NAPOLEON

INNOVATION BUILT BETTER

INNOVATION BUILT BETTER

THE FAMILY BUSINESS STORY OF WOLF STEEL LTD. AND NAPOLEON

OVER 50 YEARS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT AND TRADITION

DR. ULRICH FRISSE, LL.M.

© Copyright Ulrich Frisse and Napoleon 2025.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the permission of the publisher.

Published by Historical Branding Solutions Inc. 93 Anvil Street, Kitchener, ON, N2P 1X8, Canada

For inquiries visit our website at www.historicalbranding.com or email us at info@historicalbranding.com or call 519-501-1412.

Printed in Canada.
ISBN number: 978-1-989148-17-4
Cataloging data available from Library and Archives Canada [www.collectionscanada.gc.ca].



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Message from the Schroeter Family 4

Introduction by Ron McArthur 5

CHAPTER 1: Ingrid and Wolfgang Schroeter—
From Growing Up in Germany to Early Entrepreneurship in Canada 6

CHAPTER 2: The Founding and Evolution of Wolf Steel and the Napoleon Brand 28

CHAPTER 3: Becoming a North American Leader with International Aspirations 56

CHAPTER 4: Transitioning of Napoleon 76

CHAPTER 5: Chris and Stephen Schroeter—
The Second Generation of Schroeter Family Entrepreneurs 114

CHAPTER 6: Becoming a Global Brand 128

CHAPTER 7: The House and the Heart—
The Napoleon Values and Culture 158

CHAPTER 8: Leading the Industry Through Innovation Built Better—
Napoleon Today and Outlook into the Future 184

ANNEX:

Setting the Industry Standard Through Innovation: Napoleon Firsts 198

Napoleon Awards and Accreditations 198

About the Author 200



THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO ALL NAPOLEON ASSOCIATES, CUSTOMERS AND PARTNERS.
YOUR LOYALTY, COMMITMENT, AND CONTINUED SUPPORT ARE THE FOUNDATION OF OUR JOURNEY.

WITH HEARTFELT THANKS,
THE SCHROETER FAMILY

THE NAPOLEON STORY CONTINUES

BY RON MCARTHUR
FORMER PRESIDENT, NAPOLEON

When I was invited to write the introduction to this second volume chronicling the journey of Wolf Steel Ltd.—known to most as Napoleon—I didn't hesitate. Saying yes wasn't just about reflecting on the company's growth or achievements. It was about honouring a decade of my life that shaped me both professionally and personally.

I first met Wolfgang and Ingrid Schroeter, along with their sons Chris and Stephen, in early 2012. From our very first meeting, it was clear this was a different kind of business. What stood out wasn't just the scope of what they had built, but the values behind it. They spoke about the company with deep pride, not simply in terms of products or performance, but in the way they talked about people—their associates, their customers, their partners. This was a family business in the truest sense, and I felt that immediately.

At the time, Napoleon had reached a pivotal point—one that called for evolution, not revolution. After nearly four decades of growth under Wolfgang and Ingrid's direct leadership, the family had begun a thoughtful transition into the next chapter of the business. I was honoured to be offered the role of President—the first person outside the family to step into that position. Knowing I came from outside the hearth and manufacturing industries, Wolfgang suggested I spend a few days working in the plants before stepping into the office.

It was an experience I'll never forget. On the floor, beside welders and assemblers, I quickly saw what powered the company from the inside: pride, care, and craft. The flame of craftsmanship burns brightest when fueled by integrity—and that integrity was everywhere.

We soon set bold goals for the future. Together, we committed to doubling the business within five years, driven by relentless product innovation, a sharpened consumer focus, and strong, consistent service. We partnered with HY Connect to refine our marketing voice and brand identity. And in 2013, we were honoured to be named one of Canada's Best Managed Companies—a recognition we've proudly received every year since.

That growth came with hard work and a shared sense of purpose. We articulated that purpose simply: "We enhance everyday living." We built on that foundation with a company-wide cultural statement—"As the Napoleon family, we put each other first. Customers and quality are our focus. We are innovative, agile, collaborative, and accountable." And we brought clarity to our values by distilling them into HEART: Honesty, Engagement, Accountability, Respect, and Teamwork.

Of course, no story of growth is without its challenges. In March 2020, like so many businesses around the world, we were faced with the realities of COVID-19. Wolfgang's directive to our team was both simple and profound: "Over 1,600 families depend on us for their livelihood. Your responsibility is to make sure this company comes through this just as strongly as it went in." We moved quickly, transitioning office teams to remote work, and reconfiguring our manufacturing operations to prioritize safety. Demand for our products surged as people reinvested in their homes, and our teams rose to the challenge with resilience and heart. We didn't just weather the storm—we came out stronger on the other side.

In early 2021, I informed the family and the Board that I would retire at the end of 2022. A thoughtful transition followed, and on July 1, 2022, our very capable CFO, Michael Tzimas, stepped into the role of President. I couldn't have asked for a better leader to carry forward the values, ambition, and culture that have always defined Napoleon.

This book is a continuation of a remarkable story—one of growth, transition, and transformation. It celebrates not just a company, but a culture, and it honours the people—past and present—who have made Napoleon a name known not only for the warmth of its products, but for the warmth of its people. At every stage of this journey, **Innovation Built Better** has been more than a title—it's been the company's promise. And so, as we open this next chapter, we do so with gratitude for those who laid the foundation, and with excitement for the future that still lies ahead. The fire may have started in 1976—but its warmth and light continue to grow.

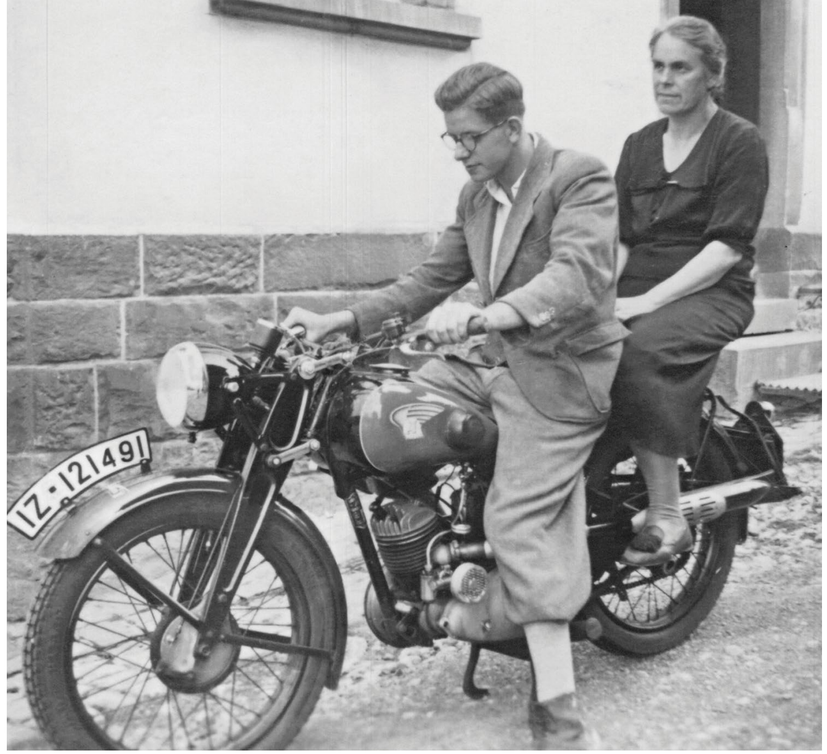
Aerial view of Benshausen, Germany.

INGRID AND WOLFGANG SCHROETER

FROM GROWING UP IN GERMANY TO EARLY ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN CANADA

1





WOLFGANG'S STORY

FAMILY BACKGROUND IN GERMANY

Wolfgang Schroeter, the founder of Wolf Steel Ltd. and Napoleon, was born on June 3, 1949, in Benshausen, Germany—the only child of Karl-Heinz Schröter and Frida Schröter, née Lapp. From 1949 until the reunification of the two German states in 1990, Benshausen, located in the state of Thuringia, belonged to the Communist Eastern German state, the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

In 1949, the year Wolfgang was born, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, that is West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR, that is East Germany) were founded as independent states.
As tensions grew between the former Allies of the Second World War, the FRG became part of the Western Alliance while the GDR developed into an important part of the Communist Eastern bloc.

The young family lived in Benshausen until Wolfgang's father relocated back to his hometown of Pforzheim in West Germany to work in his profession as a civil engineer. Wolfgang and his mother stayed back at first, and, in September 1949, after crossing the border undetected by the Eastern German border guards, they joined Karl-Heinz in Pforzheim.

Crossing the border between the two German states could not have been any less adventurous. Until 1952, when the border was closed and a barbed wire fence erected, this single most important demarcation line of the Cold War was patrolled by soldiers. As per Stalin's advice to the East German Government to "guard the line of defense with their lives," the border guards on the Eastern German side had received orders to shoot anyone who tried to cross illegally into the West.

This page left image: Wedding picture of Wolfgang's parents. This page right image: Wolfgang's father and grandmother on the motorbike. Opposite page left image: Wolfgang's Lutheran Confirmation in 1963. Opposite page right image: Wolfgang and his mother.

Frida had to abandon her first attempt to cross into the state of Bavaria in Western Germany on foot with her three-month-old son when she heard shots while she and Wolfgang were hiding in the forest close to the border. The second attempt, undertaken a week later, proved successful, and this time mother and son made it safely to the train station on the other side. Afraid that Wolfgang might scream and thus attract the attention of the Eastern German border guards, Frida had given her infant son some Schnapps so that he would sleep. To her dismay, the alcohol had exactly the opposite effect and Wolfgang was unsettled and extremely agitated in his carriage while she pushed him across the border into West German territory.

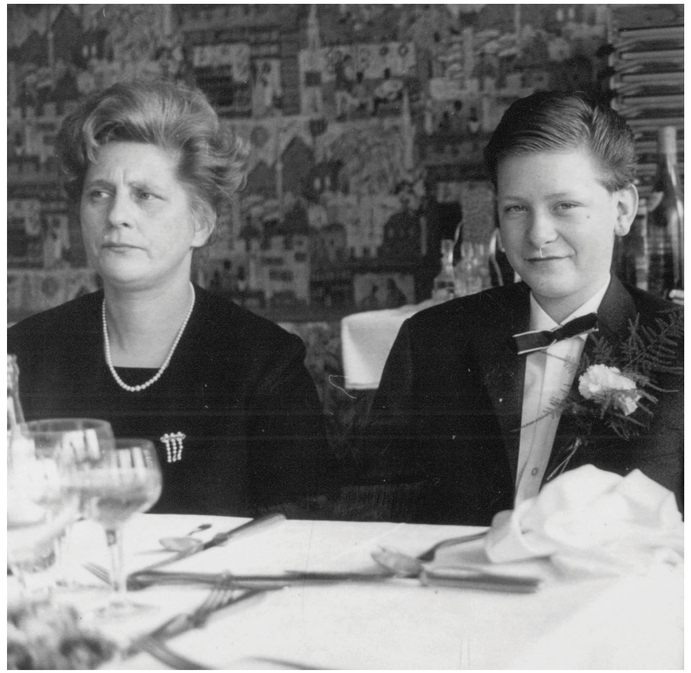
Unfortunately, life as a family lasted for only three years, as Karl-Heinz's health deteriorated quickly as the result of an injury sustained during the Second World War. While serving as a German tank commander in Russia, Karl-Heinz was shot in the chest and, due to its location in the body, the bullet could not be removed. He passed away on December 26, 1952, at the young age of 32.

SCHOOL YEARS AND TRADE SCHOOL IN PFORZHEIM

While growing up in Pforzheim, Wolfgang attended the Arlinger Elementary School (Arlinger Volksschule). Life was not easy for Frida as a single mother in post-war Germany. After her husband's passing, she took on whatever kind of part-time employment she could find to provide for her son and herself. Wolfgang vividly remembers his mother crying at Christmas one year because all she could afford to give him as a present was a little jackknife, when she knew that what he had really been hoping for was a bicycle. It was not until he was twelve years old that Wolfgang got his first bicycle.

When Wolfgang was seven years old, his mother got remarried to Heiner Eisele.
A trained goldsmith, Heiner ran his own business out of the attic and basement of the family's townhouse, making highly valuable, custom-made jewelry bracelets out of 24k gold under contract for one of Pforzheim's many jewelry manufacturing companies.

In 1963, at age fourteen and after completing grade eight of elementary school, Wolfgang enrolled at the Heinrich-Wieland Vocational School for Fine Precision Mechanics Engineering (Heinrich-Wieland Berufsschule für Feinwerktechnik) in Pforzheim. Under Germany's dual apprenticeship training system which continues to this very day, Wolfgang would attend classes for two and a half days and then worked as an apprentice at the Anton Fischer Company for the remainder of the week. The Anton Fischer Company was one of many businesses in Pforzheim involved in the production of jewelry and watches.







This page: Wolfgang going into Grade 1 at the age of 6. Opposite page: Excerpt from Wolfgang's trade school workbook.

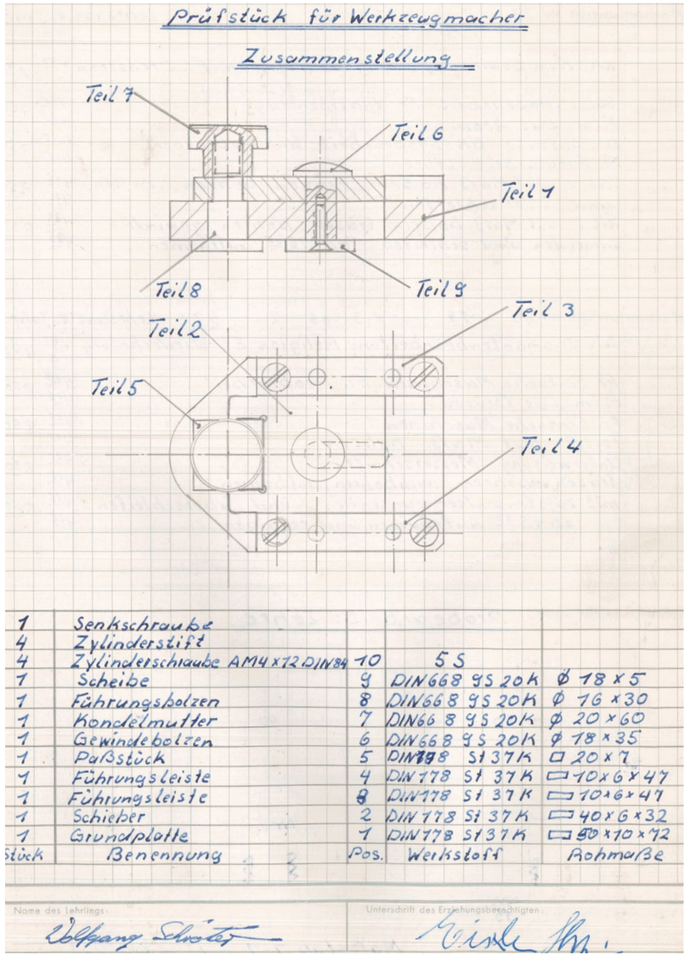
At the beginning of trade school, Wolfgang and his fellow students were given a six-inch-long U–profile piece of steel, which they had to work on for six months. They were assigned the highly repetitive task of filing that piece down to a one centimeter in diameter cube. Even though he did not see the benefit at the time, it taught Wolfgang a skill he was to benefit from greatly after coming to Canada. "The filing was so intense during those first six months of trade school that even today nobody can show me how to do it better," says Wolfgang. In 1967, after three years of trade school, Wolfgang obtained his diploma as a certified tool and die maker.

TEENAGE YEARS DURING THE 1960s

Wolfgang's teenage years took place during the time of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. When he was around sixteen years old, Wolfgang bought a 50cc Kreidler moped. He and his friends spent many hours riding together as a group. Since their mopeds were limited to 50cc by law, they worked on them all the time to make them faster and look like real motorcycles. Some of the many things he did to enhance the performance and looks of his bike included taking the engine apart and tuning it up, drilling up the carburetor, polishing the intake, grinding down the cylinder head, as well as replacing the moped's fork with a fork from a real motorcycle. Today, in retirement, Wolfgang has returned to his passion for motorcycles, spending many hours turning historic motorcycles into custom bikes and building his collection.

ENTREPRENEURIAL ROOTS

While growing up, Wolfgang always looked at his uncle, Oskar Lapp, as his role model. A trained engineer, Oskar had started a business out of his house after being released from a prisoner of war camp in Russia and leaving East Germany for West Germany to escape Communism, like so many other Germans at that time. From his new base in Stuttgart, he went around to factories and supplied them with specialty cable, cutting off and selling whatever quantity manufacturers needed. His business prospered because there was high demand for materials right after the war and factory owners did not yet have the money to purchase entire rolls of cable. Later on, Oskar started his own factory, producing cables under his own name. As he became a successful entrepreneur, he bought machines that had been originally designed for making rope. Wolfgang's stepfather, Heiner Eisele, converted these machines so that they would braid metal wire around electrical cables instead. Oskar eventually established a spin-off factory for Wolfgang's parents in Pforzheim where the cable coating was woven around the wire that Oskar produced in his own manufacturing plant. Today, the company Oskar Lapp established—Lapp Kabel—is one of the largest cable companies in the world. It was led by Wolfgang's cousins, Oskar's sons Andreas and Siegbert Lapp, for many years before transitioning into the third generation. Today, Siegbert's and Andreas's children are involved in the company.







Wolfgang has great memories of his family's frequent visits with his cousins. He remembers listening to his uncle talk about his company and the ways that he was pushing it forward and making it successful. Oskar shared a lot of insights about successful entrepreneurship back then that still make business sense to Wolfgang even today. Mainly because of his uncle's influence on him, by the time he was sixteen years old, Wolfgang was determined to become an entrepreneur and operate his own company one day.

It was not until two years later, at age eighteen, that Wolfgang tried to set up his first business in Germany. Having a knack for fixing up cars, he bought tools, rented a small shop and started his own garage. His first project as an independent car mechanic was a burned-out Karmann Ghia. Wolfgang intended to restore the car and then to sell it for a profit. One day, after the bodywork and painting were already completed, all of his tools were stolen from the shop. Since Wolfgang did not have the money to replace them, the loss of his tools marked the sudden end of his first business venture.

Wolfgang's grandfather in Benshausen, Eduard Lapp, was another entrepreneurial influence on him while growing up. Prior to the Second World War, Eduard and a partner had founded Lapp and Roth, a company producing poultry shears, bullrings, and corkscrews. Their machine shop with lathes and milling machines had done well until the Communist takeover in East Germany had resulted in the prohibition of private entrepreneurship. Under Communist doctrine, the GDR Government took ownership of the business and had Wolfgang's grandfather, and his business partner manage the company as state employees. Although he had been an independent entrepreneur all his life, Wolfgang's grandfather was now being told by the Communist authorities what to do and what direction to take the business in. Under the new regime, the company produced mechanical pencils with retractable leads. Being innovators, Eduard and his business partner developed a system that allowed their pencils to change colours by drop action. Since they were the first to create a pencil that gave its users access to five different colours, they had the invention patented.

THE DECISION TO EMIGRATE

After completing his apprenticeship, Wolfgang worked as a tool and die maker for a company in the automotive industry. One night, while at a pub, Wolfgang and his friends talked about doing something different with their lives, feeling too young to settle into a routine yet. Wolfgang suggested that they go to the U.S. for a few years to learn English and then come back to Germany. Everybody agreed. When he went to the American Embassy, he was told that the U.S. were indeed looking for young tradespeople. However, he was also warned that after one year in the country he and his friends would be subject to mandatory military service in the U.S. army and sent to Vietnam to fight in the Vietnam War.

With the U.S. no longer an option, the next best thing in their minds was going to Canada. Canada was also looking for young men trained in the trades. The Canadian Government was even running ads on German TV to recruit skilled young tradespeople. When asked about his English language skills by the Canadian official, Wolfgang answered that his knowledge of the language was very limited. As a matter of fact, he had not been taught any English at school. His first exposure to the English language was when he took a one-week-long language course at Berlitz Language School in Pforzheim just before leaving for Canada.

In response, the interviewing officer suggested to Wolfgang that he go to Kitchener, in the province of Ontario, located about one hour west of Toronto. Kitchener, formerly called Berlin, had been a centre of German immigration since the early 1800's. Due to its German heritage, the city and surrounding area of Waterloo County had attracted thousands of post-WWII immigrants who had started businesses, clubs and other institutions which, the officer pointed out, would make it easier for Wolfgang to adapt to life in Canada.

Determined to leave as soon as possible, Wolfgang filled out the papers and applied for immigration to Canada. To his great surprise, while he started putting their joint group plan into action, all of his friends, one after the other, pulled out. It was not long before he was the only one left. Undeterred, the nineteen-year-old informed his mother of his plans. Hoping that he might change his mind, she asked her son to stay home for another year and wait until he turned twenty. During that year, Wolfgang's aunt, as well as his other family members also tried to convince him not to immigrate to Canada.

Following his mother's advice, Wolfgang stayed in Germany for another year. When he finally left for Canada in October of 1969, four months after his twentieth birthday, his plan was to live in Canada for two years and then move on to South Africa for another two years before eventually returning to Germany.



Opposite page top image: Wolfgang's grandparents' house in Benshausen, Germany, before the creek was moved underground. Opposite page bottom image: Wolfgang motorbiking with friends. This page: The freighter Rendsburg on which Wolfgang came to Canada in October 1969.





ATLANTIC PASSAGE AND STARTING OUT IN KITCHENER, ONTARIO

Wolfgang came to Canada onboard the Rendsburg, an old freighter traveling from Hamburg to Chicago via Scotland, Quebec and Toronto. After crossing the Atlantic from Scotland, the Rendsburg landed in Quebec City. Wolfgang then spent two days in Montreal sightseeing and waiting for his immigration papers to be processed, before going on to Toronto, where he got off the ship.

In Toronto, he was picked up by the Wiegand family, friends of his mother who had immigrated to Kitchener earlier. The Wiegands took him to Kitchener, where Wolfgang stayed his first night off the ship in their house. Wolfgang's first impressions of Canada were that everything was big and wide—big streets, big houses, big cars, big shopping malls – in short: a big country. Everything looked huge compared to what he was used to from growing up in Germany.

The next day, his host family took Wolfgang to the bank to open his first bank account in Canada. To his great surprise, the teller changed the spelling of his name from Schröter to Schroeter, since Umlauts are not used in the English language. Ever since that day, Wolfgang has spelled his family name Schroeter. That very same day Wolfgang had a job interview, arranged for room and board, and was shown Conestoga College on King Street in Waterloo, where he would learn English several times a week in the evenings after work. On the second day after he set foot on Canadian soil, Wolfgang started working at Electro Porcelain in Kitchener's twin city Waterloo.

At Electro Porcelain, which produced ceramic insulators for Ontario Hydro and for residential cook tops, Wolfgang's workstation was placed between the drying oven and the furnace. It was his job to take the ceramic parts out of the drying oven and to put them into the furnace. "It was so hot between the two furnaces, it was probably the worst job in the entire factory," Wolfgang remembers. Glad that he had found employment so quickly after his arrival, he did not complain and kept doing his job.

In January 1970, after two months at Electro Porcelain, Wolfgang joined his second Canadian employer, Vanderzwaag Tool and Die in Waterloo. There he worked in his learned profession as a tool and die maker with a starting pay of $1.65 an hour. With the money from his new job, he bought his first North American car, a used Ford Falcon, for $200. Overjoyed he wrote home to his parents: "Got a car bigger than a Mercedes!"

After a few months, Wolfgang learned that his two Canadian co-workers were making around $4.00 an hour while he was only being paid $1.65. When Wolfgang approached his employer, Mr. Vanderzwaag made all kinds of excuses as to why he could not pay him more. Among other things, he said that Wolfgang's English was not good enough yet, and that he still had to learn working with non-metric measurements. Wolfgang remained persistent and kept asking, and when Mr. Vanderzwaag finally agreed to give him a raise, he paid him $1.70 an hour.

With no real perspective for professional development in his current employment situation, Wolfgang felt that it was time to move on. He quickly found a new position at Heffner Tool and Die in in Kitchener, where he was paid $4.50 an hour. It was a great job, and Wolfgang enjoyed the excellent working atmosphere, but he got laid off within less than a year, as the Canadian economy went through a recession.

MOVING TO TORONTO

After losing his job with Heffner's in 1970, Wolfgang tried to find new employment anywhere in Kitchener-Waterloo. Despite his persistence, no local companies were hiring. Through a friend, he learned that Chromalox Electric Heat in Toronto was always looking for qualified toolmakers. Wolfgang applied, went through the interview and landed the job. Although, at twenty-one years old, he was the youngest employee in the tool room, due to his in-depth training in Germany, he could accomplish more difficult jobs than his older and much more experienced colleagues. The many monotonous hours he had spent at trade school filing by hand now came in handy. Wolfgang was paid well for his skilled work at Chromalox, receiving $6.50 an hour.

The first place Wolfgang lived in after moving to Toronto was a boarding house where every room was rented out individually. From there, he moved into an apartment on the 16th floor of a high-rise building on Jane Street that he shared with students from York University. Not only did he enjoy the camaraderie of living with Canadians his own age, but he was also excited about the opportunity to improve his English by living with native English speakers. During this time, he also took an English as a Second Language (ESL) course at York University.

MEETING INGRID

While living and working in Toronto, Wolfgang always went back to Kitchener to spend the weekends with his friends there. It was through a mutual friend that in February 1971, Wolfgang met Ingrid, a German immigrant like himself, at a dance at the Schwaben Club, one of the local hubs for German-speaking immigrants at the time.





Opposite page images: Wolfgang leaving Germany on the freighter Rendsburg, October 1969. This page top image: Wolfgang with friends after coming to Canada, circa 1972. L to R: Wolfgang, Renate Lipowitz, Bert Penzendorfer, Brigitte Penzendorfer, Ingrid, and the late Rudi Lipowitz. This page bottom image: View of Toronto, circa 1970.





INGRID'S STORY

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH IN GERMANY

Ingrid was born on June 29, 1951, in Ottobrunn near Munich, Bavaria, the daughter of Helge and Hildegard Heide, née Michl. She grew up in Ottobrunn until moving to Munich in 1961 where she attended the Anger Cloister Modern Languages High School (Anger Kloster Neusprachiges Gymnasium), a private high school for girls that she graduated from in 1970. Ingrid's father was an electronic engineer who worked for Grundig, the largest radio manufacturer in all of Europe at the time, and then for Körting Kiefel as service representative and account manager. Her mother worked as a secretary for the Fritz Jugan Company in Munich, a small retailer of machines for the woodworking industry, for twenty years.

Ingrid's family connection with Canada was through her grandparents on her father's side who had immigrated in 1951 via Sweden. Ingrid's grandfather, Alex Heide, who was fluent in German, Swedish and English, had worked in Sweden for the government before going to Canada. Ingrid's father was born in Berlin, while her mother was from the Sudetenland, in today's Czech Republic, where her family had owned and operated a knitting factory in Asch. As members of Czechoslovakia's ethnic German minority (the Sudeten Germans), they had lost everything when they were evicted by the Czechs at the end of the Second World War. Similar to Wolfgang, whose uncle and grandfather were entrepreneurs and business owners, Ingrid's family history includes entrepreneurship as well.

Opposite page: Ingrid and her mother, circa 1955. The picture was taken and developed by Ingrid's father, an amateur photographer. This page left image: Ingrid's parents, circa 1951. This page right image: Ingrid's grandparents on her mother's side, Georg and Anna Michl on their wedding day.









COMING TO CANADA

When Ingrid's grandparents, together with their youngest son Rudolf—Ingrid's uncle—immigrated to Canada in 1951, Ingrid's father decided to stay in Germany, because he had just gotten married, and his wife was pregnant with Ingrid. Ingrid's father's brother Axel followed his parents in 1959. Ingrid and her parents visited her grandparents and uncles twice in Canada—in 1963, and again in 1969 to attend an uncle's wedding. Following the second visit, Ingrid's parents decided to immigrate as well to join their family in Canada. They held off for another year, however, until 1970, so that Ingrid could finish high school in Germany first. Ingrid's father immigrated in May of 1970, and Ingrid and her mother followed on Sept. 5, 1970.

Despite being an electronic engineer, Ingrid's father, like many other qualified immigrants, could not find a job in his profession after coming to Canada and ended up repairing radios and TVs in their new hometown Kitchener. Ingrid's mother found a job at one of the local lunch delis, where she worked as a part-time cook. Ingrid worked in the deli's butcher shop for about two months before starting a new job in the kitchen at the KW Hospital, where her grandmother worked as a dietician.



Opposite page top left image: Ingrid and her best friend Roswitha Lentes during Fasching (Mardi Gras).
Opposite page top right image: Ingrid's Holy Communion.
Opposite page bottom left image: Ingrid's first day of school.
Opposite page bottom right image: Ingrid with her godmother Elisabeth Winter during Ingrid's Confirmation in the Catholic Church, circa 1965. This page: Ingrid flying to the U.S. and Canada for the first time with her parents and friends, 1963.





This page top image: Ingrid graduating from York University in 1974. L to R: Ingrid's father, Ingrid, Ingrid's mother, and Ingrid's aunt, the late Ingeborg Schuster. This page bottom image: Ingrid doing graphic design work at her godparents' company in Germany. Opposite page top left image: Ingrid and Wolfgang in front of their first home in Toronto, 1972/73. Opposite page top right image: Ingrid and Wolfgang's engagement photo, Christmas 1971. Opposite page bottom image: Wolfgang and Ingrid getting married in Germany, July 1, 1972 (their only wedding photo).

Ingrid's original plan after coming to Canada was to become a graphic designer. She applied at Conestoga College and was accepted into the program. On the advice of her parents who felt that a university degree would offer Ingrid more possibilities for professional advancement in the future, in 1971, Ingrid enrolled in the BA program at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo with the goal of becoming a translator. After Ingrid and Wolfgang got married in 1972, with Wolfgang working at Chromalox in Toronto, she applied for a transfer to the University of York, where she completed her studies with a Bachelor of Arts degree in languages (French and German).

GETTING MARRIED

After meeting at the Schwaben Club for the first time, in February 1971, Wolfgang and Ingrid's paths crossed again at a birthday party. They fell in love and would meet every weekend until they got engaged on Christmas Day of 1971. At the time, Wolfgang had wanted to go back to Germany, but Ingrid had just started studying for her BA degree at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo. They decided to stay because they figured that they would have more opportunities for advancement in Canada. Looking back, they never regretted that decision. Wolfgang and Ingrid got married on July 1, 1972—Canada Day—in Germany where they had a small wedding with about twenty guests at an inn. Wolfgang's mother had organized the wedding in their absence. Ingrid was 21 and Wolfgang was 23 at the time they exchanged their vows. For their honeymoon, Ingrid and Wolfgang went on a road trip through France (where they camped in Paris), Monaco, Italy and back through Austria to Germany. Rather than renting a car, they bought an old Opel Kadett for 500 Deutschmarks. After six weeks and putting on a lot of kilometers, they sold the car for 550 Deutschmarks before returning to Canada.

FIRST-TIME HOME-OWNERS

In 1972, Wolfgang and Ingrid bought an old two-bedroom bungalow on Lippincott Street in Toronto for $22,000 with a down-payment of $3,000. They had looked at the house only once, made an offer on it and had then left for Germany to get married. It was not until they moved in after returning from their honeymoon in Europe that they took a second, more critical look at their first home. When Wolfgang opened the door to the attic for the very first time, he noticed at least twenty-five pails partially filled with water, placed there by the previous owner to catch the water seeping in through the home's leaky roof.

During their first two years of marriage, Ingrid went to university while Wolfgang continued working at Chromalox. Money was tight and Ingrid operated on a weekly grocery budget of $15.00. As they were struggling to make ends meet, renovations were limited to necessary updates that did not cost a lot of money. They fixed the leaks in the roof with tar because they did not have enough money to replace the worn-out shingles. To take care of their yard, Wolfgang bought a non-working lawnmower from the wreckers for $5.00 and refurbished it to make it work again. Seeing a business opportunity, he went back and bought five more. After fixing them all up, he put a "For Sale" sign up on their front lawn and sold them for a profit.

When they decided to redo their seven-foot-high basement, Wolfgang and Ingrid went to a carpet store to buy carpet. The helpful store clerk gave them carpet sample books which they took home. Although they liked







many of the products that were sampled in the binders, they quickly realized that they could not afford any of them and took them back to the store. To their surprise, the store owner told them that these were old sample books and that they could keep them if they wanted. Seeing an instant opportunity to achieve their goal of having new carpet in the basement despite only having limited funds, Wolfgang and Ingrid asked whether they could have more old books. They then went to several other carpet stores and collected old carpet sample binders from them as well. With the samples from all the various books, they created a patchwork carpet and put it down in their basement at no cost whatsoever.

IW LAMPSHADES—INGRID AND WOLFGANG'S FIRST JOINT BUSINESS VENTURE (1973)

In 1973, while they were back in Germany on vacation, Wolfgang and Ingrid noticed lampshades made from sisal ropes. With their modern look, they were very popular in Europe at the time. On a whim, Wolfgang and Ingrid decided to try producing and selling them in Canada. After their return, they went to a store to buy rope and two jumping-on balls. To be able to buy the rope wholesale, they had to make up a company name first. Using the initials of their first names, they simply called their business IW Lampshades.

Back at home, Wolfgang and Ingrid inflated the ball, wound the sisal rope around it and applied liquid fiberglass resin. When the resin had dried, they took the ball out and, to their great delight, their first lampshade stayed in shape on its own. After building two prototypes that way, they decided to make them in production and sell them. For their next batch, they decided to use beach balls instead because the balls they had used on their first two lampshades were too expensive. With the new material, they made their first batch of ten lampshades and hung them off the ceiling in their basement to dry overnight. When they went to check them the next morning, they found that each of the lampshades, excluding one, had collapsed. To Ingrid and Wolfgang's dismay, the resin had melted the plastic of the balls, causing the air to evaporate and making the shades cave in. The failed experiment had cost them $138, which was a lot of money for them at that time.



Realizing that making lampshades was too labour-intensive and disliking the smell of the resin, they gave up on the plan. That decision was made easier by the fact that they had not been looking for an opportunity to become entrepreneurs but had decided rather spontaneously to give it a try when they had come across the lampshades in Germany.

MOVE TO BARRIE (1974)

In 1974, the employees at Chromalox went on strike. Since Wolfgang was too proud to carry around a union sign, as well as for other reasons, Wolfgang and Ingrid felt that it was time to move on again. Ingrid had finished university, and they were looking at possible places to relocate to. When they started looking between Toronto and Parry Sound, they soon felt that Barrie was the right place to go. They met with a real estate agent who showed them a two-year-old home, located in Utopia, just outside of Barrie in the Township of Essa. Ingrid and Wolfgang liked the home in the countryside and purchased it for $38,000.

In September 1974, soon after moving to Barrie, Wolfgang was hired as a tool and die maker at General Electric (GE) in Barrie. GE was unionized as well and a couple of weeks after he started working for GE, the union steward approached Wolfgang and asked him to slow down in his work, emphasizing that this was a union job. Looking back, Wolfgang says: “No wonder the GE plant had to close down eventually: they only really worked for two hours a day, and the working morale was terrible.”

About three months after he had been hired, Wolfgang was let go by GE before Christmas. This was standard practice so that the company did not have to pay its employees over the holidays. Wolfgang started looking for a new job and quickly found a position as a tool and die maker at Prodomax in Barrie. Since the economy was in the midst of a recession again, Wolfgang was employed at Prodomax on and off, depending on whether there was enough work for him.

