

Only the best is good enough

Jo Austin caught up with Alfons (Fons) Aldering at WTCE in Hamburg where he was meeting up with old friends in the business and displaying his fine wines from South Africa



Born into a family of 11, Fons learned at an early age the importance of making himself heard. The eldest of nine brothers and one sister, Fons claims that the family had an entrepreneurial spirit from the word 'go' and were all closely involved in their father's hotel business in Holland.

Then

"We were always working as a family and to this day I work 75 hours a week", says the indefatigable Fons.

Following a stint at hotel school in Zurich, Fons soon got into the food business, starting up his own food company at the age of 20. His wife of 45 years, Marianne, also owned her own hotel.

Together with Marianne, Fons set up Marfo in 1969 with the aim of supplying ready

meals to supermarkets and hospitals in Holland. The name Marfo is a combination of their names: Fons and Marianne and together they ran the company for 15 years before selling it to Martinair.

"In those days convenience foods did not have a good name. My plan was to bring new standards of quality, convenience and hygiene to convenience food. These were the seed ideas behind the launch of Netherlands-based Delta DailyFood back in 1987, with the slogan: 'Only the best is good enough'.

"Although there was a lot of publicity in those days about new concepts in airline food, we set up a new 'state of the art' production plant capable of pasteurising food by microwave tunnels to give it a shelf-life of six

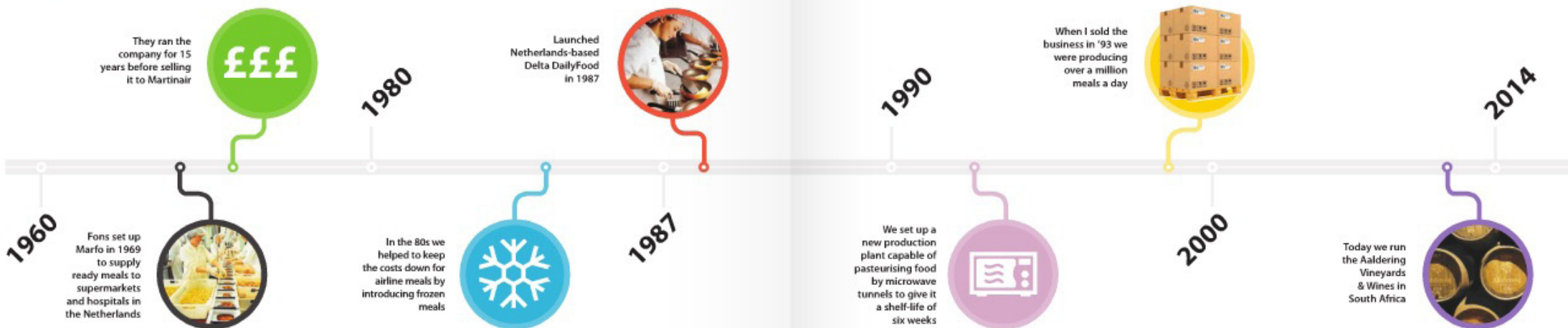
weeks. It was revolutionary and we soon expanded the business to six countries using highly sophisticated equipment."

Marianne sold her hotel and



Pictured: Left: tales from the past; right: the terraces of Aldering Vineyard in Stellenbosch, South Africa

Fons' career highlights



invested with Fons over 30 million guilders into the business opening a new factory near Schiphol. "We truly believed in the concept of ready-made meals and were soon producing 25,000 meals a day! When I sold the business in '93 we were producing over a million meals a day, employing 3000 people in eight factories. We were supplying 54 airlines worldwide as well as 4000 supermarkets in Holland, the United Kingdom, Canada and America. In many ways I regret selling the business, as it didn't do well after we got out, but my life was being spent in hotel rooms and plane seats and it was time to be with my family.



Now

"Today we own a wholesale company in Holland supplying 3,500 restaurants with imported foods from all over the world including Asia. I still travel a little and we have an office in China, but I have cut my flying hours down from 1000 to a mere 300 a year!

"When looking at newcomers to the food industry I see them making the same old mistakes. There might be special equipment and new inventions but we still need to learn from each other.

"In the 80s we helped to keep the costs down for airline meals by introducing pasteurised and frozen meals. Today KLM is happy to acknowledge that frozen meals can retain excellent quality, - so much so that they now serve them in Business Class. This is a significant change.

Today we run the Aldering Vineyards & Wines in South Africa. We

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bought the winery in Stellenbosch ten years ago and we now divide our time between Somerset West in South Africa, Holland and Spain. We still have a wine cellar in Holland with 3000 mainly French wines (collected for the bad times).

KLM is serving our wines in Business Class and Asiana Airlines lists our wines in First Class.

So what is the secret of their success?

"Striving for quality and working smart. I have always been closely involved in every part of my businesses and have strived for the best. It is nice to be involved in making something now that (unlike food) doesn't attract complaints. There is a lot of bad wine in the world but wherever we go in the world people like our products."

Fons and Marianne have been married for 45 years and have two daughters. "But my wife says it is more like 22 years as I was never at home."