SaphirKeramik

A REVOLUTION IN CERAMIC



LAUFEN



THE FREEDOM TO RESHAPE

Swiss manufacturer Laufen is the only company in the world to produce SaphirKeramik, a new patent pending ceramic-material. Laufen revolutionised bathrooms in 2013 with this unique material perfected after five years' intensive research and development.

Strong and malleable, SaphirKeramik permits the creation of wafer-thin yet robust 3–5mm walls and tight-edge radii of just 1–2mm. Its slender profile not only allows for a more precise design language but also has functional and ecological advantages. For example, its slim walls create more functional space. This revolutionary, ceramic material reaches its exceptional hardness blended with corundum, a colourless mineral found in sapphires. Rigorous testing has revealed that its flexural strength is equal to that of steel.

In 2015 Laufen's cutting-edge engineering has once again stretched the innovative material's limits by increasing its maximum size – its 120 cm long washbasin in SaphirKeramik is its largest to date. Laufen has also applied its impressively efficient, high-pressure casting technology to other, high-volume pieces in SaphirKeramik. Moreover, as a brand new ceramic medium, SaphirKeramik gives designers almost limitless freedom to experiment and innovate.

KARTELL BY LAUFEN
DESIGN BY L + R PALOMBA



Kartell by Laufen 815334 (tap bank right)
460 × 280 × 120 mm

Kartell by Laufen 815335 (tap bank left)
460 × 280 × 120 mm



Kartell by Laufen 812331
420 × 420 × 120 mm



Kartell by Laufen 810334 (shelf right)
600 × 460 × 120 mm

Kartell by Laufen 810335 (shelf left)
600 × 460 × 120 mm



Kartell by Laufen 815331
460 × 460 × 120 mm



Kartell by Laufen 812332
750 × 350 × 120 mm



Kartell by Laufen 810338 (shelf right)
900 × 460 × 120 mm

Kartell by Laufen 810339 (shelf left)
900 × 460 × 120 mm



Kartell by Laufen 813332
1200 × 460 × 120 mm

LIVING SAPHIRKERAMIK
DESIGN BY PLATINUMDESIGN



Living SaphirKeramik 811435
380 × 380 × 130 mm



Living SaphirKeramik 811434
600 × 340 × 110 mm



Living SaphirKeramik 811433
360 × 360 × 130 mm



The unique material SaphirKeramik opens up new opportunities of design with much more creative freedom and greater finesse while the traditional production process is maintained.

With arbitrary non-linear shrinkage in the drying and firing process, vitreous china is the oldest and also the most difficult to control material.

A HIGH TECH MATERIAL AT THE CORE OF NEW DESIGN

New creative standards have been set by the first two ranges of products made of SaphirKeramik. The confident, almost graphic visual presence of the Living and Kartell by Laufen washbasins help define the architecture of the interiors they are installed in. Their linear yet expressive forms create a strong dialogue with the architectural space around them. This is sanitaryware whose impact goes way beyond mere functionalism. The product overview on the left shows the augmented range of 2015.

VAL
BY KONSTANTIN GRCIC



KONSTANTIN GRCIC: The prospect of working with SaphirKeramik, a very innovative and new material, certainly gave the project an extra edge. I always enjoy technology! Bathroom ceramics are a very classic project in industrial design. The opportunity to explore a new material in such a traditional domain is unique. Laufen appealed to me because of its culture, its quality, but in the end it's the people who make the difference for me.

Munich-born Konstantin Grcic has created a collection in SaphirKeramik comprising two bowls, one built-in washbasin, an elegantly minimalist range of wall-mounted washbasins as well as additional, pared-down, movable accessories – two multifunctional trays and a bathtub made of Sentec. The products' forms are architectural and not too expressive. Konstantin Grcic uses these super-fine forms to create exquisite surface textures and patterns. His in part asymmetrical bathroom objects thrive on different levels, refined transitions, and functional patterns. The tactile surfaces and patterns are both decorative and functional. They create semi-wet areas, which items can be placed on.

To achieve an immaculate surface fine dust is blown away from the washbasin before glazing.



Non-stop craftsmanship: demoulding, assembling pieces, seam polishing, cleaning and sponging.