Like Wolfgang, Ingrid continued to work as an employee after the couple’s move to Barrie. Since there were hardly any jobs available that suited her educational background, Ingrid, in September 1974, started working part-time for the local newspaper, the Barrie Examiner. In that position, she was first assigned to work with the photographer. Her responsibility was to get the photos ready for the printing press. From there, she moved up into the office where she operated one of the switchboards. Part of her routine was putting telephone plugs into the switchboard so that parties could communicate with each other—just like in the old movies. In addition to operating the switchboard, Ingrid was assigned the task of looking after accounting, which she had no real experience with. As it became increasingly apparent that the work did not match her academic background, she was eventually let go after a few months.

Looking back, Ingrid believes that losing her job at the newspaper was a good thing because in January 1975 she was hired by Bell Canada as a customer service representative, a position which she enjoyed a lot and that allowed her to make a good wage. Ingrid was the first external candidate to be hired for that job since Bell Canada usually promoted from within the organization. Ingrid’s employment at Bell Canada was highly beneficial to the young couple: not only did she receive thorough training in customer service, enabling her to develop interpersonal skills that would later come in handy when dealing with customers after the founding of their own company, but Ingrid having a steady full-time job further put her in a position to carry them through while Wolfgang pursued his first steps as an entrepreneur.

FROM ‘PRO INDUSTRIES’ TO ‘DERKS ORNAMENTAL RAILINGS AND IRON WORKS’—EARLY STEPS AS AN ENTREPRENEUR, 1976-1977

Not being the kind of person who could sit around and do nothing, Wolfgang built a two-car garage on his house while he was off work from Prodomax. He accomplished and built almost everything himself, including digging out the foundations with a shovel and establishing the forms for pouring the foundations. One day in 1976, after building the garage, Wolfgang was talking







This page: Wolfgang and Ingrid during their honeymoon in Germany. Opposite page top left image: Building the family cottage on Rose Island, Carling Township. L to R: Wolfgang, Ingrid, and Ingrid’s parents, 1973. Opposite page top right image: Ingrid and Wolfgang on the roof of their house while putting on an addition. Opposite page bottom image: Ingrid’s father finishing the roof of the family cabin on Rose Island.

to his neighbour. Knowing that Wolfgang was looking for work, the man told him of a barn that had burned down in the area and suggested that Wolfgang approach the farmer and inquire whether he needed help rebuilding it. Following this advice, Wolfgang drove out to the farm, but to his disappointment the barn had already been rebuilt.

As Wolfgang and the farmer began talking, the farmer mentioned that he had just received a quote for an install of new calf stalls on his property. When he asked Wolfgang whether he could weld, and even though he had never welded before, Wolfgang answered, “I can do anything.” At this, the farmer countered, “Why don’t you give me a quote for the calf stalls then.” He handed Wolfgang the plans and drawings the other company had provided. Wolfgang went home, worked out a proposal, went back to the farmer and quoted him $12,000 for the job. “Go ahead,” the farmer said.

Wolfgang was in business. He went to Canadian Tire, bought a hacksaw, a vise, and an electric welding machine and set up the tools in his garage. He then ordered all the materials he would need and built a rack for his Rambler station wagon so that he would be able to carry the 24-foot-long steel tubing he required for the stalls on top of the car. Wolfgang cut all the metal with his hacksaw, painted it with a brush and installed it himself. The farmer was so pleased with the quality of Wolfgang’s work and with the final product that he referred him to other farmers in the area as well. Of the many jobs that he accomplished for farmers in the Barrie area, Wolfgang remembers one install in particular. The farmer wanted steel bars to be placed in front of the stall window where his bull was housed because the bull always kicked out the glass with his horns. While he was installing and fastening the steel bars to the wall, the bull was standing on his foot and refused to move for over ten minutes.

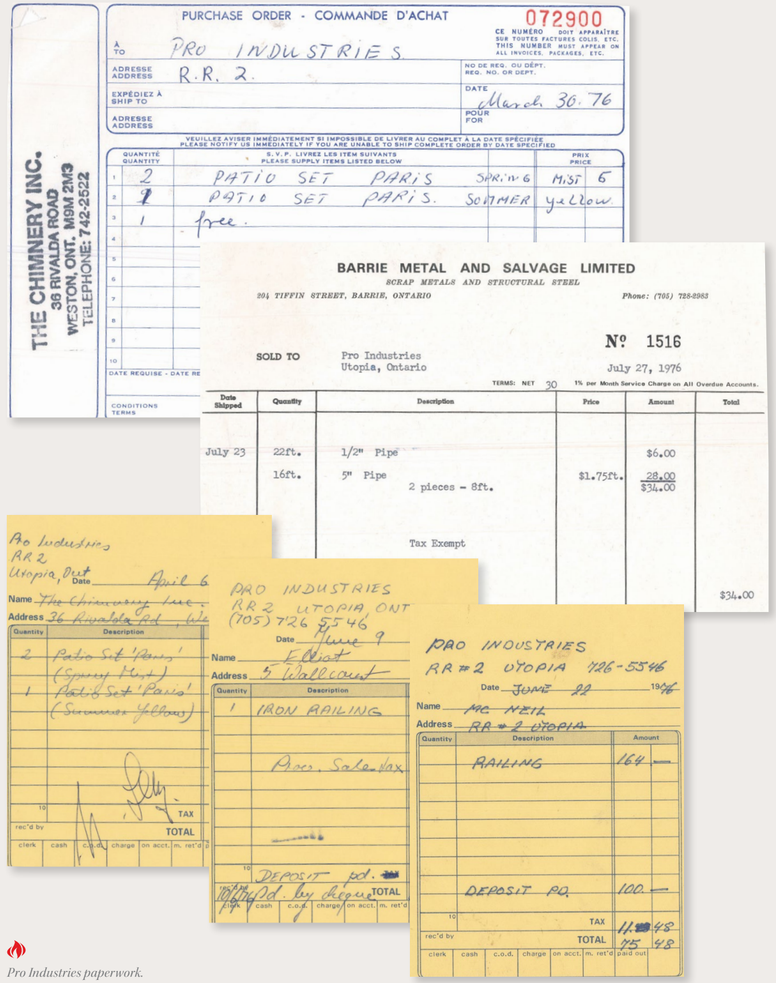
Wolfgang decided to name the small business he operated out of his garage Pro Industries. While gathering valuable experiences as an independent contractor, Wolfgang always attempted new projects in an effort to expand his business. Having gained know-how in making wrought-iron railings, he started building wrought-iron patio furniture to keep himself busy in-between railing jobs. After building his first set, he took pictures and tried to sell it in Barrie and Toronto. At first nobody wanted it, until he met the German owner of a store in Toronto who purchased some of his patio furniture.

Wolfgang picked up the steel he required for jobs directly from the steel supplier in his Rambler station wagon. At the plant, the employees made him load 24-foot-long tubing and 20-foot rods onto his car himself. He noticed, however, that if he sent Ingrid to pick up the materials the steel workers would put them on for her. One day when Ingrid came back from picking up the order, they had put so much steel onto the roof that the weight of the steel trusses had caused the roof to collapse. “This is the last time I am picking up steel for you,” Ingrid said.

Wolfgang vividly remembers buying a used iron worker—his first machine ever—from Walter Haas Machinery in downtown Toronto. To bring the machine home, he had to attach the trailer that he had built directly to his car. On the way up Highway 400, the machine bounced up and down so many times that the legs of the machine eventually broke through the plywood floor of the trailer.

After doing various steel fabricating jobs for farmers in the area, Wolfgang decided to build wrought-iron railings for houses, hoping to break into the new construction market that way. Making railings was similar to the calf stalls he was doing already and did not require a lot of equipment. Wolfgang saw an opportunity to expand into a new market without having to borrow money and while keeping his overhead low. To put his plan into action, Wolfgang drove around, took pictures of railings, compiled them into a catalogue, and advertised “Custom wrought-iron railings for sale” in the local paper.

Like Wolfgang, one of his co-workers at Prodomax, a Dutch immigrant of the name John Derks, built and installed railings after work and on weekends. Although Wolfgang felt that Derks was ahead of him—he spoke perfect English, had more machines, and much more experience in building railings—they got together and decided to become business partners. Under the name of Derks Ornamental Railings and Iron Works, they formed a partnership in 1977 and rented a shop on Morrow Road in Barrie. They originally intended to continue working at their day jobs at Prodomax, and to run their business on the side. After their side business picked up, however, Derks was the first to quit his day job and Wolfgang followed once they had enough orders lined up to support them both. They decided that, moving forward, Derks would do the installs while Wolfgang would drive around and talk to homeowners to inquire about jobs for their business. Ingrid was involved in the business as well, looking after the administration and doing the books after hours and on weekends while working full-time at Bell Canada. Finding new jobs turned out to be challenging as the economy went into another downturn. Wolfgang remembers driving around for a whole week, traveling from Orillia to Newmarket and from Wasaga Beach to Peterborough, and not being able to find a single job.


THE CHIMNERY INC.
36 RIVALDA ROAD
WESTON, ONT. M9M 2M3
TELEPHONE: 742-2522

PURCHASE ORDER - COMMANDE D'ACHAT
072900
CE NUMÉRO DOIT APPARAÎTRE SUR TOUTES FACTURES COLIS, ETC. THIS NUMBER MUST APPEAR ON ALL INVOICES, PACKAGES, ETC.
TO: PRO INDUSTRIES
ADRESSE ADDRESS: R.R. 2.
NO DE REQ. OU DÉPT. REQ. NO. OR DEPT.
EXPÉDIEZ À SHIP TO
DATE: March 30. 76
ADRESSE ADDRESS
POUR FOR
VEUILLEZ AVISER IMMÉDIATEMENT SI IMPOSSIBLE DE LIVRER AU COMPLET À LA DATE SPÉCIFIÉE. PLEASE NOTIFY US IMMEDIATELY IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO SHIP COMPLETE ORDER BY DATE SPECIFIED

QUANTITÉ QUANTITY	S.V.P. LIVREZ LES ITEM SUIVANTS PLEASE SUPPLY ITEMS LISTED BELOW			PRIX PRICE
2	PATIO SET	PARIS	SPRING	MIST 6
2	PATIO SET	PARIS.	SUMMER	yellow
1	free.			

BARRIE METAL AND SALVAGE LIMITED
SCRAP METALS AND STRUCTURAL STEEL
204 TIFFIN STREET, BARRIE, ONTARIO — Phone: (705) 728-2983

Nº 1516
SOLD TO: Pro Industries, Utopia, Ontario
July 27, 1976
TERMS: NET 30 — 1% per Month Service Charge on All Overdue Accounts.

Date Shipped	Quantity	Description	Price	Amount	Total
July 23	22ft.	1/2" Pipe		$6.00	
	16ft.	5" Pipe 2 pieces - 8ft.	$1.75ft.	28.00	
		Tax Exempt		$34.00	$34.00

Pro Industries RR 2 Utopia, Ont — Date April 6
Name The Chimney Inc.
Address 36 Rivalda Rd W...

Quantity	Description
2	Patio Set 'Paris' (Spring Mist)
1	Patio Set 'Paris' (Summer Yellow)

TAX
TOTAL
rec'd by
clerk | cash | c.o.d. | charge | on acct. | m. ret'd

PRO INDUSTRIES
RR 2 UTOPIA, ONT
(705) 726 5546
Date June 9
Name Elliot
Address 5 Wallcourt

Quantity	Description
1	IRON RAILING
	Prov. Sale Tax
	DEPOSIT pd.
	Bal. pd. by Regie

TOTAL
clerk | cash | c.o.d. | charge | on acct. | m. ret'd

PRO INDUSTRIES
RR #2 UTOPIA 726-5546
Date JUNE 22 19 76
Name MC NEIL
Address RR # 2 UTOPIA

Quantity	Description	Amount
	RAILING	164 —
	DEPOSIT PD.	100 —
	TAX	11 48
	TOTAL	75 48

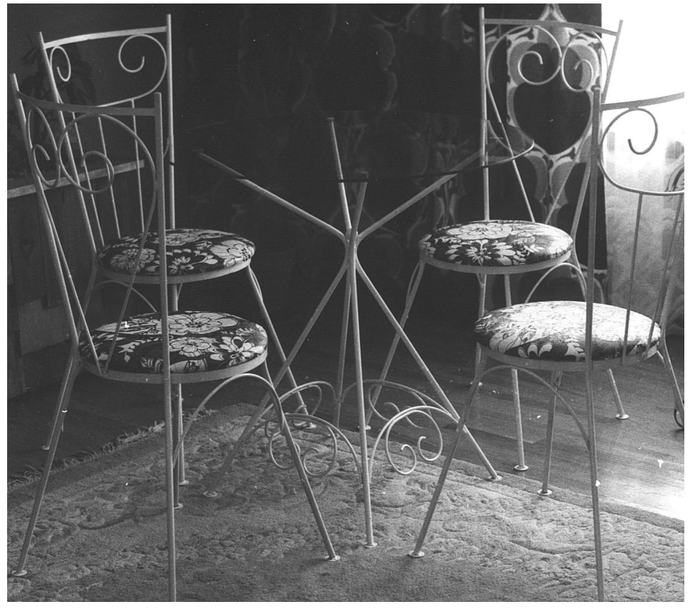
rec'd by
clerk | cash | c.o.d. | charge | on acct. | m. ret'd | paid out

Pro Industries paperwork.



In addition to wrought-iron railings, Wolfgang and Derks did other wrought-iron work as well. One time, they quoted a 30-foot-wide wrought-iron arch to be installed in a park in Innisfil, just outside of Barrie. The enormous size of the structure required them to figure out how to get the arch to the park after the pieces were already welded together. Since all they had to carry it in was a station wagon and a trailer, Wolfgang and Derks welded a long axle onto the trailer. When the arch was ready to be installed, they hauled it to the park on their improvised piece of equipment. They left at three o’clock in the morning when there was hardly any traffic so that they could use the entire width of the road while driving around curves through Barrie.

When Derks eventually brought his son into the business, this proved too much for their small company, as there was not enough money to be made to support all three of them. Furthermore, over time it became obvious that Derks and Wolfgang held different business philosophies that were not compatible in the long term. By the end of 1977, after eight months of working together, they decided to separate. Derks took over the lease of the building while Wolfgang went back to his garage.



Top image: Ingrid and Wolfgang’s station wagon that they used for transporting steel. Bottom image: Wrought iron patio set made by Wolfgang.

THE DAWN OF WOLF STEEL: SIMCOE RAILINGS, 1977-1979

In 1977, as he was back on his own again, operating under the business name of Simcoe Railings, Wolfgang hired Glen Ransom, his first employee. Glen was Canadian and older than Wolfgang, who, at the time, still had some problems with the English language. As a result, customers often went to Glen instead of Wolfgang because they thought that he was the boss. Wolfgang gladly let him play that role. Glen stayed with Wolfgang for about three years until he started a foster home together with his wife. After less than six months of working out of his garage, Wolfgang rented a 1,000 square foot space on Vespra Street in Barrie. His second employee, Ron Noordhoff, joined in 1978. He would stay with Wolfgang and subsequently Napoleon for 37 years.

At the time when Wolfgang hired Ransom, the economy was once again in recession. While struggling with finding new jobs for his small business, Wolfgang noticed a public invitation to tender issued by the government for a construction job at the penitentiary in Penetanguishene. The bid was for putting windows with bars into the cell doors so that food could be delivered to the cells without direct contact between the inmates and the guards.

When Wolfgang went to the penitentiary to hand in his tender, he was escorted inside the facility by an official with a black eye. Wolfgang asked him what had happened, and the man replied that he had been beaten in the face through an open cell door. Later on, Wolfgang noticed a naked inmate in solitary confinement in his cell. There was no way, he thought to himself that he would do that construction job. By intention, he quoted the job so high that he did not get it.

From the beginning of their business ventures, Wolfgang and Ingrid did everything together. The early years were difficult, as they had very little money, and most of the money they made they put back into the company. Ingrid's parents thought they had lost their minds for working so much and making so little in return. There was one year that Wolfgang wanted to quit, but they stayed strong and held on, mutually supporting each other through times of doubt and uncertainty.



In his last year at Chromalox, Wolfgang had made $18,000 as a tool and die maker. In contrast, during the first year on his own after splitting up with Derks, his income for the entire year was no more than $3,000. Luckily, Ingrid continued to make good money during this time working full-time for Bell Canada, allowing her to support Wolfgang and cover all their living expenses. It took seven years until Wolfgang finally started making a decent income from the business. "Nobody in his right mind today would wait that long. If it had not been for Ingrid's steady income in the beginning, we would not have been able to stay in business," he says.

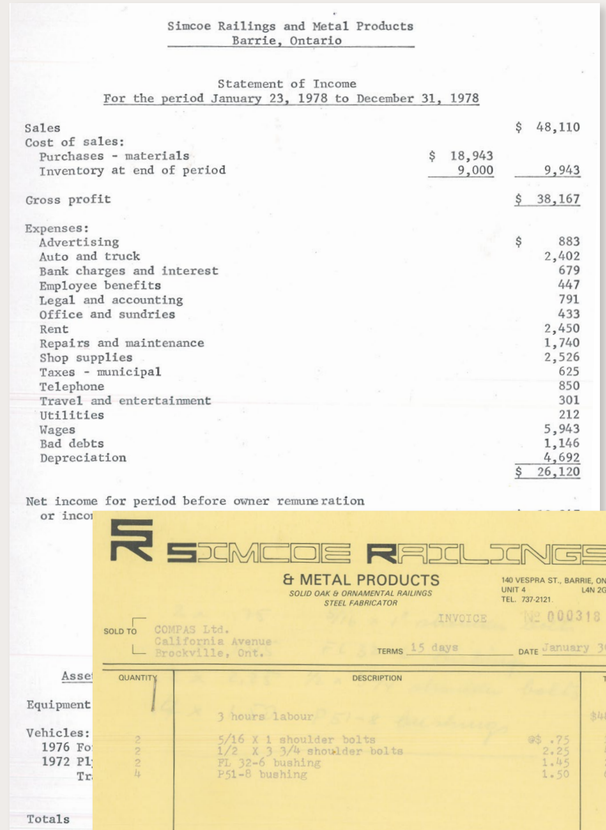
Keen on breaking into the new construction market, Wolfgang took on various jobs for local builders, including Don Pratt, who owned the largest construction company in town. Knowing that Don had his own people making railings for him, Wolfgang tried to convince him to let him do all the work and not just individual jobs every once in a while. One day when Don was in a bind, having a closing on a house and needing a railing for the very next day, he approached Wolfgang, and said: "If you can do the railing by tomorrow, you have a job." Wolfgang took the measurements, worked all night, and by noon the next day he had the railing installed. Don was so pleased that he told Wolfgang: "If you work like that all the time, you can do all the railings for me."

Following his first job with Don Pratt, Wolfgang was able to grow his railing business by working with other builders as well. Simcoe Railings soon built a reputation for being able to deliver within any time frame. When Don Pratt asked him to do steel stairs for him, Wolfgang said "No problem, I can do that for you," despite having never done them before. His natural aptitude for building and engineering things allowed Wolfgang to quickly figure out how to go about it. The biggest challenge was that building stairs required a larger welder than the small one he had purchased at Canadian Tire. Unwilling to pay for a tool rental for the entire duration of that job, Wolfgang decided to build the entire staircase, put it into place at the construction site with his small welder first, and then rent a larger one for one day only to do the real welding. He ended up working straight through the night and took the rented tool back the very next day. Looking back, Wolfgang says: "Others would have most likely bought or rented a welder for the entire week. I considered that a waste of my resources."

Another job that Wolfgang remembers was constructing steel stairs in the Eaton Centre, a landmark shopping mall in Toronto that was built in the second half of the 1970s. While the building was under construction, Wolfgang was hired to build and install stairs to connect the two floors of a restaurant. When he was ready for the install, Wolfgang loaded the parts into the trunk and onto the roof of his green Buick station wagon and drove down to the largest construction site in all of Canada. Upon arrival, he noticed people looking at him strangely because everything else was delivered on big trucks.

After an hour on the job, a man approached Wolfgang and Glen Ransom and asked them to show him their union membership cards: "We don't have union cards," Wolfgang replied. The man countered, "You realize it is Cadillac Fairview that is building here, and they are fully unionized. You can't work here if you are not in the union." Wolfgang told the union representative that he would just finish his job and continued working. Two hours later, four men in suits showed up. They threatened that if Wolfgang kept working on the site two thousand union workers would walk off their jobs and Wolfgang would be held responsible for their wages. "What do you want me to do?" Wolfgang asked. He was told to go to the Union Hall, hire union members, and have them finish the install for him. With no other option, Wolfgang did as told, and the next morning two union workers showed up as arranged. To Wolfgang's surprise, the men told him that they did not know how to do the work. Running out of patience, Wolfgang instructed them to sit down while he and his helper would finish the job themselves. Wolfgang ended up paying the two union workers $35.00 an hour each for sitting around at the job site while he and Glen Ransom completed the job which they could have finished faster without them in the first place.

The railings Wolfgang had first built after getting into the railing business in 1976 had been mainly interior and exterior steel railings. When the trend later changed to interior oak railings with spindles, curved wood railings became highly popular in high-end homes. The transition from steel to wood proved challenging for Wolfgang, because he had no experience in woodworking. To be able to meet customer demand in a changing market, he quickly acquired the necessary skills. This experience taught Wolfgang an important lesson that he has applied to his entrepreneurship ever since: "There is always change in business. If you do not go with the change, you will eventually go out of business," he says.



Simcoe Railings and Metal Products
Barrie, Ontario

Statement of Income
For the period January 23, 1978 to December 31, 1978

Sales		$ 48,110
Cost of sales:		
Purchases - materials	$ 18,943	
Inventory at end of period	9,000	9,943
Gross profit		$ 38,167
Expenses:		
Advertising		$ 883
Auto and truck		2,402
Bank charges and interest		679
Employee benefits		447
Legal and accounting		791
Office and sundries		433
Rent		2,450
Repairs and maintenance		1,740
Shop supplies		2,526
Taxes - municipal		625
Telephone		850
Travel and entertainment		301
Utilities		212
Wages		5,943
Bad debts		1,146
Depreciation		4,692
		$ 26,120
Net income for period before owner remuneration or inco		
Asse		
Equipment		
Vehicles:		
1976 Fo		
1972 Pl		
Tr		
Totals		

SIMCOE RAILINGS
& METAL PRODUCTS
SOLID OAK & ORNAMENTAL RAILINGS
STEEL FABRICATOR
140 VESPRA ST., BARRIE, ONT.
UNIT 4 L4N 2G9
TEL. 737-2121

INVOICE NO 000318

SOLD TO COMPAS Ltd.
California Avenue
Brockville, Ont.

TERMS 15 days DATE January 30, 1979

QUANTITY	DESCRIPTION		TOTAL
	3 hours labour		$48.00
2	5/16 x 1 shoulder bolts	@$ .75	1.50
2	1/2 x 3 3/4 shoulder bolts	2.25	4.50
2	PL 32-6 bushing	1.45	2.90
4	P51-8 bushing	1.50	6.00
	DOWN PAYMENT ON SIGNING OF AGREEMENT		
	FINAL PAYMENT ON COMPLETION		$62.90

Opposite page: Railing built by Wolfgang. This page images: Simcoe Railings Invoice and Income Statement, 1978.

Room with Napoleon GD-36 gas fireplace and Simcoe model mantel.

THE FOUNDING AND EVOLUTION
OF WOLF STEEL AND THE NAPOLEON BRAND

2

BUILDING THE FIRST WOOD STOVE AND THE FOUNDING OF WOLF STEEL LTD.

Fisher Stoves was a big name in the wood stove market. The company operated out of Oregon, where founder Bob Fisher had developed the first airtight welded steel-plate stove. By the late 1970s, the Fisher Stoves Company had franchise factories all over Canada and the U.S., producing and selling thousands of units of their highly popular models. These manufacturing businesses, one of which was located in Barrie, built Fisher stoves under license and paid Fisher a royalty in return.

Wolfgang had first seen a Fisher wood stove when the city of Barrie hosted a winter carnival with ice sculptures. A Fisher stove was used in one of the trailers, keeping it nice and warm despite the extreme cold outside. One day in 1978, Ingrid's father told Wolfgang that he wanted to buy a Fisher wood stove for his house. Since Wolfgang did not have a lot of contracts for his business at the time, he offered to build him one instead, using the Fisher stove as a model. Wolfgang had no idea that with this offer he was about to lay the foundation for a multi-million-dollar company that today employs over 1,500 people worldwide.

When Wolfgang and Ingrid went to the plant in Barrie where Fisher stoves were built and sold, the building was already closed for the day. As they looked through the window in the back, Wolfgang noticed some welding equipment and several wood stoves. He thought it strange that anybody would buy a wood stove when there was more modern technology around, such as gas, oil, and propane furnaces. Little did he know that only a few years later his own stove company would operate out of exactly that location.

In preparation for building his first stove, Wolfgang went to Barrie Welding and asked them to cut and bend the steel plates according to his specification. In addition to doing custom jobs, Barrie Welding was one of many companies that manufactured their own brand of wood stoves. The name of their cast-iron door model was Johnson. Wolfgang asked whether he could buy one and use one of their doors for the stove he was building. Barrie Welding had no objections and, as a result, the first stove Wolfgang ever built had a Johnson door on it. Upon completion, Wolfgang's father-in-law took the stove home to Kitchener and hooked it up in the basement. He was extremely happy with it, because it heated the entire house for many years.

After seeing how well that first wood stove worked, Wolfgang made a stove for himself and another one for his neighbour who also wanted one after seeing Wolfgang's. In 1978/79, his first two years in the hearth products industry, Wolfgang built three stoves, a Johnson and two with their own Timberwolf brand.

BECOMING A WOOD STOVE MANUFACTURER

The energy crisis that occurred in the late 1970s prompted many homeowners to install wood stoves in their homes. A severe shortage of oil in the global market and fears that Western nations would eventually run out of oil altogether made wood stoves an attractive alternative for heating.
At the height of the energy crisis, there were over 300 manufacturers of wood stoves in Canada. In Barrie alone, Wolfgang estimates that there must have been 10 to 15, including Crafted, Millscraft, Barrie Welding and Fisher. Seeing a great opportunity, Wolfgang decided to break into the stove market as strongly as he could and began building a company around the first stove he had built for his father-in-law.

In designing his company's first market model, Wolfgang created a single large cast-iron door with a spin draft in the middle that made it look like a sunburst. That same door could be used both as a left and a right door on a two-door model as well. Wolfgang and Ingrid then developed a pamphlet to promote Wolf Steel's first two models: a single-door stove and a larger double-door unit. He named the stoves Timberwolf, in part because of his own name, but also because it seemed to fit the units' large, rugged, and solid appearance.
A year later, in 1980, the Timberwolf was introduced in five different models. Wolf Steel grew to five associates and that year they sold about 30 wood stoves.

From the day Simcoe Railings started operating out of the company's first rented building in 1978 on Vespra Street in Barrie, Wolfgang and Ingrid had a small retail store on the premises where they offered their stoves to customers. The facility was so small that Ingrid's office functioned also as the showroom and a warehouse and, as a result, was always filled with wood stoves. Ingrid looked after customers in the front while Wolfgang worked in the back organizing and managing production.



This page image: Early Timberwolf wood burning stove, Model 1500 – 1980. Opposite page image: Wolfgang manning the booth with a hand painted Timberwolf sign during the company's first exhibit at the Home Show in Gravenhurst, circa 1980.



In 1979, Wolfgang had to change the name of his company from Simcoe Railings because a company in Keswick, Ontario started operating under that name and had it registered. Wolfgang decided to name his business Wolf Steel. The new name reflected the fact that his company was no longer just in the business of making railings. And so, in 1979, Wolf Steel Ltd. was born and registered.

Although production space was limited, Wolf Steel continued making railings in the small 1000-square-foot plant as well. For equipment, the company had a dip tank, welding machines, an ironworker, a polishing machine, as well as a Swedish steel machine. With no room for a spray booth inside the plant, Wolfgang and his small team had to paint the stoves on plywood sheets outside the building. After the paint had dried, the stoves were loaded on the truck, and Ron Noordhoff or Wolfgang delivered them or tried to sell them to a consumer out of the small showroom.

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS ON INNOVATION: EVOLUTION OF WOLF STEEL AND NAPOLEON DURING THE 1980s

The 1980s were a period of continuous growth, as new wood-burning stove models were added, and the number of associates grew from five (1980) to 28 (1985) to over 70 people by the end of the decade. Correspondingly, manufacturing space increased from 1,000 to 45,000 square feet. Landmark developments in the history of Wolf Steel during this time include the birth of the Napoleon brand (1980) and the introduction of the Napoleon wood-burning stove with a single pyroceramic glass door—the first of many subsequent industry innovations pioneered by Wolfgang and his company—that same year. As more space was needed, operations were moved to Bell Farm Road (1980) and then to the company's current location on what was to eventually become Napoleon Road (1983).

Other milestones include the acquisition of new state-of-the-art production equipment, territorial expansion into Quebec where a warehouse was established in Montreal (1982), and then through agents into Western Canada (1985) and Eastern Canada (1986). By 1986, Wolf Steel/Napoleon had become a national Canadian company which was represented from coast to coast. As their hearth products became ever more popular, sales increased from 30 units of the Timberwolf stove in their first year of production (1979) to thousands of Napoleon glass-door stoves and fireplaces by the end of the 1980s. By developing the first Napoleon gas fireplace and entering the gas fireplace market towards the end of the decade (1988), Wolfgang, Ingrid, and their team laid the foundations for even more sustained growth in the future.

INDUSTRY-FIRSTS: PYROCERAMIC GLASS-DOORS AND AIR-WASH SYSTEMS

After introducing the Timberwolf in five different models, Wolfgang noticed that customers were particularly interested in stoves with glass doors. “Why don’t you put a glass door on your stoves?” he was often asked. Realizing that buyers of wood stoves wanted to see the flames while the stove was operating, Wolfgang set his mind to designing a glass door that would offer that experience while being durable and safe.

Wolfgang soon came across Corning Glass Works, a manufacturer of glass cookware that was sold under the brand name of CorningWare. What made this product unique and particularly interesting to Wolfgang was that CorningWare was produced using pyroceramic glass which made it resistant to sudden temperature changes and capable of withstanding thermal shocks of up to 450 °C (840 °F). Confident in the material, Wolfgang designed a new single-door wood stove with a frame made of cast iron so that it would not warp under high heat conditions.

While using pyroceramic glass had effectively eliminated the risk of glass breakage, there was yet another challenge that needed to be resolved: depending on how wet the wood was that the stove was fired with, the glass on the door got dirty and blackened over time. By putting the spin drafts on the sides of the door where the air goes into the firebox and making the air push against the glass from the inside, Wolfgang ended up designing one of the first air-wash systems in the industry. Today, air-wash technology has become the industry standard.

WHY NOT NAME IT NAPOLEON?

Despite the success of the early Timberwolf models, Wolfgang noticed a change in the wood stove industry: the designs favoured by consumers were becoming more elegant and feminine in nature. To keep up with changing customer preferences, Wolfgang decided to introduce modern-style elements to his glass door. When thinking about design options, he remembered a cognac bottle he had seen at the liquor store with beautiful gold embossing on its label. Wolfgang purchased a bottle and added the ornaments from the label to the stove door design with some modifications. Feeling that the name Timberwolf did not fit the more polished design of this newly created door any longer, Wolfgang and Ingrid started thinking about a different name for the new stove. Taking inspiration from the cognac bottle again, Wolfgang asked: “Why not name it Napoleon?” As they discussed the pros and cons, they both felt that the name, which is the same in every language, was a perfect fit for the more sophisticated stoves they were about to produce. Thus, in 1980, the Napoleon brand was born. Later, the company logo was developed in a similar fashion, as it features a stylized rendering of Napoleon Bonaparte’s famous hat.





TRADE SHOWS AND DISTRIBUTION

As the company started to grow, Wolfgang sought out retailers in Southern Ontario who would carry his products. At first, he met with a lot of resistance. Established fireplace dealers did not want to take on Napoleon stoves, because not only were they unknown, but Wolf Steel was considered just another stove manufacturer competing for market share. Wolfgang kept pushing and when dealers eventually decided to take on Napoleon’s glass door stove, they did very well with the product due to the stove’s unique design and excellent quality.

In 1982, after exhibiting their products at local trade shows in Newmarket and Gravenhurst, Wolfgang and Ingrid started exhibiting at the National Home Show in Toronto, Canada’s longest-running and largest consumer show for home products. While exhibiting in Toronto for the first time, Wolf Steel showed both their Timberwolf models and the Napoleon stove with the glass door. Wolfgang remembers competitors walking by their booth, laughing and making derogatory remarks at the small size of the N1200, which was one of their Napoleon glass-door stoves. It was named 1200 because it was designed specifically to heat small spaces of up to 1200 square feet. With this model, Wolfgang introduced to the market a comparatively small stove at a time when competitors’ units were still much larger.



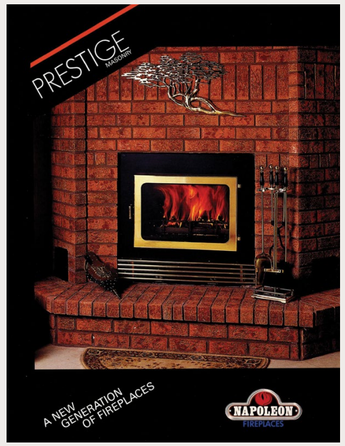
Opposite page image: Napoleon insert installed in Ingrid and Wolfgang’s house in Utopia. This page top image: Ingrid exhibiting Napoleon products at the National Home Show in Toronto, early 1980s. This page bottom image: The first Napoleon wood stove, early 1980s.













The market soon proved that smaller was better, as the Napoleon wood-burning stove with the single glass door became their most popular model, selling thousands of units. When the other stove manufacturers finally realized that without a glass-door model they could no longer meet customers' changing tastes, it was too late. By then, the Napoleon name had spread, and everybody was asking for Napoleon products. Eventually the Fisher and other Barrie stove manufacturing plants shut down while Wolf Steel could not produce fast enough to meet the demand for Napoleon glass-door stoves.

DRIVING GROWTH THROUGH INNOVATION

Throughout the 1980s, Wolf Steel/Napoleon evolved from manufacturing a single wood stove model to offering a complete line of wood-burning fireplaces, stoves and inserts in different styles and models. The growing line-up included the following products:

- Fireplace Deluxe insert (1981)
- NFI Classic insert (1983)
- N2001 model with a catalytic combustor for clean burn, with ceramic tiles and an extra-large ceramic window (1985)
- NZ2000 Prestige zero-clearance wood fireplace featuring one of the largest doors in the industry (1988)
- WM-1020 masonry "Lowboy" fireplace (1989)

While serving customers with a growing number of wood-burning stove and fireplace options, Wolf Steel/Napoleon also began distributing fireplace accessories (1985) and further started manufacturing hand-made wrought-iron toolsets (1986). Other complementary products included Kemstone boards, screens, stainless steel liners and prefab chimneys. By the end of the 1980s, the Timberwolf line was discontinued due to the overwhelming popularity and corresponding demand for Napoleon-branded products. As Napoleon products became ever-more popular, Wolf Steel, the manufacturer behind the Napoleon brand, became identified by consumers as Napoleon as well.

Opposite page top image: Napoleon product line in the early 1980s. Opposite page bottom left image: Trade show in Montreal, circa 1983/84. Opposite page bottom right image: Ingrid exhibiting the Napoleon insert at the National Home Show in Toronto, early 1980s. This page top images: Napoleon product brochures. This page bottom image: Wrought-iron toolset.







FROM COAST TO COAST – TERRITORIAL EXPANSION WITHIN CANADA

As demand for their Napoleon stoves continued to grow, Wolfgang and Ingrid began looking for ways to expand the distribution of their products within Canada. In 1982, Wolf Steel/Napoleon broke into the Quebec market by opening a warehouse in Montreal. Ingrid and Wolfgang traveled to Montreal to meet their Quebec agent, Jean Berlie of Berbec Distributions. Many years after that first meeting, Jean conceded to them: “When I saw you, two young kids, for the first time, I seriously wondered.” Despite his early skepticism, he agreed to partner with them because he liked their wood stoves, and he remained Napoleon’s Quebec agent for many years. Jean was instrumental in establishing a market for the Napoleon brand in Quebec. Three years later, in 1985, Wolf Steel/Napoleon expanded its geographical scope even further by adding an agent in Western Canada. When, in 1986, Compact Appliances signed on to serve as a distributor in the East Coast market, Wolf Steel/Napoleon was represented coast-to-coast.

