



Tannery of the Year 2013: Results



Scene at the 2013 global Tannery of the Year Awards Gala in Hong Kong.



The PrimeAsia China team on stage after picking up the global award at the 2013 Tannery of the Year Awards in Hong Kong. ALL CREDITS: WTP

PrimeAsia China picks up global award

A move towards making improvements internally at PrimeAsia China on measuring the "resource-heaviness" of its leather has begun to make a wider impact on the global leather industry. The 2013 Tannery of the Year competition has recognised the example the company is setting and acknowledged its commitment to doing things well.

Born in 1998, the result of a joint-venture between the Taiwanese footwear group Pou Chen and former US-owned tanning operation Prime Tanning, there is still something typically Chinese about PrimeAsia China, the global winner at the 2013 Tannery of the Year Awards. Based in Huangjiang, near Dongguan in the southern province of Guangdong, the facility, now fully owned by Pou Chen, works from wet blue to produce on average 3.5 million square-feet of finished leather per month. Well within recent memory, there were 25,000 footwear factories within 100 kilometres of the tannery, a situation that you could only find in China, probably only in Guangdong Province.

It's true that there are fewer footwear factories on the doorstep of the new winner of the global Tannery of the Year these days, but the largest producers, having made significant investment in automating their shoe production plants, have stayed. China exported 10 billion pairs of shoes in 2012, 840 million pairs with leather uppers. At the same time, domestic consumption of shoes

is at an all-time high. China still needs its shoe factories and many of its shoe factories still need leather.

Self-sufficiency is a central part of Pou Chen's supply chain strategy, which means PrimeAsia China will continue to have a key role to play in supplying its factories with leather. The tannery's chief operations officer, Michael Hsu (holding the trophy for Tannery of the Year Global award in the photograph above), has said that at one time, 44% of Pou Chen's production capacity was in Guangdong Province. The figure today is 34%, but Pou Chen's total capacity is more than 300 million pairs a year, which means it is still making more than 100 million pairs a year in PrimeAsia China's backyard. According to Michael Hsu, however, the group's mind-set is not about becoming bigger and bigger all the time. "Now the company says it wants to become not bigger but better," he says. This applies to all of its operations, including PrimeAsia China.

A consistent commitment to, and willingness to invest in, innovation is helping the tannery to meet this challenge of



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PrimeAsia China chief executive, Jon Clark, acknowledges that his company's calculation of the carbon footprint of its leather is controversial.



The coveted Tannery of the Year Global Award. The international panel of judges recognised the example PrimeAsia China has set for the rest of the leather industry.

becoming better. Machinery for splitting, samm-setting, wet staking and so on is from top European names and it has worked hard to reduce its use of water and energy. In addition work PrimeAsia has done to calculate the footprint (including carbon emissions, consumption of water, chemicals and manpower) at each stage of the production process has made a big impression on other people in the leather industry. This complicated exercise has involved gathering data for all of the leathers in its range and giving a "resource" score for each. Customers will have access to these numbers and will be able to use them to compare leathers. Not everyone agrees with every aspect of the method the new global Tannery of the Year award winner is using, most notably its decision to accept 7% of the carbon footprint of the cattle that supplies its hides as a part of the overall carbon emissions of its leather, but PrimeAsia has made it clear it will adjust its figures in any way required as soon as there is an industry-wide standard covering this question. There is no standard yet and the company wanted to make the information available to its customers now rather than wait.

Chief executive, Jon Clark, says his company is determined to be "an outlier" in the global leather industry when it comes to tackling "energy and resource challenges". Giving his reaction to winning the global award at Tannery of the Year 2013 in Hong Kong at the end of March, Mr Clark, said: "For many years it's been our passion to try to do the right thing and to make a difference. We are just so pleased that this award recognises some of that work. We're shocked and very excited and very humbled to be in the company we are in." He explained that "doing the right thing" had meant looking internally as well as externally.

For Jon Clark, and for PrimeAsia China, there was no need to wait for a global standard to materialise to carry out the work it has done to calculate its own environmental impact and, by extension, provide a platform for the global leather industry to do the same.