VAL
DESIGN BY KONSTANTIN GRCIC



VAL 815281
450 × 350 × 115 mm

VAL 810282
550 × 420 × 115 mm



VAL 810283
600 × 420 × 115 mm

VAL 810284
650 × 420 × 115 mm



VAL 810285
750 × 420 × 115 mm

VAL 810287
950 × 420 × 115 mm



VAL 812282
550 × 360 × 125 mm



VAL 812281
500 × 400 × 125 mm



VAL 817281
550 × 360 × 40 mm



VAL 870282 (tray)
360 × 280 × 60 mm



VAL 870281 (tray)
325 × 325 × 60 mm

INO
DESIGN BY TOAN NGUYEN



INO 812300
350 × 350 × 120 mm



INO 815301
450 × 410 × 120 mm



INO 812302
500 × 350 × 120 mm



INO 810302
560 × 450 × 120 mm



INO 813302
900 × 450 × 120 mm



INO 817302
500 × 365 × 40 mm



INO 813301
900 × 450 × 120 mm



INO 817301
350 × 365 × 40 mm

INO
BY TOAN NGUYEN



TOAN NGUYEN: It was a great opportunity to work with a new material, which hardly ever happens. SaphirKeramik is dense and strong yet very fine, its lines very precise. It's like traditional ceramic in that it's hygienic and shares the same production processes. But, while it's made of ceramic, it's also modern, very high-performance. The material is like a fruit with a thin skin: when you unpeel it there's a lot of fruit inside.

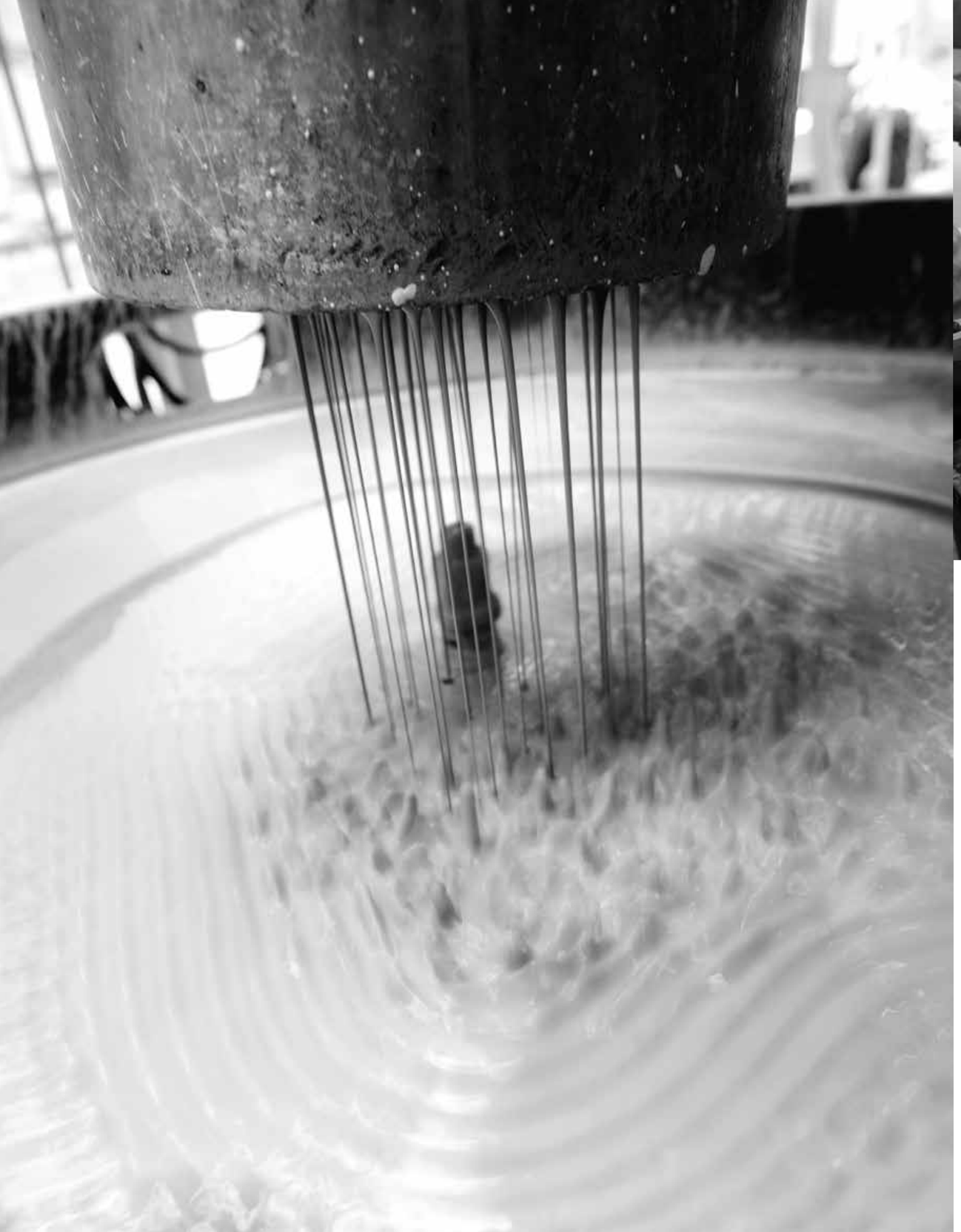
Continuing the path of collaboration already begun in 2011 and having won a Red Dot Award, Laufen decided without hesitation to focus on Toan Nguyen and in raising the stakes, entrusting parts of the new proposals for 2015 to him. The first design – a wall-mounted washbasin incorporating an integrated blade-like shelf on one side – had a very iconic, asymmetric shape. Eliminating the wider edge around a conventional basin allows for a more generously sized washbasin. Its emphasis is more on lines and surface than on volume. Toan has completed his collection with some bowls and semi-recessed washbasins, 2 bathtubs made of Sentec and, in keeping with the spirit of SaphirKeramik, very thin-walled, strong aluminium bathroom furniture fronted with wood veneer.