JOINT LEADERSHIP

Ingrid and Wolfgang are both strong-willed personalities with strengths in different areas. While always working together, they separated their functions in the business from early on. Wolfgang’s main focus was on research, design and development of new products, as well as on purchasing and production, while Ingrid concentrated on HR, advertising, marketing, accounting and sales administration. In looking after sales administration, Ingrid was the one talking to and negotiating with their dealers, distributors and customers. By taking the administrative side of the business off Wolfgang’s shoulders, she made it easier for him to focus on planning and turning his vision into reality.

This page left image: Highly efficient N2001 Deluxe stove with tiles. This page right image: Wolfgang next to the NC-16 Napoleon stove. Opposite page top image: Ingrid in the plant, 1984. Opposite page bottom image: The original property on 9 Napoleon Road when purchased in 1983.

THE MANUFACTURING PROCESS IN THE PLANT ON NAPOLEON ROAD

The expansion of Napoleon’s product line-up in the 1980s was accompanied by changes in the manufacturing process. In 1986, Napoleon began manufacturing their own custom glass doors under the Dynasty label. In 1987, the glass door line was changed to aluminum extrusion, resulting in a large sales increase in both standard- and custom-door assemblies. With sufficient space available in the Napoleon Road plant and growing demand for Napoleon products, Wolf Steel built its first assembly line of workstations connected by conveyors for the production of the Napoleon Deluxe inserts. As volume kept increasing, a second assembly line was added.

For equipment, Wolf Steel had a 90-ton mechanical shear, a little Schuler ironworker, a small punch press from Germany, a belt sander, as well as a few drill presses. Wolfgang and Ron Noordhoff remember the ground shaking as they began punching flue holes into quarter steel plates. According to Ron, “it would just go ‘bang’ depending on the type of steel we used.”

After moving to Napoleon Road, the company had a 1,000 square foot showroom. On cold days in the wintertime, it happened more than once that their store manager Don Foster (who ran the store together with his wife Marg Charlebois), would come running into the machine shop yelling “Open the doors!” as the showroom was quickly filling up with smoke. With the showroom attached to the plant, Don had fired up a wood stove in the showroom while the spray booth was operating in the plant. In those days there was no makeup air when running the spray booth, and this ultimately created a vacuum in the building. Negative pressure kept building up to the point that it would simply reverse, causing the stove to back up and fill the showroom with smoke. It goes without saying that this would not leave a good impression with a customer visiting the showroom wanting to buy a clean-burning, non-smoking wood stove!











INGRID'S ROLE IN THE COMPANY AND THE COMPUTERIZATION OF NAPOLEON

By the time their first son Chris was born in 1977, Ingrid had quit her job as a customer service representative at Bell Canada and was working in the business full-time. While Chris was little, she took him to the office with her. When their second son Stephen was born in 1980, Wolfgang and Ingrid decided that she would stay home until both children were in school. They hired an associate to look after the administration of the business during that time. Two years later, in 1982, Wolfgang asked her to come back as he felt that he really needed her help in running the company. Ingrid reassumed her previous role of leading the administrative side and continued in that important capacity until both she and Wolfgang retired.

Ingrid's father had been an electronic technician developing monitors for computers, among other things. This early exposure to technology while growing up had fostered in Ingrid a keen interest in computers. She became an early adopter and the driving force behind the computerization of Wolf Steel/Napoleon, introducing computers (Apple, Apple II plus) to payroll, HR, sales, and other administrative functions. Having a knack for design helped her greatly in her role in advertising, while sketching out designs for paper ads, brochures, and other advertising and marketing materials. When Wolf Steel/Napoleon entered the Quebec market, Ingrid's academic background and training in French further allowed her to do all the proofreading of their French language advertising material.

Opposite page image: Ingrid with Stephen at 3 months and Chris at 3 years old in 1980. This page images: Chris and Stephen as children (top image in 1982; middle image around 1986/87; bottom image at the cottage in 1986).





This page top image: Ingrid and Wolfgang on the Great Wall during their first trip to China. This page bottom image: Wolfgang showing the original Napoleon gas fireplace lineup at a trade show, 1989. Opposite page image: Direct vent gas fireplace GD 3000, another Napoleon bestseller with the most realistic flame on the market, 1989.

PRODUCT TESTING, CSA CERTIFICATION AND BUILDING OF THE TEST TOWER

Since the introduction of the Napoleon glass-door stove in 1980, Wolfgang made sure that Wolf Steel/Napoleon products were approved by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA). The CSA is an accredited provider of product testing and certification services. CSA approval means that the product has been certified by an independent organization for compliance with national and international safety and performance standards.

Prior to building an in-house test facility in 1988, Wolf Steel/Napoleon used a company in Toronto for product testing. CSA requirements became more stringent over the years to ensure that wood- and gas-burning hearth products meet safety and environmental standards. To keep up with new requirements, Napoleon needed access to a testing facility that simulated a two-storey house—at least 40 feet high—with a basement. Since the Toronto company they were using did not have the legally required space for CSA-testing under the new parameters, Wolfgang decided to move the testing in-house. At 55 feet tall, the new test tower, built in 1988 as part of a 700 square feet expansion, allowed Wolf Steel/Napoleon to continue testing all products and chimney configurations in-house while saving considerable amounts of time and money.

FIRST TRIP TO CHINA (1987)

In 1987, Wolfgang and Ingrid traveled to China for the first time to explore potential business opportunities. At the time, there was much talk, both negative and positive, about the country and they wanted to see with their own eyes what China was really like and had to offer to a Canadian manufacturer determined to keep growing.

After flying into Hong Kong, which was still an English colony at the time, they took the train to Guangzhou, known historically as Canton or Kwangchow, China's third-largest city, located in Southern China on the Pearl River, about 120 kilometers (75 miles) northwest of Hong Kong. Upon arrival at the Guangzhou train station, Wolfgang and Ingrid were picked up by a black limousine that took them to the Garden Hotel, which was one of the newest and most prestigious hotels at the time. Locals were not allowed in the hotel and Wolfgang and Ingrid noticed many Chinese people standing in front of the building trying to catch a glimpse of what was happening inside. During this period, everyone in China still wore the dark blue Mao uniforms that have become synonymous with Chinese Communism in Western eyes. Wolfgang and Ingrid noticed thousands of bicycles on the roads, and they were amazed at how wide the streets were, even though there were hardly any cars yet. The only cars they saw were either government vehicles or taxis. All major factories and stores were still under government ownership, as the transition of China into one of the world's most important economies had not yet begun. Although private enterprise was just starting on a very small scale, they observed that there was a lot of construction already.

The day after their arrival in Guangzhou, Ingrid and Wolfgang went to the Canton Fair, China's most prestigious trade show which is still held twice a year. To their great surprise, none of the exhibitors spoke English and there were very few Westerners attending the fair. As they strolled through the fair, looking at the many items exhibited, Wolfgang and Ingrid were amazed by how different Chinese culture was and by the outstanding quality of the craftsmanship displayed at the show. Since they could not develop a business sense in terms of which items might be suitable for import and sale through their company in North America, they ended up purchasing personal items, like vases, hand-painted pictures, and sculptures for their house.

ENTERING THE GAS FIREPLACE MARKET (1988)

In 1988, three years after the company had started selling wood stoves in Western Canada through an agent in Vancouver, Napoleon's West Coast Representative Max called Wolfgang and told him that he intended to ship his stock of Napoleon wood stoves back to Barrie. When asked for an explanation, Max informed Wolfgang that wood-burning products were not selling any more and that consumers wanted gas-burning stoves and fireplaces instead. Wolfgang immediately flew to Vancouver. While visiting all kinds of showrooms in BC together with his area representative, he noticed that retailers were all offering gas fireplaces imported from England and Holland. Max had been right—consumer demand was changing from wood to gas. By the time he was on the plane back to Toronto, Wolfgang knew that he had to get into the gas fireplace market immediately. Since neither Wolfgang nor his associates had any background in gas, he and several Wolf Steel/Napoleon associates took the gasfitter course at Georgian College. Wolfgang then hired Cliff Lilly, who had experience with gas-burning products from his previous position with a barbecue manufacturer in Burlington, and together they set to the task of developing the first Napoleon gas fireplaces.





In 1989, Wolf Steel/Napoleon was ready to launch their first line-up of gas fireplaces. The first gas fireplace Wolfgang designed and introduced to the market was a vented product (Model 3622). An insert (Model GI2113) was launched the same year. Compared to the highly sophisticated units Napoleon is manufacturing today, the company's original gas fireplaces were quite simple: their main technology was a pan-type burner with a series of holes in it. Using cement logs, the insulation material was soaked in brine, which gave these fireplaces the yellow glow of the flame.

By the end of the decade, direct-vent fireplaces came into the market very quickly as consumers appreciated the fact that they did not require a costly chimney.

In 1989, Napoleon brought to market a direct-vent, zero-clearance fireplace, with greater vent capabilities than any other direct-vent fireplace on the market at 40 feet vertical (Model GD3000). Its "Power Vent" venting system was capable of exhausting over 100 feet in a horizontal direction. New burner technology as well as improved gas log configuration and burner assembly, allowed Wolfgang and his team to create a highly realistic flame pattern, introduced under the marketing caption of "Yellow Dancing Flames."

As Wolf Steel/Napoleon ventured into the gas market, demand for their new product turned out to be so overwhelming that production facilities had to be enlarged almost immediately. To accommodate the company's growing manufacturing needs, 1989 saw the completion of a 15,000 square foot addition to the plant, resulting in a total manufacturing space of 45,000 square feet.

EPA PRODUCT CERTIFICATION

Venturing into the gas fireplace market provided Wolf Steel/Napoleon with the opportunity to introduce a second, alternate product category at a time when wood stoves were increasingly coming under the magnifying glass of the government due to growing environmental concerns.

In 1989, as Napoleon began selling in the U.S., Wolfgang introduced EPA-certified wood stoves to the company's product line-up. To be sold in the U.S., stoves required certification by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), an American regulatory body vested with the authority to ensure that only clean-burning wood stoves could be sold in the American market.

In the late 1980s, after devising specific test procedures, the EPA imposed limits on the number of particles allowed to be emitted through the chimney. Catalytic combustors provided the simplest approach to ensure compliance with EPA requirements. However, a more sophisticated solution, chosen by Wolf Steel/Napoleon and other manufacturers, was the introduction of secondary air tubes that burned the smoke a second time within the unit (secondary combustion), thus significantly reducing the number of particles that reached the outside.

When redeveloping their wood-burning technology to meet the EPA standard for products sold in the U.S., Napoleon decided to terminate production of non-EPA approved products altogether and have all their products, regardless of location, designed and built to the more stringent standard. Recognizing the environmental, health and cost benefits of having all their wood-burning products comply with the new EPA standard, Wolf Steel/Napoleon capitalized on the opportunity to further improve the quality of their products and distinguish Napoleon in the marketplace.

CFM VERSUS WOLF STEEL

When designing the GD3000 direct-vent gas fireplace in the late 1980s, Wolfgang concluded that placing the flue gas outlet at the top of the unit made the most sense from a technical perspective. Not realizing that their competitor Canadian Fireplace Manufacturers Ltd. (CFM) was offering a direct-vent fireplace with a top-flue outlet already and had a patent on that design, Wolf Steel started producing the GD3000 in that configuration. Other manufacturers had also adopted the top-flue venting concept, including Clare Brothers in Cambridge. Insisting on their patent, the owners of CFM launched a patent infringement lawsuit against both Wolf Steel and Clare Brothers.

When asked by his lawyers whether he could design the model differently, Wolfgang came up with a 45-degree angle design and had it patented. Although Wolfgang had changed the design and infringement lawsuits are almost always resolved by an out-of-court settlement, the case proceeded. Knowing that placing the vent on top of the unit was only logical and prescribed by the laws of physics, since gas naturally rises to the top, Wolfgang and his team started researching all kinds of patents to prove that direct-vent technology with top-flue venting had been in existence before CFM had patented their design. Wolfgang flew to Munich, Germany, where he spent two days in the archives of the German Patent Office looking for similar designs. In his research, he found a top-vented combustion chamber design with glass all the way around it that was used in lighthouses.

When CFM and Wolf Steel eventually met in court, Wolf Steel won the case because Wolfgang and his lawyers were able to prove that top-venting technology had already been used by another manufacturer prior to CFM having the design patented and that placing the flue on top of the fireplace was not the result of sophisticated research solely owned by CFM but based on common sense. When CFM appealed the judge's decision to void their patent, the case went back to court a year later, but the outcome remained the same.



Opposite page image: Napoleon's first EPA-approved wood stove insert. This page image: The Napoleon Appliance Corporation (NAC) building after renovations.





This page top image: Adding production space during a plant expansion at 9 Napoleon Road. This page bottom image: Second expansion to add production and warehousing space to the plant. Opposite page top image: Porcelain Technologies, the enameling plant co-owned with Brad Michael of Heartland Cook Stoves, later purchased by Napoleon outright. Opposite page bottom image: Delivery of a new automated punch press to the Napoleon plant in Kentucky.

Although they won in the end, this was a tough period for Wolfgang and Ingrid, not only financially—the lawsuit cost them about half a million dollars—but emotionally as well, as the very existence of their company seemed to be on the line. By winning the lawsuit, Wolf Steel safeguarded the ability of the industry to keep producing direct-vent fireplaces in an open market based on fair competition, determined by quality and price rather than monopolization.

THE 1990s - A DECADE OF INNOVATION, PRODUCT DIVERSIFICATION AND GROWTH

Building onto the strong foundations Wolfgang and Ingrid had laid during the previous decade, the 1990s marked another period of continuous growth, defined by a multiple-stage expansion of the company's manufacturing/warehouse space to 250,000



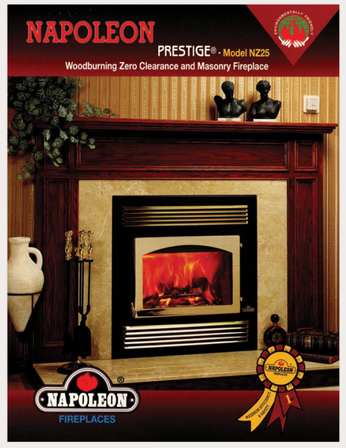
square feet (120,000 square feet on Napoleon Road, plus 130,000 square feet on Bayview Drive), the development of new products (Porcelain Technology, PHAZER Logs, gas barbecues, the Continental line, and fireplaces for the builder market), new services (consumer financing) as well as the widening of Napoleon's market presence (expansion into the U.S. and China). When customer demand turned towards stoves in a variety of colours, Wolfgang founded Porcelain Technologies Ltd. in Mississauga together with two partners. The company is still in operation today with Napoleon owning it outright. An attempt by the large utility companies to shut Napoleon out of the market for gas fireplaces resulted in the forging of closer bonds with affiliated dealers through the Napoleon Dealer Alliance.
By 1994, with staff numbers having increased to 125 people, Wolf Steel/Napoleon had become one of the largest private sector employers in the Barrie area.

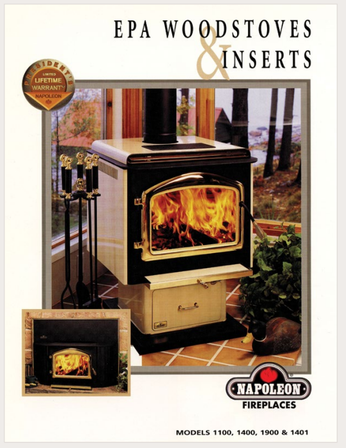






In 1995, the Napoleon Appliance Corporation (NAC) was born as a separate company to produce high-quality gas barbecues, opening up a second primary market. In 1995 Wolf Steel, and in 1996 NAC achieved ISO quality designation and the “President’s Lifetime Warranty” was born, attesting to the sophistication of processes applied in the production of Napoleon products. New machines and tools were incorporated into the production process as new technologies, such as CNC and laser cutting, became available. Napoleon also added a wood shop with skilled cabinet makers to produce mantels for their fireplaces in-house. Continued demand for Napoleon hearth products combined with the instant success of the barbecue division meant that by 1997 the company had almost doubled its workforce within three years, having grown to 240 associates. By the close of the century, Napoleon was well positioned to further expand its role as a market leader in the North American hearth and grill industry.







NEW PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

During the 1990s as Wolf Steel/Napoleon continued to diversify their product lines, the company presented many new stove and fireplace models to the marketplace. New products launched throughout the 1990s with the end consumer in mind included:

- EPA line of free-standing wood stoves with porcelain colours to offer more colourful stoves (1991)
- Periscope for the company’s gas product line for installations where the terminal would otherwise be below grade and regular installation would be impossible (1991)
- High-efficiency heater fireplace with unique glowing embers which added a very realistic charm to the flames (GD3200 - 1992)
- Wood-burning “high tech” insert, providing an environmentally friendly heating option (EPI-1600 - 1992)
- Gas stove in 4 porcelain enamel colours (GS3500 - 1993)
- Smaller gas insert designed to fit prefabricated zero-clearance fireplaces (GI-3600 - 1993)
- Direct-vent stove with an 85 percent efficiency rating, the most efficient gas-burning stove in North America (GDS3700 - 1994)
- Patented and highly efficient Bay Window insert (GI3014) and Bay Window gas fireplace (GD3200) boasting design and performance features previously unheard of (1994)
- Ceramic fiber logs for Napoleon gas fireplaces, creating the most realistic flames and glowing logs in the industry (PHAZER Logs, marketed under Napoleon’s “Yellow Dancing Flames” trademark – 1994)
- Single unit wood-burning fireplace capable of heating the entire home when installed in conjunction with its central heating option (NZ-25 - 1995)
- High BTU free-standing gas/propane stove (GD50) and its counterpart insert (GDI50 - 1996)
- Direct-vent gas stove with a secondary heat exchanger and with an advanced furnace-type burner behind the logs, acting as a “turbo boost” when extra heat was required (GDS50 - 1996)
- Double- and triple-sided see-through units, as well as an add-on bay window kit to complement the extensive line-up of Napoleon product options (1996)
- Oil stoves made by Franco-Belge, one of Napoleon’s European suppliers (1996)
- Stoves and fireplaces with tempered glass doors (GD45 and GD17 - 1997)
- Hand-held remote controls with digital read-out and thermostatic capability (1997)
- Patented adaptor to convert direct-vent gas stoves to natural draft (GS-150KT B vent - 1997)
- Hinged door for direct-vent fireplace, a first in the industry (1998)
- Unique smaller fireplace only 12” in depth making it ideal for new construction in places where floor space is at a premium (GD33 - 1998)
- Catalytic vent-free fireplace for the US market (1998)
- Fireplace with a natural draft design (GD20 – 1998/9)
- Arched door facias as decorative add-ons to all units (1998/9)

Opposite page bottom image: Thomasville model wood mantel. Opposite page top image: GD3014 gas insert. This page images: Napoleon product brochures.



SERVING THE NEEDS OF A GROWING BUILDER MARKET

At the beginning of the decade, with Canada's West Coast having become their largest growth area, particularly due to the widespread use of Napoleon fireplaces in new residential construction, Napoleon introduced a new, less-expensive builder model (GD1800). At the same time, new distribution centres were added to facilitate and accommodate the growth of Napoleon products in Western Canada. In 1994, a more efficient and larger BTU model designed exclusively for the highly competitive builder market was added (GD22). In 1996, a new direct-vent gas fireplace (GD27) was launched to satisfy builder demand for a top-vent unit. In 1997, the GD17 single-burner fireplace with tempered glass doors was introduced. When Continental fireplaces were devised in the late 1990s as a completely new line for builders and contractors, this innovative product allowed Napoleon to break new ground in the highly competitive new construction market and opened new sales channels for the company.

DEVELOPING THE U.S. MARKET

After exhibiting at the Hearth, Patio and Barbecue Expo, North America's largest trade show for hearth, patio and barbecue products put on by the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association (HPBA) since 1985, Napoleon was making inroads into the U.S. market. Distribution, however, proved to be a challenge, because unlike in Canada where Napoleon had become a brand name, no big distributor in the U.S. had heard of Napoleon, let alone be willing to take on an unfamiliar product line in truckload quantities. Realizing that to establish a more permanent presence in the U.S. it was vital to have warehouses south of the border, Wolf Steel/Napoleon established their first public warehouse in Denver, Colorado in 1990, followed by a second warehouse in Lake Forest, Illinois, the same year. In 1993 more warehouses were added in Elkhart, Indiana; St. Paul, Minnesota; as well as St. Louis, Missouri. 1994 saw the establishment of warehouses in Sacramento, California; and Albany, New York. Having warehouses in the U.S. allowed Napoleon representatives to show their products to American dealers and distributors more easily while further enabling the company to supply the American market in a much shorter time.

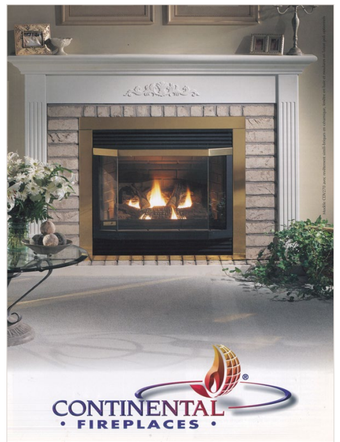
In 1998, Wolf Steel USA was founded as an independent subsidiary, and a rented 20,000 square foot facility in Kentucky began serving as a distribution centre for the American market. From this location, Wolf Steel/Napoleon can deliver to most destinations in the U.S. within one day.

CHANGES IN THE MARKETPLACE AND STRUGGLING WITH THE LARGE UTILITY COMPANIES

Around 1995, Napoleon was facing a new challenge from big gas utility companies. With their primary focus on selling energy, appliance retailing was a means to an end for these companies, based on the consideration that the more appliances they could get out to consumers, the more gas they would be able to sell as well. By the mid-1990s, individual big players in the gas utility market were not only promoting gas appliances very heavily, but they were also selling discounted stoves, fireplaces, and other appliances in their own stores at such a scale that independent dealers could not compete with them any longer.

To stay competitive, independent dealers and distributors of gas appliances organized a coalition, the Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Institute of Canada (HRAI) and took their case to the Provincial Government's business-regulating authorities. The Ontario Energy Board (OEB) eventually ordered the gas companies to separate their gas supply operations from the sale of gas-powered appliances. When the OEB ruled that the energy providers' business practice was unfair, it gave them one year to separate their two lines of business. During that year, Consumers Gas established many large and impressive "superstores", including service and installation departments with new trucks, to take on the competition under the new government-imposed business structure. At around the same time, the gas industry became deregulated and Union Gas from BC moved into Ontario, taking over some of the gas energy market. A major battle for market share in the appliance market evolved, and many independently owned specialty fireplace and barbecue stores were bought up in a buying frenzy by Union Gas, Consumers Gas and Lennox Industries. Almost overnight, Napoleon lost a significant portion of their dealers as they were acquired by these three companies.

Realizing the seriousness of the situation, Wolfgang decided to partner up with those retailers who did not want to sell out to his competitors. Buying some of them outright and partnering with others, Wolf Steel/Napoleon ended up with twelve stores in Ontario in an attempt to keep market share. "It was a tough few years," remembers Wolfgang, "and we lost a lot of money by having to operate our own retail stores and through head-on price competition with the large utility companies." Being persistent, however, paid off and Wolf Steel/Napoleon was able to persevere in the end. When the large energy companies eventually pulled out of the retail market, the stores they had acquired were sold back to their former owners or to the store managers, enabling Wolf Steel/Napoleon to sign most of the stores that had previously carried Napoleon products back on.





Opposite page: Napoleon exhibiting at the HPBA Expo. This page left image: Napoleon Continental product brochure. This page right image: Grand Opening of the Wolf Steel/Napoleon facility in Kentucky.







HELPING NAPOLEON DEALERS BE SUCCESSFUL

Throughout the 1990s, Napoleon organized twelve major trips for dealers as a company incentive. Wolfgang and Ingrid, their sales staff, and key executives participated in these special events, making dealer trips a great additional forum for solidifying close personal relationships between Napoleon and key dealers. Although dealer incentive trips to locations such as London, Paris, Costa Rica, Morocco, Tunisia, Portugal, Greece and Italy served an important purpose, Wolfgang and Ingrid decided in 1999 to discontinue the trip incentive program. Not only did organizing these trips take up a lot of Ingrid's time, but Wolfgang and Ingrid also realized that the funds spent on trips could be used to a much greater advantage for their dealer network. The outcome of these considerations was the Napoleon Alliance Dealer Program. Under this new program, established in 1999, the Schroeters put the money previously spent on trip incentives towards preferential treatment of Alliance dealers on deliveries, special offers, higher discounts on builder models, as well as further rebate levels. Napoleon also began helping Alliance dealers with their marketing and advertising efforts to drive more business to their stores.

Finance 2000 was another initiative aimed at helping Napoleon Alliance dealers sell more products. In 1998, after realizing a gap in consumer financing options, Wolfgang and Ingrid started their own consumer finance company, dubbed Finance 2000. The purpose of this program under Ingrid's leadership was to provide consumer credit to their customers. Although there was a lot of consumer financing available through financial institutions, banks generally did not grant consumer credit for purchase amounts of less than $2,000. In the beginning, Finance 2000 was quite successful. After a few years of providing consumer credit to Napoleon customers, the financing side became more competitive, however. Banks and other financial institutions began cutting into Napoleon's Finance 2000 market by lowering their dollar figures for consumer credit to below $1,000. In 2011, realizing that they could not compete with the banks in the long run, the Schroeters decided to close their company's financing program.



SERVING THE CONSTRUCTION MARKET – NAPOLEON FIREPLACES IN HIGH-RISE CONDOMINIUM DEVELOPMENTS

Napoleon and other hearth product manufacturers did well by selling direct-vent gas fireplaces to the multi-unit residential construction industry. Many new high-rise condominium complexes were built throughout the decade and developers ordered large numbers of fireplaces to be put into new condo units. The Canadian high-rise market with gas fireplaces started in Vancouver where most new units were designed with fireplaces in mind. Over time, developers, architects and condominium owners switched to electric fireplaces, which are easier to install and more cost effective.



Opposite page top image: First Napoleon dealer trip to London and Paris. The group of participants prior to boarding the hovercraft for crossing the channel. Opposite page middle image: Dealer trip to Italy. Opposite page bottom image: 2010 Napoleon Alliance meeting. This page top image: Dealer trip to Marocco. This page bottom image: Niagara Falls wine tour during the 2010 Napoleon Alliance dealer meeting.



BECOMING A GRILL MANUFACTURER AND THE FOUNDING OF NAPOLEON APPLIANCE CORPORATION (NAC)

Although Wolf Steel/Napoleon had undergone significant growth as a manufacturer of stoves and fireplaces over the years, the fact that hearth products were seasonal posed particular challenges. In the early 1990s, to offset decreased sales of stoves and fireplaces during the off-season for heating products, Napoleon began selling barbecues (Ducane and other brands) as well as chain saws in the company's retail store on Highway 11.

Most troubling for Wolfgang and Ingrid as entrepreneurs who feel responsible for their associates and their families was the fact that they had to temporarily lay off associates after the fall season when there was little demand for fireplaces. Wolfgang believed that if he could add another product category to their manufacturing operations in the spring, this would allow Napoleon to keep all associates employed year-round. Wolfgang had been looking at manufacturing barbecues as a possibility for quite some time and, in 1995, he decided to enter that market on the manufacturing side. That year, the Napoleon Appliance Corporation (NAC) was born as an independent company to produce barbecues under the Napoleon brand.

Wolfgang's goal was to manufacture a high-end gas grill that would stand out in the marketplace through its exceptional level of quality, justifying a price tag of $999. When Wolfgang presented the idea to his family and company executives, it was met with great skepticism. Wolfgang ignored the skeptics and went ahead, believing that a high-quality product that outlasted competitors' cheaper models by many years and that was backed by an excellent warranty would be successful at that price point. To develop the first Napoleon barbecue, he hired Steve Schwarz, the son of a good friend, fresh out of engineering school in May of 1994. Wolfgang examined all barbecues on the market, dissected them, and combined what he considered to be their best features as well as many ideas of his own into the first Napoleon gas barbecue.

Strapped for space in their stove and fireplace manufacturing plant on Napoleon Road already, Wolfgang and Ingrid purchased a run-down former warehouse that was sitting empty at 214 Bayview Drive in Barrie to produce barbecues. Following major renovations, a small team of 20 people moved into the 130,000 square foot facility. Wolfgang initially decided to subdivide the space and rent out parts, but within a year after commencing production of high-end barbecues, Napoleon was using the entire space already.







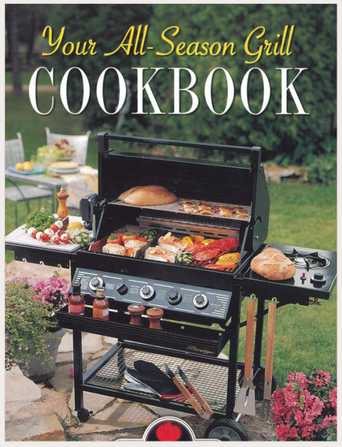


Still in 1995, both companies, Wolf Steel as the manufacturer of Napoleon stoves and fireplaces and the new Napoleon Appliance Corporation, achieved ISO certification and by 1997, staff numbers in both companies had reached close to 240, having almost doubled since the year before.

Throughout 1994 and early 1995, as they were establishing the foundations of NAC as a barbecue manufacturing company, Wolfgang, Steve Schwarz, and their team worked tirelessly on developing three prototypes to be shown to the public at the HPBA trade show in the spring of 1995. Full production of Napoleon barbecues began in the summer of that year with the goal of producing 1,000 units during the first year.

Determined to leave their mark in the barbecue market right away, Napoleon introduced a great number of models throughout the second half of the 1990s:

- BC50 and BC60 grills built in porcelainized steel construction with a roll-top lid and equipped with a stainless-steel infrared rear burner, 3 main tube burners and an optional side burner (1994/5)
- 308 series: a smaller, two-burner unit with folding shelves, a porcelain base and optional rear and side burners (1996)
- 450 series: grill with a sheet metal lid and a redesigned base to improve corrosion resistance and longevity (1997)
- President's Choice barbecue, the first of many private label/promotional units (1997)
- ULTRA CHEF series: introduced to the market with 315 and 405 models (1998)
- 308 and 450 series units certified for sale in Europe (1998)
- 308 model converted to a cast-aluminum tub to improve corrosion resistance and cost, as well as allowing for more design flexibility (1998)
- SS 308 and SS 450: more commercial looking units built entirely out of stainless steel (1998)
- Introduction of the large four-burner P600 model (1999)
- 360 and 540 models add new options to the ULTRA CHEF series (1999)
- Conversion of the 450 model to cast aluminum tub to improve corrosion resistance and to add more design flexibility (1999)



Opposite page left image: One of the many newly constructed high rise buildings where Napoleon gas fireplaces were installed. Opposite page right image: Laurie Hardy operating the Napoleon booth at the Home Show in Toronto in 1997. This page all images: Napoleon grill cookbooks and product brochures.



This page: Wolfgang at the Wolf Steel/Napoleon facility in Huadu, China. Opposite page: Ming Zhang in front of the Wolf Steel/Napoleon facility in Huadu, China.

In the early days of Napoleon as a barbecue manufacturer, when Wolfgang approached Napoleon fireplace dealers with the suggestion to sell Napoleon barbecues as well, the typical response he received from them was "Why are you going into barbecues? You are in the fireplace business!" Many of their established dealers did not take them seriously at first, and it took Wolfgang, Ingrid and the Napoleon team several years to fully develop the barbecue distribution side of the business. While their fireplace dealers remained skeptical, owners of retail stores specializing in barbecues recognized the outstanding quality of Napoleon grills right away. These specialty dealers enthusiastically took on Napoleon barbecues and promoted them in their stores.

To further broaden Napoleon's footprint in the barbecue market, Wolfgang wrote a cookbook, which Napoleon supplied with each barbecue unit sold. Napoleon later also developed their Continental Specialties accessories program which offers retailers and specialty shops a complete line of gas grill accessories, spices, cookbooks, and other items.

TRIP TO TAIWAN AND ESTABLISHING A COMPANY PRESENCE IN CHINA

In 1997, 10 years after their first trip to China and since beginning to import fireplace accessories from Taiwan, Wolfgang and Ingrid decided that the time was right for them to travel to Taiwan and explore further business opportunities there and in mainland China. Napoleon dealers had been telling them that it was becoming increasingly difficult to compete in the barbecue segment with mass merchants that were selling grills imported from Taiwan at significantly lower prices. When Napoleon had gotten into the manufacturing of barbecues in 1995, the North American market was still dominated by products manufactured in North America. By the end of the 1990s, however, the market began to change as a greater number of less-expensive barbecues were imported into North America from Taiwan and China.

After visiting several barbecue manufacturing plants in Asia, Wolfgang and Ingrid started importing stainless steel barbecues from Taiwan. To their surprise, every time they opened a container, the product was not what they had ordered. Wolfgang and Ingrid were learning the hard way that the Taiwanese manufacturer they were dealing with always changed things around without telling them, making use of whatever materials they had available for production. Dealing with these small Taiwanese manufacturers turned out to be a real nightmare, as there was no way to ensure that the product coming out of their factories was of consistent quality.

The second issue when working with Taiwanese manufacturers was that they were always looking for large volume orders. Wolfgang and Ingrid quickly realized that since everything in the Taiwanese and Chinese manufacturing marketplace went by volume, they needed to develop an alternative if they wanted their business to benefit from increased manufacturing capabilities in Asia long term.

To overcome the challenges they were experiencing, Wolfgang and Ingrid decided to establish their own factory in China. Back in Canada, the Schroeters met with Ming Zhang, a Chinese-born national who had lived in Canada and worked as an engineer in the automotive industry before moving back to China. After hiring Ming to lead their Chinese operations, Wolfgang and Ingrid established a Wholly Foreign Owned Enterprise (WFOE). Introduced by the Chinese Government as a form of business organization only a year earlier, WFOEs became the main tool for Western businesses like Napoleon to operate in China under their own name without having to rely on a Chinese company as a formal partner.

Napoleon started operations in China by renting space in Guangzhou and turning it into the company's local office. Ming, together with another employee he hired, began purchasing products and doing quality control at some of the suppliers Napoleon was dealing with in China. This practice continued for several years until Napoleon began manufacturing in China, in addition to their North American operations, in 2005.

A DIVERSIFIED MANUFACTURER OF STOVES, FIREPLACES AND GRILLS

As the 1990s drew to a close, Napoleon was a diversified manufacturer of stoves, fireplaces, and grills that thrived on innovation paired with the strength of its growing dealer network. The 1998 founding of Wolf Steel USA had staked the path for expanding the Napoleon brand beyond Canada while the company's bold move into the grill market gave the Schroeters and their team another avenue for sustained growth in the future.



BECOMING A NORTH AMERICAN LEADER
WITH INTERNATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

3

Once a popular choice, the BGD42 fireplace with its exclusive PHAZER log set and SAFE GUARD gas control system.







BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, 2001-2012

Building onto the innovative drive of the Schroeters and their team, Napoleon underwent significant further growth, expansion, and product diversification during the first decade of the 21st century. By 2006, following a multiple-step expansion plan, total company manufacturing space in North America had grown to over 500,000 square feet. With over 500 dedicated associates and a large dealer network, Napoleon had become the largest privately-owned hearth products and gas grill manufacturer in all of North America.
The exponential growth of the company since the beginning of the 21st century is illustrated by the grill division's doubling of sales in 2001 alone. New innovative product lines were added and existing ones further diversified. New product lines included waterfalls and waterfall/fireplace combinations, pellet stoves, HVAC products including the first gas furnace "proudly engineered in Canada for North American winters," as well as patio furniture. The opening of new manufacturing plants in Kentucky (2001) and China (2009), the establishment of various company offices in Europe (2009-2011), as well as the launch of a central warehouse for the European market in the Netherlands (2011) laid the foundations for Napoleon truly becoming a North American leader with international aspirations.

This page top image: Grand opening of the new Napoleon Retail Store on 24 Napoleon Road. This page middle image: Ribbon cutting for the new Napoleon Retail Store. L to R: Joe Tascona (MPP Simcoe Centre), Ingrid, Mayor Hughes (Oro Medonte), Aileen Carrol (MP Barrie), Wolfgang, Garfield Dunlop (MPP Simcoe North). This page bottom image: The plant, warehouse, and offices at 9 and 24 Napoleon Road. Opposite page: Fiberglow gas log set, designed to be installed into an existing wood-burning fireplace opening without the need for renovations.



PLANT EXPANSION AND OPENING OF THE NEW NAPOLEON SHOW ROOM

In 2000, as Napoleon had once again outgrown production space, the company bought a piece of land on what has since become 24 Napoleon Road across from their existing facility at 9 Napoleon Road. With room for further expansion, Wolfgang and Ingrid decided to create another 250,000 square feet of manufacturing and warehousing space in three stages: during the first stage, which was completed in 2001, 80,000 square feet of warehousing space plus 5,000 square feet of office space as well as the new Napoleon Retail Store and Showroom were added. During the second stage, completed in 2003, another 33,000 square feet of manufacturing and warehousing space were created. A further 80,000 square foot expansion (warehouse and manufacturing space) in 2005 marked the third stage, bringing the company's total space to close to 500,000 square feet at Napoleon's two Barrie locations.

After completing the first expansion stage in 2001, Napoleon's new 8,000 square foot showroom and retail store was launched with great success. Within the first month following its grand opening, the new store exceeded the number of sales the old store had achieved in an entire year.











Opposite page images: Napoleon's modern design fireplaces — The Tureen (top image), Torch (bottom left image), and Manhattan (bottom right image). This page left image: Pellet stove. This page right image: Starfire gas fireplace with waterfall.

LEADING THE INDUSTRY THROUGH NEW FIREPLACE DESIGNS

As a product-driven company that thrives on innovation, Napoleon continued to launch many new products in the hearth products category. The 2003 introduction of the ElectroGlow series marked Napoleon's first foray into the electric fireplace market. Napoleon's ingenuity on the design, engineering and product development side came through once more with the 2003 launch of the patented Manhattan, "the world's first and only" integrated gas and electric fireplace equipped with a switch to turn the heat on and off, allowing for year-round use.

The 2008 introduction of Napoleon's new Modern Line of direct vent gas fireplaces stood out through a series of fireplaces defined by innovative shapes and design features (2008). Driving a new trend, modern-style fireplaces like the Tureen and the Torch redefined the fireplace industry by changing industry and consumer perceptions of what constitutes a fireplace. The most unique among Napoleon's modern design fireplaces was the LHD50SS limited edition, which combined the company's distinctive linear design with a bed of precision-cut crystals made with SWAROVSKI ELEMENTS. Catering to the high-end customer, this one-of-a-kind fireplace drew on the combined strengths of Napoleon as a state-of-the-art fireplace manufacturer and Swarovski as a leading crystal cutter with more than 100 years of experience in the jewelry and crystal-cutting business.

PELLET STOVES

In 2006, Napoleon introduced pellet stoves. Wolfgang and his team had been very hesitant about getting into pellet-burning products at first. Not only are pellet stoves more complicated to produce and operate, but the pellet market, in comparison to other hearth products, was also a rather unstable market characterized by a lot of ups and downs.

When dealers kept pushing Napoleon to develop a pellet stove to meet consumer demand, it was determined to deliver a top-quality product. The outcome of these efforts was one of the best and quietest pellet stoves on the market. The Napoleon pellet stove was rated "Best Choice" by Consumer Reports, an independent not-for-profit organization that tests and rates thousands of products annually as part of its mission to advise consumers.

In 2008, Napoleon resurrected the Timberwolf brand, named after the original stove, that had marked the beginning of Wolf Steel as a hearth products manufacturer in the 1970s, for more traditionally looking yet highly efficient Economizer wood and pellet stoves and inserts.

WATERFALLS AND FIREPLACE-WATERFALL COMBINATIONS

Always looking for new ways of adding innovative products to Napoleon's product line-up, Wolfgang realized that waterfalls naturally complement fireplaces aesthetically when placed above a fireplace, and in a practical sense as a natural humidifier.
In 2006, Napoleon began offering waterfalls with a built-in water filtration system and an optional ultraviolet light for sterilizing the water and killing algae and bacteria.
Despite creating an innovative niche product that none of their direct competitors were offering, Napoleon's Waterfall Collection was eventually discontinued. It was just too small of a market segment and, with so many other opportunities for growth at hand, it made more sense to concentrate on their company's core business instead.



This page: Oasis outdoor kitchen. Opposite page: Gemini grill with double lid.



NEW GRILLS AND BARBECUE PRODUCTS LAUNCHED IN THE 2000s

On the barbecue side of the business, Napoleon developed and introduced to the market many new stainless-steel grill models in different configurations and with a host of new features. Following on the heels of the Prestige II series, the 2003 launch of the PF series gave consumers access to a grill made entirely from 304-high-grade stainless steel, equipped with internal lights, on-board power, infrared main and rear burners, as well as dual side burners, drawers and a cabinet. The U405 series that was introduced in 2003 as well consisted of a top and bottom cast clamshell unit, offered as a cart, pedestal and post-mount. 2005 saw the certification of both the 215 all-stainless steel portable grill for marine, camping, and condo applications and of the 405 series including natural gas versions in preparation of their launch into the European market.
In 2007, Napoleon introduced its highly popular Mirage series of grills in North America, followed by its launch into the European market a year later.

Among the many great individual grill models introduced to the market in the 2000s, the 2006 Gemini 750 stands out as a large five-burner grill with dual lids—one with infrared burners, the other one with conventional burners, plus side burners and a warming drawer. Due to its unique features, this unit was awarded the Vesta award at the HPBA Expo and named “Best Grill” at the SPOGA in Cologne, Germany, that same year.

In 2009, Napoleon launched the L485 series in both Europe and North America, followed by the PRO 450 and the PRO 600 with chrome trim and built-in lights a year later. The SE series (2011) and a new line of model 500 grills (2012) further added to the Napoleon line-up of grills, which further included a full-size charcoal unit, a smoker and an electric grill marketed as a “City Grill.”

OASIS MODULAR ISLANDS AND OUTDOOR LIVING SPACES

The growing trend among homeowners towards creating an outdoor living space in their backyards prompted Napoleon to design and manufacture modular outdoor cabinets and built-in grill heads that can be customized into outdoor kitchens, islands, and other outdoor living spaces such as bar tops, eating areas, and entertainment centres. In 2002, Napoleon began offering these versatile units that can be assembled in virtually any combination under the OASIS Modular Islands trademark and with the marketing slogan “Create an outdoor Oasis in your own backyard.” Combined with Napoleon’s extensive line of outdoor fireplaces and accessories, OASIS Modular Islands provide numerous possibilities for the design of fully customized outdoor living spaces.





This page top image: Christmas party with Kentucky staff in 2010. This page bottom image: The Wolf Steel/Napoleon plant in Kentucky. Opposite page top image: The Napoleon Logistics Centre in Montreal, Quebec. Opposite page bottom image: Ingrid and Wolfgang with Daniel Patry, owner of Maxiflamme, the Napoleon representative in Quebec, on the occasion of Daniel winning the annual sales award.

WOLF STEEL USA INC. AND THE OPENING OF A NAPOLEON MANUFACTURING PLANT IN CRITTENDEN, KENTUCKY

By 2000, Napoleon had made inroads into the U.S. market and was offering a complete product line-up through multiple warehouses and the distribution centre in Kentucky. To position themselves for more aggressive growth in the U.S. market, Wolfgang and Ingrid decided to establish a manufacturing plant south of the border. In 2000, Wolf Steel/Napoleon bought land in Crittenden, Kentucky for the purpose of building a factory that would service demand in the U.S. market. The plant was opened a year later, in 2001, with 40,000 square feet of manufacturing and warehousing space. Subsequent additions brought the combined manufacturing and warehousing facility to 200,000 square feet before manufacturing was ceased and the Kentucky location was converted into a logistics and distribution hub for products sold in the U.S. market.





QUEBEC WAREHOUSE

By 2002 the Province of Quebec was identified as another focus area for further expanding Napoleon's footprint. Napoleon had a presence in Quebec since the early 1980s and products intended for the Quebec market were being stored and distributed out of a public warehouse in Montreal. To build up operations throughout Quebec, Napoleon purchased the former consulate of the Czech Republic in Montreal to serve as the company's new Logistics and Training Centre for the Quebec market. Daniel Patry and his staff managed the facility and renovated the offices. They discovered three solidly built walk-in safes during the renovation. The new Logistics Centre, a 32,000 square foot office and warehouse complex right on Highway 40 (the Trans-Canada Highway), was opened in 2002.









THE NAPOLEON MANUFACTURING PLANT IN CHINA

In January 2005, Napoleon began manufacturing out of a rented 30,000 square foot manufacturing plant in Huadu, China. The setup of the production lines and the computer programs used in operating the machinery were, for the most part, identical with the ones in Barrie. Compatibility was important for Wolfgang because that way it would be possible to troubleshoot from Canada if problems occurred in the production process in China. To this day, even though the location of Napoleon's operations in China has changed, Napoleon's Canadian team works closely with their Chinese counterpart and there is a constant exchange of associates to ensure smooth operations and consistent high quality of products.

By 2008, after three years of manufacturing some Napoleon products in China, the company had outgrown its rented manufacturing space in Huadu. Since, except for China, Napoleon owned all their facilities outright, the Schroeters were determined to purchase an existing building or an industrial building lot as the new location for Napoleon's operations in China. They came across a property in an Economic Development Industrial Park in Guangzhou and bought it from the government. The well-organized park is occupied by many Western companies including Siemens, Thyssen and others. Napoleon purchased one of the smallest properties in the park and maximized the space with a four-storey building.

Like with their former rented production space in Huadu, Ming Zhang and his team set up the new Napoleon manufacturing plant in Guangzhou in a manner that is highly compatible with Napoleon's Barrie operations. To this day, Napoleon's plant in China manufactures competitively priced barbecues including portable grills that are sold mainly through mass merchants, electric fireplaces, as well as all kinds of small parts for fireplaces and barbecues that are highly labour-intensive. Furthermore, the Guangzhou plant serves an important function in the company's overall business structure by coordinating shipments from Napoleon's Asian suppliers and by assuring the delivery of consistently high-quality parts both from their own facility and from their suppliers.

The main benefit in manufacturing some models and accessories in China is that it increased Napoleon's overall production output without hurting manufacturing in the company's North American plants. Adding manufacturing capacity in China made Napoleon stronger overall, as it has allowed for additional growth at a global scale. Since the plant came online in 2008, it has been producing barbecues for Canadian Tire and other mass merchants, as well as for specialty dealers mainly in the European market. In 2011, Napoleon's Guangzhou plant received ISO 9000 certification, confirming that operations meet ISO standards relating to quality management systems.

This page image: The Napoleon plant in China after completion. Opposite page all images: Grand opening of the Napoleon plant in China.













ESTABLISHING A PRESENCE FOR GRILLS IN THE EUROPEAN MARKET

The European barbecue market is predominantly charcoal-based, although gas grills have become increasingly popular among grilling enthusiasts in Europe. Wolfgang and Ingrid noticed in the early 2000s that the European barbecue market was starting to change, and some retailers were excelling in selling gas grills in various countries across Western Europe. They saw a role for their company to drive this change in consumer preferences and decided to go full force into the European market. Napoleon opened company offices in England (2009), Austria (Fall of 2010), and the Netherlands (serving the Netherlands, Benelux, and Germany), opened in the spring of 2011), and purchased a warehouse in Utrecht, Netherlands. The expansion into the European market with Napoleon grills proved highly successful. Grilling is a real passion for many Europeans and there are many grill schools and grilling competitions all over Europe. Napoleon capitalized onthis exceptional opportunity and developed a very large market share in the mid-range to high-end barbecue market on the European continent.

While establishing Napoleon's early presence in Europe, the Schroeters worked with Heartland Europe B.V., a Netherlands-based distribution company co-owned by Michel Voragen and Fred Schalkwijk. The initial focus was on establishing Napoleon in Wolfgang and Ingrid's home country of Germany, as well as the Netherlands and the adjacent Benelux countries. In 2011, to support Michel, Fred, and Wolf Steel Europe (Napoleon's newly founded European division), in their growth and to accelerate sales in the European market, Napoleon purchased a warehouse in Utrecht, Netherlands. This move allowed Fred, Michel, and their company, now as agents, to focus on sales growth while looking after the inventory and managing the facility.

Opposite page top left image: The building that housed the Napoleon offices in England from 2010 until 2016. Opposite page bottom left image: Book signing of the Napoleon grill book by renowned Chef Andreas Rummel at SPOGA 2012. Opposite page top right image: SPOGA 2012. L to R: Jim McLean and his wife Donna, and Laurie Hardy. Opposite page centre right image: Fred Schalkwijk, General Manager Germany & Benelux. Opposite page right bottom image: Michel Voragen, General Manager Germany & Benelux.

This page image: L to R: Chris and Ingrid Schroeter at the 2012 SPOGA presenting a Napoleon grilling book together with Adi Matzek (two-times World Champion in grilling), and Rudolf Jaeger (publisher).



Wolfgang had first met Fred and Michel in 2004 while they were selling high-end kitchens and stoves throughout Europe through their own company. Teaming up with Napoleon was attractive to the business partners as it allowed them to make a splash in the emerging European gas grilling market. Already present at the same trade shows as Wolf Steel/Napoleon, Fred and Michel started tapping into a European dealer network growing increasingly enamored with the leading North American grill brands. When, in 2009, at the height of the great recession triggered by the bursting of the U.S. housing market bubble, Napoleon's big competitors struggled with supplying enough products to their European grill dealers, Fred and Michel saw their opportunity to fill the gap. They offered Napoleon products to those out of a supplier while prioritizing existing Napoleon dealers. This helped cultivate Napoleon in Europe as a company willing to work with dealers and helping them meet their needs. "That honesty and fairness did a lot to drive people to our brand," remarks Michel, who saw Napoleon's reputation grow year over year.

The Schroeters and Napoleon credit Fred and Michel with driving a lot of the company's growth in the grill category in their sales territory in Europe and, through their success, setting an example that attracted distributors from other parts of Europe, and eventually globally to Napoleon as well. From early on, Michel and Fred had a booth displaying Napoleon grills at the annual SPOGA trade show in Cologne, Germany. "We did not have much marketing money at the time," says Michel of these early days of Napoleon making a splash in the developing gas grill market in Europe. "That's when all the other distributors began coming to us at the tradeshow because they got a sense for how successful they could be in their own respective countries from seeing how successful Fred and Michel were in selling our grills in Germany," says Wolfgang. Napoleon leveraged these contacts made at SPOGA and kept adding a few new specialty dealers from different countries to the Napoleon network each year. "People saw us as the nice guys and a smaller player, but also as one that had the strength to grow," says Michel of Napoleon's reputation during these early days of expanding the company's international footprint.

ESTABLISHING A PRESENCE FOR NAPOLEON GRILLS IN AUSTRIA

The story of how Napoleon first got into Austria is different from that of Germany, Holland, and the Benelux countries. While visiting Austria during a tradeshow, Wolfgang decided to go to a Baumarkt, a hardware and building supplies store. There he noticed a man setting up a grill products display for a large Napoleon competitor. During the ensuing conversation Wolfgang asked the man whether he had ever heard of Napoleon and Napoleon grills. The man said he had not. Wolfgang left, but, on second thought, went back and continued the conversation by telling the man that he was looking for someone to sell Napoleon grills in Austria. It turned out the man's name was Heimo Irouschek and he was open to entertaining Wolfgang's idea. Following another meeting in Munich and a subsequent visit to the Napoleon plant in Barrie, Heimo joined the Napoleon family with the mandate to establish and grow the company's presence in Austria.

During Wolfgang's next visit to Austria, he and Heimo went from dealer to dealer, all of whom were almost exclusively carrying products of Napoleon's largest competitor. One by one, Heimo, who has since retired, switched them over and today, like in Germany, specialty grill retail stores in Austria carry Napoleon grills. "Heimo was instrumental in getting us into the stores and making Napoleon known in Austria," says Wolfgang.

ENGAGING THE CONSUMER—ADVERTISING AND MARKETING

From the earliest days of Wolf Steel/Napoleon, Ingrid looked after all the company's advertising, first by herself and later, together with one assistant. Throughout the 2000s, the marketing function grew to a substantially sized team managing all of Napoleon's advertising and marketing activities, from magazine advertising to radio, TV, cross-promotions, social media, and the internet.

Around the year 2000, after many years of exclusive advertising in Canadian trade and consumer magazines, the marketing team began promoting Napoleon products in popular North American home innovation and interior design magazines geared to end consumers. To that same end, Napoleon began experimenting with marketing products at a variety of non-traditional and non-hearth-products-specific trade shows to reach out to new audiences. In 2007, for instance, Napoleon exhibited at the Interior Design Show in Toronto for the very first time. Designers instantly fell in love with the modern Napoleon designs offered in a great variety of styles and colours.

Opposite page image: Napoleon ad using the popular "Art of Fire" theme. This page all images: Cross-marketing promotions by Napoleon with other well-known brands.









Cross-promotions were identified by Napoleon's advertising managers as another avenue for marketing company products in new and creative ways. Napoleon began working with prominent chefs and award-winning grill masters around the world to promote Napoleon grills through cookbooks and popular TV shows. Cross-promotions with beer and liquor retailers, meat and bread companies, spirit, wine and soda companies, as well as airlines further raised the profile of the Napoleon brand. The company's 2011 cross-promotion with Tim Hortons as part of the coffee retailer's hugely popular "Roll up the rim to win" contest stands out as Napoleon's biggest cross-marketing initiative, with the Napoleon logo printed on over 282 million coffee cups sold across Canada.

When the internet began changing the way consumers research products and make their purchasing decision, Napoleon became an early adaptor of web-based technology and social media platforms. Even though traditional ways of advertising and marketing continue to play a role in Napoleon's marketing strategy, it is these online channels that drive the company's interactions with consumers today.

THE WORLD'S LARGEST HAMBURGER

In the summer of 2010, crowds of onlookers were on hand in downtown Toronto to witness the creation of what could become the largest hamburger in the world. Weighing in at 590 pounds, after being garnished with 50 pounds of cheese, 20 pounds of onions, 12 pounds of pickles and 30 pounds of lettuce all on a single "monster bun" – this megalithic burger was almost triple the size of the previous world record holder. Napoleon had engineered a specially designed, hydraulic-enhanced, "Monster Grilling Machine" that was able to flip the burger midway through the cooking process. It had taken the company's engineers over 3 months to design and build this custom grill. Celebrity Chef Ted Reader had created the recipe and oversaw the cooking process for the record burger. At the time, it was officially titled "The largest commercially available Hamburger" by Guiness World Records.



This page: "The largest commercially available Hamburger," grilled on a Napoleon custom grill in downtown Toronto and recognized by Guiness World Records. Opposite page left image: Napoleon Hybrid 150 furnace. Opposite page right images: Advertisements promoting Napoleon furnaces.

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR BECOMING A MARKET LEADER IN THE HVAC MARKET

When looking at the total size of the market for fireplaces and barbecues and comparing it to that of the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) market, Wolfgang identified furnaces as an opportunity for further growth in the future. The HVAC market is a multi-billion-dollar market disproportionately bigger than the fireplace and barbecue markets combined.

Napoleon first entered the HVAC field in 2007/8 by partnering with OEM manufacturers that built an HVAC line for them to be marketed under the Napoleon name. Wolfgang chose a cautious approach at first by entering the HVAC market on the sales side only because Napoleon had to compete for market share with large and well-established heating companies.

After selling OEM-manufactured HVAC products for several years, Wolfgang felt that to be able to grow this part of the business long-term, Napoleon would have to design and manufacture their own product in-house. An opportunity presented itself when Olsen Manufacturing, an Ontario company located in the Woodstock area, was sold to an American corporation that decided to move the entire business, including production, to the U.S. When Wolfgang learned that Olsen engineer Mark Robinette was looking for a new job in Canada, he hired him to lead Napoleon's new HVAC division. The trend in the furnace industry was progressing towards high-efficiency units with a small Carbon footprint and Wolfgang was determined to develop a high-efficiency furnace that would outperform the competition.

"THE ONLY GAS FURNACE MADE IN CANADA – DESIGNED FOR NORTH AMERICAN WINTERS"

The outcome of extensive research and testing was the 2011 launch of a Napoleon-designed and Napoleon-manufactured gas furnace that incorporated many distinct elements typical of Napoleon product. The company's patented SureView burner system window is a unique feature that no other furnace manufacturer had ever incorporated. It allows homeowners to see the ignition taking place, watch the burners firing up, and observe the burning process in operation. When looking at the designs of their competitors' models, Wolfgang and his team realized that they could distinguish their furnace line even more through style and colour. Eager to bring some exciting features and a new look to a market that had been stagnant for a long time and consisted of only grey industrial-looking furnaces, Napoleon came out with a furnace line in modern and bright colours, including red and blue.

With a 95 percent efficiency rating on their one-stage 9500 model, 96 percent efficiency on their 9600 two-stage model, and 97 percent efficiency on their 9700 Ultimate unit, Napoleon offered the highest efficiency two-stage furnace on the market. This was a major achievement, particularly considering that the company had been in the HVAC market as a manufacturer of their own product for only about a year. The new furnace line-up's high-efficiency ratings also shaped Napoleon's marketing approach, as the Schroeters and the marketing team decided to promote the Napoleon furnace as "The only gas furnace made in Canada – designed for North American winters."





This page: Before the Hybrid HMF150 and HMF200, there was the HMF100—shown here in Wolfgang's garage. Opposite page: Wolfgang with the Napoleon Hybrid 200, the Best-in-Show and Best-in-Category Winner at the HPBA Expo 2012.



Whereas the 9500 series consists of a single-stage, multispeed furnace, Napoleon's two-stage 9600 series features a two-stage gas valve as well as an electronically commutated motor that reduces electrical consumption by up to 80 percent over conventional blower motors. While operating on low fire for greatest efficiency throughout most of the heating season, on colder days the furnace automatically switches to the second stage to satisfy increased heating demand. This balancing of heat production results in quieter operation cycles and less energy being consumed throughout the heating season. The 9700 Ultimate model features built-in lights to make maintenance easier for the technician.

The moment the unit is opened, the lights come on automatically. Furthermore, the 9700 Ultimate uses ultraviolet lights to kill bacteria in the air while the furnace is running. In this top model, Napoleon also offers a stainless-steel heat exchanger in comparison to aluminized heat exchangers in the other models, resulting in an extended warranty.

In 2011, Napoleon hired Bill Harris as sales manager to open up the HVAC market together with the company's existing sales force. As they ventured from the comparatively small fireplace and barbecue markets into the almost unlimited HVAC market, Wolfgang envisioned huge growth potential for Napoleon. The Schroeters were so confident in the long-term success of their ultra-efficient furnace line-up that when the series was officially launched on October 11, 2011, this new product presentation was accompanied by the announcement that Napoleon would expand and hire additional associates over the course of the next five years to accommodate the company's foreseen growth. As expected, the HVAC category has grown into a major market segment for Napoleon today. It has become a key arena for leading the industry through constant innovation and development of intelligent products that help reduce homeowners' carbon footprint, making Napoleon a front runner in the creation of environmentally sustainable products.

TRANSITIONING OF NAPOLEON | 4

The Napoleon Prestige Pro 665 gas grill.







RON MCARTHUR BECOMES THE FIRST NON-FAMILY PRESIDENT OF NAPOLEON

In September 2012, following a highly selective process, the Schroeters hired Ron McArthur as the first non-family president in the history of their company. This move was prompted by a combination of motives: as will be discussed in detail in chapter 5, the Schroeters jointly believed that having a seasoned senior executive as a mentor for Stephen and Chris would further accelerate the brothers' growth towards jointly taking on the overall leadership role in the second generation. Equally important, the Schroeters had great aspirations for the future, namely, to double the business in five years, and for Napoleon to become a truly global brand.

To achieve these ambitious goals, the Schroeters required a seasoned leader used to building and leading a larger professional leadership team and operating the size of company Napoleon intended to become. His background as a senior executive who had scaled companies in the food service and digital marketing industries to new heights gave Ron the kind of qualities and experiences that would enable him to help the Schroeters take Napoleon to the next level.

From the get-go, Ron sensed an authenticity from the Schroeters and a level of trust and loyalty from their associates that clearly set Napoleon apart. "There was this sense of family," says Ron, "and for me, the desire to grow was immediately there." Familiar with Napoleon barbecues and fireplaces, he admittedly knew little of the manufacturing world. To gain the level of understanding he felt he needed for his new role, Ron worked on the floor, learning how to build Napoleon barbecues, fireplaces and HVAC products for a period of time. "It was there that I felt the same essence of pride in being part of the Napoleon team," he notes.

Ron McArthur, President of Napoleon, September 2012 to December 2022.





TRANSITIONING AND SUSTAINED GROWTH

Throughout his ten years with the company, until he retired in December 2022, Ron McArthur took Napoleon through the process of doubling the size of the company, helped Chris and Stephen grow into second-generation company leaders, facilitated substantial changes in the leadership model and the company's many processes, and helped steer the ship through the difficult dynamics of a world-wide pandemic. He was followed by Mike Tzimas as the second non-family member president in the history of the company.

Throughout the 2010s and first half of the 2020s, Napoleon made massive strides in all three product categories—grills, hearth, and HVAC—to drive growth while meeting the changing needs of consumers and a world increasingly concerned with matters of environmental sustainability. In the grill category, Napoleon upgraded and refitted existing product lines like the Prestige and launched many new bestselling series, such as the Rogue, Freestyle, and Phantom



grills. On the HVAC side, Napoleon became heavily invested in high efficiency heating and cooling, including dual gas and electric systems, heat pumps, and air handlers. In the hearth category, Napoleon has come to champion electric fireplaces and embrace new linear designs. Across its entire suite of offerings, Napoleon used innovation to appeal to consumers looking for products that would stand out through their quality, performance, and unique designs.

Next to growth, transition has been the other guiding theme in the evolution of Napoleon since 2012. This includes the change of company leadership from Wolfgang and Ingrid to Chris and Stephen Schroeter, a process that was completed in August 2018 when the brothers became co-CEOs of the Napoleon Group. It further includes the transition of Napoleon from a Canadian into an internationally recognized brand with a strong presence and ever-growing market share in close to 60 countries around the world. An integral part of these transitions has been a substantial overhaul of Napoleon's professional structure and many of the company's processes to account for the much larger and substantially more complex organization Napoleon was becoming.

From Wolfgang and Ingrid overseeing everything, the structure has evolved to include a larger leadership team under a non-Schroeter family president, leading a group of vice presidents for specialized areas, ranging from research and development to human resources, marketing, and supply chain management. Despite appearing more corporate in structure and processes today than back in 2012, Napoleon has been able to maintain its entrepreneurial spirit and unique business culture based on family values, innovation, and teamwork.

Opposite page top image from L to R: Chris Schroeter, Stephen Schroeter, Kelly Morrison (Senior Manager, Corporate Affairs Executive Office), and Ron McArthur on Canada Day in 2015. Opposite page bottom image: Ron McArthur with Mike Tzimas who succeeded him as the second non-Schroeter family President of Napoleon in 2022. This page image: Tina Hitch (Vice President, Human Resources Dept.) and Ron McArthur celebrating Napoleon being named one of Canada's Best Managed Companies in 2014.

GROWING THE SALES TEAM AND DEVELOPING THE NAPOLEON SALES STRUCTURE

Tasked with doubling the total revenue of the company in five years, Ron McArthur instantly began applying his decades of experience in sales and marketing to grow sales. “Ron was very strong in administering sales,” reflects Stephen Schroeter. “That became a key part in our evolution at this company and in our growth journey.”

The fact that Napoleon had great products, and a track record of innovation enabled Ron to employ a straightforward approach to addressing his growth mandate. “We just needed to get the right products into the right markets to make happy customers,” he says. To build a larger sales team, Napoleon targeted senior sales leaders to join the company to drive sales in all three divisions.

From new senior sales leaders to those going out and establishing contact with new customers, Napoleon made a concerted effort to overhaul and substantially grow its sales force during the early years of Ron’s tenure. Growth of the sales team went hand in hand with the reorganization of Napoleon’s sales structure, including a new incentive program that rewarded new account growth.

DRIVING GROWTH THROUGH PRODUCT INNOVATION

For Napoleon, as a product-driven company thriving on innovation, continuing to bring exciting new products to market was key to the success of the company’s growth philosophy. Since 2012/13, Napoleon has launched many new products while, at the same time, continuously upgrading existing products in all three main product categories.



The Schroeters and the Napoleon family celebrating the achievement of doubling the size of the company.



Drivers of innovation and growth in the grill category — shown on this page: The Napoleon Rogue grill in black finish. Opposite page: The Rogue in stainless steel, the Freestyle in graphite grey, and the Prestige in the matte black Phantom finish.

EVOLUTION OF THE GRILL PRODUCTS CATEGORY

THE ROGUE AND FREESTYLE SERIES GRILLS TAKE THE MARKET BY STORM

Building onto the great success of Napoleon's earlier grills, such as the Gemini, Mirage, and Prestige series, the launch of the Rogue line of grills in 2016, and subsequently of the Freestyle in 2021, took gas grill sales to new levels. Whereas the Rogue was designed as a medium level grill, the entry-level Freestyle caters to the first-time gas grill buyer. The addition of the Rogue and Freestyle series meant that the company had a full line up of Napoleon-designed and built grills catering to all kinds of consumers, from entry level to high end. Both the entry and mid-range markets provided lots of opportunities for growth on which Napoleon keeps capitalizing to this day.

NAPOLEON GETS DARK WITH THEIR MATTE BLACK PHANTOM GRILL DESIGN

The launch of the Phantom grill in April 2021 marked another important milestone in the evolution of the Napoleon line-up of grills. Its unique matte black design made it an instant success with consumers. The initial idea for adding a matte black finish came from Stephen Schroeter who liked the look it created on cars. "In recent years, we have seen matte black supercars, high-end appliances and posh wristwatches hit the market," Stephen said at the time. "Napoleon grills are renowned for combining form, function, and luxury, and with a matte black finish, they now boast a stylish and classy new look."

When originally launched, the Phantom series consisted of a limited run of Napoleon's Prestige 500, Rogue SE425 and TravelQ PRO grills painted in the luxe matte black finish. These original Phantom designed grills did so well that, in 2021, Napoleon came out with another Phantom line, the Phantom Rogue series. Upon realizing that matte black was turning into a longer-term trend among consumers, Napoleon subsequently began offering Phantom versions of their other grill models as well. "We went from the Phantom 500 to Phantom everything," says Stephen. "I did not think that it would sell that much, but our matte black Phantom finish continues to be a highly popular design to this day." Napoleon was first to market with this new design and their matte black finish has since been copied by several competitors.





THE FIRST FULL-SIZE ELECTRIC GRILL THAT WORKS LIKE A GAS GRILL

On April 22, 2022—Earth Day—Napoleon announced the forthcoming launch of the Napoleon Rogue EQ Connected electric grill series as the first line of full-size outdoor electric grills with IoT technology designed and manufactured by Napoleon. “Coming Soon—A Napoleon Electric Grill,” the message said when it was announced on the Napoleon website. The Schroeters’ vision was for the development of an electric grill that heats up just as fast and to the same temperature and delivers at the same performance metrics as a gas grill of equivalent size.

The announcement marked Napoleon’s first foray into a market with huge growth potential that is driven by consumers looking for environmentally sustainable products in the face of climate change and the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. “Napoleon is changing the conversation around electric grilling,” said Stephen Schroeter at the time of the announcement. He described Napoleon’s move into the evolving electric grill market as being “about giving consumers more choices when it comes to making sustainable decisions,” and called this product launch “a preview of what’s to come.”

The date of the announcement was highly deliberate. Stephen and Chris chose Earth Day to show that Napoleon was serious about sustainability. Together with other programs that are discussed in detail further below, this campaign started Napoleon’s ongoing sustainability initiative. “It gave us a chance to talk about sustainability and what we intended to do to become more sustainable,” says Napoleon’s VP of Marketing, Garry Scott. The company’s Earth Day message had 200 million impressions around the world and hit a nerve with consumers. When Napoleon took it to trade shows that same year, it was met with great interest from both dealers and consumers who wanted to learn more about it.

At the time of the announcement, the Schroeters expected that their new electric grills would be available for distribution to Napoleon dealers by the end of 2022. As it turned out, it would take another three



years before they could get this innovative product onto the market as both product development and testing took significantly longer than expected.

Designed to be a real disruptor, the grill operates on 220 Volt, the electric current used in Europe. To enable the intended level of performance on the North American 110 Volt system, it requires an additional power line like a dryer. This unprecedented design of the grill meant that the CSA Group in Toronto that was tasked with testing it for certification had to write the standard for 220 Volt electric grills while taking the grill through the testing process. Furthermore, Napoleon required testing and certification for three markets—Canada, the U.S., and Europe—all of which applied their own safety standards to the new product certification process. “It took so long because this was something brand new,” says Wolfgang. “Nobody had ever done a 220-volt system electric grill like that, and no one had ever tested it for all three markets.”

After completing all required tests, the grill was distributed to dealers in early 2025, backing the company’s sustainability message and commitment, and proving once again, how at age 50, Napoleon continues to be a disruptor through innovation.

COMPLETE REDESIGN AND RELAUNCH OF THE BEST-SELLING PRESTIGE LINE OF GRILLS

In 2021, Napoleon began redesigning their hugely successful top-of-the line grill, the Prestige and Prestige Pro. After many years on the market, it was time to take the existing design to the next level. Chris and Stephen had witnessed individual competitors experiencing a dip in sales after launching an updated version of an existing bestselling product. The brothers knew they had to get it right the first time and develop an upgraded product that would instantly appeal to consumers.

Opposite page: The Napoleon Rogue EQ Connected electric grill, further reinforcing Napoleon’s growth as a leader in innovative, unique, and environmentally sustainable products. This page: The Napoleon Home Mobile App, providing users with Wi-Fi & bluetooth connectivity for remote temperature monitoring, cook assist, and fuel tank monitoring while grilling on their Napoleon Connected grill.

Napoleon launched the upgraded remake of the Prestige line of grills in 2024, followed by the introduction of the new Prestige Pro in 2025. The new Prestige works as what Napoleon describes as a connected grill. Equipped with Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connectivity, it connects via a Napoleon app to the user's phone for remote temperature and gas monitoring and other app-enabled features. The Prestige was also made available without a Bluetooth connection.



To help them with the product design, Napoleon brought in IDEO, a world-renowned product design and innovation firm that works with leading brands. Hiring IDEO marked the first time that Napoleon invited an outside agency to contribute to the design of a Napoleon product. In the past, all Napoleon products had been designed exclusively in-house by Wolfgang and Napoleon's R&D teams.

Working with IDEO provided Napoleon with a sophisticated process for collaboratively developing ideas, testing how consumers would respond to them, and implementing this market feedback right into the design and product development. "They talked to consumers and dealers, went to see colour palettes trending in the market, and hit price points before we collaborated on the design," says Chris. Throughout the design process of the new grills, there was a lot of back and forth between IDEO and the Napoleon R&D team as Napoleon made sure to put its own touch on the design. "It was about 50/50 between our team and theirs," adds Chris.