"The reality of it is we try to run our company based on target management," he explains. "We love measurements. We believe we thrive with measurements: we like the challenge of measurements. As part of that, we've also had a keen sense of awareness that the

'dirty secret', so to speak, in the tanning industry is that efficiencies in energy use, chemical use and manpower are cost-saving mechanisms. So we decided that it was time for us, as an internal unit, to just take a step forward, and create, from common sense and from third-party auditing, an approach to measuring our carbon footprint. We did so; it's controversial. If you have been in any of the seminars that have been talking about carbon footprint and how much carbon we want to associate with the animal, you will know that the debate goes on. We took a stand and we decided to create that calculation."

He explains that the focus started with carbon before moving to water, manpower and chemicals, which is what allowed the 2013 global Tannery of the Year to create the index it now has of the footprint of all the items in its range. It's an index that is not for external use, the chief executive makes clear.

"And we're not using it as a marketing tool at this point," he adds. "This index is for us to have best in class within our four walls so that we can continue to move our product upstream." 🌱





Excellence across the globe

At the third Tannery of the Year Awards ceremony, which took place in Hong Kong on March 25, PrimeAsia China, was named as the global winner (see previous article). The judges chose the Huangjiang-based tannery from five regional winners; earlier in the evening, it had picked up the regional award for China. Other regional winners on the night were Seton AutoLeather for Africa, SB Foot Tanning Company for the Americas, Midori Hokuyo for Asia excluding China, and Sepici Grubu for Europe.

Eyes on Africa

A lone finalist for Africa this time around, Seton AutoLeather is, nevertheless, a worthy winner of the regional Tannery of the Year award for the continent. Based in Nigel, in Gauteng, South Africa, Seton AutoLeather is part of the global automotive leather group GST, but is its only operation in Africa. Current production levels are between 1,800 and 2,000 hides per day from which current output is over 7,000 square-metres of finished leather.

In the face of a number of challenges that the company has faced in recent years, managing director, Shalen Sewnandan, is optimistic about the future. A wave of strikes in 2010 that put some big-name customers off South Africa led to better dialogue with workers, making similar action in the future much less likely. A decision to halt operations in its own beamhouse towards the end of 2012 led to a reduction in the workforce, and issues that most other tanners will spend little time worrying about, such as empowerment of formerly disadvantaged ethnic groups and the ongoing problem of supporting employees with HIV and AIDS, are part of everyday life for Mr Sewnandan and his team. On top of that, automotive-focused tanners everywhere are facing up to the challenge of many brands attempting to reduce the amount of leather they use in their car interiors without making it too obvious to their consumers.

Mr Sewnandan's view is that, despite these challenges, there are still grounds for optimism. End-users still associate leather with prestige and luxury, he says. As he puts it: "Leather is still unsurpassed in elegance; no synthetic substrate can match it. Leather



Seton AutoLeather managing director, Shalen Sewnandan, receives the Tannery of the Year regional award for Africa.



Midori Hokuyo, general manager, Toshikazu Suzuki (centre), collects the Tannery of the Year regional award for Asia excluding China from Joachim Henkmann, head of leather business in Greater China for BASF, one of the sponsors of the Awards (right), and Simon Yarwood, chief executive of World Trades Publishing.

looks, feels and smells unique and these three qualities differentiate it from any competitor product out there. It becomes even more beautiful with age and it's the ultimate recycled product."

Automotive focus for Asia excluding China

Another automotive tanner, Midori Hokuyo, was the regional winner for Asia excluding China. Also part of a wider organisation, the diverse Midori group, Midori Hokuyo's is the only automotive

tannery that remains in the automotive powerhouse that is Japan.

Located in Yamagata City, 400 kilometres north of Tokyo, close relationships that the tannery has built up with major Japanese automotive companies have allowed it to make Kaizen and other important quality and supply chain excellence principles part of its DNA. Japanese automotive companies now have production facilities all over the world, but collectively they are still producing around ten million cars a year on home soil so Midori Hokuyo feels it will have



a role to play for years to come. However, it also knows that it must keep up its commitment to continuous improvement if it is to keep its drums turning.

All of the tannery's employees share the responsibility for coming up with new ideas for making production processes more efficient and more environmentally responsible. Managing director, Sho Sasaki, explains: "This is the culture of the automotive industry and is, therefore, our culture, and as long as the Japanese automotive companies continue to make cars in Japan, we will keep this going."

