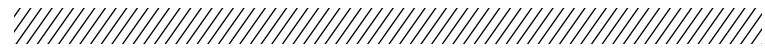


# 37. Brems



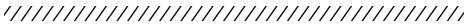
A Company  
with a  
wooden Heart

recentre



What started as a clog factory, today is a modern timber company. The great-grandfather of the current manager Stefan Vanderick saw his clog factory go down with the arrival of American ‘rubber boots’ after World War II. He did not throw in the towel and transformed his small company into a sawmill. Brems still is a family company but has grown to become a medium-sized company. The timber supplier was recently acquired by the Cras group. Especially to orientate the distribution more to the European market. Brems will largely retain its individual character. Since the fourth generation has joined the business, innovation and sustainability go hand in hand there. Brems was the first timber merchant to introduce ThermoWood in Belgium. ‘ThermoWood is made by a Finnish company. Wood in itself is a very sustainable product, because it is the only raw material that renews in such a way. And you need almost no energy to process wood. The only thing needed is to chop down a tree and you have timber. But I still think that we have to be careful with our natural resources’, says Stefan Vanderick, company director. ‘ThermoWood is a good solution. ThermoWood is pine that has undergone a thermal treatment. It changes the structure of the wood and turns pine into a more stable and weather resistant wood. With this treatment pine becomes as sustainable as tropical hardwood. It is known that tropical hardwood grows very slowly, whereas local wood species grow faster and are easily manageable.’

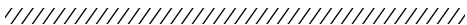
**Brems was the first timber merchant to introduce ThermoWood in Belgium.**



At Brems they strongly believe in the ThermoWood story. ‘We were pioneers when we introduced this wood species in Belgium ten years ago. Typical wood suppliers sell anything the consumer asks. We think differently and try to think ahead. It took us years to introduce ThermoWood and its characteristics to carpenters for example, but to architects too. And we are slowly succeeding. We even start

to get competitors who also respond to the sustainable story of ThermoWood.’ Brems received the support of Natuurpunt, who endorses such a sustainable story. The castle of Kiewit, the base of Natuurpunt Limburg, became a showroom for ThermoWood. The outside carpentry and indoor and outdoor furniture were manufactured out of ThermoWood. ‘Natuurpunt enabled us to build our image around ThermoWood.’ Brems trades in ThermoWood, but also uses it in the production of its own products, such as terrace and wall coatings. ‘ThermoWood is the perfect wood for outdoor use because of its weather resistance. Even though we have also made indoor wood flooring with it once. The customers asked for it because they liked the colour.’ And the customer is king at Brems. Their approach to the creation of doors is proof thereof. The customer is informed of each stage of the process. Brems’ approach was also praised by the state and they were granted a subsidy for innovative projects.

**ThermoWood is pine that has undergone a thermal treatment. It changes the structure of the wood and turns pine into a more stable and weather resistant wood. With this treatment pine becomes as sustainable as tropical hardwood.**



The timber company made a great impact with its doors in the past years. It has become their speciality. A normal wood species is used for the creation of doors, not ThermoWood. But according to Stefan Vanderick there still is a sustainable philosophy behind the doors. ‘Our doors have a great design aspect. We make products with it that are closely in line with the furniture industry. Our developments and designs are sustainable. And I don’t particularly mean the use of materials here. We use wood which is a sustainable product in itself. The main point is the way we design such a door. Our mission is to make a temporary

passage in the interior. A door is never an object in itself; we try to make it connect completely with the interior. Imagine doors that completely disappear in the wall.’ Brems recently won a Red Dot Design Award for the Secret Slide, a type of floating wall. In a traditional sliding door the rail is fixed to the ceiling or the wall, and the door slides over the rail with the trolley. With the Secret Slide the trolley is fixed to the wall and the rail is integrated in the door. The Secret Slide was awarded the title ‘Best of the Best’ that Red Dot grants to pioneering design products. ‘We are particularly proud of this. As the young generation in the timber trade I try to give a new direction to the company and always search for innovative ideas.’

## **ThermoWood is the perfect wood for outdoor use because of its weather resistance.**

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Brems is not only innovative and sustainable in the design. It also searches possibilities to produce the doors sustainably. ‘We are researching the use of cold glue. Currently the doors are glued with hot glue by using a hot press. That glue is not very environmentally friendly. We now test the use of cold glue with a cold press. The glue is better for the environment and the press must not be heated. I inadvertently saw this application in another company and adapted it for our doors. Testing such innovations takes a lot of time and adjustment. We have made a large investment in the construction of a new hall for the doors in 2007. And currently we are reviewing a number of processes, such as the use of another glue. That takes time and money.’

The manager is convinced that companies will have no other choice but to jump on the sustainability bandwagon in the long term. ‘However, sustainability is not a project you start up quickly and implement just like that. Sustainability is something to be introduced in the company culture step by step. We have already taken a few steps ourselves. The transport of timber, for example, is always



© Brems



combined with the transport of the parquet. We thus save on transport costs and the CO2 emissions are lower. For the finishing of the parquet we work with Rubio, a Belgian manufacturer of oil finishings. They produce oil without organic solvents. It is a pure natural product. I think that's important. It just won't do that you sell a nice sustainable and ecological story like ThermoWood, but that you use a toxic finishing for other products. That makes the story a lot less honest.' The company had an energy audit carried out. 'Among other things we have learned to save lighting. We will also carry out maintenance and check for leaks in the compressed air for example. A factory without leaks is almost inconceivable but this will enable us to detect leaks quicker.'

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Brems also researches environmentally friendly glues and water-based enamels. 'We are also researching other ways to modify wood. We now know ThermoWood that we import from Finland. But there are also other methods to make other wood species more stable and more sustainable. We are currently conducting a number of researches and will take decisive action soon.'





Stefan Vanderick is convinced that Brems is on the right path. ‘It becomes increasingly more important that timber merchants get involved in the sustainability story. Wood is one of the least lobbied resources worldwide. But we do hold a number of arguments to convince the world of the use of wood. I am also convinced that the importance of wood will increase in the coming years. I see a great

**The Secret Slide was awarded the title ‘Best of the Best’ that Red Dot grants to pioneering design products.**

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challenge in the wood skeleton building for example. We have a brick culture in construction, but the wood skeleton construction will become more important. And the big question is the part we - Brems - can play in it. But with our innovative skills, I think the future is bright.’

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Kizzy Vanhorne for REcentre  
Interviewee /  
Stefan Vanderick, Company Director

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[www.brems.be](http://www.brems.be)

Sector • Wood industry

Year of foundation • 1932

Number of employees • 85

Turnover (2010) •  
24 million EUR