The Schroeters are quick to emphasize that while being a first, working with IDEO on the redesign of the Prestige series of grills does not take away from the centrality of the Napoleon in-house R&D team. "Our R&D team works on so many different products at the same time that taking the design of a completely new grill out of the department and giving it to an outside design agency solely tasked with designing that particular product just made a lot of sense to us," says Wolfgang. "It's a faster way to market and it challenges our design teams, too," adds Chris.

Involving IDEO on the design side of the new Prestige grills follows the larger theme of transitioning Napoleon into a larger company with corresponding processes. "Using an external firm shows how Napoleon was growing up and entering a new phase characterized by the need to rapidly design and redesign products that instantly appeal to consumers. Working with IDEO put some science behind the redesign process to make sure that we get it right the first time," says Garry Scott. "12 or 15 years ago we would not have hired IDEO, but today, as the company keeps evolving, we see more opportunities to take advantage of companies like that," adds Stephen.





CHARCOAL GRILLS

In the charcoal grill category, Napoleon took their existing product and reengineered all the mechanisms. This was done to make the charcoal grills more airtight and easier to control. Other redesigned features were aimed at making them better looking and more easily recognizable as a distinct Napoleon product. While gas grills account for most barbecue sales, charcoal remains an important market segment with lots of potential for growth in various markets where Napoleon has a presence.



Opposite page: The redesigned Napoleon Prestige grill series in stainless steel and matte black Phantom finishes. This page top image: Napoleon Pro 605 charcoal grill. This page bottom image: Napoleon Pro 18 charcoal grill.













OUTDOOR ROOMS WITH BUILT-IN BARBECUES

In addition to standalone grills, outdoor rooms with built-in barbecues, a mainstay in the Napoleon product line-up since the 2000s, have become even more popular. To serve this greatly expanded market, Napoleon came out with a range of new models, including the 700 series.

GRILL ACCESSORIES

The company's strong presence in the European market has been the main driver for a massive expansion of the range of grill accessories offered by Napoleon to grill enthusiasts around the world. "Our grill accessories sold very well in Europe, making up about 30 percent of our total sales there," says Stephen of the decision by the Schroeters to keep investing in this product line. The reason why accessories are so much more popular in Europe is that European grill enthusiasts tend to experiment more with different grilling methods.

The size of the typical wall display of Napoleon grill accessories at Napoleon dealers was four feet whereas their main competitor offered significantly more choice to consumers, covering ten times as much wall space. "We made a real effort to expand our line so that we could also have 40 feet of display space," says Wolfgang. Today, the Napoleon list of accessories consists of over 480 different products, offering grill enthusiasts a huge selection for preparing their food the way they want it.

This and opposite page images: Napoleon grill accessories providing grill enthusiasts with virtually endless options to perfect their grilling based on their personal preferences.



This page: Napoleon Tall Vector Linear 74 gas fireplace with Luminous Logs. Opposite page: Napoleon Elevation electric fireplace used as a living room (left image) and kitchen application (right image).

EVOLUTION OF THE HEARTH PRODUCTS CATEGORY

Like the hugely popular Napoleon grills, the fireplace products segment has undergone significant changes as well. This change has been mainly driven by the growing popularity of electric fireplaces and the trend towards larger linear design fireplaces, both in their gas and electric versions.

ELECTRIC FIREPLACES

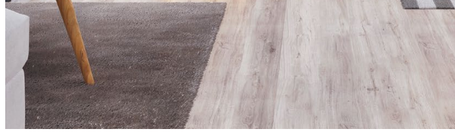
As noted in chapter 3, the launch of the ElectroGlow in 2003 had marked Napoleon's first step into offering electric products in the fireplace segment. It was not until a decade later, however, that Napoleon identified this product category as a major area for sustained growth.

Around 2012, the Schroeters made a concerted effort to establish Napoleon as a manufacturer of high-end, broadly appealing electric fireplaces at a time when only very few companies were serving this market segment. Napoleon invested in a research lab and hired specialized technicians to help develop the kind of innovative high-end product the Schroeters envisioned for both environmentally conscientious consumers and owners of condominiums who were limited in the kind of fireplaces they could install by building regulations and condo rules.

LINEAR DESIGN FIREPLACES

Napoleon developed new linear design fireplaces, both gas and electric, in response to growing market demand. The most notable change in design is that linear fireplaces have grown substantially in size, having gotten both longer and taller. Wolfgang had noticed this trend early on and, as on so many other occasions, became the driver behind Napoleon's move towards these larger designs. He remembers being laughed at by builders when he told them in the early 2010s that instead of the small 32-inch boxes which they were installing at the time, they would equip their new builds with larger fireplaces for $10,000 and more in the near future as that was where he predicted the market was going. "They told me that was impossible," he says. "Today, those same builders install Napoleon fireplaces for $15,000 and there are competitors of ours that sell custom fireplaces for $50,000 and more. Nobody would have thought that 10 years ago. That's how much the fireplace market has changed."











NAPOLEON DISCONTINUES THE PRODUCTION OF WOOD-BURNING STOVES

In 2024, Napoleon discontinued the manufacturing of wood-burning stoves. There is a symbolic dimension to this decision as it was with a wood stove that the Wolf Steel and Napoleon success story had begun five decades earlier. Napoleon did very well with wood stoves until ever more stringent regulations and testing methods turned wood stoves into a dying market. Like many other stove manufacturers, Napoleon terminated the entire product line as it had simply become too expensive and troublesome to have a wood stove certified under the new regulations and testing criteria. “Instead of continuing with this dying business, we wanted to focus our efforts on developing products that allowed us to continue to lead, such as heat pumps, because that is the future,” says Wolfgang with conviction. Yet, a sense of nostalgia becomes instantly palpable as he recounts the countless hours spent over the weekends tweaking and testing the first wood stove to create the look, quality and performance that gave Napoleon its start five decades ago.

The willingness and proven ability of the Schroeters to discontinue entire product lines and replace them with an ever-growing focus on products that place sustainability in the centre of new product development, speaks to the adaptability of Napoleon as a market leader determined to grow in an ever-changing market environment.

Opposite page top image: Astound FlexMount—A connected electric fireplace featuring unique spark technology and offering ultimate installation flexibility: wall-mounted, partially recessed, or fully recessed (1-, 2-, or 3-sided). Opposite page centre image: Lumi by Napoleon—An electric fireplace made for the mass channel featuring unique side backlighting that adds a cozy, ambient glow to any space. Opposite page bottom image: Luxuria—a fireplace featuring a wealth of premium features like Napoleon's patented heat management, safe to touch Glass Guard System, allowing it to be truly versatile for any home. This page image: High Country 5000—A wood-burning fireplace with expansive views, a powerful air wash system to keep the glass clean, and advanced technology built to last for generations.











FROM FURNACES TO AIR CONDITIONERS TO HEAT PUMPS AND HYDRONIC AIR HANDLERS—EVOLUTION OF THE NAPOLEON HVAC DIVISION

On the HVAC side, the Napoleon line-up evolved substantially to give consumers more choices for heating and cooling their house. The HVAC division has grown exponentially since the launch of the first high efficiency gas furnace manufactured by Napoleon in 2011. Over time, Napoleon expanded their HVAC offerings by adding air conditioners and heat pumps. The company's innovative hybrid heating and cooling systems consist of a gas furnace and a heat pump working together for much higher overall efficiency while catering to a wide range of home comfort needs throughout the year. In 2024, Napoleon further added high speed hydronic air handling units with or without high velocity to their growing line-up of innovative HVAC products.

Demand for new Napoleon products in the HVAC category was originally driven by dealers looking for a more integrated heating and cooling solution for their customers. When purchasing a furnace, consumers were typically looking for a package consisting of a furnace and a matching air conditioning unit. "We did not want to get into air conditioners at first," says Wolfgang, "but we were kind of forced into it by our dealers coming to us and telling us that if you sell a furnace, you also need to sell an air conditioner."

The launch of the Napoleon condo pack as a high efficiency, self-contained heating and cooling unit for high- and low-rise apartment buildings marked the next milestone in Napoleon establishing a larger presence in the HVAC market.

Heat pumps, both on their own and when integrated into Napoleon's industry-leading hybrid systems, are superior to other heating options due to their exceptional efficiency, as Wolfgang explains: "The efficiency of a heat pump is up to 500 percent more than that of a furnace with the average being 300 to 400 percent more," he says. The first generation of heat pumps in the industry were ground source whereas today, the market has changed to air source heat pumps, which are superior on the performance side and considerably less expensive to install.

In July 2024, to be able to offer Napoleon consumers the benefits of high-speed hydronic air handling units for regulating heat and air distribution throughout their house, Napoleon completed the acquisition of the required assets to produce the Ecosmart line-up of products from NV Ecovision Sales Inc. (Ecovision), a company in Woodbridge, Ontario. This strategic investment brought together the combined knowledge and technological expertise of both companies in hydronic air handlers under the Napoleon brand. The integration of Ecovision's Ecosmart offerings into Napoleon's portfolio further broadened Napoleon's HVAC portfolio, allowing them to offer a complete range of high- and low-velocity hydronic air handlers, including ducting, dampers, and controls, to Napoleon dealers.

This first-ever acquisition of another company in the history of Napoleon constituted a significant stepping-stone in Napoleon's continued success as a provider of sustainable, high-quality heating and cooling solutions that lead the industry in efficiency and performance.

Opposite page: Marking a milestone in Napoleon's journey towards being a leader in sustainable products. Top and bottom left image: The Schroeters celebrating the first production of the Ecosmart airhandler at the Napoleon plant with Luigi Pulice and the Napoleon team. This page and opposite page centre right and bottom right image: The Napoleon HVAC lineup in 2024.







GROWING THE NAPOLEON BRAND AND SALES IN CANADA

Building onto the popularity of Napoleon products among dealers and consumers in Canada, the Napoleon brand became more well known to consumers across Canada when the company began selling their grills through big box retail stores, in addition to their many specialty dealers. Mass advertising of Napoleon grills through leading big box stores—first Canadian Tire, then The Home Depot, Rona, and eventually Lowes—helped get the Napoleon name out to an ever-growing number of consumers and resulted in sales growth. From the early days of working with multi-location retailers, Napoleon built a strong reputation for responding to their needs quickly and for supplying them with the right products at the right price for their market. Napoleon was able to subsequently capitalize on this new level of sales and brand awareness in Canada when further evolving the brand across North America.

GROWING THE NAPOLEON BRAND INTERNATIONALLY

In Europe, Napoleon continued to drive international growth by expanding its footprint into new countries while continuously adding to its infrastructure on the continent. Napoleon was highly successful in capitalizing on the company's earlier presence and growing strength in Europe. Fred Schalkwijk and Michel Voragen, together with a growing team of Napoleon associates, kept strengthening Napoleon's presence in the European market from Holland and Germany by further selling into Belgium, Spain, and Portugal. For a host of other European countries, ranging from Italy and Greece, to Denmark, Finland and Norway, to Poland and the Ukraine, Napoleon established relationships with individual distributors who sell to dealers in these and many other European countries.

This page: HVAC products on display at The Canadian Mechanical & Plumbing Exposition (CMPX) in Toronto. Opposite page top image: The Schroeters with the EU team at Spoga in 2016. Opposite page centre left image: EU dealers visiting Barrie in 2019. Opposite page bottom left image: Napoleon grills and accessories at a retailer in Helsinki, Finland. Opposite page bottom right image: 2023 Distributor Meeting.

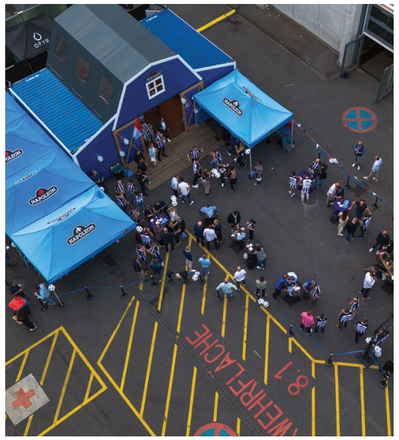




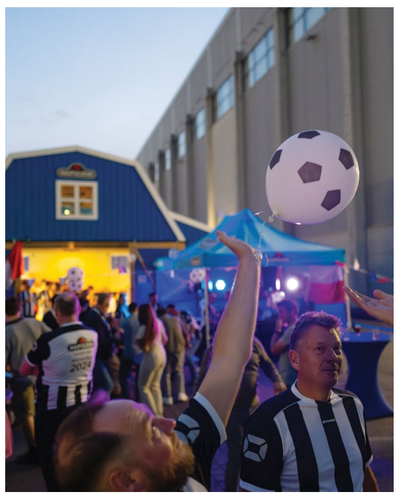












Napoleon exhibiting at SPOGA in 2020 (centre right image) and 2024 (all other images).







The role of the late Jim McLean in leading Napoleon's growth in the grill category in Europe cannot be overemphasized. After joining the Napoleon head office team in Canada on June 1, 2010, as Vice President of Sales, Grills Division, he oversaw Napoleon's growth efforts for grills in Canada, the U.S., and Europe. In this role, Jim personally visited many distributors and dealers in Europe interested in carrying Napoleon products to determine whether they were the right fit for joining the growing Napoleon network. "Jim was always encouraging and wanted to hear people's thoughts," recalls Michel, "but he also always wanted to find things out for himself." His business acumen, coupled with his years of global sales experience and his outgoing personality made Jim "a wonderful liaison for Napoleon's understanding of the European market," as Fred says. "He brought a European mindset back to the team in Canada, helping to make it all work."

This page top image: 2017 International Distributors Meeting. This page bottom image: 2017 Grill Tour in Austria. Opposite page top image: Jim Mclean with Ingrid, Wolfgang and the EU team. Opposite page middle image: Jim McLean with customers. Opposite page bottom left left image: Jim McLean and Stephen Schroeter. Opposite page bottom middle image: Jim McLean with Fred Schalkwijk. Opposite page bottom right image: Jim McLean with Ingrid (left) and Napoleon's Events Coordinator Melissa Graves (middle) at a photo booth during a sales award ceremony.









REMEMBERING JIM MCLEAN

Through his almost six years with the company, from June 2010 until his untimely passing in March 2016, Jim McLean played an instrumental role in bringing the Napoleon name to the forefront in Canada, the U.S., and Europe. A testament to his personality and passion for growing the Napoleon brand and presence, he established very close relationships with Napoleon dealers and distributors around the globe. "He ate, slept, and breathed that special Napoleon passion," says Ron McArthur. Jim's unexpected passing in March 2016 came as a great shock to the entire Napoleon family. One of the boardrooms at the Napoleon head office in Barrie is named the Jim McLean Board Room in his honour and in recognition of his legacy at Napoleon.

















This and opposite page images: Napoleon grill events with Chef Andreas Rummel and Chef Adi Malzek in Germany and Austria, 2016 and 2017.

By 2013, Napoleon's European sales had surpassed the company's readily available supply of inventory on the continent. To meet the needs of a growing market and to sustain further growth in the future, Napoleon purchased a warehouse in the city of Geldermalsen, about 40 kilometers north of Utrecht, in Holland. The design and quality of Napoleon grills and the Canadian origin of the Napoleon brand were at the heart of the growing popularity of Napoleon in Europe. On the product side, the introduction of the Rogue and Lifestyle series of grills hit the nerve of European consumers. Their smaller design and lower price in comparison to the larger North American grills Napoleon had introduced in Europe at first were more in line with what Europeans wanted from their grill. At the same time, the higher-end Prestige grills connected particularly well with grill enthusiasts in countries like Germany and Austria, where consumers show a special pride of ownership in their high-end Napoleon grills. "Customers always appreciated how nice our products looked and their high build quality," notes Michel, "and it certainly helped that the grills bore the Canadian flag."

Napoleon capitalized on a steady presence at barbecuing competitions across the continent to carve out its ever-growing piece of the competitive European market. "A big part of our great success in Europe was that we supported the World, European, and many national and local BBQ championships and all the professional grillers used our products as well," says Wolfgang, "That increased our brand recognition in Europe exponentially."

Napoleon outgrew their warehousing space again and this prompted the purchase of land in Tiel in the Netherlands for the building of a new state-of-the-art distribution centre to continue servicing Napoleon's growing European business. In September 2019, Napoleon broke ground on the over 215,000 square foot warehouse in Tiel that was opened in 2021. Having a centralized distribution centre helped solve the logistical challenge of products previously being held in three different locations.





Corresponding with Napoleon's steady growth, targeted marketing efforts in Europe increased as well to reach an ever-larger audience. In August 2019, Napoleon launched a partnership with FC Utrecht, a soccer team playing in the Dutch premier league, giving the brand access to a television audience in the millions. At the start of a game, the game ball was presented on a Napoleon grill placed in the centre of the field and during the games the Napoleon brand was displayed on the LED screens and permanent boards surrounding the stadium.

Today, Napoleon is fully established as a leader for gas grills in Europe with Napoleon products available in 22 of the 27 member states of the European Union, as well as other European nations. From a logistics perspective, the location of the Napoleon Distribution Centre in Tiel to the east of Rotterdam, Europe's busiest port, provides the company with easy access to the European market. Moving forward, Napoleon expects to further solidify their footprint in the European grilling market and continue to grow the Napoleon brand as part of the ongoing transition of the company into a truly global brand.

GROWING THE U.S. MARKET

Close geographical proximity from Canada combined with the size of the American consumer market made the U.S. a natural choice for Napoleon to grow into. Since the early 2000s, the Crittenden, Kentucky-based Napoleon manufacturing plant and warehouse served the U.S. market with products appealing to the American consumer. It was not, however, until the adoption of their 2012 exponential growth strategy that the Schroeters and the leadership team began looking at the U.S. as a country and market for targeted strategic growth.

The main challenge for Napoleon when entering the U.S. market more seriously was that the hearth and grill space south of the border was dominated by a litany of established big brands. Whereas in Europe the Napoleon team grew the brand while converting dealers, distributers, and consumers traditionally favouring charcoal to the benefits of grilling on gas barbecues,



in the U.S. Napoleon had to compete in an already saturated market where the Napoleon name was but a mere blip on the radar from a brand recognition perspective. With limited brand recognition, the Napoleon name just faded behind the industry's big players.

Today, after a decade of concerted effort to evolve Napoleon into a recognized brand of choice in the U.S., over half of total American consumers are familiar with the Napoleon name and its products. "Today, every competitor talks about us in their board meetings," says Kimberly Stuteville, Napoleon's Vice-President of U.S. Sales. Napoleon has made an impact in the U.S., turning it into a serious contender for further growth of market share in the world's single-largest consumer market.

The company's sustained growth in the U.S. market started with the addition of John Czerwonka as Napoleon VP of Sales–Hearth U.S. in 2013. He served in this role until his retirement in 2019, and, as of today, Kimberly Stuteville is leading the sales team in the U.S.



Opposite page top image: The Napoleon Europe Logistics Centre in Tiel, Netherlands, after completion. Opposite page bottom image: Chris Schroeter breaking ground for the new European Logistics Centre in September 2019. This page all images: Napoleon's partnership with Dutch Premier League soccer team FC Utrecht.







The U.S. sales team began developing new and leveraging existing relationships, getting Napoleon grills and fireplaces into dealer showrooms one by one. This was no easy task as the price of a Napoleon grill was considerably higher than the average price of $291 for a grill sold in the U.S. in 2013. By and large, U.S. consumers were willing to sacrifice quality for price and, given a choice, tended to go with a brand they already knew. Against this background, Napoleon faced an uphill battle in navigating the U.S. market at first.

To increase brand awareness across the U.S., Napoleon started working with HY Connect, a media and advertising company based in Madison, Wisconsin, in 2014. Realizing that fewer than 10 percent of Americans knew the Napoleon brand, HY Connect encouraged the Schroeters to connect with U.S. consumers by means of a national advertising campaign, including commercials on national television broadcasts.

A year later, in 2015, Napoleon grills made their appearance on TV screens in American homes. The producers employed humor to capture the audience's attention with a lead commercial conveying that Napoleon grills had enough functions and gadgets to entice people to covertly use their neighbour's grill at night.

The results of Napoleon's first TV ad campaign were compelling as there was an almost immediate uptick in U.S. sales across various dealer networks. Yet, it still took some time for the Napoleon name to stick.

The Napoleon U.S. sales team approached home improvement giant Lowe's in 2016, hoping to strike a contract with the third-largest grill retailer in the U.S. The Napoleon team in Canada had made the plunge into Canadian Tire and Home Depot to bring Napoleon grills to more consumers in the Canadian market. The instant success of Napoleon grills in the big box retail space in Canada had led to Napoleon being recognized by Canadian Tire as Vendor of the Year in 2015. This boded well for the U.S., where most consumers purchase goods online and at big box retail stores. Although the team did a great job with their presentation, Napoleon was not enough of a brand name in the U.S. yet, and the initial pitch was not successful.

That same year, Napoleon expanded operations in Crittenden, Kentucky by adding a new warehouse and manufacturing space. The expansion grew the combined facility to over 180,000 square feet and created 30 new jobs. If Napoleon manufactured more products in the U.S. the thinking went, the Napoleon brand could have additional appeal to consumers preferring to buy "Made in the U.S.A." products. At the same time, the new warehouse would enable Napoleon to get products to consumers across the U.S. market faster. Following the grand opening, Napoleon started manufacturing the Prestige line of grills in the new Crittenden plant.

In 2018, just two years after failing to win Lowe's over, the U.S. sales team secured a contract with the retail giant for three skews of grills in up to 500 U.S. locations. Seeing that Napoleon products, namely the Prestige and Rogue series grills, resonated with U.S. consumers prompted Lowe's to give Napoleon the floor space they needed to reach new heights in the U.S. market.

To build upon the strength of Lowe's orders and those of their other dealers, the Napoleon team realized they needed to drastically scale up their U.S. distribution to be able to reach American grill enthusiasts from coast to coast. "We turned to some long-term dealer relationships," says Kimberly, "and they helped us explode in the U.S. market." Before long, ACE Hardware and other national retailers joined an ever-growing list of independents in taking on what was becoming known around the country as grills that stood out through their quality, reliability and great design. Distribution in the U.S. contributed to Napoleon's high growth rates year over year.

The growth that Napoleon experienced in the U.S. kept perpetuating the need for more distribution avenues to supply dealers across the country. In 2024, to further grow their distribution capacity, Napoleon ceased manufacturing at the Kentucky facility and switched it over to operate as a full-time distribution warehouse and logistics hub. That change allowed Napoleon to get products to market faster and serve customers better through greater storage and faster fulfilment.

Today, Napoleon's assets in the world's largest consumer market consist of a strong brand, an extensive and growing dealer network, as well as proper distribution facilities and processes for getting Napoleon products into stores across the entire country. Likewise, years of focused investment into building brand awareness in the U.S. has created impressive results.

Opposite page top image: North American sales meeting 2024. Opposite page centre image: Kimberly Stuteville, Napoleon's Vice President of U.S. Sales. Opposite page bottom image: John Czerwonka, Napoleon's former Vice president of Sales Hearth U.S. This page: Scene from one of several Napoleon TV commercials.





This page top image: 2016 Grand opening of the Wolf Steel U.S.A. warehouse in Kentucky following expansion. This page centre and bottom images: Kentucky warehouse expansion. Opposite page images: Napoleon displays at trade shows in the U.S.





The expectation of continuous growth in the U.S. extends beyond grills. Committed to offering Napoleon's full suite of hearth products to American consumers, the Schroeter family tasked the U.S. sales team with leveraging existing relationships into a similar success story for fireplaces as the one created for grills. Since then, she and her team have focused on servicing the construction channels as the decision to purchase a fireplace is typically made at the construction stage of a new house or apartment building. HVAC, too, presents bold and captivating opportunities for ensuring sustained success in another developing category in the future. There is no doubt for the Schroeters and the leadership team that, with strong foundations in place already, Napoleon will continue to experience steady growth across all product categories in the U.S. in the future.



EVOLUTION OF THE NAPOLEON ORGANIZATIONAL AND LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

Having a non-Schroeter family president, a new setup that started with Ron McArthur in 2012 and carries on today through Mike Tzimas, marked a fundamental transition in the leadership and organizational structure of Napoleon. The addition of a larger higher professional management team consisting of vice presidents with vast experience from a variety of sectors further supported the process of professionalization of leadership and the gradual transition from a founder-based model to more of an enterprise approach. Says Ingrid: "Bringing in higher management people was a major change to the organizational and leadership structure of our company because before it was Wolfgang and myself who did it all." With that transition completed, Chris and Stephen Schroeter, first in their roles as co-CEOs, and today as CEO (Chris) and Executive Chair (Stephen), focus on the broader direction while Mike Tzimas and his team lead the day-to-day implementation of their vision.

The creation of an advisory board constitutes another foundational component of the revised organizational and leadership framework the Schroeters and Ron McArthur put in place with an eye to the long-term future of Napoleon as a second-generation family business and global player. Ron, who had set up boards at every other family company he had worked for in the past, and the Schroeters strongly believed in the benefit of having an advisory board. "Knowledgeable people on a board bring a different perspective and can help you identify your blind spots while moving the organization forward," Ron says.











The Napoleon advisory board started with one external advisor from Deloitte, and, in 2020, it took on its current shape with the addition of a third external director. Since then, the board has consisted of Wolfgang and Ingrid Schroeter as founders, Chris and Stephen Schroeter as co-CEOs, Michael Burrows (CEO of Maple Lodge Farms), Peter Brown (partner at Deloitte Canada), Vince Timpano (president and CEO of Lassonde Industries), and Ron McArthur.

The individual backgrounds and vast experiences of the board members from accomplished careers in different industries contribute to a transparent environment in which they advise Chris and Stephen as the second-generation leaders on a wide range of matters, from auditing to strategic planning. “Their role is to see our plan, poke holes in it, and advise,” says Chris Schroeter of the board members. “The board leaves all autonomy with the family but provides invaluable advice to Chris and I,” adds Stephen.

GROWTH OF QUALITY, PRODUCTS, CUSTOMERS AND ASSOCIATES

As envisioned by Wolfgang, Napoleon has undergone a period of massive growth since 2012. The company has doubled–and redoubled–its worldwide revenue while pushing into new markets in Europe, the U.S., and many countries around the world. Growth has permeated more than just revenue and size. “There was growth of quality, products, customers and associates,” says Ron McArthur, who served as Napoleon president from 2012 to 2022.

This and opposite page images: Napoleon products on display at trade shows in the U.S. to build brand awareness and drive sales in the American market.



Chris (left) and Stephen Schroeter (right) in 2018 when they became co-CEOs of Napoleon.

CHRIS AND STEPHEN SCHROETER

THE SECOND GENERATION OF SCHROETER FAMILY ENTREPRENEURS

5





This page top image: Stephen and Chris in front of one of Napoleon's bestselling gas burner inserts, Model GD3014. This page bottom image: Stephen with an air gun shooting out T-Shirts at hockey tournaments in Kelowna, B.C. Opposite page top image: Chris working in the plant during summer school holidays. Opposite page bottom image: The Schroeter family.

Today, Napoleon is jointly led in the second generation by Stephen and Chris Schroeter. The transitioning process from Wolfgang and Ingrid as the Napoleon founders to their sons was highly intentional, planned, and carefully executed over several years. Exposure to the family business from a young age, working with their parents for many years, and continuous guidance through internal and external stakeholders helped Stephen and Chris grow their executive skills and prepared them well for their role as joint leaders of the Napoleon Group of Companies.

FIRST EXPOSURE AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE COMPANY

As the children of entrepreneurial parents, Chris and Stephen were exposed to the company from the time they were very young. Whether it was Ingrid taking Chris with her to the office after returning to work in 1978, seeing their dad develop and test new products at home, or having both parents discuss business matters at the dinner table—family entrepreneurship was always present in the Schroeter home. Naturally, Chris and Stephen were both introduced to working casually in the plant in their early teens. Chris started going to work with Wolfgang during the summer while being off school when he was around 13 years old. Cutting the grass was his first work assignment. His first job inside the plant was working in the shipping department before moving into the tool room for two years doing jigs, learning the mill, lathe, and taking machines apart. When he was about 18, Wolfgang put him into the R&D lab, where, among other things, Chris was involved in small projects. Having a knack for computers, Chris took on the role of looking after computer equipment and computer-based processes in the company. Committed to utilizing computer programs to the largest extent possible, he replaced a lot of unnecessary paperwork in the company through e-filing, among other things.

Stephen's early development in the company was similar to that of his older brother. When Stephen was about 15 years old, Wolfgang told him one Sunday night during his summer vacation that starting the next day he would be working in the plant for two weeks. From then on, Stephen worked in the company every summer in-between school terms. Stephen's first job in the office was photocopying and filing. He then spent three weeks in the production of doors for wood stoves, drilling holes into the hinges. From stove and fireplace production he went into the barbecue side of the business, working in maintenance and packaging before going back into fireplace production, where he was assigned to the production and painting of fireplace logs for two summers.

Throughout the years, both Chris and Stephen have tried their hand in every department on the floor level. It was important for them to learn what is involved on the plant floor and to get to know and respect the people who work in production. Furthermore, working from the ground up has allowed Chris and Stephen to develop and cultivate an understanding of how decisions they make at the management level today may impact processes at the floor level.

During his second year in university, at age 21, when Stephen came to work for that summer, Ingrid told him about her and Wolfgang's plan for him to spend a day or two working in every single position in the administration of the company. Thus, Stephen spent an entire summer doing other peoples' jobs under the guidance of various Napoleon associates.

Looking back, Stephen sees working in every position in the administration as well as his on-the-floor experience as a huge advantage, as it allowed him to learn how things work. In the same way, Chris also recognizes the benefits of having been exposed to all areas of the business. As a teenager, when he was assigned specific tasks by Wolfgang, he sometimes thought of them as a waste of his time. Today, however, Chris realizes the benefits of having done things like taking a machine apart, because knowing both the various processes and the technology used around the company, has allowed him to make educated decisions, in his former roles as senior vice president of operations, research and development (until 2018), co-CEO together with his brother Stephen (until 2025), and today as CEO of the Napoleon Group. "Everything our parents did for us back then was beneficial for the future. We just could not see it at the time."













JOINING THE COMPANY FULL-TIME

Ingrid and Wolfgang always left it up to their sons to decide for themselves whether they wanted to eventually join the company full-time or pursue a life outside of the family business. Taking over the business and leading it into the second generation was always an offer, but not an obligation. Ingrid and Wolfgang were straightforward in telling their sons that if they decided to pursue their future within the company it would not be a walk in the park for them; to the contrary, Ingrid and Wolfgang made it very clear to Chris and Stephen that they would be tough on them to ensure that one day they would be able to lead the company.

Chris and Stephen realized the great opportunity and they took on the challenge. Stephen never thought about anything else for a career other than joining the company full-time. Even while growing up, he remembers having the drive to build things all the time. As a teenager he built speaker boxes and sold them to friends. If he had not joined the company, he would have most likely started his own business. Chris adds: "We did not learn the entrepreneurial spirit; it was always in us. Seeing our parents do and build things shaped us from the earliest days."

During their time at university, Chris studied Mechanical Engineering at Laurentian and Ryerson University, while Stephen earned a Bachelor of Commerce in Management, Economics, Industry and Finance at the University of Guelph. After joining the business full-time, Stephen worked exclusively with Ingrid, learning accounting, marketing, and advertising, as well as the administration of the business. Chris, on the other hand, worked closely with Wolfgang, starting off in research and development, doing IT until Stephen became involved in that area, then going into production control, scheduling, and purchasing, as well as logistics.

Opposite page top image: Chris and Stephen in the warehouse. Opposite page bottom left image: Chris in the plant checking parts. Opposite page bottom right image: Stephen and Wolfgang at a trade show in England. This page image: Chris and Stephen in the plant.











This page top left image: Chris Schroeter with Michel Voragen and Fred Schalkwijk. This page top right image: Stephen and Chris speaking at a Sales Award Ceremony in 2014. This page bottom image: Stephen and Chris attending Hearth, Patio and BBQ Expo in 2015. Opposite page image: The Schroeter family in 2016.



STEPHEN AND CHRIS AS DRIVERS BEHIND NAPOLEON'S EARLY ONLINE PRESENCE AND USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN OPERATIONS AND INTERACTIONS WITH CONSUMERS

Having grown up with computer technology and the internet, Chris and Stephen were at the forefront of many new company initiatives, from training to an extended internet presence and increased computer-based automation of manufacturing and administrative processes. Their rationale for embracing process automation and having computers replace unnecessary paperwork was not to eliminate jobs, but to free up Napoleon associates from unnecessary tasks so that they could focus on innovation, growth, and expansion.

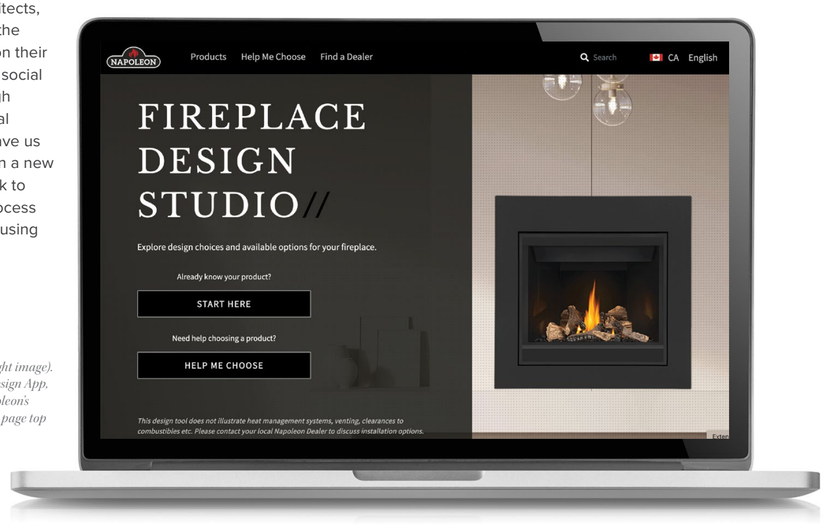
While working in production control and scheduling, Chris implemented a new PC-based system (MRP-PC) which saved Napoleon associates a lot of time by having the program do most of the scheduling work for them. During a stint in logistics, Chris further helped eliminate a lot of paperwork by implementing a computer-based bar code scanning system that improved Napoleon associates' ability to keep track of components and inventory at all times.

Around the year 2000 when the internet became an increasingly popular forum for product research by consumers, Chris and Stephen became strong promoters of using the internet as a sales and marketing tool. They firmly believed that changes in consumer behavior required the company to adapt and rethink their understanding of the sales and communication process with consumers. With a growing number of people wanting to do research and troubleshoot a problem for themselves before calling a customer service representative, Chris and Stephen saw an opportunity to give consumers easy online access to step-by-step guides. Simple repetitive processes such as turning on the pilot light at the beginning of the heating season lend themselves well to videos posted online. "We did not want our managers repetitively doing things; we wanted them to be proactive and to add new things instead. Posting information online helped us towards that goal," says Chris.





The next stage in making digital tools accessible to Napoleon customers was reached with the launch of Napoleon's Fireplace Design Studio iPhone app in 2013. Designed as an easy-to-use fireplace configuration device, this popular app allowed homeowners, designers, architects, builders, and all other users to create the look of their fireplace, stove or insert on their phone and share their design through social media. The app has since gone through multiple iterations, with many additional features added over time. "The app gave us the ability to engage with consumers in a new way, putting mobile technology to work to make them partners in the creative process of enhancing their home environment using Napoleon products," says Stephen.



This page: Stephen (top left image) and Chris (top right image). This page bottom image: The Napoleon Fireplace Design App, one of the many technology solutions driven by Napoleon's second-generation family business leaders. Opposite page top image: Ron McArthur. Opposite page bottom image: Stephen Schroeter and Ron McArthur.

