

## Beyond the style there is Tecnoform

Even in the VR furniture sector, design needs to give way to industrial design, the real one, the one who starts from an idea and that turns, step by step, into a serialized product: that is what affirms Roberto Kerkoc, Tecnoform CEO, at the head of one of the companies that have most marked VR's evolution over the last 50 years.

Words Antonio Mazzucchelli



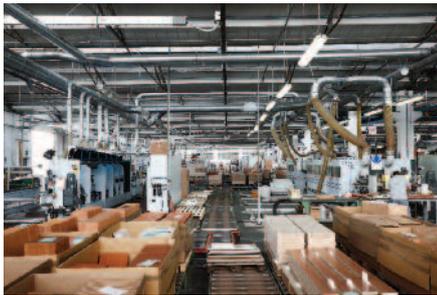
With constant commitment and unimpeachable investments, Tecnoform has created a new way of conceiving VR furnishing. First he did it in Europe, now he is doing it in the rest of the world. More than half a century has passed since, in 1965, Federico Kerkoc created a company based in Italy, a company that immediately started in the VR sector, by experimenting new solutions, focusing on the interaction between the study of Design and serial production of furniture items. For years it emerged as the sector requiring the most attention by the public, and not just by the operators, for the fascinating concepts proposed at Caravan Salon. Half a century of history is not less and a company that would like to continue its business so long, has to renew itself, starting from the people. This is what Tecnoform has managed to do, thanks to the management of the Kerkoc Brothers, who have received the baton from their father and have been able to better organize the work team, also managing a generational change between older employees and a younger staff. We interviewed Roberto Kerkoc, son of the founder and current CEO of Tecnoform.

**Aboutcamp BtoB: Your company has passed 50 years of activity: which were the crucial stages in Tecnoform's history?**

**Roberto Kerkoc:** What made the company really progress, was my father's intuition to go beyond the national borders. Already in the 1960s my father tried to be close to Italian customers, such as Arca and Laverda at that time, but he also looked for customers on the European scenario. In a short time our company became a reference point for all French builders and for most of Germany. And my father made the decision, certainly winning, to create logistic sites close to some of our great customers, as the Dutch Kip and the French Caravelair and Digue. It should be noted, however, that the supply of furnishings was simpler than today, because less variety was required. For example, Digue produced about 40,000 caravans each year, but there were only two varieties of doors and a single type of decorative paper, only one tonality. In any case, already in the '70s it was clear to the builders that the Italian Tecnoform was the leader in VR furniture. Then there was a generational change, I assisted my father in conducting the company, and I have not restricted myself to a few European clients, but I tried to expand our range of action, moving towards a global market. At the beginning I brought the company to the English market: after only three years England became our first market. At a later time we tried to open ourselves to the whole world, gaining customers in Australia and the United States. Today, in Australia, we cover about 80% of the market, providing local builders with complete kits ready to be mounted. As far as the United States are concerned, we have been working on a long-term project, which now begins to deliver great results.

**Aboutcamp BtoB: Thinking about his past and present job, what are you most proud of?**

**RK:** Without a doubt, I am proud of the people working with me, employees and collaborators are Tecnoform's true strength. I am also proud of the new "Tecnoform Way" work method, which for



some years has been at the top of our priorities: a way to operate in the company that everyone has to follow. We have identified twenty points that are at the base of our internal relations and our goals, standards on which to set our way of working. For example, we start from the assumption that no one knows better how to do something than anyone who is already doing it. It may seem trivial but it is not: even the worker on the production line can teach me, because he carries out daily tasks that I do not do. I really believe that innovation can come from the bottom. That is why we do meetings not only with technicians and designers, but also with staff of the production line. And there are also prizes for those who suggest something innovative for the company, at any level.

**Aboutcamp BtoB: In the furniture sector, what is the perception of the "made in Italy" design abroad? Can Italians boast of being better than everyone else?**

**RK:** the Made in Italy is now something consolidated, both on design and product level. If we look at the world of design, such as furniture, Italian designers are known and appreciated. But it is also true, that today there are also great designers in other parts of the world: some Australian designers do

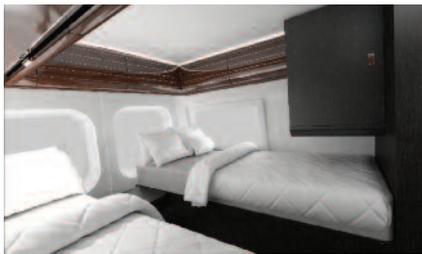
exceptional things, but some French designers are no less impressive. I believe that in the future there will be more and more global design. I think, for example, that we will have a fusion of Asian styles and designs: it is not said that they will perceive exactly the taste and the needs of the European customer, but surely there will be great competitiveness in the design world. But if it is true that design will be more and more globalized, it is equally true that the attention to detail makes all the difference: the "made in Italy" finishing can play a decisive role in determining differences.

