

# The history of packaging with style

By Martin Kugler



Historical label printer.

**The city of Heidelberg is home to the oldest university in Germany dating back to 1386. Over the centuries the institution has evolved into what it is today a cluster of research faculties and advanced scientific institutes.**

Heidelberg's economy is dominated by the university and by tourism. Academic tradition and the image of the city as a romantic and cultural hotspot manage to attract some 12 million visitors every year.

## Heidelberg

Besides its important role in the fields of science and art, Heidelberg also boasts the corporate headquarters of a number of large and well-known industry giants: SAP, the multinational software corporation based in the metropolitan area develops enterprise software for businesses worldwide; pen manufacturer Lamy has its headquarters and factory in Heidelberg and so has HeidelbergCement, the multinational building materials company, today the largest construction aggregates producer in the world.

More interestingly, the city has lent its name to one of the largest corporations in the global printing industry, Heidelberger Druckmaschinen, or shortened to simply Heidelberg, the eponymous name under which it is widely known.

## Heidelberger Druckmaschinen

With a history of more than 170 years, Heidelberger Druckmaschinen has a long



Historical branded signage.

tradition of manufacturing sheet-fed offset printing machines and besides presses, today, in their own words, targets markets of packaging and advertising printing with their integrated prepress, press and post-press solutions and new digital business models. As printing and packaging are closely associated in terms of concepts and materials, it is not surprising to find that Heidelberger Druckmaschinen is among the members and sponsors of one of the city's most intriguing museums: the Verpackungsmuseum, the museum of packaging.

## Verpackungsmuseum

Tucked away in a backyard off Heidelberg's main shopping avenue, the museum is housed in a former church building. Ever since its opening in 1997, the museum of packaging has been the first and only museum of its kind to focus on the cultural aspects of packaging with an emphasis on printed packaging as used by the traditional and most universal brands and their most distinctive packaging designs.

Visitors will find a comprehensive selection of exhibits on the history of all types of packaging made of a variety of materials, mainly cardboard but also glass, wood, ceramics, plastic and metal. For the museum, packaging is part of our cultural heritage. It thus presents exhibits from the long and varied history of industrial packaging of consumer goods.

## Reflection of cultural developments

The museum aims to demonstrate that product

packaging has always presented itself as a reflection of the cultural developments in our society. Thus the historical change in the way products are presented simultaneously shows the changes of everyday life over the years. The function of packaging, however, remains basically unchanged: as an outer wrap of a branded merchandise, it makes a significant contribution to the differentiation and recognisability of a brand or a manufacturer. In addition to technical innovations and machinery, the museum explores the evolution of the design of culturally significant brands that have accompanied our everyday lives for generations. The exhibits provide valuable insights into many household brands of our everyday environment. Artefacts from food to fashion, medicine, cosmetics and automotive industries are all represented in the permanent exhibition.

The museum distinguishes three historical phenomena that are at the origin of some of the classics of packaging.

Firstly, at the end of the 19th century the growth in prosperity of a broader middle class and an economic peak of industrialisation



Brand names become prominent circa 1935.



The museum's 2 floors.



Schubert SKA folding machine circa 1960.

resulted in a revitalised demand for upmarket consumer goods. Branded products became more widespread and with it the need to distribute consumer goods in a durable and commercially appealing format. New food preservation techniques led to the introduction and wider availability of novelty products such as preserves, canned food, soft drinks and/or packed bakery products.

Secondly, the appetite for luxury goods among the newly emerging upwardly mobile classes emerged mainly in the United States. Newly acquired wealth was used to invite envious comparisons through display of luxury goods. The appearance and attitudes of this new leisure class became role models for consump-

tion. The sudden revelation that consumers could gain prestige from the visibility of luxury brands and branded packaging opened up new target groups for manufacturers of these products.

Thirdly, these consumers were able to afford new consumption patterns, which led to new forms of product presentation and packaging such as cigarette packs, chocolate bars, soft drink bottles. Innovative products needed to have a distinctive packaging, which in turn established a strong brand image that in many cases lasts until today. Well known product brands such as Coca-Cola, Haribo, Nivea, Weleda, Milka, Melitta, Nestlé or Maggi have become iconic brands because their unmistak-

able packaging ensures their distinctive character and recognisability on the market.

### Special exhibition on Bauhaus

In 2022 the museum is running a special exhibition on the Bauhaus movement's impact on typography on packaging. When Bauhaus, initially an art school, emerged in the 1920s it quickly became synonymous with European avant-garde and modernism. Founded by Walter Gropius, the Bauhaus art school worked on the basis of the principle that form and function should work together, not separately, merging the aesthetics with the functionality of modern industrial design. Bauhaus design shaped the architecture and furniture design of generations to come and immediately had a powerful influence on everyday life and consequently on the design of consumer goods and their packaging. The exhibition shows how the sober modernist design and typography of Bauhaus influences leading brands such as Chanel, Braun, Lego and Apple even today.

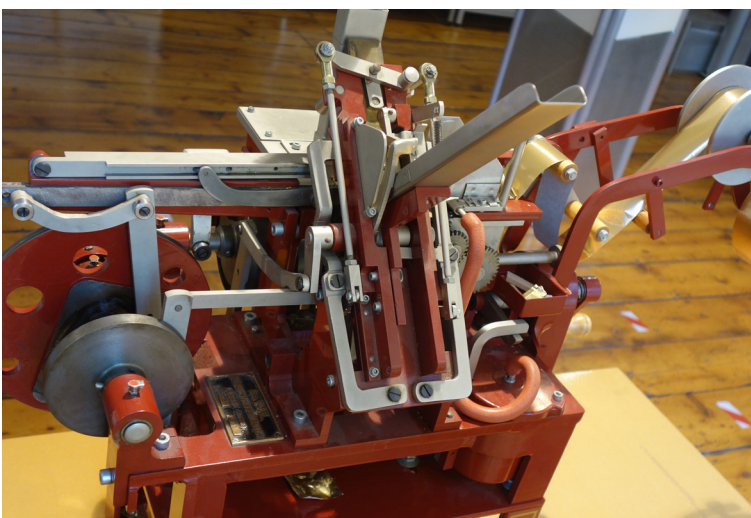
### Independence

The museum insists they only consider brand packaging and designs that are popular among the public and for which there is widespread recognition and consumer awareness. The museum does not want to be seen as a partner of the manufacturers in advertising or promoting their brands and products. They state that manufacturers have no influence on the selection of exhibits.

Further sponsors of the museum include BOBST, IGEPA, Mondi and many others.

The temporary exhibition on Bauhaus typography is open until 31 December 2022.

[www.verpackungsmuseum.de](http://www.verpackungsmuseum.de)



SAPAL packing machine circa 1910.



Printed packaging made of a variety of materials.