The washbasin with an edge radius of 1–2 mm is still soft and delicate while being demoulded.



The raw piece is handled with the greatest attention and devotion.







Left: SaphirKeramik derives its strength from its component corundum, a colourless mineral found in saphires.

Top: For the first time, Laufen's groundbreaking rapid prototyping has created an exploratory model made of SaphirKeramik.

AT THE VANGUARD OF DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Journalist Dominic Lutyens in discussion with the Laufen team.

WHY DID YOU CREATE SAPHIRKERAMIK? AND WHAT ADVANTAGES DO YOU THINK IT HAS?

The materials used to make ceramic sanitaryware have remained the same for years yet have changed in all other disciplines of product development. This is why we created SaphirKeramik, a new, unique ceramic of unprecedented strength. But it's also malleable and permits the creation of wafer-thin yet robust walls and tight-edge radii of just 1 to 2 mm. Space-saving, lightweight and environmentally friendly, it gives designers almost limitless freedom to experiment. It allows them to tear up the rulebook of bathroom design, to create bathroom products that are elegantly economical and linear. What's more, products made of SaphirKeramik can be manufactured on an industrial scale.

WHICH HAVE BEEN THE MAJOR MILESTONES FOR LAUFEN SINCE YOU STARTED SELLING SAPHIRKERAMIK PRODUCTS IN 2013?

We've started using high-pressure casting to manufacture SaphirKeramik. It's a very industrial technique that allows us to create pieces faster and in bigger numbers. When we produced the first SaphirKeramik collections, we made basins that measured up to 90 cm. Now we can make them up to 120 cm on an industrial scale.

WHAT WERE THE ADVANTAGES OF PRESENTING TOAN AND KONSTANTIN'S NEW DESIGNS AS

PROTOTYPES MADE OF SAPHIRKERAMIK AT FAIRS AND DESIGN EVENTS IN MILAN, LONDON, MIAMI AND BELGRADE LAST YEAR?

The prototypes look like the finished products and enable us to assess how successful the designs were. They have all the qualities you appreciate in ceramic products from their tactile, sensual surfaces to the way they reflect light and their impeccable but robust, long-lasting finish… Our prototypes allow us to explore the material and create finished pieces in a short space of time. They were also a useful research tool for us to find out what our clients and opinion-formers from all over the world think of the designs. This then helps us to perfect the pieces. Such thorough research is vital for an industrial company like ours which needs to know how to sell our designs on a huge scale, globally. The designers we collaborate with are perfect for this project: Konstantin, for example, is an industrial designer, and his artistic touch makes the pieces stand out as different. Throughout our journey from Milan to Miami, our new pieces had an unbelievable reception and attracted lots of media interest. The way Konstantin has worked with ceramic, and his tray designs, were really appreciated. And people found the super-fine borders of Toan's washbasins fascinating: they instinctively wanted to caress their contours.

HOW HAVE YOU MODIFIED THE DESIGNS SINCE THEY WERE EXHIBITED AT MILAN AND ELSEWHERE?