**Aboutcamp BtoB: Is there an evolution in American taste about the decoration of recreational vehicles? What is the state of the art and what added value can Tecnoform give you on this market where you have already supplying well-known brands such as Airstream and Winnebago?**

**RK:** Up to four or five years ago, American customer desires were the antithesis of the wishes of European customers. When an European customer gets on the camper, he wants to feel himself on holiday, wants to escape from everyday routines, wants to feel free, like when he is in a house at sea or in another different place from his home. The

American customer, on the other hand, the traditional one, argues in the opposite way: when he gets on the camper he wants to feel at home, he does not want to hear a difference, even not a detach from his home. That's why American campers have always enjoyed domestic settings, even with rocking chairs and a faux fireplace. However, something is changing. American camper manufacturers are in fact focusing on the new generation of customers, young and less traditional, seeking new environments which want furniture that is different from home. A young generation, like the European customer, while getting on the camper, wants to feel on holiday, already in the setting. American builders are focusing on these new customers, which is the reason why they are directing their policies towards a European style, smaller dimensions and mechanical European settings. That's why Italian design is catching on, it is increasingly appreciated: wood and classic furnishings are abandoned, while there is a tendency for light colors, combined colors, with soft lights. In this area Tecnoform is entering in the best possible way after years of work: we are selling thousands of furnishing kits to Winnebago, adopting this new style on "Class B" and "Class C" vehicles. And soon the world premiere will be present-





The new design concept will be showcased at Caravan Salon in Düsseldorf. The furnitures have a weight about 30% below the average.

ted with the new "Class A", the first real American camper of European taste: the furniture is handled by Tecnoform, another reason to be proud.

**Aboutcamp BtoB: The VR sector is changing, even in Europe there are concentrations of large groups, not just for builders but also for suppliers. What is the strategy that can put an independent player like Tecnoform in the field in order continue its successful path?**

**RK:** I believe that independence should no longer be a value. A small-medium company can draw great benefits by joining large groups, thanks to the synergies being put in place. I believe that a company's strength lies in the CEO's ability to maintain brand independence, optimizing synergies for marketing and technique, but without undoing the company's identity.

**Aboutcamp BtoB: Which trends developed in the recent years for furniture of recreational vehicles? Is there always a correspondence between the trends in the home furnishing world and if so, with what delay are acknowledged by our industry?**

**RK:** There is often the tendency to study what's happening in the furniture industry, in order to transfer style and solutions to VR production. In fact, however, the link between the two domains is limited: VR furniture needs to have lighter and smaller sizes, so the bond enhances only in shapes and chromaticities, sometimes in the materials. The most interesting lesson comes from the world of industrial design, where you do not look for the most beautiful design, the best shape, but for the best compromise between design, cost and durability of the product: this is the true industrial design. I strongly push on time to marketing: to our

customers Tecnoform proposes a finished furniture in a short time. Acting in a traditional way, a builder should first consult a designer, then look for a furnishing supplier, then return from the designer with the supplier's indication, and so on: Time is stretched and costs increase. In Tecnoform, the design study and the interior design can be carried out within the same business process, from the design studio to the furnishing kit. Regarding the taste of the end user, VR's buyers, twenty years ago, a design for individual areas was thought about, a furniture for the French market, one for the Scandinavian market and so on. Today, everything is disappearing: we try to make a choice between three or four shades, but with a unique European style.

**Aboutcamp BtoB: Sometimes the furniture you made reports the Tecnoform's brand. This is an exception that does not find similar examples between your competitors and that certifies a strong image of your brand. Do you also think the end user is beginning to perceive the value of a signed furniture?**

**RK:** Years ago, camper makers thought that the concept of furniture created within the company should be a plus, even though we realized it in Tecnoform. Still today, we have customers which want to make our furniture like theirs and we respect this choice. But more and more customers feel it is important to customize with the Tecnoform brand the furnishing of the vehicles they produce, and they see it as an added value. In any case, Tecnoform will push more into the analysis of the needs of the end consumer: only if we understand the culture and needs of those who use the vehicle, we will be able to offer our customers winner furniture solutions.

**Aboutcamp BtoB: Is there enough room for further experiments in terms of materials and production processes or do your customers prefer to rely on traditional materials and proven systems?**

**RK:** At the Caravan Salon in Düsseldorf, Tecnoform presents a new concept of furniture: a complete furnishing that weighs about 30% less than conventional furnishings. To do this we had to design a new fixing system, with a net change compared to the past. But we also had to use new machinery to produce this new furniture. It is therefore a completely new project that touches different levels. But our research does not stop here: we will also have tables made of innovative materials and surfaces that can be repaired if they are damaged by scratches. We know that innovation also serves as a reference for the builder to create new needs and sell more.

**Aboutcamp BtoB: What would you like to see from Tecnoform in the future?**

**RK:** I would like to be able to offer always more complete furniture's solutions. Tecnoform should become a manufacturer of technological solutions that enable customers to evolve, not only in the aesthetic but also in terms of productivity, increasing production volumes. I would like everyone to know that Tecnoform can go without interruption from idea, design, to series production of furniture solutions. For example, in America they are trying to design small-size camper furnishing solutions based on mechanical models derived from the Fiat Ducato, but manufacturers are not yet specialized in this type of product, perhaps because they have teams specialized only in Trailers and large motorhomes. Well, we can support them, in order to avoid mistakes, so that we can have a valid product straight away.