

In dialogue with:



CHRISTIAN ABELN

Ceramic technician Laboratory manager for research and development

Christian Abeln is sitting in the combustion chamber in front of the laboratory furnaces while the heating coils hum. For fire safety reasons, the kilns are situated in rooms designed for this purpose. Christian Abeln reports that his career has taken him from Lingen in Emsland, where he grew up, to Bückeberg via an apprenticeship as a ceramist in Landshut and a technician training programme in Höhr-Grenzhausen.

Christian Abeln develops product formulations for production. The biggest challenge, and at the same time the thing he enjoys most about his job, is meeting the customer's requirements as precisely as possible. Strength and chemical resistance, for example. "The brick as an end product is a composite of the clay shard and our colour," he explains, holding up a small clay plate, "this sample here is a good example, it's a glass surface and underneath is the ceramic."

The really difficult thing is the texture of the clay on the customer side. Clay is a natural material and may contain organic impurities. The quality can vary and have different properties, even though the clay comes from the same quarry. "To put it simply, that's why we carry out very precise analyses and conduct tests at the customer's premises to determine which recipe is best suited to which clay, and which recipe will consistently achieve the desired quality."

"The brick as a finished product is a composite of clay and glaze."



"Without the colleagues in the field sales nothing would work here."

Clay composition, glass composition, mass and firing temperature must be considered in combination and adjusted on the spot. "Nothing works without our sales colleagues in the field. I can't just develop something here in the company and then send a finished product to the customer," explains Christian Abeln, "unlike in tile production with standardised substrate material, for example, it's much more difficult with clay to firmly attach a visually attractive glaze to a roof tile." A great deal of personnel and technical effort therefore goes into quality assurance, he adds. With special equipment such as a heating

microscope and a dilatometer, analyses can be carried out directly in-house instead of outsourcing them, which takes a lot of time.

Over the years, Grothe has developed a special expertise. For Christian Abeln, this is one of many reasons for the company's market leadership. He mainly looks after customers in Germany, but also some in Europe and Asia. Technical discussions in English are therefore not uncommon.

Christian Abeln likes to spend his private time working on his own house, which is about ten kilometres away from the company. His great passion, however, is fishing. He loves fishing for sea fish from the beach on Fehmarn. "You can fish for sea trout, flatfish and garfish there," he says. This is a little more sporty than from a boat or the banks of a pond. "And compared to the combustion chamber, the air is a lot fresher," he adds.