

Press Release

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150 years of Romaco Kilian

The story of an East-West German company

Kilian's story tells of the rise, fall and resurgence of a Berlin company steeped in tradition, which is now based in Cologne. It is the story of the entrepreneur Fritz Kilian, who turned a small locksmith's workshop in Berlin into a successful company that is still a leading manufacturer of tablet presses today. It is the story of a visionary whose legacy has endured the test of time and continues to this day.

In the beginning: the late 19th century

In a small locksmith's workshop in the Lichtenberg district of Berlin, 150 years ago, the foundations were laid for the tradition-steeped Romaco Kilian company we see today. In this workshop, which his father had founded in 1875, the young Friedrich Franz Otto Kilian discovered his passion for engineering. Following his apprenticeship as a mechanic, in 1886 the young man took over his father's business following the latter's untimely death, and developed a keen interest in compression techniques.

Fritz Kilian was commissioned by pharmacies in Berlin to develop various compression devices. These included a manual spindle press for producing pastilles, for which he obtained his first patent in 1891. As his next major goal, he devoted himself to designing an automatic tablet press. His prototype impressed the German Imperial Military Administration, and this catapulted his order book to a whole new level. Fritz Kilian had now made a name for himself as an entrepreneur. He moved into new premises and named his company the "Fabrik pharmaceutischer Maschinen und Geräthschaften" (Factory of Pharmaceutical Machines and Apparatus). In 1898, he obtained a patent for his universal press – the eccentric tablet press 4D, in which printing of the finished tablets was also incorporated.

Straight to the top

To cope with the rise in incoming orders, Fritz Kilian established new company premises including residential quarters in Berlin-Lichtenberg and, in 1899, began trading under the name "Fritz Kilian Maschinenfabrik" (Fritz Kilian Machine Factory). He chose a powder mill bearing his initials as the company logo, demonstrating his expertise in the handling of the raw materials involved in tablet production – knowledge that, even then, was critical for end product quality. His customer-focused, end-to-end approach and foresight as regards the importance of compressed products for various industries were key to his entrepreneurial success.

In 1905, a second factory was built in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, significantly expanding Fritz Kilian's production capacity. This laid the perfect groundwork for a modern company with a workforce of over 100 and numerous branches in other countries, including in the U.S. and UK. At the 1913 EXPO in Gent, Belgium, he was awarded the "Grand Prix" for his automated machines for the production of pharmaceutical products. Throughout his long career, he protected many of his inventions with more than 60 patents. Up until his retirement aged 74, the company continued to grow steadily in terms of sales, profits and portfolio expansion. Fritz Kilian emerged unscathed from the Wall Street Crash in the late 1920s, in part because the pharmaceutical industry was less affected by the general downturn. The bitter turning point only arrived with the onset of the Second World War.

Relentless decline

In 1940, Fritz Kilian stepped back from active involvement in the company and passed the business on to his two sons, Fritz and Hans. In retrospect, this was the beginning of the end. In 1941, Fritz Kilian Jr. was killed when a bomb was dropped on his night train to Hanover, where he was heading on business. A year later, in 1942, Fritz Kilian Sr. died of a stroke at the age of 76.

His other son Hans Kilian had taken over his father's machine factory in the middle of wartime and somehow managed to keep the business going. The good news: the two production plants in Hohenschönhausen and Lichtenberg in Berlin survived the end of the war virtually unscathed, and Hans Kilian saw a realistic chance of resuming full production with most of the old workforce. He had purposefully decided against moving with his family to Hamburg, thereby sealing his fate.

In 1946, Hans Kilian was arrested by the Soviet military administration and initially detained at the prison in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen. From there, he was transported to the Special Camp Sachsenhausen near Oranienburg where he is thought to have died, in 1947 already, of tuberculosis. The reasons for his arrest were never officially confirmed. His wife Eva then managed to flee with their three children to her mother's home in Delmenhorst.

After the sudden disappearance of Managing Director Hans Kilian, operations at the Maschinenfabrik Fritz Kilian finally ceased. Some employees, including Head of Production Werner Rühe and Head of Engineering Fritz Greter, managed to flee to the Western Occupation Zone – carrying numerous company documents and format drawings with them in their luggage.