LEADERSHIP GROWTH UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF RON MCARTHUR

In 2011, Wolfgang and Ingrid decided it was time to start the process of handing the reins over to their sons. "I remember being in the boardroom with the family and a consultant we had hired," says Stephen. "We were going through the process of figuring out a transition in the top end of our business structure," adds Chris.
At 34 and 31 years old respectively at the time of those conversations, Chris and Stephen did not feel ready yet for a full transition of leadership. The family agreed that hiring a seasoned business leader as president and having Stephen and Chris work closely with that senior executive would provide the brothers with invaluable opportunities for further growth in their leadership capabilities, preparing them for their roles as co-CEOs (2018 - 2025) and CEO (Chris) and Executive Chair (Stephen) today.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in 2012, the Schroeters hired Ron McArthur to take Napoleon to the next level and to mentor Chris and Stephen on their shared path towards jointly steering the ship. From the onset, Ron looked to take advantage of Chris's and Stephen's existing strengths while guiding them in their growth journey to eventually carry on the family legacy as the second-generation owners and leaders of Napoleon. Towards this end, he created a development program for the brothers that had both weekly and monthly objectives. The Schroeters and Ron McArthur agreed that it would take time and targeted effort to ensure that they would get the transition right to ensure continuous stable leadership and the long-term sustainability of Napoleon as a second-generation family business.





While reporting to Ron and, ultimately, to their parents, Chris and Stephen kept managing their respective areas of the business as vice presidents—with Chris more involved in the logistics, R&D, and manufacturing side of things and Stephen focusing more on managing the areas of sales, marketing, and finance. Ron and the family thought it best to maintain this functional dichotomy while building the leadership team around them. “We pretty much stayed in our own lanes during the transition,” says Chris. If he had a concern about marketing or anything else under Stephen’s purview, Chris raised it with his brother and Ron, whereas for everything on the operations side, it was the other way around. This approach allowed Ron, the Schroeters and the group of vice presidents added during this time to streamline operations while building Chris’ and Stephen’s capacity for executive problem-solving.

The next step in this evolutionary process was reached on April 1, 2000, when Chris became senior vice president of operations, research, and development. Three years later, on April 28, 2003, Stephen took on the position of senior vice president business division, followed by senior vice president of sales, marketing, and administration on April 7, 2016. In these roles, Chris oversaw research and development, purchasing, production, and logistics while Stephen was in charge of all administrative functions, as well as advertising, marketing, sales, and finance.

Both generations of Schroeter family entrepreneurs were fully committed to the process that would ultimately allow Chris and Stephen to take on the overall responsibility for the Napoleon Group. Chris and Stephen both joined TEC, and Chris subsequently joined OG 100 as well. Both organizations gave them access to peer groups consisting of business leaders from non-competing industries supporting each other in their growth. “TEC was a great growth platform,” says Chris, while OG 100, with business leaders of much larger companies, “helped with learning how to be a big company.”

Wanting to see the company continue as a legacy business in the second generation, Wolfgang and Ingrid were always open to ideas presented by Ron McArthur. “They let me manage and take them down the path they wanted to go down,” he says. That said, it is never easy for founders to take that step back. “We were used to being down in the weeds on everything,” states Wolfgang, adding that “we had to learn that we could no longer make immediate decisions or set the goals.” And as Ingrid says, “We had different experiences because we built the company from scratch, and it became a challenge not to be at the centre of it anymore.”









CARRYING THE LEGACY FORWARD—CHRIS AND STEPHEN AS BUSINESS LEADERS

In 2018, Ron and the Schroeters felt ready to formally change the leadership structure of the company and, in August of that year, Stephen and Chris became co-CEOs of the Napoleon Group, making them the formal leaders of the organization.

With Ron now technically reporting to Chris and Stephen, he continued to guide the brothers in their leadership growth until he retired in 2022. It was during this time as well that he began working more closely with Chris, whose hands-on role on the R&D and operations side had kept him more removed from the office during the earlier stages of the transitioning process. As for Wolfgang and Ingrid, they dropped their official titles as CEO and CFO respectively and replaced them with the joint title of “Founders” as they kept progressing in their own journey of gradually retiring from the business they had founded and built.

Their new role as co-CEOs required Stephen and Chris to remove themselves from the actual implementation of processes, look at higher-level items, and lead through inspiration, showing vision and enabling the hired leadership team, rather than doing the work themselves. By his own account, Chris struggled with this part of the transition as he was used to being fully hands-on from his years of leadership on the R&D and operations side of the company. “I have started separating myself from that and am now looking at higher-level items,” he says. Finding themselves at the top of the hierarchical structure further created a sense of alienation for both Chris and Stephen at first. Their daily interactions were now mostly with the leadership team instead of the associates they were used to working with side by side throughout their many years of being involved in the business.

Opposite page image, from L to R: Ron McArthur, Chris Schroeter, and Dave Brown of Hoffman York advertising agency accepting the Hanley Wood Marketer of The Year Award in 2018.
This page images: Ron McArthur, Chris Schroeter, and Stephen Schroeter accepting Vesta Awards on behalf of Napoleon.



As joint leaders of the much larger and highly aspirational company Napoleon is today, Stephen and Chris are deeply aware of the need to constantly balance the need for accountability with the organically grown family culture of being a caring organization. When mapping the company from the perspective of different leadership models and styles, they defined the goal for their own leadership to be balanced between caring on one end and requiring order, structure, and accountability on the other end. “I would say we are close to that today,” says Chris.

As co-CEOs, Chris and Stephen placed a lot of emphasis on improving, integrating, and relying more on sophisticated processes, involving the use of state-of-the-art technology for Napoleon to keep growing as an industry leader. From process innovation, their focus has further evolved over the last few years to ensuring higher levels of efficiency through continuous improvements to the various stage gate processes that will be described in the next chapter; monthly S&OP huddles that hold sales and operations fully accountable to the forecast; and the use of digital technology in training, communications, and advertising and marketing.

Technology leadership is another area that has the name of Chris and Stephen all over it. The same way that during their early days with the company they became strong promoters of the Napoleon Fireplace Design Studio App and the automation of processes using computer technology, they keep pushing for continuous technology advancement as a key differentiator of Napoleon as a market leader. “We were the first ones to come out with Bluetooth connectivity and an app for grills connected to users’ phones, five years before anybody else. We did that without even having the marketing capacity for it at the time,” says Chris of Napoleon’s technology leadership.

During their time as co-CEOs (2018 - 2025), Chris and Stephen maintained their respective areas of responsibility while making all decisions affecting the company at large together. Today, Stephen, as Executive Chair, continues to play a key leadership role focused on long-term strategic planning, stewardship of company culture and values, supporting key external relationships, and financial management. Chris, as the sole CEO, is leading the company through its next phase of growth and innovation while working closely with his brother and the Senior Management Team to ensure that their joint plans build a strong future for Napoleon.

As for Ingrid and Wolfgang, while officially retired, they continue to stay involved in the affairs of the company as members of the advisory board, through their continued attendance of SPOGA and dealer events, as well as during their increasingly infrequent visits to the head office and plant. There is a lot of loyalty and respect for them, and both internal and external stakeholders enjoy their continued presence. Like their sons who have experienced their growth into leaders as an evolutionary process, Wolfgang and Ingrid look at their role as founders as a moving target: moving from decision-making to asking questions, staying curious, celebrating achievements, and supporting and inspiring the leadership team and Napoleon associates from the background. As family entrepreneurs themselves, Chris and Stephen recognize and appreciate their parents’ ongoing need to stay involved at the founders’ level in the affairs of the company. “Napoleon really is our parents’ first child dating back to the year before I was born,” says Chris. “They naturally want to protect this child and make sure we keep nurturing it. We appreciate their sometimes-bullish attitude and encouragement to try new things as the second-generation leaders.”

BECOMING A GLOBAL BRAND | 6

Elevation electric fireplace.













TRANSITIONING OF THE MARKETING FUNCTION FOR DEVELOPING NAPOLEON INTO A GLOBAL BRAND

As Napoleon moved into new international markets, namely in Europe and the U.S., there was a need to create brand awareness and brand loyalty among end consumers who knew very little about Napoleon. Under the guidance of external agency HY Connect and Dave Brown (temporary VP of Marketing), Napoleon began transitioning the marketing function to that of an aspiring larger company and increasingly international brand. These efforts bore promising results, and, in 2018, Napoleon was awarded Marketer of the Year by Marketing Magazine.

On January 23, 2019, Napoleon took over the domain napoleon.com and launched a completely redesigned new website, replacing the old one under the previous domain of napoleonproducts.com. The redesign and launch of the new website in five languages was so successful that it received two awards in 2019.

By the time Garry Scott joined Napoleon in 2021 as the new VP of Marketing, the marketing division was maturing while still needing some further structuring and professionalization. “We still had to understand the science behind marketing,” says Garry, “so we could build upon the foundations, expedite sales, and continue to build brand awareness outside of Canada.”



This and opposite page: Napoleon European grilling events in England, France, and Poland.

The Schroeters invested heavily into the marketing and advertising function to support the various efforts aimed at turning Napoleon into an evolving global brand—from the award-winning best in class website, to increased reliance on the use of digital technology and social media to reach consumers around the world, TV commercials in different languages, partnerships with chefs reaching many national audiences, working with producers of TV shows hosting grill competitions on Napoleon grills in various countries, and sponsoring a great number of local, national and international BBQ competitions.

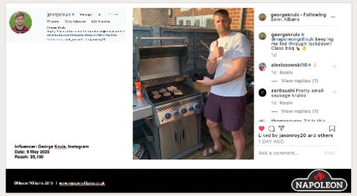
Digital advertising on all major social media channels placed Napoleon products and the experiences they create in front of hundreds of millions of consumers. This avenue has become so significant that it accounts for nearly half of Napoleon's annual marketing budget today.

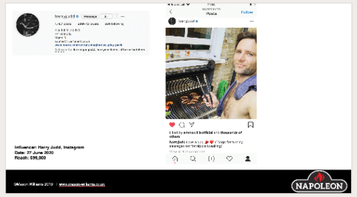
Influencer marketing through Napoleon brand ambassadors has become another growing avenue for Napoleon to connect with end consumers. In 2021, the marketing team worked with several influencers in the cooking industry to promote Napoleon products, aligning influencer content to brand themes and having them share their #NapoleonMoments and their unique #NapoleonEats creations with a large online audience.

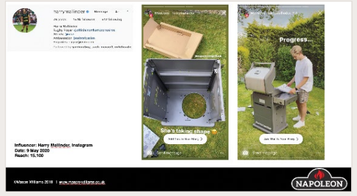
When Napoleon introduced the new Phantom grill in May 2021, this exciting product launch was accompanied by a robust influencer program that generated an unprecedented level of engagement across North America.

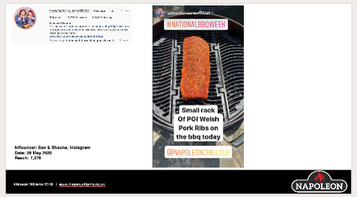
A key pillar of Napoleon's digital fluency strategy, the company's social media activities kept accelerating at a rapid pace. Between 2020 and 2022 alone, Napoleon's growing focus on social media for brand building and promoting new products resulted in a 500 percent growth rate in social media impressions to 130 million. "The number of people we have been able to reach through our digital marketing channels is mindboggling," says Stephen Schroeter who maintained significant input into the marketing function at a high level as co-CEO.

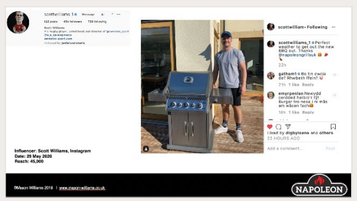
Attesting to the sophistication of Napoleon's activities in the digital marketing arena, the company's #NapoleonEats campaign was recognized by the Summit International Awards (SIA) with a bronze award for Best Social Media Campaign in 2022, competing with large well-known brands such as Bud Light and Wells Fargo.

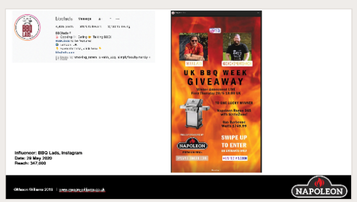
















Opposite page: Napoleon website in Spanish and influencer posts promoting Napoleon products. This page top image: Tall Linear Vector fireplace featuring a taller flame for greater visual impact without increased gas usage, customizable media, and multi-colour ember bed lighting for a stunning focal point. This page bottom image: Prestige Grill Series product brochure.

INNOVATION BUILT BETTER—DEFINING THE NAPOLEON BRAND MESSAGE

In 2021, the Schroeter family and the leadership team engaged in a process to define a clear brand identity and corresponding brand message to help facilitate the transitioning of Napoleon into a leading global brand. There was agreement that to be genuine, the brand had to embody the very essence of Napoleon. Furthermore, it had to create a corporate identity beyond the company's Canadian-made, family-owned reputation that would make it applicable in every market.

The initial inquiry by the group into what Napoleon stood for brought forward various attributes, describing Napoleon as a Canadian company that was family-owned, innovative, values-driven, and renowned for high quality products. While emphasizing the key characteristics that had been integral to Napoleon's success over the years, the answers lacked a single simple message that could be leveraged globally.





This page: Napoleon Silhouette ultra low profile direct vent terminal. Designed for proper fireplace operation even under extreme weather conditions without the need for a power vent, the ultra-low profile of this cutting-edge innovation from Napoleon means that the protrusion is less than half that of the industry standard. Opposite page images: The Napoleon Home App and the EQHub thermostat, representing more leading technology solutions created by Napoleon.

To define the core of the Napoleon brand more deeply, the family and leadership team identified two areas that set Napoleon apart at a foundational level: passion and being a challenger. As for being an organization that distinguished itself through passion, the Schroeter family has poured their hearts and souls into the company they have built together with their loyal associates and customers over the course of five decades. Their genuine and unparalleled passion for Napoleon is instantly noticeable, draws people in, and makes them excited to be a part of the company.

Napoleon has consistently challenged the competition through innovation. At the heart of being a challenger for five decades has been the determination of the Schroeter family, the leadership team, and Napoleon associates to do an even better job, create an even better product, and serve Napoleon customers and end consumers better today than yesterday.

"Innovation Built Better" emerged as the brand positioning statement that was officially adopted in 2024. "We innovate and challenge the status quo without cutting any corners while striving for perfection," says Stephen Schroeter to further illustrate the key brand message that resonates well with customers, end consumers, and internal stakeholders alike.

"Our vision is to be an aspirational brand of choice. We want people to think Innovation Built Better when they think of Napoleon."

– Chris Schroeter, CEO

EXPANSION, MODERNIZATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF COMPANY PROCESSES

Process innovation and continuous process improvement have been cornerstones of the Napoleon quality promise from early on and played a major role in driving and sustaining the expansion Napoleon has undergone since 2012.

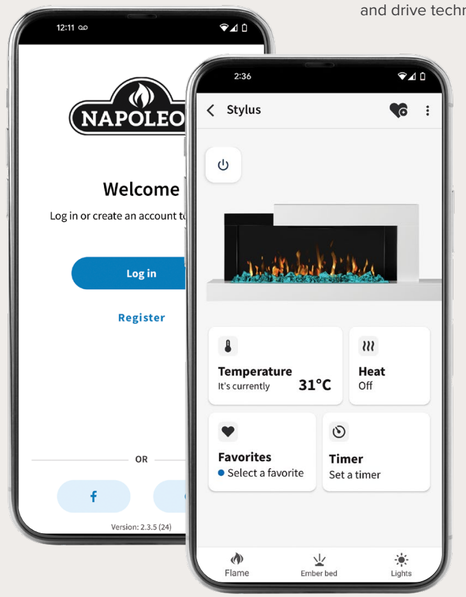
The sophistication of the company's management processes is reflected in Napoleon being one of Canada's Best Managed Companies. This designation recognizes excellence in private Canadian-owned companies based on a wide array of performance assessment criteria. Napoleon has been named one of Canada's Best Managed Companies every year since 2013, and today, the company is part of a select group of businesses with platinum member status.

Improved integration of sales into other key functional areas of the business became a priority focus area in support of Napoleon's growth trajectory. More regular sales forecasts helped the Napoleon leadership team with planning new initiatives and keeping track of targets. The adoption and continuous improvement of a stage gate process, a framework developed by a German company, created a new level of alignment between different functional areas. In its first iteration, it linked R&D with purchasing and operations and today, it incorporates sales and inventory, alongside marketing and R&D on the planning and product development side. "The stage gate process gets people in all different areas on board and sets clear project management timelines and milestones," says Chris.

S&OP processes linked sales and operations like never before, holding both functions accountable to the company's forecasts through monthly huddles. "With growth came concerns about slow-moving inventory, and S&OP helped us address that," adds Chris.

In January 2019, a newly incepted Product Innovation Team began life as a small group of in-house engineers with the mission to solidify Napoleon's culture of innovation and drive technological change around new product development. Deeply embedded in innovation and adaptability as foundational pillars of the Napoleon success story, the team developed a formalized process for gathering and screening novel ideas, rapidly iterating on ideas through the creation of prototypes, and for bringing the most promising prototypes into production. Within the first year of its existence, the Product Innovation Team proved instrumental in bringing the Silhouette Terminal, the slimmest, sleekest fireplace exterior vent in the industry, into the hands of Napoleon consumers. At the same time, the team was working on a connected product platform for the creation of smart, internet connected products from across different product categories.

These efforts have since resulted in the launch of industry leading technology solutions, such as the Napoleon Home App. This key innovation allowed all Napoleon products that had connectivity to be controlled by one app platform. Other notable innovations under the leadership of the Product Innovation Team include the development of the EQHub Smart Controller that was an industry first by Napoleon. This innovative product consists of a thermostat, which pairs to a heat pump and gas furnace. The EQHub enables the heat to be provided by the most efficient and cost-effective heating method based on time of day, energy chargers, and outside temperature.



CANADA'S BEST MANAGED COMPANIES







Concurrent with multi-location big box retail stores becoming an important additional distribution channel for Napoleon products, 2023 saw the introduction of a new express stage gate process specifically designed for the development of grills for big box retailers like Rona, The Home Depot, Costco, and others. Designed to streamline the development of products for this growing distribution channel, the new structured framework brought organization, efficiency, and a logical sequence to the development process. It provided for every step being systematic and risk-mitigated to ensure that high-quality Napoleon grills are delivered to large multi-store retailers on time and on budget.

On the finance side of the business, there have been substantial process improvements in areas including financial reporting, the use of data, speed and accuracy. When, in 2020, after years of working closely with external financial partners, the Schroeters hired Mike Tzimas as Napoleon's first full-time Chief Financial Officer, Mike came with extensive experience of controlling the purse strings of a large company in the automotive industry. His comprehensive review of the company's financial structures identified opportunities for improvement which have since been implemented. This included moving to a more professionalized system of financial reporting and a new system of data collection that allowed the Napoleon team to make data-driven decisions on all matters from price points to cash flow to headcount.

Supply chain management, logistics, and distribution are other functional areas that saw substantial modernization of processes to sustain the much higher volume of Napoleon products and the massively increased geographical footprint of operations. As will be discussed in more detail further below in this chapter, the COVID-19 pandemic, with its unprecedented consumer demand, showed gaps in existing processes. Despite Napoleon having a double supply process in place for some items, supply chain challenges during the pandemic reinforced the need for securing dual supply on all key items needed for production. "We had to make sure we could scale our supply vis-a-vis our competitors," says Chris. The pandemic served as a catalyst for becoming more strategic and having a better process for scaling in response to a sudden uptick in demand. "Our contracts with suppliers now forecast open capacity and create a more intelligent way of buying," says Chris. This process has been facilitated by the adoption and ever-growing use of new advanced technologies connecting people across the entire Napoleon network.

Process integration relates to all functional areas of the business, including human resources. In 2024, Napoleon fully integrated a new HR operating model to further improve the important role of the HR department in supporting the various departments in their work. Through this program, which required a revision of HR processes from the ground up, the HR team works directly with the stakeholders in each department to help them determine their future needs and build a talent strategy that aligns with each department's objectives and those of the business. The IT department mirrors that same philosophy by identifying the future IT support needs with the leaders of each department on an ongoing basis. "This integration approach has been hugely successful," says Tina Hitch, VP of HR.

SUPPORTING NAPOLEON DEALERS IN THEIR GROWTH AND SUCCESS

Independent specialty dealers remained at the heart of the Napoleon distribution model even as consumer purchasing decisions moved increasingly online and Napoleon developed an additional distribution channel for certain products, namely grills, through big box retail stores. Napoleon kept supporting their independent dealer network through a wide range of programs, from marketing support, online to offline sales conversion, and providing a convenient online-based order and order tracking system, to in-person and online training events and courses, webinars, podcasts, and various means for personal interaction with the company as part of the growing Napoleon family.

In 2018, Napoleon launched its digital co-op marketing program for dealers around the world. Through this program, Napoleon supports the advertising efforts of Napoleon dealers by giving them access to assets developed by the Napoleon head office marketing team. Napoleon offers dealers a series of digital packages that support their social media and digital marketing activity in their respective local areas to drive consumers to their stores. The Napoleon online assets database gives dealers access to virtually thousands of images for use in their own promotions, cutting down on the time it takes them to get artwork for their advertising. The promo box is a software program that enables Napoleon to automatically post digital content on all social media channels of Napoleon dealers who subscribe to this service. "They do not have to market; we do it for them across the product lines they subscribe to," says Chris Schroeter.

Opposite page top image: The Napoleon Logistics Centre in Barrie, Ontario. Opposite page bottom image: Mike Tzimas, former CFO and current President of Napoleon. This page: Marketing support materials for Napoleon dealers.



The Napoleon website provides another avenue for Napoleon to support its loyal dealer network. In April 2019, following the launch of the new company website, Napoleon introduced the My.Napoleon.com dealer support site, a convenient comprehensive digital platform providing Napoleon dealers with quick and easy access to their orders and other relevant information, such as product availability in the warehouse nearest to them, price, and shipping data. Available to dealers in both French and English, My.Napoleon.com quickly achieved an 80 percent adoption rate, and by July 2020, the site exceeded over 11,000 orders created and processed. “Instead of having to call us, dealers can now just log onto the portal and instantly access the information they need,” says Chris Schroeter of the gains in efficiency achieved through these technology-enabled processes in communications between Napoleon and the dealer network.

Despite the much larger size and increasingly international nature of the dealer network, personal contact and face-to-face interactions with dealers remained integral to the unique Napoleon family culture—from personal visits of dealer locations and meetings during trade shows to dealer and distributor groups from around the world touring the plant in Barrie and spending time with Napoleon leaders and associates.

In July 2019, The Barn was opened to provide a new welcoming setting for hosting customers, vendors and dealers from around the world while visiting Napoleon in Barrie. Located within a short driving distance from the head office and the Barrie plant, the Schroeters’ vision and focus for The Barn has been on providing visiting customer groups with an interactive dining experience featuring an accredited Chef cooking on Napoleon grills. Interrupted only by the COVID-19 pandemic, family and senior leadership have been hosting groups of dealers and distributors from many countries for dinner and one-on-one conversations in the Napoleon Barn since it opened.

Dealer incentive trips continue to provide opportunities for relationship building, recognizing high-performing Napoleon dealers for meeting and exceeding sales targets, sharing information on new products and strategies, and for having fun together as joint members of the Napoleon family. Through these and many other means, the Schroeters and the Napoleon team maintained their highly approachable and personal way of doing business even as the company grew exponentially, and digital communications became more common in the company’s day to day interactions with the dealer network.













This page: 2018 Dealer Meeting. Opposite page top image: Wolfgang and Ingrid Schroeter with members of the European Union team in 2021. Opposite page centre and bottom images: Some of many customer events held at the Napoleon Barn.









E-COMMERCE, THE NAPOLEON ONLINE TO OFFLINE PROGRAM, AND PROTECTING THE INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT NAPOLEON DEALERS

Napoleon's unwavering commitment to helping dealers be successful is at the heart of the unique approach the company applies to online sales, a growing sales channel that caters to consumers preferring purchasing online over visiting a bricks-and-mortar store. Whereas other manufacturers may have no issue with selling and shipping direct-to-consumers online, thus bypassing their dealer network entirely, Napoleon ensures that dealers benefit from the company's online sales.

When, after years of hesitation to protect both the Napoleon brand and the dealer network, Napoleon began selling products online in response to growing consumer demand, the adoption of this additional sales channel was accompanied by the 2023 launch of Napoleon's unique "online to offline program" for independent dealers. It established a system where after buying products on the Napoleon website, consumers, at the point of sale, are prompted to choose to pick up their product at their nearest Napoleon dealer's location or have it shipped from that dealer to them. By allowing local dealers to fulfill online transactions, Napoleon gives them an e-commerce presence they otherwise would not have. "We do the final sale and they 'own the customer' by running the fulfillment," says Chris. "We solve some of their staffing challenges for them by closing the deal and getting the payment and then paying them to deliver or install the product. They find this unique in the industry," he adds. In 2024, this hugely successful program was expanded into the U.S. where it enables Napoleon dealers to grow sales with Napoleon in the online space as well.





The Schroeters' and the leadership team's awareness of the need to protect the interests of independent Napoleon dealers further impacted the company's approach to selling Napoleon products through big box multi-location retail stores. Napoleon is highly intentional about managing the differences between channels in a way that allows both independent dealers and big-box retail chains to succeed in their respective market segments. Independent Napoleon dealers tend to sell products that are only available through them, such as the higher-end Prestige line of grills, whereas Napoleon's more entry- and mid-level Freestyle and Rogue series grills are available through the big box stores as well. That way, both distribution channels can co-exist with the Napoleon brand side by side without direct competition.

Opposite page: Dealer events at the Napoleon Barn. This page: 2025 Dealer Incentive Trip. Centre image: The Napoleon Hearth Brand and Product teams are embracing the excitement of presenting their new products during an internal training event.







THE NAPOLEON EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (NED) AND SUPPORTING NAPOLEON DEALERS, TECHNICIANS AND INSTALLERS THROUGH ONLINE LEARNING TOOLS

As noted previously, Napoleon has a long-standing history of delivering educational content to their dealers, technicians and installers to help them be successful. Designed to support them through a face-to-face training experience, Napoleon continued to offer regular training events for dealers in different locations on a wide range of themes, from information on new products to modifications of existing products, advertising techniques, and much more. At the same time, technical training events kept providing Napoleon installers and technicians with the knowledge needed to install, troubleshoot and do regular maintenance on Napoleon grills, hearth, and HVAC products as Napoleon kept launching many new products in all three main product categories into the market.

When Lee Scott joined Napoleon in July 2016 as digital learning supervisor, his mandate was to establish an online learning environment for Napoleon dealers. Formally launched as Napoleon Education (NED) that same year, the mission for this program was to take Napoleon's entire product portfolio, digitize all information relevant to Napoleon dealers, and put the content online. Microlearning and mobile learning were becoming increasingly popular methods used in adult learning and Napoleon fully embraced the e-learning space to enable dealers to access the information they needed on their computers, laptops and mobile phones anywhere and anytime.

Throughout this process, Napoleon was highly intentional about obtaining and incorporating feedback from the dealer network. "It became a runaway success," says Lee. "Our dealers, technicians and installers immediately saw the value of microlearning and mobile learning and having the content accessible anytime and anywhere. Mobile content delivery allowed for the flexibility to learn on the go, which was important to salespeople, technicians, and installers who don't sit behind a computer screen and want to access information when they need it."



Since its 2016 inception, the NED team has expanded Napoleon's online learning space to include approximately 500 individual micro courses while maintaining the practice of hosting over 100 face-to-face technical training events across North America every year.

Online learning and webinars were the two main delivery channels for training when COVID-19 changed the way companies conducted business and people interacted with each other around the world. The pandemic instantly suspended the ability of the trainers to go out into the field and lead technical training events. Napoleon embraced virtual training and subsequently, the digital content created by the NED began shifting more towards the practical needs of installers and technicians.

In 2023, NED became part of the R&D department, a move that reflected the determination of the Schroeters to have the NED team lean more heavily into the technical side with the production of instructional videos and tutorials for technicians and installers. Napoleon hired a video production leader and, in April 2023, launched its highly popular YouTube channel. Quick instructional videos are designed to showcase practical solutions for troubleshooting during the installation and regular maintenance processes of Napoleon products. Since then, the NED team has produced close to 100 technical videos in-house, supporting customers in all three main product categories. With an eye to the future, the NED team is looking into how AI can further expand the Napoleon learning experience.

"The feedback we keep receiving from our dealers, technicians and installers is that we are light years ahead of our competition in the use of mobile and microlearning to help our partners be successful in today's online world," concludes Lee Scott about Napoleon's leadership in strategically using digital technology to the benefit of Napoleon dealers, technicians and installers.

This and opposite page: Various training initiatives by the Napoleon Education Department (NED).





This page top image: Chris Schroeter accepting the 2018 Marketer of the Year award from Marketing Magazine on behalf of Napoleon. This page bottom image: Napoleon is being recognized with the Home Depot 2019 Vendor of the Year Award. Opposite page all images: Ontario Premier Doug Ford's visit of the Napoleon plant in October 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A COMPANY ON A ROLL

Throughout 2019, the year leading up to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Napoleon was on a roll in all areas of the business with the new Vendor Portal going live as a new platform for electronic communication with Napoleon suppliers (January), the launch of the new Napoleon.com website (March), the opening of The Barn for hosting customers (July), breaking ground for the new distribution centre for Europe in Tiel, Netherlands(September), first moving into the Latin American market with their grills, and being recognized by The Home Depot as Vendor of the Year (December).
In February 2020, within weeks of the start of the pandemic, Napoleon began the rollout of the Napoleon Rogue series of grills to 500 Lowe's stores in the Eastern U.S. while the entire platform of Napoleon charcoal grills, portable series, smokers and accessories became available on the Lowe's website.

With a workforce of 1,600 associates, the company was operating in a highly dynamic growth-driven environment where new things happened daily. Napoleon entered the pandemic as an exceptionally strong company that kept investing heavily into growth while, at the same time, reaping the benefits from the massive investments, substantial changes, and improvements made through the previous years.

SAFETY FIRST—NAPOLEON DURING THE EARLY PHASE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

By March 2020, Canada, like much of the rest of the world, found itself in the quickly evolving global COVID-19 pandemic. As the news of the pandemic hit, Napoleon instantly changed gears: "I had two clear mandates during that early part of COVID," says Ron McArthur. "One was to prevent the spread of the virus in our facilities, and the other was to ensure the survival of the company." As 1,600 families depended on Napoleon for their livelihood, the Schroeters and the senior leadership team made it their mission to ensure that Napoleon would get through and come out of the pandemic as strong as ever.

As news of the pandemic kept spreading, Napoleon immediately began introducing an extensive list of health and safety protocols to protect Napoleon associates and their families. Approximately 500 office associates were sent home, and the retail store was closed immediately. When Ontario declared a state of emergency and ordered a province-wide lockdown, Napoleon shut down all manufacturing operations both in Barrie and in Crittenden, Kentucky, on March 23, 2020, for a limited time.

Napoleon's COVID response structure was defined by daily meetings between Ron McArthur, Ingrid Schroeter, Tina Hitch (VP of Human Resources), Kelly Morrison (Senior Manager of Corporate Affairs), and others. Together, they reviewed and acted upon ever-changing regulations and what was needed on any given day, as the virus kept mutating and changing health guidelines kept being announced by the different levels of government in short order.

On March 31, 2020, Napoleon launched a comprehensive online COVID-19 training course, co-developed by the Napoleon Education Team (NED) and technology partners with the goal to keep associates and their families safe. Mock drills in the event of a positive COVID-19 case being reported in any Napoleon facility became a new reality in April.

While focused on his lead role in the company's pandemic response, Ron McArthur worried about the connections and camaraderie that were so central to Napoleon as a family-owned business. "Customers loved the appreciation events, the trade shows, and us being present," he says. "The family culture is a key strength of Napoleon, and COVID did not bode well for those personal connections."

When a neighbouring Barrie-based medical supply company made the decision to increase their production to help meet the surging demand for protective gear for healthcare professionals, the Schroeters and the Napoleon team instantly decided to support them in this effort. Throughout March and April, 85 Napoleon associates covered four shifts each day, providing much needed support in the areas of material handling, machine operations, assembly, engineering, quality control, team leadership, and supervisory support. In April, Napoleon further helped protect front line medical workers at Royal Victoria Health Centre in Barrie and Soldiers' Memorial Hospital in Orillia by leveraging Napoleon's global supply chain. The Schroeters and the leadership team put Napoleon's trade connections to good use by sourcing and donating much needed N95 masks to the two local hospitals.

In May 2020, during stage two of the Ontario Government's approach to reopen essential businesses across the province, the plant and the showroom in Barrie reopened subject to stringent social distancing and sanitation requirements. Napoleon subsequently began bringing associates back, in cohorts of 50 at a time, to ensure social distancing measures could be followed properly and everyone remained safe.









This page: Launch of the Napoleon Prestige 500 grill in the new matte black Phantom finish. Opposite page: Napoleon advertisement promoting the new Phantom lineup of grills.

"At the beginning of the pandemic we did not know whether we would have any sales that year. But then after the first three months it went through the roof. We were back ordered on everything while production came back online very slowly. The warehouses in Barrie, Canada, and Tiel, Netherlands were empty. People waited on their barbecues for six months. We increased production by 60 percent over pre-Covid in 2021 to service that unprecedented surge in demand for Napoleon products."

– Wolfgang Schroeter



FROM SUDDEN STANDSTILL TO FACING UNPRECEDENTED DEMAND: NAPOLEON FROM JULY 2020 TO THE END OF THE PANDEMIC

Like companies in all industries, Napoleon experienced a steep drop in sales at first as no one knew what the future would hold in the face of the first, large-scale global pandemic since the Spanish flu over a century earlier. During the second half of 2020, however, against all initial expectations, Napoleon, like companies across the entire home improvement field, was faced with a sudden and unprecedented demand for their products. Consumers, with time and money on their hands while being restricted in their ability to travel, embarked on home renovation projects and engaged in eagerly awaited indulgences.

Grills, hearth, and HVAC were no exception. In a matter of months, the demand for Napoleon products reached an all-time high and Napoleon was dealing with a backlog across all their facilities. "Sales went through the roof," says Wolfgang of the consumer spending spree during the summer and autumn of 2020. "We were backordered on everything, and our warehouses in both Barrie and the Netherlands were completely empty of stock." People had to wait up to six months to receive a new Napoleon grill while the orders kept coming. "It was like 75 percent growth of untapped demand," adds then CFO and current President Mike Tzimas, saying that "whatever we could produce went out the door in an instant."

Napoleon forged ahead to meet this surge in demand in the best ways possible. Managers at head office worked tirelessly with Napoleon dealers who were calling for more product to meet consumer demand in their respective sales areas. By mid-July 2020, Napoleon was on a hiring spree, looking to fill over 100 positions in manufacturing for their Barrie facilities alone. Across the entire plant network, Napoleon hired hundreds of new associates and ramped up production levels to 60 percent higher than prior to the start of the pandemic while the number of associates grew to nearly 2,200 people.

To create additional manufacturing capacity, Napoleon opened a second plant in China, which was up and running in four months, a testament to the dedication of Ming Zhang and the Napoleon team in China. Together with ramped up Ontario and Kentucky operations, that second Chinese plant helped Napoleon work through the mound of backorders while churning out new merchandise for various markets.

A substantially enlarged footprint for grills in big box stores across Canada contributed to the unprecedented number of orders coming in. Building onto the successful launch of the Rogue grill in over 500 Lowe's store locations in the eastern U.S. just prior to the start of the pandemic, Napoleon, in September 2020, secured five SKUs for grills, barbecues and grill toolsets with Costco across all their store locations in Canada. In 2020 as well, Napoleon partnered with Canadian Tire for the launch of the new 4-foot Napoleon accessories bay at Canadian Tire stores throughout Canada.

