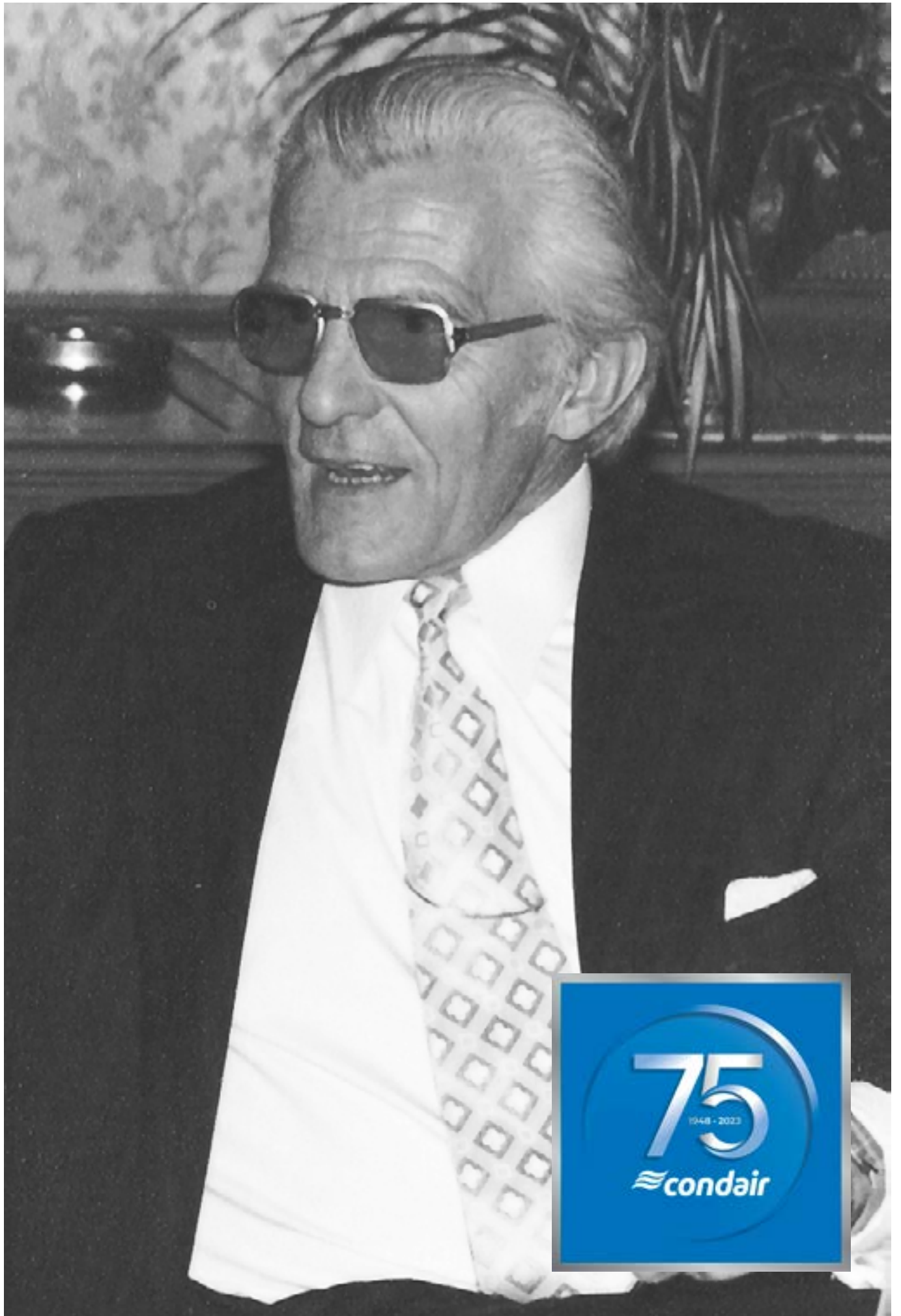


Condair Pioneer Hans Badertscher

# The Man with an Opinion

**Hans Badertscher** (1920-2011) was a gifted design engineer and a patron of the old school. Not only did he create the name *Condair*, but the first Swiss steam humidifier, still an important product in Condair's product range today, also belongs to his innovative achievements.





One feels the Bern design engineer's immense presence everywhere in the company. Whoever wishes to exist beside him must accept a place in his shadow. Hans Badertscher the founder, sole owner and longtime technical director of *Plascon AG* (later Condair), is a source of inspiration, a dedicated leader, a caring company father for all who work here. Those who can't get along with him don't last long, and soon part ways.

Following a boozy evening at a bowling alley, Badertscher once received a letter of resignation from an employee who said: 'Mr Badertscher so humiliated me in front of my colleagues while bowling, that I had no other alternative but to conclude he regarded me as too unlikeable and incapable to work in his company.'

