

THE EVIAN® BOTTLING SITE, A FRENCH INDUSTRIAL SAGA



1900: “La Manutention”, first evian® factory

From the beginning of the 20th century, Evian-les-Bains was the most fashionable thermal spa of the Belle Epoque. The SAEME (Société Anonyme des Eaux Minérales d’Evian), the evian® company, was established to allow spa clients the opportunity to drink evian® after they had returned home. Bottling became more organised to market evian® natural mineral water as a commercial product and in 1900, “La Manutention” site was opened. This modern building is automated to satisfy this growing market. Supplied in small pitchers to thermal spa clients and in bottles to pharmacies and grocery stores (Felix Potin), evian® joined forces in 1908 with its main supplier, the Givors glass factory, later BSN and future Danone. By 1911, more than 12 million bottles were being shipped.

The baby boom of the 1950s (evian® suitable water for babies) saw sales explode from 14 million bottles in 1948 to 100 million in 1954, when a new bottling site to work at industrial pace “Evian-Gare” was built near the railway station. Soon overwhelmed, it was extended in 1958, enabling the following year’s production to reach 270 million bottles.

Sales of evian® quadrupled in 10 years, reaching almost 450 million litres annually by 1964. The Amphion plain was selected to build the new factory and thus the brand’s future. Built in 7 months, on a 50-hectare plot and with a covered area of 26,500 m², the extensive new evian® bottling site matched the brand’s ambition – to be the natural market leader in the French natural mineral water market. The T65 building (T for the construction process called Turbil, and 65 for 1965, the year of its construction) was designed to accommodate several

bottling lines (each consisting of a bottle washer, a water filler, a capping machine and a labelling machine), a cap manufacturing unit and a crate handling system in charge of dispatching the bottles. The first bottling line started operations in May 1965. Four more lines came into service in the following months, all with glass bottles. To ensure shipping, management decided to take inspiration from the existing facilities at Evian-Gare: a railway station within the factory grounds. To make it more efficient, the railway line was extended right to the end of the bottling lines since the majority of each year’s production would be leaving the site by rail, with 2,000 trains or 50,000 wagons shipped to customers. To manage this rail traffic, a signal box was created within the factory.

Historically bottled in glass, evian® introduced in 1970 a new bottle made of PVC plastic (an inert and completely neutral material) to consumers. This innovation brought a range of advantages, especially in terms of handling and logistics, but involved major technological changes within the factory and evolved the product’s image: plastic is used as a bottling material; a non-returnable packaging. Experimentation continued and different formulas of PVC were developed in collaboration with raw-material suppliers to choose a tint that expressed the purity and transparency associated with the French Alps. This colour was “ice blue”.

To install the PVC lines, the Amphion factory had to be extended. A new building was built (T72) as an extension to the main building. In January 1970, the Amphion site received its first, impressive, PVC bottle-making machine, an extrusion blow moulder (the machine could make bottles in a single



1965: The evian® bottling site in Amphion-les-Bains

phase) called a Mills. More than 150 million 1.5 litre PVC bottles were produced in 1970. Five years later, production was nearer 500 million, with 10% for export. The start of the real industrial adventure.

In 1994, the factory committed to the PET era with the “Flipper” bottle, beginning the third chapter of its history since its construction in 1965 and the change to PVC in 1970. Once again, evian® was innovating to make life easier for a consumer demanding greater simplicity and practicality. evian® adopted a single shape all in transparency for its entire range (the same bottle was launched in 14 European countries) with a PET bottle that is compactable and made of 100% recyclable plastic. Its properties allow all the qualities of evian® natural mineral water to be retained. Once empty, the bottle can be compacted to one quarter of its volume. The new bottle has become emblematic of the brand across the world. The site configuration was completely transformed, from manufacturing to the bottling lines, right through to the loading bays. To achieve this, a number of teams were reorganized and trained for new roles.

By the early 2010s, the evian® bottling site was nearly 50 years old and renovation was required. evian® took this opportunity to rethink its operational modalities and build, together with the workforce a high performing factory to take it forward into the future. Its exceptionality lies in the scope of the project, which involved demolition-reconstruction on the original site, a 10 hypermarkets surface area, without disrupting production and shipping, and guaranteeing the highest standards of



Main entrance of the transformed evian® bottling site

hygiene, quality and safety. Buildings were built or renovated, production lines were restructured and logistics were reorganized in terms of storage and loading capacity, with the remodeling of the internal rail network. This was an unprecedented investment for the factory, entirely transformed over 6 years. The great challenges of the transformation project were growth-enhancing and operational excellence. This bottling site’s ambition is clear: gain agility to produce 2 billion bottles per year and develop new and innovative packaging solutions by 2020 while preserving natural mineral water.

KEY DATES

- 1900: Opening of the “Manutention” site
- 1954: Construction of a modern industrial site, “evian® Gare”
- 1965: Opening of a new bottling plant and private train station in Amphion-les-Bains
- 1970: Commercialisation of bottles made from PVC
- 1994: Launch of new bottles made from PET
- 2011: Start of the modernisation work
- 2017: Official inauguration of the evian® bottling site