Resurgence in Cologne

In the same year that her brother-in-law had died, the widow of Fritz Kilian Jr. took the initiative to rebuild the company and, together with Rühe and Greter, the two heads of department who had also fled the East, contacted the heirs of Fritz Kilian Sr. They soon found a production partner, Strunk, and in 1948 the newly founded Kilian & Co. GmbH was set up in Ehrenfeld, Cologne as the official representative of the Maschinenfabrik Fritz Kilian.

Despite the war years, international demand for Kilian products was as high as ever. A huge need for spare parts and services meant the company overcame its initial teething problems in its new setting and launched the first fully enclosed Kilian tablet press made in Cologne onto the market in 1952.

Back on track for success

Kilian was back. In 1953, wealthy English manufacturer James Frank Marshall and his wife – the widow of Fritz Kilian Jr. – acquired a majority stake in Kilian & Co. GmbH. At this point, production was outsourced to the Schmidding-Werke plant in the Niehl district of Cologne. After Marshall's death, Kilian was finally sold in its entirety to Schmidding-Werke in 1976 and remained a privately owned company until 2000. As there were no suitable successors, Kilian & Co. GmbH was then sold to the Italian group IMA S.p.A. Subsequently, Kilian was part of the globally active IMA Group for 13 years. During this period, the company also moved into the modern and spacious company premises and light-filled assembly workshop in Scarlottallee 11 in Niehl, Cologne. The current owner, Romaco, took over the

tableting technology manufacturer in 2013 and incorporated Kilian in its Processing division.

Today, the successor models to Fritz Kilian's original tablet press machines have joined the portfolio of Romaco, a one stop provider with technologies that cover the entire process chain for the manufacture and packaging of pharmaceuticals and non-pharmaceutical products. Here, alongside processing machines from Innojet and tablet coaters from Tecpharm, Kilian's tablet presses are in good company. This seems to be in keeping with the inventor's intentions. After all, Fritz Kilian made a stylized powder mill his company logo way back in 1899, demonstrating – almost by the by – his expertise in powder processing.

Technical achievements

When the young Fritz Kilian brought his first apparatuses onto the market, he was by no means the first. From the mid-19th century, many manufacturers of tablet press machines were already active in Europe and the U.S., all trying to outdo one another with their latest inventions. It is therefore all the more remarkable that, with his inventions, the initially quite penniless Fritz Kilian managed to assert himself in this competitive environment, and to become one of the leading tablet press suppliers of his time. Today, Kilian is the oldest still active manufacturer of tableting technology in the market.

Looking back, several of Fritz Kilian's technical achievements were groundbreaking for modern tableting technology, and these deserve a closer look. In 1900, Kilian designed a pair of compression rollers for his rotary presses, so that the compression force could be generated by upper and lower punches. The practice, still common today, of pre-compressing products before they enter the main compression unit, was developed by Kilian. The company launched a press with three filling stations for multilayer tablets way back in 1908. The best-known rotary tableting system from the early Kilian years is probably the "Heinzelmännchen", named after the mythical helpful elves of Cologne because of its user-friendly design. And in 1919, Kilian introduced the non-wearing upper punch guide.

In the mid-1930s, Kilian's industrial production of tab-in-tab applications was another pioneering invention that grew in popularity after the war. At this time, tablets were increasingly becoming the method of choice for taking antibiotics. However, the core containing the active ingredients needed to be dry-coated to

protect the unstable substances and mask the bitter taste of the medicine. Kilian had set the standard for the tab-in-tab production process, which helped the company gain a foothold in Cologne in the early 1950s and remain an active player in the international market until this day.

The modern successors to Kilian technologies impressively continue the legacy of company founder Fritz Kilian: on show at interpack in Düsseldorf, Germany (Hall 16, Booth D22) from May 7 to 13, 2026.

Concluding remarks

This article is based on the memoirs of Hans-Jürgen Kilian (son of Hans Kilian and grandson of Fritz Kilian Sr.). The memories endure, and so do the stories they inspire.

