



KÖNNEN GlasHaus manufactures European-style windows, which feature a unique tilt-and-turn mechanism. At the turn of a handle, the windows tilt in at the top or turn inward.

'Old World' Windows and Doors Find a U.S. Niche

KÖNNEN GlasHaus has created a network of distributors to market its distinctive European-style windows and doors.

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A trip to the European countryside often reveals the beauty, grandeur and "Old World" charm of its villages and cottages. Distinctive solid wood windows and doors are a part of the charm surrounding many of these structures.

European windows, with their intricate profiling and design, are renowned for their tilt-and-turn feature — they tilt in at the top with a turn of the handle or

turn inward for a full opening. Skilled European woodworkers have passed the mastery of this craft down from generation to generation.

Although these windows are not yet prevalent in the North American market, one Colorado company, KÖNNEN GlasHaus Inc., is looking to change that. Mike and Mimi Windemuller, president and vice president of marketing and

design, respectively, first noticed the potential U.S. market for European-styled windows while visiting a job site in the Rocky Mountains southwest of Denver. The owner had imported German windows for his home.

"We looked at that project and said, 'Hey, this is something that is desirable for fine



ARCHITECTURAL WOODWORK: WINDOWS AND DOORS



KÖNNEN GlasHaus' windows and doors are completely custom and can be manufactured in a variety of shapes and sizes.

custom homes in North America,” Mike explains. “We realized that it was a missing niche in the marketplace, so we did some research and jumped off the cliff”

“We just saw a great product, and we saw that there was a need for it,” Mimi adds.

The Windemullers started KÖNNEN in 2001 and began importing windows and doors from three manufacturers near Frankfurt, Germany. Mimi, a marketing professional for a financial services firm, quit that job and began the arduous process of research and development of a marketing program to put in place such things as the company name, logo and legal obligations so that they could “hit the ground running.”

“We got through all of the minutiae and learned by doing it,” Mike says. “There was no manual for us to refer to on the importation of goods from Europe, specifically a very custom product like the windows and doors we provide.”

Eventually, they decided to produce their own and, today, KÖNNEN manufactures all of its products in-house.

Creating a Brand

One of the first key decisions the Windemullers made was to brand the

company themselves. Because of the legacy of woodworking in European countries like Germany, manufacturers generally have family names.

“We saw this [business] as long-term for us,” Mimi says. “So, I wanted to have control over the marketing to our clients in North America, because obviously we do things a little bit differently.”

The objective was to find a name that expressed the “European essence” of the product by using a German word that actually meant something. “KÖNNEN seemed like the perfect fit,” she says, “because it translated literally as ‘to be able.’ It’s a verb — to be able to craft, to be able to do. The product that we manufacture and the product that we were importing at that time is very, very custom and we can do anything like that. GlasHaus translates literally as ‘glass house.’”

Finding the right suppliers was crucial to the company’s early success. With extensive research, the Windemullers went to Europe and interviewed roughly 15 to 20 different manufacturers: Austrian, German, French and Italian. They eventually settled on German products, due to their reputation for engineering, Mike says.

KÖNNEN imported products for approximately seven years; however, due to the highly customized nature of these types of windows and doors, the Windemullers eventually decided that manufacturing the products themselves would be more efficient.

“It was a challenge getting the products over here,” Mike says. “The cultural valley between here and Western Europe is vast. We Americanized the product as much as the manufacturers would allow us.” But, there were issues surrounding thresholds, which have to be a minimum of $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch above a finished floor, and locking mechanisms for the doors.

By developing the manufacturing state-side, “it gave us an opportunity to fully Americanize the doors by incorporating things that we are accustomed to in the United States, like active exterior door handles and a traditional locking cylinder,” Mike explains.

Another problem that arose with importing the products was that after 9/11, shipping became increasingly difficult due to the stringent security policies that were put in place. Also, it took a month to ship the products and if there were problems or the products were damaged, replacing



Pictured above left is KÖNNEN GlasHaus' showroom, which features many of its European-style windows and doors. Above right, an employee operates a Homag CNC router from Stiles Machinery.

them cost valuable time and money.

"It was just a nightmare to get it replaced in a timely manner," says Mark Windemuller, Mike's brother and a sales representative for KÖNNEN. "We would spend thousands of dollars air freighting that stuff over here, and it just didn't make sense to spend those dollars. Working with the European manufacturers was becoming more and more inconvenient for our clients, missing lead times. Our products are a critical juncture of the (building) process. If you don't have windows and doors, the job site shuts down, so it is crucial to meet our lead times."

Developing the Manufacturing Process

The Windemullers spent three years researching what would be required to manufacture their European-style windows and doors in America. "Take what we thought and multiply by 10," Mike laughs.

"We spent hundreds of hours with the manufacturers in Europe, so we had a pretty good idea how the products went together and the efforts that take place to build this sophisticated product," he adds. "We just started meeting with various machinery companies over in Europe primarily to understand what it was going to take from an investment standpoint in terms of dollars, but also the machinery that we needed."

According to Mike, they spent many weeks in Europe at Homag Groups' factory, near the Black Forest in Germany, developing the machinery. "We partnered with Stiles Machinery and bought 90 percent of our equipment from them. Our Homag CNC router is the heartbeat of our company. It does all of the profiling of the products. It basically takes a raw piece of lumber and turns it into the work of art that we provide in our window and doors."

Other key equipment in the shop includes the Kentwood M609X moulder; an Omega T421 automatic cross-cutting saw and an Omega BA825 system for sash finishing; a Stegherr KSF-2 cross joint milling machine and a Cefla Falcioni finishing line.

Improving the Construction Method

With the extensive research that the Windemullers conducted, they were able to take hundreds of years of experience from the German manufacturers and condense it — developing the appropriate machinery, replicating the products they previously had imported and further enhancing those products.

"It was because of the machinery that we purchased and the due diligence that this company did in making those machinery decisions that we were successful," Mike says. "We did not change the aesthetic value of the product, but we enhanced

the construction style by going from a mortise-and-tenon connection to a dowel connection, which is more structural. It will weather the test of time, if you will, better than a mortise-and-tenon or a joint-and-tenon connection."

Mike also stresses how important the intricate profiling is to the success of a window. "Although it is easy to make a window tilt, he says, if you do not profile the sash and frame correctly, the product will not stand the test of time, specifically from an operational standpoint. We replicate what the Europeans are doing to a 'T,'" he adds.

Marketing the Brand

The Windemullers say that it was tough getting into the market. They started out by meeting prospective buyers with samples of the European-style windows in the backseat of their car. Now KÖNNEN has a network of distributors throughout the country.

"And we're looking to bring on a few more distributors," Mimi says.

Their goals include continuing to improve lead times, and they hope to further expand the distribution of their products by creating a satellite manufacturing facility in another market.

The Windemullers say they are "proud" to offer a European tradition that is manufactured in America. "We are a local, family-owned company fueling the American economy and trying to bring jobs and products back to America," Mimi adds. 🌿