Actions are what matter at SB Foot

For the Americas, the regional winner at Tannery of the Year 2013 was SB Foot, one of only a handful of tanners still in operation in the US. Based in Red Wing, Minnesota, it has been under the ownership of Red Wing Shoe since the 1980s. Bill Sweasy, whose family has owned and run Red Wing Shoe since the start of the twentieth century, says that it made sense for his company to acquire the tannery because it was, and is, intent on continuing to make at least some of its shoes on home soil. Mr Sweasy, however, has made it clear that his favourite outcome from this deal was saving people's jobs.

SB Foot has been in operation in the town, and an important employer, for 140 years. These days it employs 175 people, some of whom have been there for decades. Bill Sweasy wants people to be in it for the long haul, as he is. His view is that it's no coincidence that many privately owned companies in the leather sector stay true to their values and their commitment to quality while many of those who have to keep at least one eye on Wall Street and find it hard to look further than the next quarterly report have begun using synthetic materials, at least in their entry-level ranges.

Footwear is, naturally, the tannery's main focus. It uses local raw material to make around 20 million square-feet of finished leather a year in its high-tech and environmentally efficient facility.

Turkey takes European award

Turkish tanning group Sepici Grubu is the Tannery of the Year for Europe 2013. The Izmir-based company has a broad activity base, comprising vegetable-tanned leather for luxury goods, sole leather and chrome-tanned leather. It's run by a well established



Andy Rhein, technical director of SB Foot, winner of the regional award for the Americas, Tannery of the Year 2013.



Family-run firm Sepici Grubu won Tannery of the Year 2013 for Europe. Mustafa Sepici collected the award.

family, which took the Sepici name, meaning 'tanner', in 1934 when Turkish naming traditions changed and surnames became compulsory.

Today, a number of projects at Sepici Grubu catch the eye (for example, it is converting solid waste from the tannery into organic fertiliser) and its commitment to quality and innovation is high. Its aim is to focus on higher-quality raw material, even if this means processing lower quantities, and producing top-class leather that it can sell "at a fair price". Current monthly output volumes are of 70,000 square-metres of vegetable- and chrome-tanned leather and 70 tonnes of sole leather.

Company chairman, Mehmet Sepici, the grandson of the founder, describes his tannery as "a great school" for the whole of the Turkish leather industry. He explains that every time he goes to a seminar or a leather event in another part of the country he meets engineers, technicians and the company leaders of other tanneries who cut their teeth at Sepici Grubu. His uncle, Talip Sepici, claims to have retired (having worked in the company since the 1950s) but still goes to the tannery every day, still wears overalls and says he cannot stay away from the factory floor because he loves spending time with the employees making leather. ☺



Highly commended awards for four tanneries

The other four finalists in Tannery of the Year 2013 received Highly Commended awards at the gala dinner in Hong Kong on March 25.

The industry owes congratulations also to the other four finalists in the Tannery of the Year award programme for 2013. Far from leaving empty handed, they each took home from Hong Kong an award for being Highly Commended in the 2013 programme. This is an excellent achievement in its own right, and something to tell partners, suppliers, workers and investors about with great pride. This is recognition for their commitment to innovation, to fairness, to the environment and to the future.

American heights

For the Americas, the family-run Lefarc tannery in León, Mexico, picked up the Highly Commended award for the Americas. Now being run by fourth-generation tanners from the Collazo family, Lefarc has a strategy of being self-reliant and making progress on its own. It's located about ten kilometres from León's main tanning district and has put in place its own effluent treatment system rather than try to run a pipeline to the city's common effluent treatment plant.

Lefarc makes a great deal of promoting its mission and values throughout the operation, putting one (in Spanish) for each of the letters in the company's name. The values translate as loyalty, effort, training, love, respect and commitment, with the one for love insisting that all 140 Lefarc employees will "do what I do with love".

The company is also working hard to be lean and to operate without much buffer stock. This is far from easy because another commitment is to sourcing hides from north of the border (more than 1,000 kilometres away) so as to be able to offer better quality to clients. The key, according to Lefarc, is to build strong relationships with suppliers and with customers, to share information with them, plan pricing and cash-flow with them and to generate continuity and trust.

Sales director, Luis Ernesto Collazo, says he and his brothers, Fabián and Roberto



The Collazo brothers from León (left to right): Roberto Carlos, Luis Ernesto and Fabián. Their initials make up the name of their family-run tannery, Lefarc, winner of Highly Commended at the Tannery of the Year Awards for 2013.

Carlos (the company name comes from a combination of their initials) deliberately chose a rhino to be their logo. "We like the rhino as a symbol," he says. "The rhino has tremendous strength and when he makes up his mind to do something, nothing can stop him."

