for learning about new ideas from suppliers. glasspex INDIA 2017 last February was beneficial too, with a good number of exhibitors and visitors.

GW: What are the challenges of finding skilled workers to support the production expansion and improvements at Madhupur and Uttaranchal?

Both plants are very important to their communities and we have a good balance of experience and 'fresh blood'. Our increases in capacity have seen us double the workforce to 900 in Uttaranchal and 450 in Madhupur. We are very particular in our selection

process. On one side, we are recruiting workers who ideally have experience of the glass industry or a background in production. But we also fulfil our social responsibility of creating employment by recruiting and training young people who are new to the industry. We find if they stay in the glass industry for two years, they normally remain for life!

We strongly believe in training our people one step ahead of their current duties... we expand their areas of responsibility by training them for a job one level up. So employees have ample opportunities with us, feeling involved and staying motivated.

GW: In general, how is the tableware sector in India performing?

It's very positive but also very challenging. Opal production is increasing but we have the advantage of long experience and superior quality. Legislation from the Indian government has slowed down imports to India, which is also currently a real advantage for us.

The market size and demand for tableware is increasing in general. Even with recent investments from Indian companies in this sector, there is still a lot more potential for the market to grow. But competitiveness with other nations also depends on production costs and other factors



La Opala's Sovrana Regent Red tableware series.

such as the current high interest rates in India. Some 20% of output at La Opala is exported globally and compared to porcelain, we have the advantage of being break-resistant and microwavable, with equal quality and better price.

Overall, La Opala is definitely making good progress, maintaining and increasing market share. We also have the advantage of family ownership and our passion for glass is never lacking!

GW: As a former President of the All India Glass Manufacturers' Federation, what is your current involvement with the AIGMF?

I still attend meetings when possible and as a former President, I fully appreciate the importance of AIGMF activities. My son Ajit, joint Managing Director of La Opala, has also served as AIGMF secretary in recent years.

AIGMF initiatives to address issues with the Indian government has achieved much over the years and there are fewer challenges in those areas nowadays. Vinit Kapur, General Secretary, is doing a very nice job and working very intelligently, including maintaining the fellowship among members and organising events such as the interesting 12th International AIGMF Conference that took place alongside glasspex INDIA 2017.

AIGMF's co-operation with *Glass Worldwide* ensures a lot of interesting reading material. Co-operation with *Glass Worldwide* is very good because it is recognised as the best international glass magazine. ■



La Opala's Quadra Summertide opal glass tableware.

FURTHER INFORMATION:
La Opala RG Ltd, Kolkata, India
tel: +91 33 30536656
email: laopala@eth.net
web: www.laopala.in