



Profile

Horst Brandstätter, 80, and toy designer Hans Beck brought toy line Playmobil to the world's attention in 1974. The company is part of the strong German Mittelstand: small and medium-sized enterprises that form the core of the economy. Geobra Brandstätter GmbH & Co. KG, the parent company of Playmobil, was founded in 1876 by Brandstätter's great-grandfather Andreas. It is now the largest toy company in Germany.

Top 3 markets

- 01 Germany
- 02 France
- 03 Benelux

Venue

The offices of geobra Brandstätter lie in Zirndorf, northern Bavaria. The headquarters contain a company canteen, which is a common feature in Germany. A conference room with a broad view of rolling farmland and stunning skies is filled with Playmobil figurines, spread out on tables and in cabinets. Food cooked in the canteen kitchen is served at a conference table, set with traditional Bavarian-themed tableware.

Menu

Weisswurst veal sausages heated in water are a Bavarian speciality. Served with soft German-style pretzels and a sweet, grainy mustard, there is an art to elegantly removing Weisswurst from its casing. Following tradition, Brandstätter's meal is accompanied by half a litre of Weissbier, a "white" wheat beer.

Play time Zirndorf, Germany

Preface

Horst Brandstätter, owner of perennial childhood favourite Playmobil, enjoys the simple things in life: toys and Bavarian sausages.

Writer

Jessica Bridger

Photographer

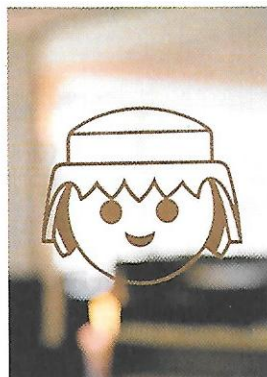
Thomas Dashuber



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"I wanted to have this meal here in the offices so you can see the company, my life's work. I started working here in 1952 at 19 and no one has worked here longer: I've been here more than 60 years. I lost my father when I was seven and my mother told me that I would become a partner in the family toy company when I turned 21 to take my father's place. My two uncles were co-partners when I started working and didn't like me very much because they had their own sons. In order to find out what was going on I had to wait until they went to lunch and go through their files to learn all the secrets.

If someone asks what I'd like for dinner I usually say 'Whatever' – I am no gourmet. I like traditional regional foods such as Weisswurst, a very Bavarian dish. The mustard it's eaten with is very important: it must be a little bit sweet.



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Recipe

Traditional Weisswurst meal

It is said that Weisswurst should never hear the noon bell – ie, buy them and eat them on the same morning.

(Serves 2-3)

500g Weisswurst sausages

2.5l water

1 lemon

Handful of parsley

1 bay leaf

Grainy sweet mustard

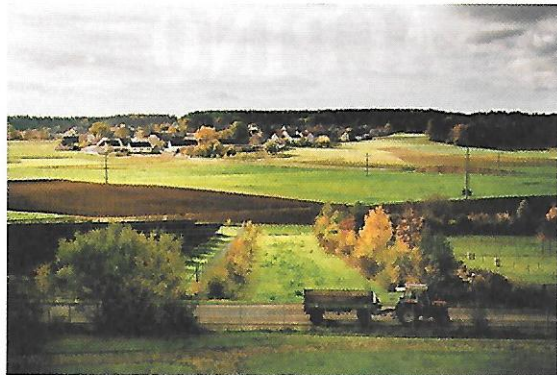
German soft pretzels

The method

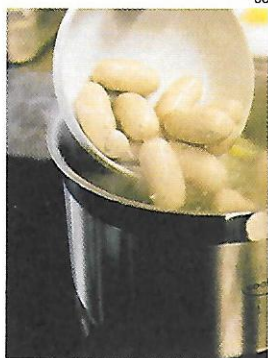
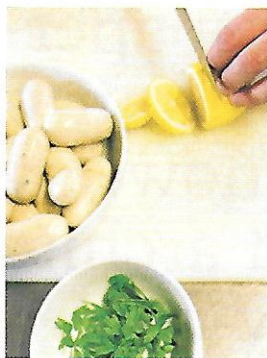
01 Slice the lemon and add to a pot of water with the parsley and bay leaf. Heat until hot but not boiling.

02 Add sausages and heat for 10 to 15 minutes.

03 Reserve some cooking water in a tureen to keep sausages warm and serve alongside sweet mustard, soft pretzels – and Weissbier, of course.



- 01 Horst Brandstätter
- 02 Playmobil HQ in Zirndorf
- 03 The familiar face of Playmobil
- 04 Native American figures
- 05 One of many display cases in the office
- 06 Idyllic view from HQ
- 07 Lemon, a traditional Weisswurst accompaniment
- 08 Sausages are added to hot – not boiling – water
- 09 Pretzels are a plus
- 10 Served on traditional Bavarian china
- 11 Weissbier on the side
- 12 Brandstätter tucks in



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It was my task early on at the company to think about new products, a very important thing in the toy industry. I learned that the company was too old fashioned. This led me to hire Hans Beck as a model maker to help develop new toys. We collaborated for many years. Because my father died when I was a child he could not teach me anything but I learnt from Mr Beck.

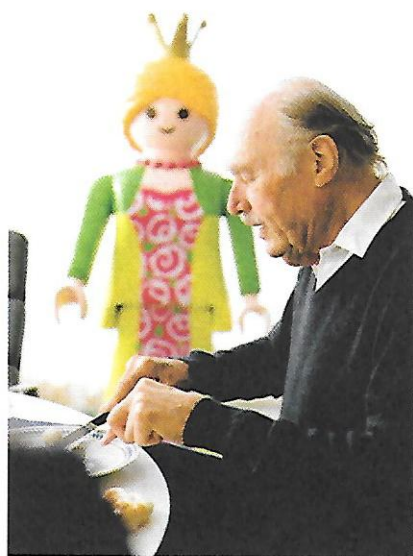
In the early 1970s I went to him and said, 'The way we're doing our job will not work in the future because it takes so long to develop and produce each toy.' I told Mr Beck that we needed a system whereby one Christmas a child would get a car and the next a garage for that car. One day he handed me a small human figure and a wheelbarrow the figure could hold – and that is how Playmobil came to be in 1972, launched in 1974.

The real value of Playmobil is in the head of the child – it is in the imagination. It is something children can use for many days over many years. And when they grow up they don't throw it away – they save it and give it to the next generation.

Playmobil's 40th anniversary is in 2014 and it has been nice to see it develop over the years. Most companies suddenly grow then can also shrink just as fast but I have never had to fire anyone due to a bad economic situation. Over the years I tried to take small steps.

If I could eat with anyone it would be [Konrad] Adenauer [first post-war West German chancellor] and I would like to discuss the global economic situation. I don't understand it because I have a company. At the end of the year I need black figures, not red. The government gets so much money from taxes; I don't understand why they cannot make their budget work.

I am very happy that I got the opportunity to work for Playmobil. I don't want to ever sell the company because it might change – and I don't want to change the games that children play with the toys. In the coming years I think Playmobil will be safest if it becomes a foundation. In the future nothing will really stay the same – time goes on and the world changes from day to day but I hope that the people of the foundation will know what to do so that Playmobil stays Playmobil." — (M)



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