Pakistan pioneer

Pakistan's first finalist in the Tanner of the Year initiative, Lahore-based Royal Leather Industries, received the Highly Commended award for Asia excluding China for 2013. Run by Agha Saiddain, the current chairman of the Pakistan Tanners' Association, Royal Leather is a long-standing and highly valued supplier of leather to Swedish furniture group Ikea, a demanding customer, but one from which Mr Agha says his organisation has learned much.

Ikea's commitment to quality and attention to detail have inspired Royal Leather to make pioneering moves such as installing Pakistan's first fully operational wastewater treatment plant. The tannery opened the plant in 2006 and immediately

invited rivals (or colleagues) from all over the country to come and see it up close to encourage them to emulate what Royal had done.

Royal Leather is used to finding its own solutions to challenges. It has in place home-developed solutions for chrome recovery, for making dust-cakes, made hide-shavings and it even made its own five liming and ten tanning drums. Its current processing capacity is 110,000 goat skins every month, 10,000 buffalo hides, 20,000 sheepskins and 5,000 cow hides.

Mr Agha says that one of the main reasons he wants the leather industry in Pakistan to keep growing is because it is the poorest in society who will benefit the most. "By my calculation," he says, "if you include farmers, abattoir workers, those who carry out the salting of hides, those involved in transportation and, of course, tanners and finished product manufacturers, this industry is responsible for a million jobs in Pakistan and that is very important. We need to be more conscious, in my opinion, of the benefits we can bring to humanity."



Royal Leather Industries director, Agha Saiddain, believes the leather industry deserves more credit than it receives for creating millions of jobs, especially in developing economies and especially amongst the poorest in society.

Cheer for China

Xuzhou Nanhai Tannery and Leather Company, based on the outskirts of the city of Suining, in the northern province of Jiangsu, won Highly Commended for China in the latest Tannery of the Year programme. Owned by large industrial group Guangdong Holdings (GDH), Xuzhou Nanhai's innovation and consistent quality convinced GDH to make the Jiangsu operation its only tannery in 2004. It carries out beamhouse, dyeing and finishing at its main site, three kilometres outside Suining, and has extra finishing and drying capacity at a smaller tannery nearby, which it acquired in 2005.

Xuzhou Nanhai has an annual production

capacity of 48 million square-feet of finished leather at the moment. It has a five-year development plan to have an additional plant in operation by 2017, after which it will have the capacity to make 144 million square-feet of leather every year. The company says it has been turning away business and firmly believes that it will be better for it to become bigger.

It mainly uses fleshed and salted hides from North America with an average weight of 29 kilos, although some non-fleshed Australian salted hides of similar weight are also being processed at present. No hides of Chinese origin are in use at the tannery. Around 90% of the leather Xuzhou Nanhai produces goes into footwear and the rest into bags and other accessories.

Managing director, Sun Jun, insists that Xuzhou Nanhai will keep investing back into the business so that its 700 workers will continue to have jobs and personal prosperity.

Italian pride

The famous Arzignano tanning cluster in the province of Vicenza in northern Italy is home to more than 800 companies with links to leather, but these days, surprisingly few are full-service tanneries. One that is, Gruppo Dani, picked up the Highly Commended Award for Europe in the 2013 Tannery of the Year programme. Founded in 1950, it's a well established player in the Italian, European and global tanning sector, but is still in the hands of the second generation of the Dani family thanks to the fact that Giancarlo Dani, youngest son of the founder, Angelo Dani, is still chief executive, and is still making his wisdom, his vision and



Gruppo Dani chief executive, Giancarlo Dani, with the Highly Commended Award for Europe, alongside Simon Yarwood, chief executive of World Trades Publishing.

his leadership available to the company. Seven of Angelo Dani's grandchildren are now part of the operation.

One of the benefits of Giancarlo Dani's knowledge of the market was that, when a production facility, a kilometre away from the main site, became available in 2009, the group snapped it up and set up a separate production line devoted to the automotive market. It was far from the best economic environment in which to make such a move, but the success of high-end European automotive brands in the past four years shows that it was an excellent decision.

Excellence is the word Giancarlo Dani uses to talk about the Italian tanning sector in general, not just his company. "We are very proud of this," he says, "we have it in our blood. But for far too many years tanners (in general, not just us) were reluctant to tell their stakeholders about what they were doing. Everything was internal. But now we want to share this and communicate it externally. Italian leather is a luxury product; we are proud to show it to people."

