

RETROFIT PROJECTS

FUTRONIC

Glass giant at the summit in Brazil

Verallia Brazil has relocated its glassworks from the Água Branca district of downtown São Paulo to the outskirts of Jacutinga – a small town in a landscape marked by mountains. The new plant's three production lines currently manufacture around one million bottles a day for the domestic beverage industry. futronic supplied the controls and drives and was involved from the outset. Even for a glass giant like Verallia, this was an unusually large and complex project.

What is probably Brazil's most modern glassworks now stands where a mountain crest once proudly dominated the hilly landscape surrounding Jacutinga



Verallia is one of the biggest container glass manufacturers in the world – a global player by any definition. The company employs around 10,000 people and is made up of 32 glass production facilities in 11 countries throughout Europe and Latin America. In 2019, the Group reportedly achieved turnover of EUR 2.6 billion. In short, it's a mammoth organisation, where things are constantly on the move. There's always something being extended, converted, replaced or modernised somewhere at one of the numerous manufacturing facilities. Verallia has specialists for this purpose – indeed whole departments with experienced project managers who accomplish even the most complex missions ably. Nevertheless, the Jacutinga project turned out to be a monumental task, even for Verallia.

MOUNTAIN MAKES WAY FOR A NEW GLASS PLANT

Verallia Brazil has its headquarters in the São Paulo metropolitan area. For many years, one of this huge country's three Verallia glassworks was located just a stone's throw away in an industrial park in the city's Água Branca district. During the early tens of this century, it became clear that capacity for production and growth would soon be exhausted, with no more local reserves available. There appeared to be no other option but to build a new plant. The question was, where? It didn't take long to find the ideal spot – on the outskirts of the small town of Jacutinga in the state of Minas Gerais, some 200 kilometres north of São Paulo. The area surrounding Jacutinga is quite hilly, though, and graded land is a rarity. The management therefore decided to move half a mountain in order to make space for the new plant.



THE REGION'S PRIDE

This construction project of almost biblical proportions is documented in a video. The scenes it depicts are more than a little reminiscent of 'Fitzcarraldo', the Werner Herzog epic film from 1982, in which the protagonist of the same name – played by Klaus Kinski – dreams of building a lavish opera house in the middle of the virgin Amazon rain forest. Fitzcarraldo, obsessed by his grand vision, forces his indigenous crew to haul an old steamship over a mountain. Fortunately, there was none of this madness to be witnessed at the construction site in Jacutinga. On the contrary: Brazil's – if not the entire South American continent's – most modern glassworks was systematically charted out and completed in a mere 26 months and Carlos Messina, Verallia Jacutinga's Project Director, admits that: "we at Verallia – and literally the whole region – are very proud of it."

In May 2017, an army of excavators, bulldozers and trucks moved in to remove about 630 tons of earth and create a gigantic graded area for the new plant to stand on. All in all, around 30,000 tons of concrete and 1200 tons of steel were used. 164 kilometres of cables and

almost five kilometres of pipelines were laid. The new Verallia works, which was inaugurated in July 2019, provides around 270 direct and 90 indirect jobs for the local population.

ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY MADE IN GERMANY

Verallia invested something like EUR 77 million in the new plant – and in state-of-the-art technology to match. "Our new factory complies with even the strictest safety and environmental regulations," Messina emphasises. Verallia sets itself high standards and the production shop is no exception. Two complete lines were transported from Água Branca to Jacutinga in connection with the move. A new, German-built IS machine from Heye International is also installed there. The two existing systems were modernised by futronic as part of an extensive retrofit.

The retrofit project was prepared by experts at Verallia and futronic well in advance. "I was invited to the first meeting with Verallia representatives in São Paulo in spring 2017," recalls sales engineer Marc Meersschaut, who is responsible at futronic for business with South America. Eduardo José M. da Fonseca, the project manager at Verallia who also oversees technologies and processes

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at all Verallia Vidros plants, was similarly in on the negotiations from the start. The two of them spoke to each other regularly on the phone during the months that followed, discussing various details as well as specific safety features. Meersschaut eventually took a second trip to São Paulo to wrap up the contract. The controls and drives for the three production lines were shipped and put into operation at the end of June 2019. Only days later, the complete plant went productive.

BUILT FOR THE FUTURE

“A project on that kind of scale can only succeed if you bring in the best of the best to help you – competent partners who you can rely on absolutely from day one,” da Fonseca stresses. “That’s why we went straight to futronic, to get the specialists from Lake Constance on board.” The two partners know each other and they hold one another in high regard – in fact, they have done for many

years now. In spite of that, “The new plant in Jacutinga was an unusually large and complex project even by our standards,” Meersschaut adds. “That’s the reason we’re particularly proud of the contribution we had the privilege of making.”

Of course, he’s also hoping to get a chunk of the pie whenever more refurbishments or expansions are planned in the future. The three production lines currently manufacture around one million bottles a day for beer, wine and spirits. Yet the market is growing – and in Brazil, too, there is a noticeable trend away from plastic packaging in favour of glass. It goes without saying that the new plant is geared to this growth potential. The present factory buildings have enough space for three more lines and preliminary talks are already under way with futronic, amongst others. Additional capacity exists as well in the outdoor areas. “The Verallia plant in Jacutinga”, Meersschaut concludes, “is built for the future.” ■



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