### **Overcoming poverty**

Hans Badertscher was born in 1920 in Emmental, Switzerland. Together with his two brothers, he grew up in poverty. When food was scarce, the brothers sought nourishment from scraps left by the military. But with diligence and determination, Badertscher rose from his bleak situation, attending *Burgdorf Technikum*, a university of applied sciences, from which he graduated with a degree in design engineering. In the 1940's, his desire for adventure led him to the USA, where he experienced air-conditioning, that is, the tempering of indoor spaces by means of cold and hot

air. Badertscher started in 1951, with his brother Ernst, the *Badertscher + Co* company, which continues today with his grandnephew at the helm. The company has sold and serviced oil-fired furnaces and forced-air heating manufactured by the American company Wayne and, according to an ad in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, air-conditioning, too, since 1955 under Badertscher's protected name Condair. Badertscher also established in 1958 in Münchenstein near Basel, where he managed a Badertscher + Co branch, yet a second company: *Plascon AG*. This company initially sold plastic heating-fuel tanks and leakage warning systems.

### **Engineering and launch of the first steam humidifier**

During this time, Badertscher discovered still another market: humidification. Air-conditioning systems dry out the air in indoor spaces. In the 1950's, the passionate designer experimented with a new technology to humidify the air in indoor environments, one that didn't employ atomization, like the Defensor systems already available, but one that utilized vaporization. Since water contains minerals, like lime, it is possible to heat it with electricity. In 1961, Plascon introduced the first steam humidifier, marketing it initially under the Badertscher + Co. name, later under the brand *Lumatic*.

Like his steam humidifier, Badertscher was constantly powered by impulses, but in his case, the

impulses came from a drive to innovate and to grow his businesses. At breathtaking speed, he built up a global sales network, so that by 1968, the Lumatic I-IV models designed for use in industrial applications saw 89 percent of their sales in foreign markets, whereas 37,500 Lumatic Junior steam humidifiers sold domestically to private consumers.

A key factor in Plascon's success is their plastic injection molding knowhow and inhouse injection production line, which permit swift design and prototyping of injection molded parts. This keeps material costs for the parts used in electrothermal devices decisively low, allowing, for example, the use of plastic instead of glass cylinders.

### **Freedom above all**

Business was booming. Still, principles remained more important than money for the freedom-loving patron. As the Soviets put down the Prague Spring protests and movement, Badertscher abruptly breaks off license negotiations with two GDR companies. He writes them 'you are members of a community that not only loudly supports the interventions (in Czechoslovakia), but also actively partakes in the destruction of personal freedom. United with resolve we forfeit any financial and material gain and hereby denounce your tyrannical actions.' Every Plascon AG employee placed their signature on the letter and Badertscher sent it not only to the companies in Dresden and



Booth Plascon



Technician Guido Jörg

Niedersachswerfen, but to the embassies of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Poland and Hungary in Switzerland, as well. A slight overestimation of his global political weight.

### Ever present at the company

Company, family, politics, leisure, all these facets of life harmonized wonderfully in Badertscher's life. There were employees, like the installation technician Guido Jörg, with whom Badertscher socialized off the job, such as at the shooting range just across the street from the new company building on the Heiligenholzstrasse in Münchenstein. And when Jörg performed the annual service on the heating system in the Badertschers' holiday home in Mürren he could spend an entire vacation week there with his wife in return. At some point they are even on a first-name basis, a rare honor that no one at Plascon is

aware of because such communication is reserved solely for time away from the company. At the company, Badertscher insisted on addressing each other with Mr.

Badertscher is always present in his company, even physically then. In the early years as the company was becoming established, the company's domicile was none other than the Badertscher's private home on the Emil-Frey-Strasse in Münchenstein. And when the company moved into the ultramodern, new company building on Heiligenholzstrasse in 1971, Badertscher moved with his family into the penthouse on the top floor of the factory and office building. He was always in the building, ever present.

### A swimming pool for the employees

The building is itself a statement. It is the place a company with glo-

bal standing calls home, a company that values its employees. An illustration of this is the luxurious sport and spa facility, Badertschers Sportcentre, featuring a round swimming pool, spacious sauna and fitness center. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the male employees could relax and recuperate for free after work, and Wednesdays it was the ladies' turn. Later in the evening and on weekends, the facility belonged to the Badertscher family, of course.

As Hans Badertscher, unable to find a successor in 1981, sold Plascon AG to Walter Meier AG for a great deal of money, the company employed over 100 people and had revenues of over 20 million CHF.

Perhaps the final and clearest example of Badertscher's iron will was his death at 91, on November 27, 2011, his birthday!