More than half of Gruppo Dani's 500 employees come from outside Italy now. So the company is working hard to provide training and support for all and to make it clear to entire families that they are important members of the Arzignano communities. An initiative called Fabbriche Aperte (Open Factories), launched in May 2012 to share all of the tannery's activities with its neighbours was a great success and will be repeated in 2013. 🌐



The Xuzhou Nanhai team from China at the Tannery of the Year Awards, with guests representing its North American hide suppliers.



Innovation of the Year

A new component of the Tannery of the Year 2013 was the Innovation Award. As in previous editions of the programme all of the finalists displayed a serious commitment to innovation. One example of this inventiveness for each of the nine finalists was chosen and a special panel was invited to select the most outstanding example.



Sun Jun, managing director of Xuzhou Nanhai (centre), receives the inaugural Tannery of the Year Innovation Award from Thomas Strebost, joint managing director of Heller-Leder (right) and Simon Yarwood, chief executive of World Trades Publishing.

Tannery of the Year finalists all demonstrate a number of qualities. They care about the environment, look after their workforces, they hold their heads up in society and take seriously their responsibilities for sharing resources with people, old and young, in their communities. They meet their obligations and pay their way. They are open and honest, happy to let the *World Leather* team and, by extension, the whole industry see behind the scenes in their operations and share their stories with a global audience. They are good corporate citizens, all the while continuing to make beautiful leather.

However, tanners could not produce leather today without a strong commitment to research and development, investment in new technology and global support networks of supplier organisations. It was also clear that considerable in-house innovation has taken place at these organisations. Underpinning all of this is their spirit of

innovation. Tanners are creative, imaginative people who like to try new things and come up with new ideas when facing up to the challenges that their work presents them with all the time.

As the team has moved round the world, it has seen at first hand examples of this commitment to innovation from each of the finalist tanneries. This has been a feature since Tannery of the Year began. In past cycles of the Awards, we highlighted the best of these in later articles under the heading 'Innovation' in *World Leather*. Many of the ideas are joint efforts involving the tanners, supplier companies and research bodies. Some are big, some are small. Some are completely new, some less so. We appreciate them all and decided that, this year, formal recognition would be given to this phenomenon. One idea from each of the nine finalists was selected and a panel of experts asked to choose one as the worthy recipient of the inaugural Tannery of the Year: Innovation Award.

Solutions to problems

These examples were not simply the use of off-the-shelf products or equipment, but reflected carefully considered solutions to problems, and were not limited to any single part of production. There are applications in areas of product development, machine amendment, environmental applications and management systems.

Technology was not restricted to any particular size of organisation. In some cases considerable investment has taken place by relatively small companies, whereas companies of considerable size have sometimes introduced concepts that were stunning in their simplicity. Some are unique to a single tannery, while other applications may be found in different forms in several tanneries.

All nine finalists were contenders for the Innovation Award and a list of the nine creative ideas follows.



Tannery of the Year 2013: Results



Xuzhou Nanhai: sulfide recovery and reuse

All of the sulfide-containing liquors are separated and delivered to a dedicated holding tank within the effluent treatment plant. This wastewater is then pumped into a pair of sealed tanks where it is treated using sulfuric acid to lower the pH to 5.0. Compressed air is blown into the base of the tanks to mix the solution and flush all of the hydrogen sulfide from solution. These gases are delivered into the base of two scrubbing columns, where the hydrogen sulfide is dissolved in a spray of sodium hydroxide to form a sodium sulfide solution. This provides 99% recovery of sodium sulfide, being reused in the subsequent unhairing and liming processes. The whole effluent treatment plant is free of any sulfide odour, and the generation of sulfate in the effluent is avoided.



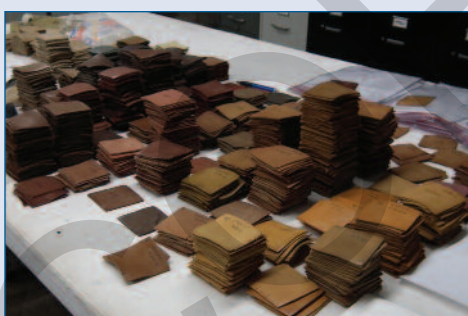
Seton AutoLeather: recycling used lime liquors

Plant is installed for the recycling of used unhairing and lime liquors. This is designed for the collection of all used floats from unhairing and liming and the first wash. These are screened, and then allowed to settle for the removal of fine solids and grease from the surface. The supernatant is then stored in tanks and heated to the temperature required as the float for the next loads for liming and unhairing. The sulfide addition to the liming process is calculated daily, based on the residual content of the supernatant.