After Milan, we spoke with Konstantin and his assistant Charlotte and we decided there were too many design elements in them and wanted to simplify and refine them. One washbasin originally had a lip at the edge of the circular bowl but this has been removed, while its border's height has been made taller. The draining area to the right of the basin now slopes slightly to allow the water to drain off it. This surface also has a different relief pattern. The grooves in the pattern have been filled with translucent glaze so you can still see the pattern despite the area being flat, and it remains hygienic. Another Konstantin design, a rectangular washbasin, was changed more radically. The semi-wet area is now nearer the centre of the bowl, resembling an island you can rest things like soap or jewellery on. And Konstantin has created an additional, more conventional application of a washbasin, a classic, wall-mounted design in SaphirKeramik in six sizes. It's very pared-down and elegant, and made using high-pressure casting. As Toan has said, since Milan, we've created a more commercial variation of his washbasin, one without a shelf, also made of SaphirKeramik. But the first model with its blade-like shelf hasn't changed except that we have made the washbasin's walls slimmer. Toan has also created some new bowls which can be semi-recessed into a countertop or placed on a pedestal and bathroom furniture with walnut-veneered or powder-coated and glossy lacquered aluminium front.

LAUFEN VALUES LONG-TERM COLLABORATIONS WITH DESIGNERS AND OTHER COMPANIES. WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF THESE FOR YOU?

We have a culture of collaboration which is crucial to our company and integrated in our value chain. We partner with clients, suppliers, companies like Kartell and external designers, and really value our long-term relationships with them. We work exclusively with external designers – the best designers in the world – and truly value their expertise. Of course, they need to understand our culture of using ceramic but, once they do, they can really push the boundaries. We believe long-standing relationships with designers can produce outstanding results. It's not just a question of briefing them but of having a close dialogue when developing new ideas.

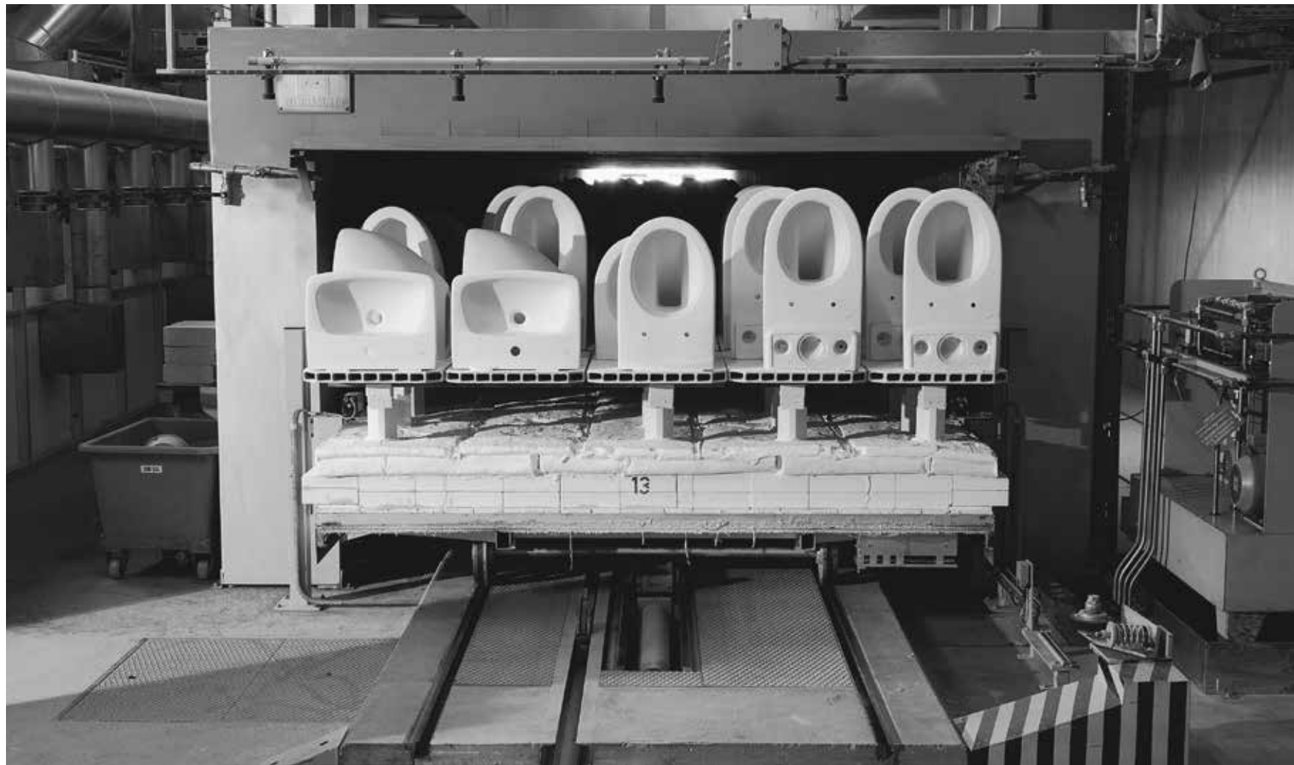


LAUFEN IN FIGURES
Laufen Bathrooms AG is a Swiss company specialised on premium segment solutions for bathrooms. The headquartes are located in Laufen near Basel. Managed by the family-owned Roca group since 1999 Laufen runs 7 manufacturing sites in Central Europe, 2500 employees and sales offices in 44 countries.