As mentioned previously, the unprecedented surge in demand revealed existing gaps in Napoleon's supply chain and, like countless other manufacturers, Napoleon ran into supply chain issues. "COVID demonstrated the limits of our capacities," says VP of Supply Chain, Doug Wilcox. To complete orders, Napoleon had parts they needed flown in from China and when this proved to not be enough, the Schroeters went to local hardware stores to source screws and other small items needed to complete barbecue orders waiting to be completed on the line at the Barrie plant. "We had problems with everything," remembers Wolfgang. "There would be one small part missing so we went to all Canadian Tire stores in the area and bought all their inventory of that one small item just so that we could finish those barbecues on the line," he adds. "Wolfgang even bought out a few Home Depot stores of all their screws," remembers Mike Tzimas.





Despite mounting challenges to cope with the demand, Napoleon did not lose track of the larger picture. During the first year of the pandemic, the company introduced 45 new or improved products throughout all three product categories, exemplifying the tremendous discipline and teamwork of the Napoleon R&D, production, sales, marketing, and distribution teams under the most challenging working conditions.

The Schroeters' and the leadership team's confidence in the outstanding quality of Napoleon products expressed itself in the May 2020 announcement of the new enhanced bumper to bumper warranty for the Rogue series (15 years bumper to bumper on all parts) and the Prestige and Prestige PRO grills (lifetime bumper to bumper on major components). An expression of the company's unconditional commitment to producing quality products even under mounting pressure, quality measurements improved by over 30 percent in all Napoleon production facilities throughout 2020. Napoleon uses DPPM (Defective Parts per Million), a globally recognized method designed to demonstrate product quality of a company to measure the quality of Napoleon products. As 2020 ended, Napoleon's DPPM scores were stronger than ever.

With the big national shows suspended and dealerships in every jurisdiction facing restrictions through lockdowns and social distancing protocols, Napoleon had to become creative in how to connect with dealers. In August and September 2020, the European team, for instance, took to the road with a roadshow in replacement of Europe's largest outdoor and garden exhibition in Cologne, Germany (SPOGA), which had been cancelled. A Napoleon branded blue Canadian-style barn was set up in four locations, allowing dealers to attend in designated time slots to speak with sales representatives and view the new Napoleon products.







Opposite page: Napoleon grills at Costco in 2015. This page all images: The blue barn used during the Napoleon road show in Europe in the summer of 2020 to connect with dealers while the main industry trade show, SPOGA, was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.





Knowing that their loyal dealers and distributors dealt with many of the same challenges Napoleon was faced with, the Schroeters and the leadership team never lost sight of their objective to help Napoleon dealers and distributors be successful. Thanks to the great teamwork at Napoleon, the company was able to deliver significantly more product to them than they had ever received, which resulted in most Napoleon dealers having record years during the pandemic. “In all, most of our dealers in Europe ended up with 30 percent more stock than the year prior,” says Michel Voragen, General Manager of the Napoleon sales team for Germany and the Benelux countries.

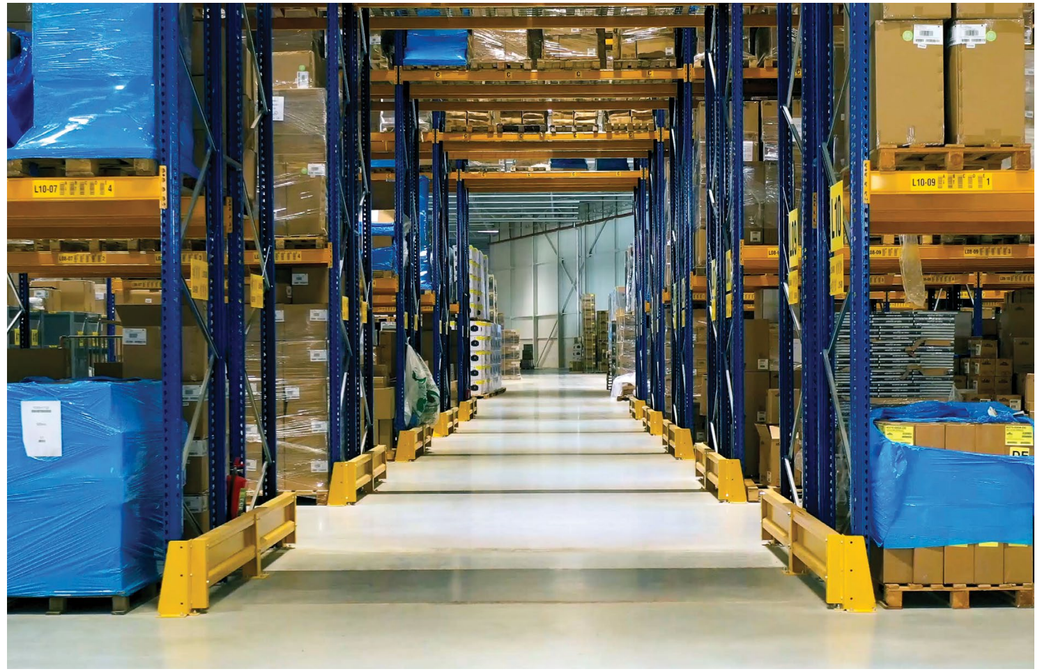
Napoleon’s impressive performance during the pandemic was only made possible through a massive company-wide team effort. The seemingly never-ending flow of new orders coming in prompted the production teams to set volume records for manufactured products in all Napoleon facilities across the globe while logistics shipped more products than ever before. The administration provided support for the sales increases on every level while the sales teams supported customers throughout the delayed supply of products. Meanwhile, the Napoleon R&D and innovation teams stayed focused on the development of industry-leading new products, such as the Phantom grills (North America), Freestyle grills (Europe), and NS 18 heat pumps and air handlers, all of which were launched in 2021. Further attesting to the company’s leadership during a time of exponential pressure and unprecedented challenges, Napoleon, in 2022, became the #1 grill brand in Canada while seeing robust growth in both the U.S. and European markets at the same time.

THE NEW EUROPE DISTRIBUTION CENTRE IN TIEL, NETHERLANDS

The COVID-19 pandemic did not stop Napoleon from continuing to make significant investments into the company’s infrastructure to sustain further growth and success of Napoleon in the long term. In September 2020, Napoleon opened their newly built, over 215,000-square-foot distribution facility and European headquarters in Tiel, Netherlands. Situated along a canal connecting the Napoleon facilities to the Port of Rotterdam, the location of the new distribution hub is perfect for servicing existing and new Napoleon customers across Europe with Napoleon products.



Opposite page top image: Napoleon Freestyle grill. Opposite page bottom image: Napoleon NPFX48A60A air handler installed in a basement. This page: The Napoleon warehouse in Tiel, Netherlands, filled with Napoleon products ready to be shipped out.











MIKE TZIMAS BECOMES THE SECOND NON-SCHROETER PRESIDENT OF NAPOLEON

Effective July 11, 2022, Mike Tzimas became the second non-Schroeter president of Napoleon. A chartered accountant, Mike had originally joined Napoleon in January 2020 as VP of Finance and, in January of 2021, was promoted to CFO. Prior to becoming part of the Napoleon family, he served in leadership positions in finance for global automotive supplier companies. At the time of his appointment as president of Napoleon, Mike defined long-term sustainable growth, supporting innovation, and enhancing Napoleon's global footprint as his three core focus areas.

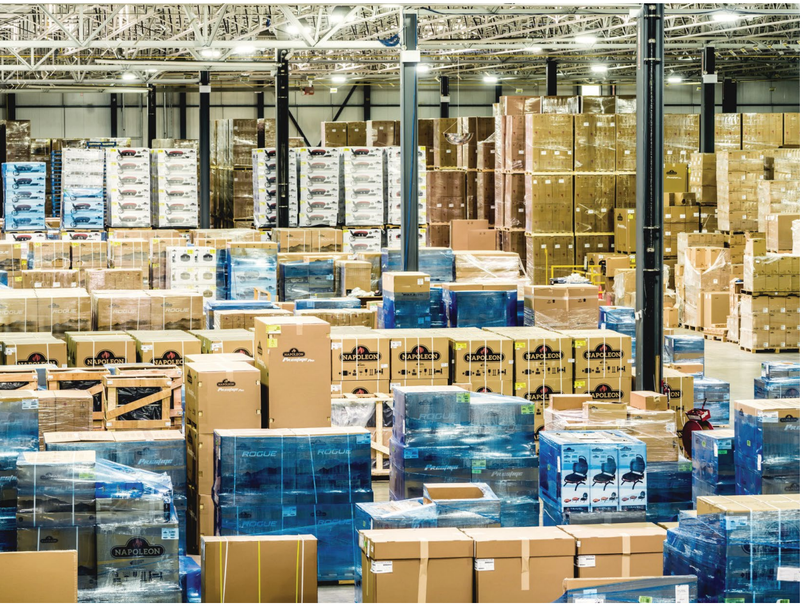
OPERATING IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ENVIRONMENT

By the time Mike Tzimas took on his new role as president of Napoleon, the business environment had changed drastically yet again. The bonanza that had seen demand surge to unprecedented levels lasted through 2021 and into 2022. By the summer of 2022, however, the consumer splurge had slowed down and Napoleon, like so many other businesses, had to abruptly switch gears while inflation and high interest rates curbed consumer spending. "There was a three-month period in 2022 when we did nothing but clean and paint the floors without producing anything because the warehouses were full, and orders kept dropping. We had to take a big loan out to pay for all that," Wolfgang remembers the challenges of the immediate post-pandemic environment.

Once again, Napoleon worked closely with their distributors and dealers to identify new sales opportunities in this changed environment. "We checked in with all our dealers, figuring out their overstock and formulating a plan to move it," says Michel Voragen of the situation in Europe, which was similar to North America.

Mike Tzimas, President of Napoleon since July 2022, with Chris and Stephen Schroeter (opposite page). Stephen Schroeter (this page top image), and his predecessor Ron McArthur (this page bottom image).





With too much product in the warehouses, Napoleon had to rebalance manufacturing and rightsize the company by paring down its expanded workforce and implementing austerity measures to remain cash flow positive. In September 2022, company leadership made the difficult decision to lay off 80 full-time associates, followed by the temporary layoff of another 100 associates in November, in response to the new realities of the post-pandemic era.

The new ERP system and other efficiency measures helped align all functional areas, compounding the effects of fiscal discipline through the back half of the pandemic and the early post-pandemic business environment. The sudden downturn further offered Napoleon a chance to address the supply chain issues the company had faced during the surge.

Together with greater dual supply capacities, Napoleon introduced S&OP procedures designed to streamline production and accurately forecast the supply and manufacturing needs three to nine months in advance. The 13-step cadence that the team goes through each month "allows us to hedge against unforeseen disruptions like a government shutdown by forecasting demand and our capacities," says Napoleon's VP of Supply Chain, Doug Wilcox. "COVID really showed that we needed new processes, and this system enables us to scale our supply vis-a-vis our competitors, forecast capacities, and create more intelligent buying of materials," adds Chris Schroeter.

Despite the challenges associated with curbed consumer spending in the high interest environment of the post-pandemic world, Napoleon closed 2023 not only in the black, but still bigger than prior to the start of the pandemic.

This page: Warehouses filled with Napoleon products ready to ship out speak to the high demand for the grills, hearth products, and HVAC solutions the company offers to customers worldwide. Opposite page: Napoleon Ultimate Series furnace.

NAPOLEON SOLIDIFIES ITS POSITION AND KEEPS GROWING AS A LEADER IN THE HVAC FIELD

Throughout 2024, Napoleon remained focused on renewed growth. Streamlined operations ensured the company could maintain its bottom line while making larger moves to further enhance market share, particularly in the massive future-oriented HVAC market with its growing focus on environmental sustainability. In July 2024, as detailed earlier, Napoleon finalized the purchase of the assets of NV Ecovision Sales Inc to produce their Ecosmart line-up of hydronic air handlers for greater control of temperatures at all levels of a house, whether it be for heating or cooling. "That purchase allowed us to further develop and sell Ecovision's more compact hydronic handlers through our more integrated customer base," says Mike Tzimas.

Purchasing Ecosmart put Napoleon in a position to cut down on development time and bring their own integrated heating and cooling systems using those air handlers to market more quickly. Owning the state-of-the-art Ecosmart air-handling technology gave Napoleon another means to further distinguish itself as an industry leader in the growing HVAC market. "You usually have HVAC companies that are either good with air handlers or with boilers," states Mike. "You'll rarely find one adept at both."

BECOMING A LEADER IN THE AREA OF ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

As a grill, hearth, and HVAC manufacturing company, Napoleon has been intrinsically linked to the use of fossil fuels, both in the production of the products and their applications in consumers' homes. Building onto its long-standing company practice of avoiding waste throughout the production process, Napoleon made it a priority to further reduce the company's carbon footprint. The company started tracking sustainable products in July 2020 and the 2021 strategic plan defined the goal to increase the number of environmentally sustainable Napoleon products manufactured by Napoleon by 250 percent.





This page: The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals adopted by Napoleon. Opposite page: Chris Schroeter leading Napoleon's sustainability efforts.

"We are here for the long run," says Chris Schroeter, "and that means we have to do what is required to help limit our impact on the environment."

Napoleon has taken strides to become an industry leader in sustainable products and practices by limiting waste, offering products that significantly reduce the users' carbon footprint, and inspiring others to do the same. This not only resonates with the core values of many Millennials and GenZs, who make up large contingents of Napoleon's workforce today, but also reflects a growing consensus among business leaders who see the use of renewable energy as the only way forward. Like the automakers who have led a switch to electric vehicles or the growing number of governments championing wind and solar power, Napoleon has committed itself to promoting sustainability everywhere. "We are a progressive company," explains Stephen, "and we want to lead change that will contribute to a better future for our world."

In early 2021, Napoleon formed a partnership with Enbridge to assist the Canadian-based energy company with achieving its targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. As part of this example-setting sustainability project, Napoleon supplied Enbridge with its innovative hybrid heating system that lowers greenhouse gas emissions by switching between heat sources, while, at the same time, saving customers utilities costs when compared to a conventional heating system. Connected through a smart controller, the Napoleon hybrid system utilized the company's innovative NS18 series heat pumps alongside one of Napoleon's two stage gas furnaces. The project has since been rolled out in communities across Ontario, supported by the Ontario Government and participating municipalities.

Embracing hybrid technology has been a key element in Napoleon's evolution into a leader for sustainable products. Until the electric grid has caught up to produce enough electricity to support society's broader switch to going fully electric for all kinds of consumer products, hybrid systems, like the dual heating and cooling system offered by Napoleon, lead the way. From gas fireplaces equipped with an electric slot that use electricity most of the time and gas for building up higher levels of heat to hybrid gas and electric HVAC heating systems with a thermostat that chooses the most efficient energy source—Napoleon has fully embraced hybridization as an interim step towards full net zero sustainability.

In early 2025, Napoleon delivered on their earlier promise to develop and bring to the market the first full size electric grill as a more sustainable option. The rollout of the innovative Rogue EQ Connected electric grill series to Napoleon dealers established Napoleon as a leader for high performance electric grills. In the hearth products market segment, Napoleon embraces sustainability through an ever-growing portfolio of electric fireplaces.

Equipped with leading technology for flame realism, the Luminex, Alluravision, Astound, Entice, Elevation, CLEARion Elite, Trivista Primis, Cineview, Ascent, Stylus, Allure Vertical, Element, and Trivista Pictura series electric fireplaces define Napoleon as a leader for sustainable hearth products.

On the HVAC side, high efficiency gas furnaces, electric heat pumps, a highly energy-efficient pilot on demand system, and sophisticated heat management systems designed to maximize efficiency and control heat output in the most environmentally conscious manner further reinforce Napoleon's standing as an industry leader on sustainability. "The end goal is to produce new products that are net zero," Chris defines the larger aspirational objective for the future.

Parallel with incorporating sustainability goals into the development and constant refinement of new products, Napoleon has made the manufacturing process more environmentally sustainable. From solar panels at various facilities, to a fleet of electric forklifts that run on 20-50 percent less energy, to the use of high-efficiency LED lights, energy-efficiency air compressors, and fiber optic lasers—the Schroeters have invested heavily into sustainable processes and equipment as part of a state-of-the-art overhaul of the fabrication processes. New waste diversion and packaging programs have further led to a sharp reduction in plastic, metal, and cardboard waste at Napoleon facilities. Using recycled materials for all of Napoleon's packaging needs instead of plastic and Styrofoam adds another process to the company-wide efforts of practicing sustainability. The Napoleon Environmental Committee, created in 2019, provides a forum for continuous input on sustainability matters from within all functional areas of the business.



THE HOUSE AND THE HEART

THE NAPOLEON VALUES AND CULTURE

7



The Napoleon Rogue, one of Napoleon's best selling grills.





FAMILY VALUES AS THE FOUNDATION OF THE CORPORATE VALUES AND CULTURE OF NAPOLEON

As is typical for founder-led family companies, the Napoleon core values and culture evolved organically over time as direct representations of Wolfgang and Ingrid's personal values, their shared business philosophy, and the way they felt committed to and treated Napoleon associates and business partners. Key attributes of the Schroeters that have shaped Napoleon over the course of 50 years are: being creative and innovative, being willing to take risks, cultivating genuine relationships with associates, dealers, and the community, teamwork, and being ethical, hands-on, and fair in all business dealings.

Photo taken for an article in House and Home magazine. L to R: Wolfgang, Stephen, Ingrid, Cliff Lilly (VP of R&D at the time), Roger Gripton (VP of Sales at the time), and Chris.



This page: The Schroeter family. L to R: Chris, Wolfgang, Ingrid, and Stephen Schroeter. Opposite page: The House and the Heart capturing the values and culture of Napoleon.

THE VALUES FOUNDATION—WOLFGANG AND INGRID'S VALUES AND SHARED BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY AS THE VALUES FOUNDATION OF NAPOLEON

The values and distinct culture of Napoleon, as expressed in the House and Heart today, have their foundations in the following core beliefs, values, and entrepreneurial imperatives developed and consistently applied by Wolfgang and Ingrid during their time of building Napoleon:

1. Be creative and innovative and do not shy away from trying new things in pursuit of the goal to provide quality products at competitive prices that suit the ever-changing needs of the consumer.
2. Once you have developed an idea, implement it and make it work.
3. When realizing that something does not work or that there is a better way of doing business, do not be afraid of making a change.
4. Cultivate a working relationship with associates that is conducive to maintaining high standards of quality and production in an atmosphere that is appreciated by associates and allows them to take ownership, be innovative and excel.
5. Recognize the importance of your dealers and distributors in the overall success of the company, maintain open lines of communication, and honour that relationship at all times.
6. Work as a team to complement and maximize your strengths.
7. Grow strategically without taking on huge debt loads.
8. Money and profit are not the primary goal, but the byproduct of successful entrepreneurship.
9. Be hands-on, approachable and lead by example.
10. Delegate and trust in others' ability to do the job right.
11. Do not judge a book by its cover.
12. Be ethical and fair in all business dealings.

THE HOUSE AND THE HEART—FORMALIZING THE NAPOLEON CORE VALUES

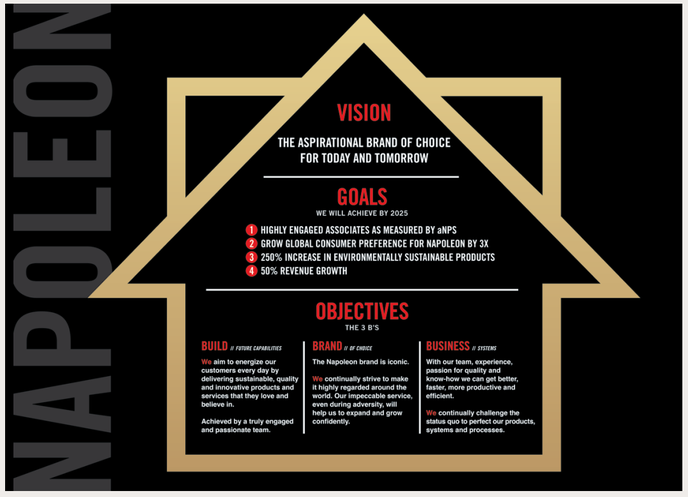
Deeply aware of the importance of the family's values for the culture of their company, the Schroeters created a values book with 12 core values. Ingrid spent a lot of time developing the commentary around those values. While this first attempt at formalizing the values helped new associates understand what the Schroeters and Napoleon stood for, there was a growing consensus among the family and the leadership team that the values needed to be condensed down and put into a framework to make them more accessible.

In 2020, as part of their larger effort to take the company to the next level, the Schroeters and the leadership team engaged in a collaborative process, the outcome of which was the creation of The House and the Heart, which was officially introduced in 2021.
A conceptual model that is all encompassing, it defines the vision, goals, objectives, purpose, culture, and core values of Napoleon.

Starting from the 12 previously defined values, the family and leadership team narrowed them down to the five values that define the very essence of Napoleon—Honesty, Engagement, Accountability, Respect, and Teamwork. At one point throughout the discussions, Tina Hitch had the idea that an acronym would be really helpful and suggested using HEART because it brought together what the values foundation seemed to be all about—Napoleon being a business with a heart that is run by people that care about the company and each other.

HEART allowed the group to connect the core values—and what they mean—to a single word that instantly resonates with people. In a second step, the Schroeters and the leadership team developed the concept of the House. Within the resulting combined framework, the Napoleon House is built on the vision, goals, and objectives, whereas the purpose, culture, and core values work together in forming the Heart. In simpler terms, the House describes WHAT strategic goals Napoleon intends to achieve—while the HEART represents HOW the company goes about achieving them. "Our values guide us on how to create outstanding customer experiences and how to work together as a team in creating this environment," the Schroeters say.

The integration of company goals with core values is central to the Schroeters' self-perception as value-driven family entrepreneurs—and to their understanding of Napoleon's identity as a company where values and the culture, as expressed particularly in how people are treated, underpin everything the company does. "The House and the Heart truly speaks to the core identity and the unique culture of Napoleon," says Garry Scott.









THE NAPOLEON CORE VALUES

HONESTY means acting with integrity. As an honest organization, Napoleon values truth and transparency; ensures its leaders model and lead by example; creates an environment where executives and team members count on each other to do what is right; where everyone is committed to doing the right thing even when it is not acknowledged by others or convenient to the individual or the organization.

ENGAGEMENT means listening to understand and speaking with purpose. Engaged leaders and team members bring passion and energy to work and strive for high-quality contributions that drive individual and organizational excellence. As an engaged organization, Napoleon consistently seeks the voice of its team to collaboratively improve the associate experience; values those who speak thoughtfully, listen carefully, and always participate with an open mind; and encourages, respects, and actively seeks diversity of opinion.

ACCOUNTABILITY means performing with responsibility. At the heart of accountability is reliability and personal responsibility. Taking initiative and, when seeing a problem, moving to solve it. Being empowered and having the information required to make effective decisions. Accountability defines clarity as a must to set the necessary expectations and establishes the imperative to be precise to identify what successful achievement looks like. As an accountable organization, Napoleon strives to be socially responsible, supporting communities and being ever mindful of its impact on the planet. As an organization, individuals, and a team, Napoleon and its people take ownership of the outcomes, good or bad, without ever passing the buck.

This page top image: Napoleon Associates wearing their cancer awareness shirts in support of Napoleon Cares, with all proceeds helping fund the program. This page bottom image: The Latin American sales team with award-winning Chef Daniela Cavieres.

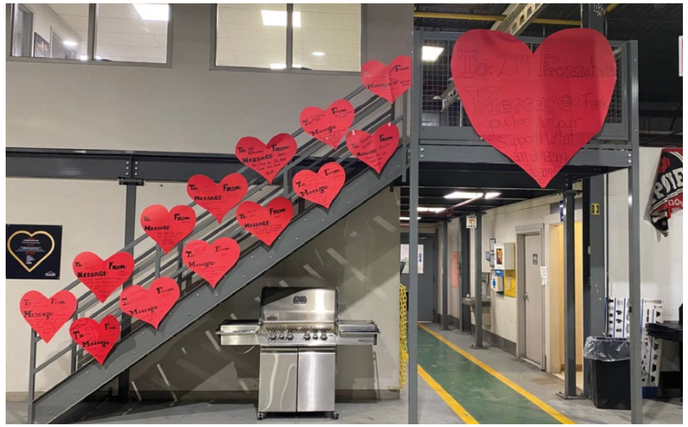
Opposite page top image: In honour of those we've loved and lost, a monument was erected along the Napoleon walking path located beside the Napoleon Logistics Centre in Barrie. Opposite page bottom image: Group photo from one of the Associate Appreciation luncheons.

RESPECT means behaving with care. Respect mandates any Napoleon stakeholder to be humble and thoughtful, bringing their best to each other and ultimately to Napoleon customers. Acknowledging respect as a core value postulates realizing the benefits of differing opinions and insights and providing a safe environment for open communication. Respect further prescribes providing constructive feedback and taking criticism without being personally offended. Ultimately, respect means acting with consideration and courtesy, honouring and building positive relationships.

TEAMWORK means supporting each other; working as a team to maintain high standards of quality and productivity; proactively planning, driving towards common goals, collaborating, and celebrating; arriving every day inspired to make an impact through one's talents, passion, and hard work; genuinely caring and engaging in discussions with the purpose of investing in personal and team growth; and acting without ego or jealousy, while challenging each other to be their best.

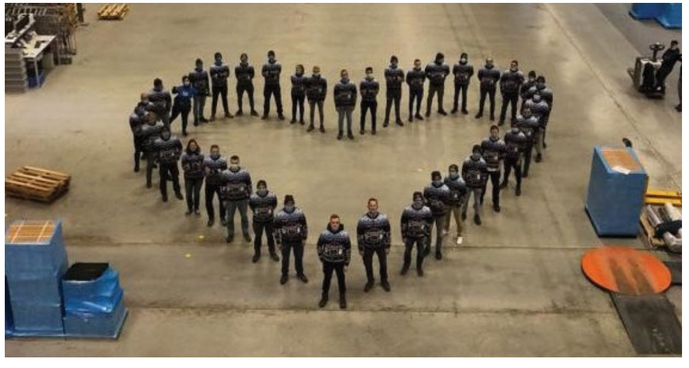












This page top left image: Napoleon participating in Mental Health Week to help bring awareness on how to support others, with the theme being "This is empathy. Before you weigh in, tune in." This page top right, middle and bottom images: Napoleon's Tiel, Netherlands associates showing how much they care by forming the Napoleon House and Heart and providing aerial photos. Opposite page: Tina Hitch, Vice President of Human Resources.

"The concept of the HEART took off like something we never expected. Everyone just loves it — rather than thinking about the individual values it represents, they think HEART. The HEART provides that strong foundation of how we are as people, how we do things, and how we interact with one another. Everyone embraced the concept from the get-go, and it became totally entrenched in the business; it was no longer something that was written on a page. Each time someone brings up examples of associates living the core values in meetings, it gets instantly equated with the notion of truly working with HEART. Every meeting starts with us talking about the House and the Heart. The concept of the HEART has become so embedded in the culture of Napoleon that today it even translates into how we evaluate performance." *- Tina Hitch, Vice President of Human Resources*

FAMILY VALUES AT WORK— THE NAPOLEON ASSOCIATES EXPERIENCE

The core values and culture come to life in the way Napoleon associates approach their work and how Napoleon treats and takes care of their valued team members. The Napoleon family of over 1,500 associates lives the company's core values day in and day out while contributing to, and participating in, the unique Napoleon culture.

It is not a coincidence, but a reflection of a deep commitment to the foundational values and Napoleon's distinct company culture, that the Schroeters have consistently invested in the associate experience from early on. The family recognizes that their company could not have developed into what it is today without their dedicated associates. "We may be product-driven, but it is the people who make us who we are," says Stephen Schroeter.

As a family and values-driven business, Napoleon puts a lot of emphasis on providing associates with opportunities to grow and to take responsibility in their respective areas. This is reflected in the fact that many associates have been with Napoleon for decades. John Ayotte is the longest-serving associate, having worked in various positions in the company including assembly and maintenance for 40 years.

There is a distinct sense of ownership among Napoleon associates that has helped make the company strong. "We are family here," is a statement made not only by the Schroeters, but by many associates as well. "It does not matter how big the company has grown; we are still family!" confirms Napoleon's former Building Maintenance Supervisor Ron Noordhoff, who retired after 35 years with the company.

From the early days, Wolfgang and Ingrid made sure that associates saw a perspective for professional growth and development in the company. Courses offered through the company were one of many ways to enable associates to have fulfilling long-term careers. As Napoleon became more structured and process-driven, the associate experience became more formalized as well. Under the leadership of Vice President of Human Resources Tina Hitch, who has served in leadership roles in HR since 2006, Napoleon developed and adopted many processes and programs to support associates in their growth within the company.

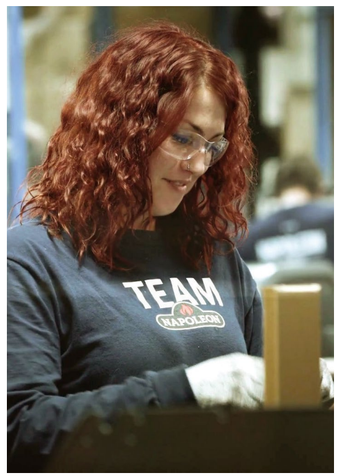
Over the years, the performance evaluation and continuous feedback process has evolved to adopt a more pathway-focused approach—one aimed at identifying individual development paths and creating actionable plans to help associates achieve their growth goals. PATH is an evaluation system for the more engineering type



associates that lays out a path for how they can take their careers to the next level. Another program that is embedded in the performance review process is aimed at creating pathways for hourly workers to develop the skills necessary to qualify for roles of higher responsibility. The program provides virtual access to all relevant information, such as the courses they need and the tuition reimbursement associated with a particular course that will take the respective associate closer to their goal of being a machine operator, for instance.











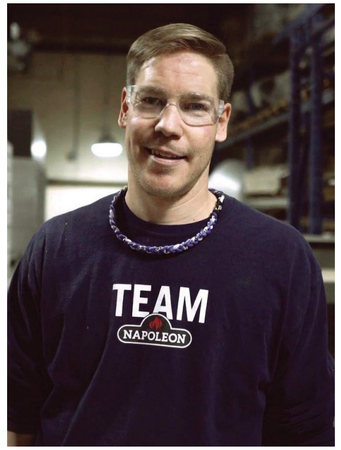
In addition to showing pathways for personal and professional growth involving external education courses, Napoleon offers internal training programs for many different operational roles, such as machine operator, forklift operator, or painter to allow associates to keep growing in their careers with the company.

Since its inception in 1995, the Associates Relations Committee (ARC), operates as an organized forum for associates to communicate issues of concern to management. Part of the ARC's mission today is to help Napoleon associates achieve their growth goals as a partner. One of many initiatives, the ARC established a 'buddy system' that creates accountability throughout the professional development process and helps associates be successful in their transitioning into a new role.



























“Engagement is key — we value Associates who are involved, passionate, and committed to driving our shared success.”









AWARDS AND RECOGNITION OF ASSOCIATES

Over the years, the Schroeters have put in place many incentive programs, including continuous improvement awards to foster teamwork, quality, and process improvements. These awards provide associates with the opportunity to come forward with proposals on how to improve processes and products. It is often simple ideas brought forward by the associates that save the company time and money and help keep Napoleon competitive.

In 2024, Napoleon launched its hugely popular peer-to-peer virtual recognition program called Awardco. This digital platform provides associates with a forum to recognize each other's contributions through shoutouts and comments. It operates like a chat system where people can go in at any time and shout out to someone for doing well. In 2024, there were 1,136 peer-to-peer shoutouts acknowledging individual team members and teams while the special category of "Caught in the act of excellence" saw over 1,300 peer-to-peer recognitions alone. Recognitions are converted into points that associates can build up over time and redeem for products from a wide variety of retailers accessible through the platform. The program further provides the company with a forum to welcome new team members, acknowledge birthdays, promotions, and retirements, among others, while giving team members the opportunity to comment and express their best wishes for each other.









SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

The Wolf Pack, Wolf Steel's and Napoleon's social committee, organizes company events for the associates, including an annual Christmas party, a summer picnic, and many other activities for associates and their families.

THE NAPOLEON CODE OF CONDUCT

The Napoleon Code of Conduct, introduced in 2023, is deeply rooted in the Napoleon core values. Introduced by Chris Schroeter and Mike Tzimas to all global Napoleon associates, spanning North America, Europe, and China, the Napoleon Code of Conduct outlines the way Napoleon does business around the world. In addition to reinforcing applicable legal frameworks for conducting business, it recognizes international human rights as well as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

"Accountability is essential — we take ownership of our actions and deliver on our commitments to each other and our customers."

















"Respect is fundamental — we value diverse perspectives and treat everyone with dignity, fairness, and kindness."



MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE COMMUNITY

The Schroeters are grateful for the amazing opportunities they have had over the years. As the largest privately-owned employer in the Barrie area and as value-driven entrepreneurs, they see it as their responsibility to give back to the community. When approached by charities and other local organizations, they do not like to say no, resulting in monetary and product donations to hospitals, nursing homes, sports teams, schools, and many other charities. Like the Schroeters, Napoleon associates invest in many community organizations and, through Napoleon Cares, in each other to help fellow associates who have fallen on hard times. “Giving back is very important to us,” says Wolfgang on behalf of the entire family.

Much of Napoleon’s community involvement starts close to home. Napoleon supports training programs at colleges and universities, offering four and eighteen-month internships to help develop the next generation of manufacturing and engineering talent as well as co-op opportunities throughout the company. A tree planting program at all Napoleon facilities further supports Napoleon’s environmental sustainability goals.









“Teamwork is at the heart of everything we do at Napoleon — it’s the driving force behind our innovation, our success, and our strong sense of community.”



BEING A PART OF THE WIDER COMMUNITY: COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND INITIATIVES SUPPORTED BY NAPOLEON

Alzheimer Society-Barrie Chapter;
American Heart Association
(heart disease and stroke prevention)
Autism Ontario-Simcoe County;
Barrie Colts Hockey Team;
Barrie Food Bank;
Barrie Soccer Club (team sponsorships);
Big Brothers-Big Sisters;
Canadian Cancer Society-Simcoe Chapter;
Canadian Special Olympics-Simcoe Chapter;
Children’s Wish Foundation;
City of Barrie (various community events);
Crohn’s & Colitis Society-Simcoe Chapter;
Easter Seals of Simcoe County;
Elmvale Fire Fighters;
Festival of Sound (the Barrie area arts);
Georgian College (sustainable energies lab,
wellness facility, scholarships);
Gilda’s Club-Barrie (cancer facility);
Habitat for Humanity-The ReStore;
Hawkestone Community Association
(local children’s activities);
Hospice Simcoe (palliative care facility);
Knights of Columbus-Barrie;
MADD Canada;
MS Society-Simcoe County;
Oro-Medonte Fire Fighters;
Oro-Medonte Minor Soccer (team sponsorships);
Oro-Medonte Museum;
Out of the Cold Program-Barrie;
Ovarian Cancer Canada;
PAK-Players Assisting Kids (support of
underprivileged children to attend camp);
Parry Sound Hospital;
Reach for the Rainbow
(children with special needs);
Royal Victoria Hospital Barrie Cancer Care Facility;
Salvation Army Shelter;
Seasons Centre for Grieving Children;
Simcoe County Museum;
Simcoe Hospice;
Soldiers’ Memorial Hospital Orillia;
Team Ontario Women’s Gymnastics;
Tim Horton’s Children’s Foundation;
Wendat (Simcoe) Community
(psychiatric support programs);
Women & Children’s Shelter-Barrie;
YMCA of Simcoe Muskoka (new Barrie facility)









NAPOLEON CONTRIBUTES TO THE NEW YMCA SPORTS FACILITY IN BARRIE

In October 2019, building on their longstanding involvement in the community, the Schroeters, in the name of Napoleon and Napoleon associates, announced that they were donating $500,000 over a ten-year period to the YMCA of Simcoe Muskoka. When the new facility on 535 Bayview Drive in Barrie had its groundbreaking ceremony in March 2025, the YMCA recognized the contribution by the Schroeter family by naming the new gymnasium after Napoleon. “As soon as our family heard about the possibility of a brand-new YMCA facility, we knew that this was something we would love to be part of,” Stephen said at the time of the announcement. Funds raised through this fundraising campaign are being applied to the new building and to several new initiatives introduced by the Y, serving the community in the areas of physical and mental health, immigration services, healthy families, and transitional housing for youth.