Lefarc: solar energy

Solar panels are used to provide hot water to the dye and retanning department. This comprises solar 60 panels each 2.5 x 1.0m³ that are fitted on the factory roof and operated by recycling the water between these panels and a hot water storage tank. This operation raises the temperature to approximately 75°C, but if the water supply is not hot enough there is steam addition from the adjacent oil-fired boiler plant. As hot water is withdrawn, the system is topped up with cold water fed into the solar units. The system has operated for approximately five years and was part-funded by a government grant.



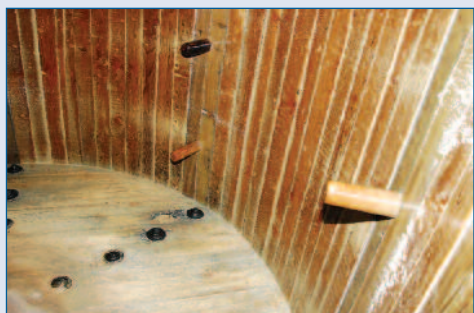
SB Foot Tanning: management of colour control in dyeing

Six basic leathers are manufactured: standard, softie leathers, and a tumbled softie version, each as waterproof and non-waterproof, in 85 colours. As part of colour control, cuttings are taken and dried from each pack of leather at the end of dyeing, retan and fatliquoring. Placed on top of a cutting from previous packs to that colour in the control office, this presents a detailed colour profile of production. By comparison to previous packs and master samples, this simple working tool immediately highlights any variations and is central to basic colour management.



Midori Hokuyo: avoiding contamination

When leathers are removed from the end of the finishing lines they are lifted from the conveyor on wooden poles to avoid damage by direct handling. These poles are then placed in moveable racks to suspend the leather to allow it to cool, and for movement between operations. To avoid any contamination and protect the leather, these racks are fitted on top and on three sides with clear plastic panels. Once the rack is loaded, the front is closed using plastic curtaining fitted on a rail.



Royal Leather Industries: the construction of liming and tanning drums

All of the five wooden drums used for liming, and the ten tanning drums have been made at the tannery in on-site carpentry workshops. This complex operation also involved the careful construction and fitting of drum doors to create a watertight seal, and the forming and fitting of the pegs that serve as internal fittings.



PrimeAsia China: reuse and recycling of water

There is considerable water recycling within this plant. The effluent treatment is to a high standard, using Felton reactions and activated carbon for tertiary treatment. Coupled with a low salinity due to manufacture from the wet blue this has enabled 50% of original fresh water input to be replaced with treated effluent. Recycling occurs in four different ways:

- All of the water used for wetting back wet blue stock as it enters production is "green" or recycled water.
- The floats discharged from wetting back are screened to remove fibre and fine suspended solids, and then held in a collection sump. This water is recycled twice for wetting back subsequent loads of wet blue.
- 50% of the water used within retanning and fatliquoring processes is "green" water.
- All machinery, felts, scrubbing waters for emissions and overspray, and for general housekeeping use "green" water.

Once these different operations have been completed, all of the wastewaters are discharged directly to the effluent treatment plant. New green water storage tanks are being installed at present to increase the percentage of water that can be recycled.



Gruppo Dani: oxidative unhairing process

After 30 months' development, and in co-operation with a university team, the oxidative unhairing process has reached a stage where loads of two-tonne input weight is being produced on a regular basis. The process uses hydrogen peroxide for unhairing and sodium hydroxide as the source of alkali. A polypropylene drum fitted with an internal water jacket for temperature control has been specially installed to manage this process.

At the completion of the process the hides are completely hair-free with no signs of residual skin pigmentation or grain damage. These can be compared to the hides from the standard unhairing liming process as shown in the image. These hides are being processed into both wet blue and wet white leathers for a comprehensive range of outlets.