Top: No way for "won't work" – this is the guideline demonstrating the innovative spirit of Laufen's production and product development team.

Bottom: With arbitrary non-linear shrinkage in the drying and firing process, vitreous china is the oldest and also the most difficult to control material.





Founded in 1892, Swiss company Laufen has been at the vanguard of innovation in industrially manufactured bathroom design. Laufen invented the wall-hung WC, the floor-standing ceramic washbasin and, in 1981, the most efficient high-pressure casting technology. Sustainability is a key concern for Laufen, which has won the European Environment Prize for Outstanding Achievements and several Green Good Design Awards in recognition of its environmentally friendly manufacturing.

HEAD OFFICE

LAUFEN Bathrooms AG, Wahlenstrasse 46
CH-4242 Laufen, Schweiz

Tel. +41 61 765 71 11, Fax +41 61 761 36 60
feedback@laufen.ch, www.laufen.com

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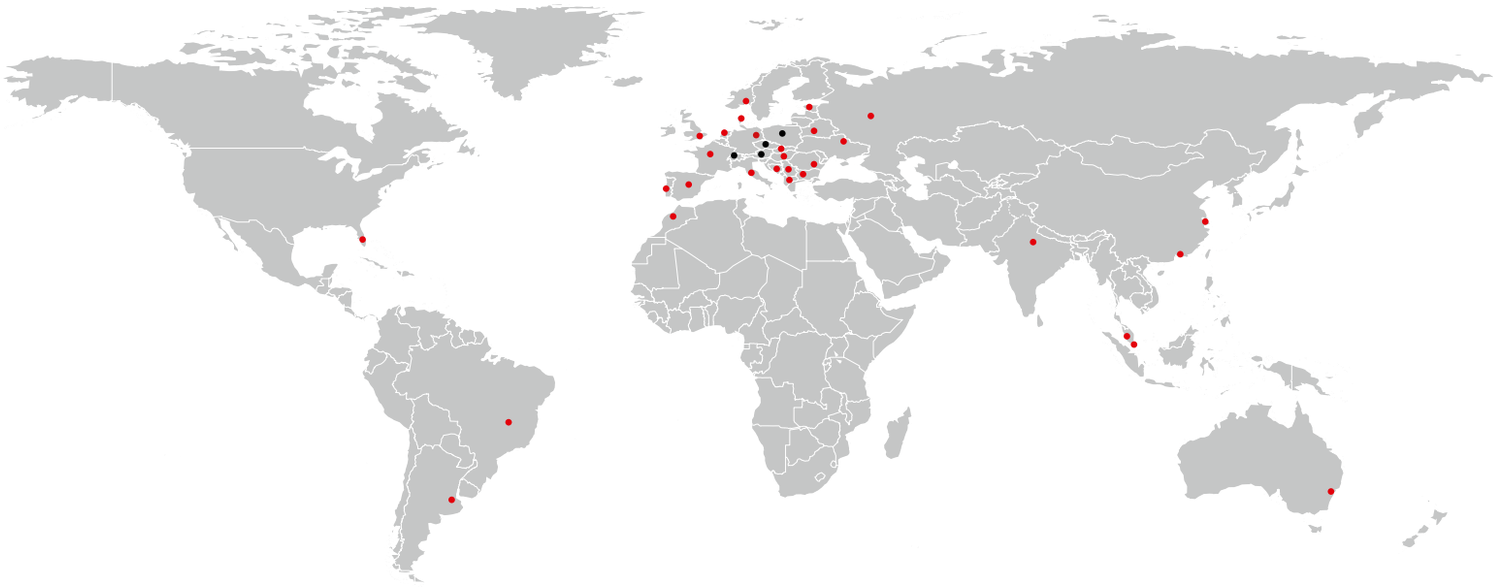

- Laufen sales companies
- Laufen ceramic production centres and sales companies

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Bathroom Culture since 1892 www.laufen.com