Summary

Romaco Kilian looks back at its 150-year history. It all began in 1875, in a small locksmith's workshop in Berlin, where Fritz Kilian built his first tablet press machines. Major contracts from the German Imperial Military Administration paved the way for the Fritz Kilian Maschinenfabrik to become a leading supplier of tabletting technology in just a few decades, with over 100 employees and several branches around the world. The inventions of this visionary entrepreneur were protected by more than 60 international patents. Only World War II abruptly interrupted the company's success story. The years between 1941 and 1947 saw the deaths of both founder Fritz Kilian Sr. and his two sons Fritz and Hans, whom he had trained to be his successors. The two factories in Berlin then ceased their operations.

However, 1948 already heralded a new beginning in Cologne, where Fritz Kilian's heirs and some of his closest employees rebuilt the company together with partners from the industry. Global demand for spare parts and services was unwavering, which helped the company to restore its business relationships. The first tablet press made in Cologne arrived on the market in 1952, and Kilian fought its way back onto the winning track. Kilian was sold to Schmidding-Werke in the 1970s, and remained in private ownership until the turn of the millennium. In 2000, the company became part of the Italian IMA Group, until the tradition-steeped company was acquired by Romaco in 2013 to expand its Processing division.

The world has inventor Fritz Kilian to thank for several trailblazing developments, such as his design of the first automatic rotary press, which featured a pair of compression rollers for generating compression force with upper and lower punches. One of the best-known models of the early Kilian years was the “Heinzelmännchen” – the user-friendly “helpful elf” rotary tableting system. Kilian also set the standard for the industrial production of tab-in-tab tablets in 1935. With the widespread use of antibiotics in tablet form from the 1950s onwards, this technology grew in importance in the post-war years and secured the financial status of Kilian & Co. GmbH for the future.

Romaco Group

Romaco is a leading international supplier of processing and packaging equipment specializing in engineering technologies for pharmaceutical products. The Group provides individual machines, lines and turnkey solutions for manufacturing, filling and packing powders, granulates, pellets, tablets, capsules, syringes, liquids and medical devices. The company also serves the food and chemical industries. Through its various technologies, Romaco is committed to sustainable production and to systematically reducing CO₂ emissions.

The Romaco Group has its headquarters in Karlsruhe (Germany) and is part of the TruKing Group, a globally operating high-tech enterprise based in Changsha (China). TruKing's core competency is handling and filling pharmaceutical liquids.

Romaco operates from six production sites worldwide, with a broad portfolio comprised of seven established product brands. Noack and Siebler (Karlsruhe, Germany) supply blister, heat-sealing and rigid tube filling machines. Macofar (Bologna, Italy) markets technologies for filling sterile and non-sterile powders and liquids. Promatic (also Bologna, Italy) specializes in cartoners, track & trace systems and case packers. Kilian (Cologne, Germany) is a leading manufacturer of tablet presses. Innojet (Steinen, Germany) is in the business of granulating and coating fine solid particles. Tecpharm (Barcelona, Spain) offers tablet coating technologies.

More than 930 highly skilled and committed Romaco employees are dedicated to the development of future product technologies and to the continuous implementation of internal improvement processes. The Romaco Group's multi-brand system solutions are sold worldwide through eight Sales & Service Centers

and a dense network of local agent organizations. Over 12,000 installations delivered by Romaco are currently in use in more than 180 different countries.

For more information on Romaco, visit our website and social media channels: www.romaco.com – [Showroom](#) – [LinkedIn](#) – [YouTube](#)

The following pictures are enclosed with the press release.

1. Kilian nameplate bearing the stylized powder mill logo

[Kilian_Heinzelmaennchen_nameplate_1062.jpg](#)



2. Company premises of the Fritz Kilian Maschinenfabrik in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, photo taken in 1922

[Kilian-site_Berlin-Hohenschoenhausen_1922.png](#)



3. Assembly workshop at the Kilian plant in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen

[Kilian_shop-floor_Berlin-Hohenschoenhausen.png](#)



4. Kilian's "Heinzelmännchen" – the vintage "helpful elf" tablet press from the year 1918

[Kilian_Heinzelmaennchen_1918.jpg](#)



5. Company founder Fritz Kilian Sr. (first on the left, front row) with family in 1914

Fritz-Kilian-Family_1914.png



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