Sepici Grubu: composting solid waste

All of the organic waste from waste treatment and manufacture is composted on site. This operation started in 2009, being developed by Sepiciler in cooperation with local universities, and has a capacity of 15 tonnes per day. The waste typically comprises 70%-80% dewatered solids at 20%-25% dry solids from effluent treatment (screenings, mixed chemical and biological solids), 10% fleshing residues (protein) following grease recovery, with the balance made up with vegetable tanned shavings, grass and green residues from a local farm with occasional horse and cow dung.

In practice the solids are deposited under cover in long rows (windrows), and then mechanically mixed and turned several times for the first day. The windrows are then left for one week for the biological process to become established, and then turned once every three days for three weeks. Turning continues once every three days for the next four weeks, the whole process operating on a two-month cycle. The compost has a Cr content of 1,500 mg per kilo on dry weight, and is used within horticulture mixed with other organics generally at 1:3 ratios, or blended to reduce the Cr content to below the limit of 1,000 mg per kilo. Trials as a nutrient source and as a conditioning agent continue with the Aegean University Faculty of Agriculture. ☺



Panel decision

To consider which of these brilliant ideas was the most outstanding in this Tannery of the Year programme, a special panel comprising senior members of the leadership teams from previous global winners of the competition, Thomas Strebost from Heller-Leder and Reg Hankey from the Pittards Group, held detailed discussions with *World Leather* technical editor, Richard Daniels.

As a result of their considerations, the inaugural Tannery of the Year Innovation Award went to Xuzhou Nanhai for its work

on recovery and re-use of sulfides.

The final choice was made on the basis that this system avoids the conventional approach to sulfide treatment, in which, ideally, sulfide-containing wastewaters are segregated, then catalytically oxidised. This is high in energy costs, converts sulfides mainly to sulfates, increasing the level of salts in the treated effluent on discharge, with the possibility of post-generation of hydrogen sulfide by bacterial action, with fresh chemicals required for unhairing.

With the innovative approach in use at Xuzhou Nanhai, although the sulfide-

containing wastewaters still need segregation, the outcome is a totally odour-free plant and a sodium sulfide solution that can be reused for unhairing. Moreover, the closed loop almost eliminated the need for the purchase of any sodium sulfide.

The panel considered that many variations to this basic technique will be possible in practice around the industry. It recognised that, due to the toxicity of hydrogen sulfide gas, the system needs to be professionally engineered and totally secure, and that sulfide alarm systems and monitoring devices will be imperative. 🌐

Judging panel



ICT secretary, Paul Pearson, chairman of the Tannery of the Year judging panel.



Dr Patricia Casey of IULTCS prepares to present the regional award for Europe at the 2013 Tannery of the Year final.



HR expert Kim Reid of British Airways at the Tannery of the Year gala dinner.



Ivan Král project coordinator for leather for UNIDO, he is based at its headquarters in Vienna, Austria.

Judges for the Tannery of the Year Awards 2013 were kind enough to give up their time in the build-up to the final in Hong Kong in March to read all nine detailed reports, as published over the previous year in *World Leather*, and, on the day of the final, to hear presentations from each tannery.

The judges for the 2013 final were **Dr Patricia Casey**, representing the International Union of Leather Technologists and Chemists Societies, **Kim Reid**, head of leadership and talent at British Airways, **Paul Pearson**, representing the International Council of Tanners, and **Ivan Král**, representing the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO).

Paul Pearson, who is in the process of retiring from his position as director of the UK Leather Federation while continuing to serve as secretary to the International Council of Tanners, kindly acted as chair of the judges at the final of the Tannery of the Year 2013 programme. In the build-up to the event, he explained that two of the core roles of the ICT

are to promote the image and understanding of the industry worldwide and to encourage good governance in the sector. "We firmly believe that the industry has a very positive story to tell and that we should take every opportunity to tell it," he said. "We see the Tannery of the Year Awards as an occasion to celebrate this and to demonstrate, share and promote best practice in the industry worldwide."

For her part, **Dr Patricia Casey** is IULTCS vice-president for 2012-2013 and president elect. She earned her doctorate in industrial chemistry at Buenos Aires National University, Argentina in 1975. Since then she has worked in different companies in the leather industry. Since 1997 she has been quality assurance manager at Curtiembres Fonseca, an Argentinean tannery producing leather mainly for automotive upholstery. She has led environmental, ISO and other internal audits. Since 1980, she has been an active member of the Argentine Leather Chemists and Technicians Association (AAQTIC) and is its current president. She



represents Argentina and Uruguay on the IULTCS executive committee. In 2011 she was elected IULTCS vice-president for the period 2012-2013 and will be its president for 2014-2015. She has published several articles in technical journals and presented research at international, Latin American and Argentinean leather congresses. She has given courses and lectures at AAQTIC and Argentinean universities, as well as to industry associations and other organisations in the leather sector.