NAPOLEON CARES

Parallel with investing into community causes, Napoleon also makes sure to take care of their own. In 2016, on the initiative of long-time associates Tina Hitch and Shannon Beelik in the HR Department, Napoleon created Napoleon Cares, a benevolent fund for supporting Napoleon associates experiencing a crisis or sudden hardship in their lives. “We were fundraising for charity support around the Christmas season and an associate came to our office and said, ‘I have trouble supporting all these external efforts knowing that my co-worker is struggling with XYZ.’ That really hit us hard and made us realize that we were not doing enough for our own people. The outcome of that was Napoleon Cares, a program and fund based on the idea of associates helping associates,” says Tina Hitch.

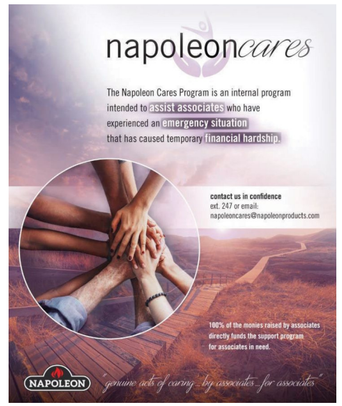


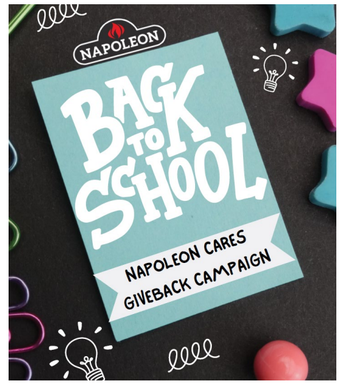
Napoleon associates contribute to the fund through payroll deductions that are matched by the company at year’s end. The fund is administered by the Napoleon Cares Committee and associates can receive aid by direct request to the committee or nomination from their peers.

In addition to payroll deductions, various departments have launched special fundraising campaigns for the program, such as a 50/50 draw, the annual IT department cook-off, a bake sale, and a Christmas bazaar. In 2023, the company created a Napoleon Cares T-shirt, the proceeds of which went directly to the fund under the tagline “By associates, for associates.”

Associates helping fellow associates through Napoleon Cares has brought people together like never before and fundraisers for the program have become an integral part of the Napoleon culture. Since its inception, Napoleon Cares has helped associates in need in many different ways. When tornadoes ripped through Kentucky, Napoleon Cares provided much-needed support to Napoleon associates who had suffered damage from the storm. When an employee’s house unexpectedly burned down, financial support through Napoleon Cares helped them get back on their feet. Associates dealing with unexpected catastrophic events like a sustained health crisis, receiving a cancer diagnosis, or losing a spouse have been recipients of Napoleon Cares support as well.

In late March 2020, as an immediate response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Napoleon Cares Committee temporarily modified the program criteria to create a short-term crisis intervention solution for associates who were facing financial or medical difficulties during lockdown measures. The “Tools for School” initiative raises funds to help Napoleon families struggling with paying for backpacks and school supplies during expensive back-to-school times. Likewise, many associates have benefited from “The Giving Tree” program, which ensures that no Napoleon team member goes without a holiday meal or gifts to put under the Christmas tree. “We are happy to help those associates going through a hard time,” says Wolfgang of this initiative. “It is important to take care of our own people.”









INVOLVEMENT OF SCHROETER FAMILY MEMBERS IN INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS

For the Schroeters as values-driven entrepreneurs, involvement in the community extends to taking on leadership roles in the main industry organization that helps advance the interests of the entire hearth, patio and barbecue products industry. For many years, Napoleon has been closely affiliated with the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association of Canada (HPBAC) and its umbrella organization, the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association (HPBA) in the U.S.

The Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association of Canada (HPBAC) is the national industry association for the hearth and barbecue industries in Canada. Founded in 1994 and located in Huntsville, Ontario, the purpose of HPBAC is to promote and protect the industry, represent it on matters of public affairs and government relations, and provide education for members and the public. Its industry-wide focus is reflected in its diverse membership, consisting of manufacturers, retailers, distributors, sales agents, and service companies.

Located in Arlington, Virginia, Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association (HPBA) is an international not-for-profit trade association first established in 1980 to represent and promote the interests of the hearth products industry in North America. In 2002, the Hearth Products Association (HPA) merged with the Barbecue Industry Association (BIA) to form HPBA. The association includes manufacturers, retailers, distributors, manufacturers' representatives, service and installation firms, and other companies and individuals. Every year, HPBA hosts HPBExpo, North America's largest trade show for the hearth, patio, and barbecue industries.

While HPBAC is an affiliate of the U.S.-based HPBA, the Canadian organization maintains a standalone identity as an independent organization that deals with different issues in the context of Canadian regulations than its counterpart in the U.S.



Ingrid first took on an active role in HPBA in 2008 when she joined as a member of the Communications Committee. This was followed by positions as a board member and treasurer. As a member of the Board Development Committee, she was involved in developing various policies that had to be put in place at HPBAC. The organization did not have a lot of experience in this area and Ingrid's background with creating policies at Napoleon put her in a position to help HPBAC with that.

While continuing to serve on the board of the HPBAC, Ingrid also became a board member of the HPBA in the U.S. where she served as the representative for their Canadian affiliate organization HPBAC. She first became involved in HPBA in 2011 as an Expo Committee member before also joining the Affiliates and Government Affairs Committees for four years. From 2016 until 2020 she served on the Executive, and, in 2018 and 2019, she was Chair of the Board of HPBA. While involved in leadership roles at HPBA, Ingrid continued serving as a board member of HPBAC as well. She proudly refers to herself as "the voice of the HPBAC" on the American board.

When Ingrid retired from both boards in 2020, Stephen Schroeter took over as a member of the HPBA board where he took on the role of treasurer. Subsequently, Chris Schroeter took over from his brother as a board member in 2023 and he continues in this role to this day.

In 2024, Ingrid received the first HPBAC appreciation plaque recognizing her many years of dedication, service, and support, and she was called an 'association champion.' "I tremendously enjoyed working with many people in the industry for the common good of our businesses," she says. "Even though we were competitors, it was our joint industry, and we all felt committed to support that through our involvement in HPBA and HPBAC."

Co-founder, Ingrid Schroeter, being honoured with the Association Champion Award by the Hearth, Patio, and Barbecue Association Canada. From L to R: Ingrid Schroeter, Laura Litchfield, and Dan Bonar.



Group photo taken after Ingrid received her Association Champion Award from the Hearth, Patio, and Barbecue Association Canada.

NAPOLEON ASSOCIATES INVOLVED IN HPBA AND HPBAC (AS OF 2025)

Like the Schroeters, many Napoleon associates have been associated with both HPBA and HPBAC over the years. To this day, they help shape the industry both in Canada and the U.S. through their involvement on various committees.

HPBA

Board Of Directors
Chris Schroeter - Co-Chief Executive Officer

Communications Committee
Justin Spray – Marketing - Manager - Digital

Expo Committee
Bruno Tassone – Marketing- Trade Show Manager

Government Affairs Committee
David Shulver - VP Research & Development
Cuong Vo - R&D Hearth - Sr Manager Product & Technology - Electric Heat

Market Research Committee
Justin Spray - Marketing - Manager - Digital

Affiliate Leaders Committee
Alexis Ellis - Sales Hearth US - Distribution Sales Manager
Randy Morris - Sales Hearth US - Business Development Manager
Paul Nigon – Marketing - Category Manager - Outdoor Products

Electric Hearth Appliance Section
Cuong Vo - R&D Hearth - Sr Manager Product & Technology - Electric Heat

HPBAC

Board Of Directors
David Shulver - VP Research & Development

Board Development Committee
Tracey Elkerton – Sales Hearth - Senior Director of Sales - Independents - Canada

Communications Committee
Steve Gauci - General Manager, NHC Retail Store
Christine Hamlyn – Marketing - Director Product Management - Hearth

Education Committee
Cindy Buckle - Training Supervisor

Public Affairs Committee
Christine Hamlyn – Marketing - Director Product Management - Hearth
John Kennedy - R&D Hearth - Sr Manager Product Engineering Hearth & Special Projects

LEADING THE INDUSTRY THROUGH INNOVATION BUILT BETTER

NAPOLEON TODAY AND OUTLOOK INTO THE FUTURE

8

Astound FlexMount — A smart electric fireplace with spark technology and flexible installation: wall-mounted or 1-, 2-, or 3-sided recessed setups.









This and opposite page: Napoleon locations in Barrie, Ontario, Canada. Opposite page top image: Grill manufacturing and offices, 214 Bayview Drive. Opposite page bottom left image: Napoleon Logistics Centre, 2621 Gore Rd. Opposite page bottom right image: Aerial view of HVAC manufacturing, offices and retail store, 24 Napoleon Road. This page image: Fireplace manufacturing and offices, 9 Napoleon Road.

NAPOLEON TODAY

A COMPANY WELL POSITIONED WITH DIVERSIFIED CAPACITIES AROUND THE GLOBE

Led by the second generation of Schroeter family entrepreneurs and an experienced senior leadership team, Napoleon is a global leader with a market footprint that spans 60 countries around the world. With production facilities in Canada, China, and Mexico, warehouses and distribution centres in the UK, Netherlands, Canada, and the United States, an office and showroom in Austria, over 1,500 dedicated associates, and an extensive dealer and distributor network, Napoleon reaches consumers in North America, South America, Europe, Oceania, and Asia.

As a company that manufactures in both Canada and China, and as an exporter of manufactured products to the U.S., Europe and many countries around the world, Napoleon is no longer immune from the macroeconomic and geopolitical headwinds affecting governments and corporations the world over. As both the cost of doing business and risk exposure for internationally operating companies has increased due to factors outside the control of individual market players, Napoleon pays close attention to risk-proofing their global manufacturing and distribution capabilities.

With rising costs of ocean freight and growing geopolitical tensions between Western countries and the People's Republic of China, Napoleon has taken it upon itself to further diversify its capacities globally. The intent of the Schroeters to reduce Napoleon's reliance on overseas manufacturing and to expand manufacturing capacities in North America has resulted in the 2025 opening of Napoleon's latest manufacturing plant in Mexico.
By establishing operations in Mexico, Napoleon has gained further efficiency by positioning a third manufacturing hub closer to suppliers and U.S.-based customers. "This strategic move underscores our dedication to fortifying our global position and sharpening our competitive edge in an industry that is under extensive cost pressure," says Mike Tzimas.



















Opposite page: Top left image: Wolf Steel in Berkswell, UK. Top right image: Napoleon facility in Ramos Arizpe, Mexico. Centre image: European Logistics Centre, Tiel, The Netherlands. Bottom left image: U.S. warehouse in Crittenden, Kentucky (2014). Bottom right image: Quebec warehouse in Montreal, Canada.

This page: Top image: Wolf Steel USA. Centre left image: Wolf Steel Austria in Haag. Centre right image: The Napoleon plant in Guangzhou, China. Bottom image: The grill manufacturing and offices building at 214 Bayview Drive, Barrie, Canada.

A GLOBAL CHALLENGER THAT LEADS THE INDUSTRY THROUGH CONSTANT INNOVATION

At the 50-year milestone, the Napoleon story is one of constantly challenging the status quo, taking risks, and innovating in the execution of the entrepreneurial spirit of the Schroeter family. It is a story of never standing still, creating opportunities, and pivoting into new areas time and again. At the heart of the Napoleon success story is the Schroeters' deep desire, so deeply embedded in the Napoleon culture, to always keep improving and to being better today than yesterday in presenting consumers with high quality products that enhance their everyday living experience.

The family's special drive and commitment to ongoing innovation expresses itself in Napoleon being a challenger and disruptor, as Wolfgang explains: "There have been so many times that we were told we would not succeed, yet we did. When we came out with the first grill for $1,000, people said it wouldn't sell because there was no market for it," he says. "The same thing happened when we got heavily into electric fireplaces. People told us it does not look the same as a gas fireplace and that we wouldn't be successful," adds Ingrid. There were naysayers along the entire Napoleon journey and the Schroeters take pride in the fact that they proved them all wrong.

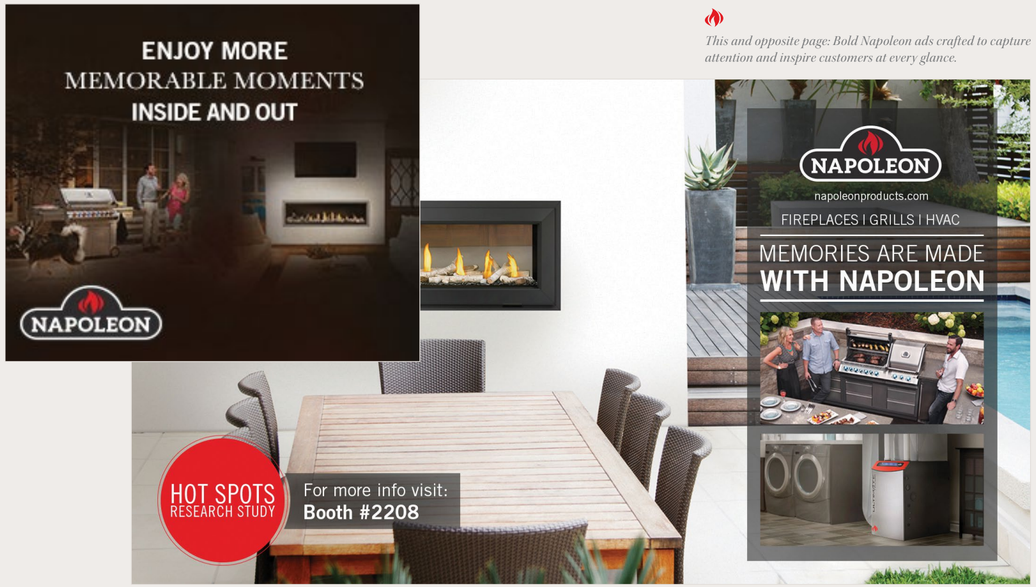
Being a challenger is so fundamental to the Napoleon identity that one of the three key objectives of the "Napoleon House" describing the philosophical foundations of the company today and into the future is "We continually challenge the status quo to perfect our products, systems, and processes."

A SECOND-GENERATION FAMILY-OWNED BUSINESS THAT KEEPS BUILDING ON THE FOUNDERS' LEGACY

Chris and Stephen have been the drivers behind changes that differentiate the Napoleon of today from the time of their parents' visionary leadership.

There has been an intentional shift from an entrepreneurial business model to a more systems- and process driven legacy business that is sustainable in the long term and that can stand on its own. The brothers' shared focus on implementing new processes, making process improvements, identifying efficiencies, and capitalizing on them has been an important contributor to the exponential growth Napoleon experiences today.

Under their joint leadership in the second generation, Napoleon invests much more heavily in brand building and marketing to reach a larger consumer audience in more countries than ever before. The brothers' propensity for the use of technology as a differentiator expresses itself in their company's strong presence on all popular digital and social media platforms and the application of the latest digital marketing tools. Whereas during their parents' leadership, Napoleon products were almost exclusively made available through independent specialty dealers and distributors, the Napoleon



This and opposite page: Bold Napoleon ads crafted to capture attention and inspire customers at every glance.

of today uses a host of different sales channels—independent specialty dealers, distributors, multi-location big box stores, and e-commerce—while carefully balancing the needs of their loyal distributors, dealers and consumers in each channel. "We invest in knowing consumers and where they want to buy. Understanding the channels, knowing the markets, and assigning the right products to each channel is critical. Channel management allows our independent dealer base to thrive while we meet consumers wherever they are," says Chris.

A COMPANY THAT INVESTS IN STATE-OF-THE-ART INTEGRATED SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

Under the leadership of Chris and Stephen Schroeter, Napoleon distinguishes itself as a company that keeps investing in state-of-the-art integrated systems and processes. One of many examples, the move from the company's previous ERP system to Microsoft Dynamics 365 Finance & Operations has enabled Napoleon to achieve a higher level of integration and efficiency in management processes across the entire network. Transitioning to a new ERP system, which was started during the pandemic and implemented in phases, was a massive undertaking, requiring the Napoleon team to ensure proper data migration, existing software integrations, synchronization of new third-party applications, plus testing and training.

Microsoft Dynamics provides many benefits over the previous system that was run locally instead of being cloud-based and difficult to upgrade. Monthly updates ensure that the new system always stays up to date and aligns with new laws and regulations while new functionality keeps being added. The system's integration with AI agents and analytics, together with thousands of software packages designed to extend the system's functionality through third party add-ins, suggest that it will stay relevant as Napoleon keeps growing in all areas of the business.

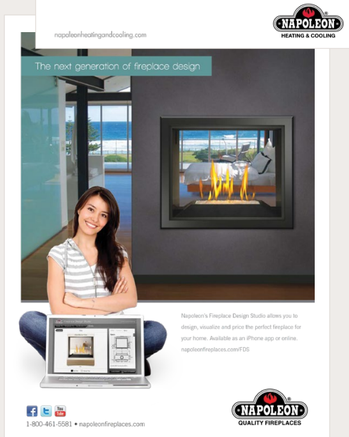
The Bluestar product lifecycle management platform that is part of the ERP system tracks engineering changes and non-conformances, generates bill of materials data directly from CAD drawings and reduces errors and manual work. As a global ERP, warehouse management, and customer relation management system all in one, Microsoft Dynamics further serves as a single data management tool across the entire Napoleon network, serving all functions of the business, and thereby improving data quality and reporting and analytics capabilities. By providing a single view of inventory for all of Napoleon's facilities worldwide, it further supports the centralized administration of Napoleon's global distribution system.







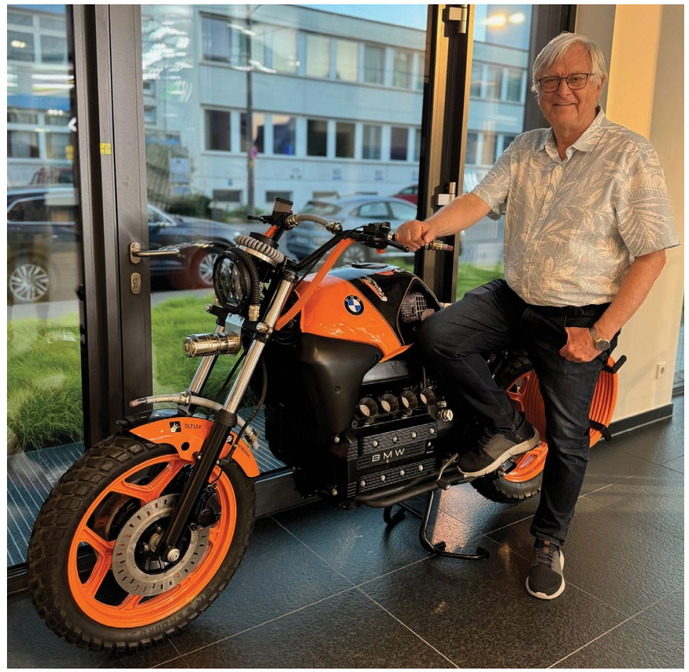












A COMPANY WHERE THE ONGOING PRESENCE OF THE FOUNDERS IS PART OF THE COMPANY CULTURE

While taking great pride in their sons' leadership, Wolfgang and Ingrid maintain an active and healthy presence in the company as the founders. Their ongoing role on the board of advisors provides a formal structure for their input on matters affecting the company at large.
When not working on motorcycles or traveling together with Ingrid, Wolfgang continues to be involved in R&D projects at Napoleon. Ingrid, who plans to take up artwork and photography in her retirement, enjoys traveling and time with the grandchildren, looks after her mother as well as tending to various administrative matters related to the Schroeter family office. Together, Ingrid and Wolfgang attend annual dealer trips and the main industry events, namely SPOGA and the HPBExpo, where they continue to meet with long-time dealers and distributors who love to see and interact with them, building upon the memories they have established with Wolfgang and Ingrid over decades. "As those who primarily built the company, Wolfgang and Ingrid's continued involvement, however limited, is essential to a company whose culture revolves around family," notes Ron McArthur.

Chris and Stephen and their leadership team retain a symbiotic relationship with Wolfgang and Ingrid as the founders. "We have it pretty streamlined now," says Chris of his parents' involvement through the advisory board. "They usually want to check the numbers," says Chris, understanding that the company is still "a child they wish to protect at all costs." But today they are more the ones asking questions than giving directives, and that works just fine for everyone. "It is one for all when they come in on matters today," notes Ron McArthur, who continues to serve on the Advisory Board of the Napoleon Group of Companies. "There is trust in both directions, and they can see things are in good hands."



Opposite page top image: Wolfgang at the German Grill Championship 2025. Opposite page bottom left image: Ingrid judging the children grilling challenge at the German Grill Championships in 2025. Opposite page bottom right image, from L to R: Edu Hartog (Managing Director - Europe), Michiel Beekhuizen (Manager Transport/Logistics/EU, and Wolfgang at the German Grill Championships 2025.

This page top image: Wolfgang with the motorcycle he custom designed for his cousin's company, the Lapp Group in Germany. This page bottom image: Wolfgang showcasing his motorcycle collection, most of which he custom-designed himself.



Chris, Wolfgang, Ingrid and Stephen Schroeter.

THE FUTURE

A COMPANY COMMITTED TO CONTINUOUS GROWTH

Chris and Stephen are committed to continuing to grow Napoleon as an industry leader and increasingly global brand. To them, the Napoleon vision to be "the aspirational brand of choice for today and tomorrow" is personal as it defines the direction for their own future and for that of their company. While Napoleon has come a long way already in achieving this vision, the brothers see lots of opportunity for sustained growth in the future. Not growth for growth's sake but growth through the development of sustainable and innovative products that help provide solutions to today's pressing concerns about the future of the planet.

The fact that Chris and Stephen grew into their leadership position during a time of exponential growth, while Napoleon doubled and redoubled revenue and outperformed the competition, plays into their commitment to facilitating sustained growth moving forward. The brothers have clear expectations as to what the continued growth of Napoleon in the future will look like: "Our long-term strategy is that we want to grow revenue 15 percent year over year. It is achievable and we have the capital to grow at that rate while keeping our customers satisfied," says Stephen. With virtually all of Napoleon's current product having been updated or newly launched in the last few years, Chris and Stephen see many opportunities for sustained growth in all product categories. "Realistically, we have additional 50 percent capacity in all our plants, adds Chris.

Together with the latest warehousing, logistics, and supply management technology and processes, Napoleon's dedicated warehousing and distribution space in North America and Europe supports ongoing growth and the unique requirements of Napoleon customers in markets around the world.

A FAMILY-OWNED COMPANY THAT WILL CONTINUE TO THRIVE ON THE COMBINED STRENGTHS OF GREAT PEOPLE

As they keep moving Napoleon forward, Chris and Stephen rely on a strong leadership team and a work force of over 1,500 associates that is second to none. By the same token, the advisory board provides them with great advice from business leaders who have led their own organizations through change and sustained growth and ask the right questions. "The board makes us more mature as a company," says Stephen. Structured as an advisory board rather than a board of directors, it provides invaluable input while ultimately leaving the brothers the autonomy they need to make the larger decisions affecting the organization as a whole.

Napoleon always has been and will remain a place for associates to develop and grow. It is not a coincidence but by design, that many associates have evolved with the company throughout careers that span 10, 15, 20, and even 30 plus years. Focus on constant innovation, paired with a distinct and strong family culture, facilitates personal and professional growth and development in all areas of the business. This also results in lower turnover, while new roles —such as those in AI and mechatronics, which didn't even exist ten years ago—continue to attract talent from emerging fields. Attracting the right people will be key as Napoleon continues to grow as an industry leader.

A FAMILY-OWNED COMPANY THAT WILL CONTINUE TO THRIVE ON ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT AND FAMILY VALUES

The entrepreneurial spirit of the Schroeter family, their ability to make quick changes and adjustments as leaders of a family owned company, and the special family culture with its strong relationships and mutual loyalty between Napoleon and their trusted dealers and associates are core foundations for Napoleon's ongoing ability to not only thrive but lead the industry as a family business compared to their mostly corporate competitors.



“At Napoleon, we are in the business of inspiring and enhancing the most memorable moments people enjoy in their homes. Our core values are a fundamental part of these memorable moments. They provide us with the framework for our beliefs as a person and as an organization. These values guide us on how to create outstanding customer experiences and how to work together as a team in creating this environment. These values help us to know what is right from wrong. At Napoleon, we strive to work with values of the HEART.”

As the second-generation leaders, Chris and Stephen feel deeply responsible for making sure that Napoleon maintains its distinct family culture. “Leadership needs to protect the brand, customers and team members and be serious at all times about putting the right foot forward while living and exemplifying the values and culture,” says Chris. The brothers agree that it is important that people know who they work for and that who they work for cares about them beyond getting the product out the door. The concept of the HEART that carries the Schroeter family values into the future helps preserve the founders’ legacy while facilitating a caring and accountable environment within the global organization Napoleon has become.

A COMPANY GENUINELY COMMITTED TO SUSTAINABILITY AS A KEY DIFFERENTIATOR FOR THE FUTURE

Environmental sustainability of products and processes is of central importance for Napoleon moving forward. Chris and Stephen look at sustainability as a key differentiator in the near and long-term future. The goal is to produce products that are net zero and to have environmental sustainability fully integrated into everything Napoleon does. “Sustainability is both a goal and a purpose-driven journey and we want everyone to be aligned on it,” says Chris.

Attesting to the significance the Schroeters place on sustainability, Napoleon is intentional about helping associates understand the role sustainability will play in the future of the business. A February 2025 engagement survey established the baseline for what associates know about Napoleon’s sustainability efforts. It confirmed that there is strong buy-in from associates, who feel a greater sense of purpose in their work due to the Schroeters’ and Napoleon’s genuine commitment to sustainability.

In the same way Napoleon is creating awareness for what the company is doing on the sustainability side and its long-term effects on processes and products, the Schroeters and the leadership team are intentional in their conversations about AI and how it will impact the business and people’s roles in the future.

A COMPANY DRIVEN BY THE IMPERATIVE OF “INNOVATION BUILT BETTER”

“Innovation Built Better,” the company’s core identity statement, mandates that Napoleon will continue to stay ahead of new trends and lead the industry through innovative products offered at the right value. “Napoleon runs on the new and not the old and that shows how adaptable and good the company really is,” says Stephen. “From the days of our parents starting the company, we have always gone where the market went and changed with the times and we will continue to do that going forward.” “There are so many industry firsts going back to our parents and the early days of our company,” says Chris. “We see building onto that great legacy as central to our role as the second-generation leaders.”

As the founders, Wolfgang and Ingrid are grateful to see their legacy continue. They take great pride in their sons’ joint leadership, the excellence of the senior leadership team, and the combined strength and dedication of the Napoleon team of associates. “I drive by the plant on the highway every day and often think about what we have been able to build here together,” says Ingrid. “We are grateful to all the people who helped us grow this business and continue to work with us today,” adds Wolfgang.

Chris and Stephen share their parents’ gratitude to those virtually thousands of internal and external stakeholders—leaders, advisors, business partners, vendors, distributors, dealers, customers, and associates—without whom Napoleon would not have become the industry leader it is today. Looking forward, the brothers see a long-term future for themselves in their ongoing roles as co-CEO’s. “We are still young as CEO’s, giving us some runway,” says Chris. Whereas Stephen and his wife Shannon have no children, Chris and his wife Diana have two daughters, Coralie and Rochelle. At nine and five years old respectively, it is too early to tell whether there is going to be a third generation of Schroeter family entrepreneurs. What is sure though is that, just like their parents, Chris and Stephen will hold the business in an open hand to enable its long-term future as a family-owned legacy business solidly built on the Schroeter family values and the core imperative of “Innovation Built Better.”



ANNEX

INDUSTRY-FIRSTS—SETTING THE INDUSTRY STANDARD THROUGH INNOVATION

Driven by innovation, Napoleon has developed many firsts in the industry:

- Single-cast-iron door with pyroceramic glass—an industry standard today
- Wood stove air-wash system
- Direct-vent fireplace with venting at 40 feet horizontal and vertical
- Combination direct-vent and b-vent adapter
- First down-draft combustion system in wood stoves (“Deluxe N2001”)
- First direct-vent fireplace with a 45-degree angle take-off for venting
- Porcelainized sheet metal system that acts as a triple mirror to enhance flame appearance
- Night lights for fireplaces
- Combination gas and electric fireplace
- Hinged door for direct-vent fireplaces
- “The Dream” – the largest gas fireplace on the market at the time it was launched
- Double-lid barbecues
- Ultraviolet lights in a furnace
- Condopack with interchangeable heating and cooling systems

NAPOLEON AWARDS AND ACCREDITATIONS

Over the years, Wolf Steel/Napoleon has been recognized for their contributions to the hearth, patio and barbecue industry and the economy of the larger Barrie area. The innovative spirit of the company has resulted in a number of industry awards.

Since 1998, when *Napoleon* started exhibiting product at the *Sport, Camping and Garden Lifestyle Show (SPOGA)*, the world’s largest trade show for the promotion of outdoor products with over 2,500 exhibitors from 63 countries, in Cologne, Germany, the company has won several SPOGA awards. The Hearth, Patio and Barbecue Association (HPBA) introduced its annual *Vesta Awards* for hearth products excellence in 2001. *Napoleon* products have consistently been among the finalists and Napoleon’s leadership in this category has been recognized through many Vesta awards.

AWARDS RECEIVED BY NAPOLEON

- 2004 City of Barrie - Business Development Bank - Manufacturing Business - Excellence Award to Napoleon Fireplaces/Wolf Steel Lts.
- 2006 Vesta Award for the Napoleon “750” five-burner grill
- 2007 HPBExpo to Napoleon Fireplaces in Recognition of 20 Years of Exhibiting in the HPBExpo
- 2007 SPOGA Gold Award for Napoleon and first place in the barbecue category for the Napoleon “Gemini” grill”
- 2012 Vesta Award in the central heating systems category and Daniel J. Melcon Award for best-in-show product in the hearth products category for Napoleon’s “HMF200” and “9600 wood/gas furnace combination
- 2013 Deloitte - Canada’s Best Managed Companies to Napoleon Group of Companies
- 2013 Oro-Medonte Chamber of Commerce - Employer of the Year Award to Wolf Steel Ltd. Napoleon Products
- 2014 AmazingRibs.com Top Ten Best Value to Napoleon for Charcoal Grills “Mirage PRO605CSS”
- 2014 Canadian Tire - Divisional Vendor of the Year (Seasonal & Gardening) Award to Napoleon Grills
- 2014 City of Barrie - Barrie Business Award to Napoleon Group of Companies for Mayor’s Employer of the Year
- 2015 Webaward Competition - Best Manufacturing Website - Wolf Steel Ltd. “Napoleon Grills”
- 2016-2017 Canada’s Best Managed Companies to Napoleon Group of Companies
- 2017 AmazingRibs.com Top Ten Best Value to Napoleon for Charcoal Grills “Mirage PRO605CSS”
- 2017 AmazingRibs.com Top Ten Best Value to Napoleon for Charcoal Grills “NK22CK-C”
- 2017 AmazingRibs.com Top Ten Best Value to Napoleon for Charcoal Grills “NK22CL-L”
- 2017 AmazingRibs.com Top Ten Best Value to Napoleon for Tailgate and Portable Grills “TravelQ 285X with Cart”
- 2017 HPBExpo to Napoleon Products In Recognition of 30 Years of Exhibiting in the HPBExpo
- 2017 Oro-Medonte Chamber of Commerce - Oro-Medonte Business Excellence Awards - Employer of the Year to Napoleon
- 2017 Vesta Award presented by HEART&HOME for Gas Products
- 2017 Vesta Award – The Daniel J. Melcon Award, Presented by Heart&Home for Best-in-Show Hearth Products
- 2018 AmazingRibs.com Pitmaster Award to Napoleon for Best Charcoal Grill “Mirage PRO605CSS”
- 2018 AmazingRibs.com Pitmaster Award to Napoleon for Best Charcoal Grill “NK22CK-C”
- 2018 AmazingRibs.com Pitmaster Award to Napoleon for Best Charcoal Grills “NK22CL-L”
- 2018 AmazingRibs.com Pitmaster Award to Napoleon for Best Gas Grill “Prestige P500RSIB”
- 2018 AmazingRibs.com Pitmaster Award to Napoleon for Best Gas Grill “Rogue R425SIB”
- 2018 AmazingRibs.com Pitmaster Award to Napoleon for Best Value Portable Grill “TravelQ 285X with Cart”
- 2018 Vesta Award presented by HEART&HOME for Hearth Accessories
- 2019 Acquia Engage Awards - Excellence in Digital Marketing - Napoleon
- 2019 Internet Advertising Competition - Best Consumer Goods Website awarded to Wolf Steel Ltd. for “Napoleon Grills: Upgrade Your Grilling Game”
- 2019 Vesta Award
- 2020 Canada’s Best Managed Companies to Napoleon Group of Companies
- 2021 HRAI - Membership Award to Napoleon Heating and Cooling - In Recognition of 20 Years of Commitment and Support to HRAI and the Canadian HVACR Industry
- 2022 Duravent Group - Sales Award to Wolf Steel for reaching Gold Level $500,000 +
- 2022 The Influence Agency - Summit Creative Award - Best Social Media Campaign - Napoleon - “#Napoleon Eats”
- 2023 BUILDING BETTER TOGETHER - Supplier of the Year Award to Napoleon HVAC - For providing consistent, exceptional support throughout 2023
- 2023 HPBExpo In Recognition of 35 Years of Exhibiting in the HPBExpo
- 2024 Oro-Medonte Chamber of Commerce – Business Excellence Awards presents Manufacturing Leadership Award to Napoleon







THE AUTHOR

Dr. Ulrich Frisse, Historical Branding Solutions Inc.

A corporate biographer, publisher, and historical branding and story-marketing consultant, Dr. Ulrich Frisse, LL.M. is the founder and creative director of Historical Branding Solutions Inc. Working out of Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, Dr. Frisse and his team provide family businesses, corporations, and not-for-profit organizations with customized, turnkey solutions to capture their story for preservation, celebration, brand-building, and marketing purposes. A trained lawyer and historian with a passion for research and communication, Dr. Frisse has taught history at Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Western Ontario. He is the author of many company history books and has advised businesses and not-for-profit organizations across North America on how to integrate their stories into their brands, processes, and culture. He can be reached at ufrisse@historicalbranding.com.



THE DESIGNER

Lesley Warren, W Design Co.

Lesley is the founder, CEO & Creative Director of W Design Co. Founded in 2007, W Design Co. is an award winning, full-service marketing and graphic design agency dedicated to building brands and growing businesses. A strategic thinker at heart, Lesley approaches design as both an art and a business tool—grounding every project in insight, purpose and intention to deliver results that are not only beautiful but meaningful. With over 25 years of industry experience, from Graphic Designer and Creative Director to Founder and CEO, Lesley has built a reputation for delivering work that balances bold creativity with clear strategic outcomes. Her work is guided by a belief that great design starts with listening, and that the most powerful ideas are rooted in human connection. Whether working with startups or global organizations, Lesley's focus remains the same: to help brands grow with clarity, confidence and heart. She can be reached at lesley@wdesignco.ca.

NAPOLEON