

Inauguration of the new innovation and production center in Biel/Bienne

13 September 2019

The spoken word applies.

Speech by Bernhard Iseli, Overall Project Manager GF

Dear Mr. Ammann, President of the Cantonal Government and Head Cantonal Department of Economic Affairs, and dear Mr. Fehr, Mayor of the City of Biel;

Dear guests from GF, dear customers, dear friends,

It is a great pleasure to have you here on our opening of the new innovation and production center in Biel.

This vision for a new centralized facility was first discussed in 2013 during a management visit of our previous CEO, Yves Serra, and Chairman, Andreas Koopmann.

I remember well the moment of decision, when we decided in December 2015 that it is not only a great opportunity to bring all our know-how together under one roof, but also use it as a kick-off for new ways of working and mostly innovating together.

Of course, such great new projects only happen in collaboration. Never alone. So we established a project team with the main streams, which are building, people and processes, projects, customer journey and operational.

After we got the land, we had 14 months, in which we could not start with the construction due to cantonal laws. The City of Biel recommended to plant some corn and use it in a positive way until we could start with the construction. So who would have thought that GF was getting into the farming business? If I had said that to a customer, he surely would have thought I had gone crazy! For me this is just one of many stories of how we always embraced challenges and the unexpected and made the best out of every big problem or opportunity.

The groundbreaking ceremony was in March 2017. Until then we had to clarify thousands of details to design the facility. This was a very intensive and not always harmonious time within the project team. As we see today, great things always happen in a constructive friction, not from conforming to mainstream opinions.

When the construction started, we needed to excavate soil with around 8'000 truck runs. Needing 2'750 tons of steel and around 25'000 m³ of concrete, this generated a usable surface of about 45'000 m².

The whole construction phase lasted 26 months. Unfortunately, at the beginning we found some left-over pillars from a previous project in the ground, so we had to stop the excavation and postponed the project by three months. If you would like to learn more about obstacles in building a 24'500 m² landmark, we love to share our survival stories later at the bar.

The topping ceremony was held exactly one year ago in 2018. The building was handed over at the end of April 2019.

Moreover, the operational functions started to move in the building in June this year. Besides this building, we had to manage several other projects like the automated warehouse; the centralized cooling water system; the water/water precooling system; badges and entrance system.

We had to design and build in the restaurant curating most of our tastes, wishes and needs. As you surely know, there is not a topic more complicated than food—between vegan, vegetarian and bloody steak wishes—we smartly opted for an Italian solution, which I believe, works very well.

We were very proud and honored, that we could guide the process and in our responsibility, the whole in-house architecture was done including all designs for offices, social zones, projects rooms, receptions and all furniture. It is up to you, not us, to judge its success. Of course, I am not neutral at all, but I can tell you, I am very proud every time when I enter the door in our new headquarters.

However, it's not only about function and beauty. The building is realized by "minergie" standards. Special are the precooling water/water system which use the energy out of the production activities. And the building isolation is done with mineral wool. With our limited parking spaces, we had to find a way to motivate our employees to come to work with public transportation or use bicycles.

Today, I am here to give a special thanks to the project stream team for this successful building. All of them are in responsible rolls in the organization. For all of them and their team members, this work was in addition to their regular jobs, many extra hours had to be delivered!

Thanks to the three GF full time project members who were part of the HRS project team. Thank you to our partners to HRS, GLK, 2AP, Seeland Lex, creaholic, agiplan. I address a special thanks to the City of Biel and the Canton of Berne. The biggest thank you goes to the GF Management who believe in this project.

Bernhard Iseli
Overall Project Manager GF