The judging panel at the 2013 Tannery of the Year awards also included **Kim Reid**, head of talent, leadership and learning at British Airways. Ms Reid joined BA in 2008. During her time there, her main focus has been on enabling the organisation to build a high-performance, customer-centred culture. During 2012 a key priority was to ensure the effective resourcing of the BA volunteers for the London 2012 Olympic Games, both as Games Makers (volunteers who helped the Games function smoothly) and hosts for a special event called BA Park Live, for spectators to view the athletic events on screens set up just outside the stadium.

Previously, Ms Reid worked in the defence industry for 17 years for BAE Systems, where she held a number of roles, starting her career in BAE in pensions, before moving into HR. She was HR director for a multinational division of BAE Systems and then moved to a joint venture with EADS, BAE

Systems & Finmeccanica as Group HR director of MBDA, the European missile company.

Ivan Král, project coordinator for leather for UNIDO, completed the judges' line-up. Originally a tanner from neighbouring Slovakia, he has been based at its headquarters in Vienna, Austria, for a number of years but travels widely to consult on and help implement ideas and technologies that help tanners in developing economies.

Recent examples include work in Bangladesh on wastewater treatment, the use of renewable energy in leather processing (especially solar water heating) and on a hair-saving process. UNIDO is also at the forefront of trying to find workable solutions to the environmental problem caused by the use of salt to preserve hides and skins.

In the build-up to the Tannery of the Year final, Mr Král said: "The work of Tannery of the Year to highlight best practice and to encourage tanners in all parts of the world to speak up about techniques and technologies they are using successfully will help us. To share ideas is always good, and UNIDO commends the generosity of Tannery of the Year finalists who want to help their counterparts in all regions learn from their example."

The organisers of Tannery of the Year are deeply grateful to the judges for giving generously of their time and expertise to help make the competition a success. ☺

Launch of the fourth programme

World Leather launched the fourth programme of Tannery of the Year as soon as the 2013 Gala Dinner ended. After a pause to allow us to publish special sets of articles on the important subjects of automotive leather, leather for luxury goods and sustainability, in the next three issues of the magazine, Tannery of the Year reports will begin again in the autumn of 2013.

This next Awards cycle of the competition will culminate in a spectacular Gala Dinner and awards presentation in Shanghai at the time of next year's All China Leather Exhibition, in September 2014. The ongoing support of sponsors BASF, Buckman and Lanxess will be invaluable, and the magazine is also grateful to APLF, the International Union of Leather Technologists and Chemists Societies, the International Council of Tanners, The United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, the China Leather Industry Association and its Brazilian counterpart, CICB, for the practical help and advice they have given

and continue to give.

Tannery of the Year was initiated on behalf of the international industry by *World Leather* in 2009, after the seminal World Leather Forum event in Paris in 2007. The clear message from the Paris event was that the leather industry, often very reticent in the wake of unfair criticism and inaccurate reporting in mainstream media, has a lot to be proud of and a huge number of positive stories to tell. Even today, almost six years on from the World Leather Forum, when campaign groups and some big consumer product brands have painted a less-than-accurate picture of the leather industry, the response from the industry itself has, largely, been silence.

World Leather feels strongly that, more than ever, it's important for the industry to have a platform for sharing positive, accurate stories, with the industry itself, but also with the outside world.

Thanks to the enthusiastic response, the generosity and the openness of tanners around the world, we now have a series of 29 in-depth reports (around 5,000 words

each) that show tanners in all parts of the globe to be organisations that care about the environment, look after their workforces, take seriously their responsibilities for sharing resources with their communities, meet their obligations to local and national governments, are committed to strong, positive relationships with customers, colleagues and suppliers, and apply a spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation to making beautiful leather.

World Leather intends to keep building on this. It knows that new ideas and new stories of innovation, creativity and inventiveness in the face of challenges will continue to flow. It also knows that example after example of kindness and solidarity from people in the global leather industry will also continue to come to light; this is the material we intend to find and to publish in future Tannery of the Year reports before inviting the industry to gather again for another sparkling celebration of its achievements. The invitation is open to everyone in the industry. ☺