TREASURES OF LATVIA
OUTSTANDING EXPORT BRANDS AND INSPIRING TALENTS
How do you define excellence? It is the continual improvement and development. The Red Jackets movement is about excellence. It is about outstanding export brands that carry Latvia’s name into the world. It is about the exceptional people who create and lead these companies.

Our second book tells about Latvia’s best export brands and its Rising Stars. These are companies that proudly enter export markets and amaze the world with top-notch products, services, knowledge, and values. These are brands rooted in Latvia and led by talented, intelligent and sincere people.

We also introduce you with outstanding talents from Latvia – great personalities in music, art, science, sports, and culture. These are stories of hard work and superior, world-class results. These are stories about talents with roots in Latvia.

In 2018 Latvia will celebrate its 100th birthday. And to mark this occasion, The Red Jackets movement will have found 100 export successes, and created stories about what Latvia is.

100 stories about Latvia. 100 stories about excellence.
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The largest independent private bank in Latvia providing individual banking and financial services for private and corporate clients. In 2015, the bank’s profit reached 69 million euros, and its net assets at the end of that year were 4.93 billion euros — these figures grew by 18.2% in one year. At the close of 2015, its clients’ deposits equalled 3.79 billion euros. The bank founded a subsidiary in Luxembourg, which is subject to that country’s regulation and oversight system. Therefore, for any clients who believe that the Latvian banking sector is still not developed or safe enough, ABLV can offer its Luxembourg branch, right in the heart of Europe, and this option is becoming more and more popular among clients.
Olegs Fiļs, council chairman at ABLV Bank, about chess master Mikhail Tal: “Both in chess and in the banking business, one must be able to think strategically and have good foresight over the field.

Success in business is tied to a bright idea, as well as to the ability to predict future scenarios and manage risks. Excellent chess players have these abilities, too, and Tal is definitely among them, having won the world championship title at the age of 24, the youngest ever to do so at the time. The largest shareholders in ABLV also got their start at a very young age. Moreover, a new street in Riga has been named in honour of Tal; it is located in New Hanza City, a centre for financial services and recreation which will soon host the brand-new headquarters of ABLV Bank.”
Mikhail Tal was perhaps the most unusual chess player the world has known. His style of playing the game was revolutionary for the time—risky, energetic, unpredictable, and he usually drove his opponent into a dead end. In 1959, at the age of 23, Tal became the youngest world champion in the history of chess. He also won the European and USSR championships, as well as various other chess Olympiads, and by 1957, had already become a Grandmaster. He loved to smoke and to observe his opponents for long periods of time. Legends were even told about how he hypnotised his opponents. Tal died at the age of 55. He had never taken good care of his health; he had had chronic kidney problems since childhood. Tal played chess, but he also enjoyed playing table tennis and the piano.
It was at the closing ceremony of the Winter Olympic Games in Turin in 2006 that the whole world held its breath and watched people...flying. Flying above the Olympic Stadium with skis or snowboards, and possibly for a moment, believing that man’s dream of flying may have finally come true. At the time, Aerodium was still a very new business in Latvia, and the wind tunnel at the Olympic Games in Turin was a giant adventure. The employees had set up a wind tunnel in Sigulda the previous summer, mostly to entertain tourists, and then they received a request from the organisers of the Games, who were looking for a similar technology. The young men at Aerodium were still only exploring the possibilities and learning how to fly themselves, but they nevertheless went all out to prepare a short video clip and sent it to Italy. They soon received a reply: if they could repeat the same stunts live, the organisers of the Games wanted to cooperate with them!
Ivars Beitāns, chairman of the board at Aerodium Technologies, about auto designer Anatols Lapinš: “In the same way that Lapinš created a trend, so too are we blazing trails in the field of vertical wind tunnels in order to delight clients and have the competition follow. His work proved that Latvians are creative, talented and courageous people. You just need to want it badly enough, and then you’ve got the power to open up any door in the world!”
Anatols Lapinš (Anatole Lapine) was a person who did not follow trends. Instead, he created trends. And creating the Porsche trend means creating a trend in the entire global automobile industry. For almost 20 years, from 1969 to 1988, Lapinš was the director of the Porsche auto design studio, and the legendary Porsche G Series 911, 924, 928 and 944 models were developed under his command. Lapinš was born in Riga in 1930, but his family fled as refugees to Poland shortly before the Second World War. The family later moved to Germany, where Lapinš became an apprentice at the Daimler-Benz factory in Hamburg after the war. He relocated to the United States in 1951, where he worked in the body development department at General Motors.

One of his most prestigious tasks there was working on the 1962 Chevrolet Corvette Stingray, which for a long time was the only American sports car. Lapinš later transferred to the development division at Adam Opel AG. After meeting Ferry Porsche at an industry show and discussing his views on auto design, Lapinš was offered the job of directing the Porsche design department. And the rest is history. Lapinš lived out the rest of his life in Germany, in Baden Baden. He also owned a professional Pearl drum kit, on which he enjoyed playing a bit of jazz now and then.
Silk and lace, finely drawn lines, ornate details and figure-highlighting silhouettes, allurement and the mystery of sensuality – all of which together bring the feminine form into bloom. By loosening each flower petal layer by layer, and delivering inspiration. The essence of Amoralle is precisely this inspiration and helping women to unleash their femininity. With its unique designs and perfectly crafted details, Amoralle’s luxury lingerie, nightgowns and hosiery definitely stand out among the broad range on offer from the lingerie manufacturing industry, but above all, the feeling of skin touching silk or lace is like a soft caress. This touch of elegance, confidence and femininity has been hailed as a breath of fresh air by the international fashion press. Amoralle’s products are sold in 20 countries worldwide, including Great Britain, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Russia, the United States, Germany, France and the Netherlands.
Inese Ozola, owner and head designer at Amoralle, about opera singer Kristīne Opolais: “Kristīne Opolais is like our nation’s shining jewel. And in a way, she also embodies the Amoralle philosophy: she is the union of feminine daring and passionate love. She is a woman who radiates confidence about her voice and her identity. She is emotionally strong and yet womanly fragile. She is one of the most vibrant women making Latvia’s name known throughout the world.”
Kristīne Opolais is possibly one of the most striking sopranos on today’s opera scene. She has sung on all of the largest and most prestigious opera stages in the world: the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, the Royal Opera House in London, the Vienna State Opera, and others. Audiences have been amazed not only by her voice but also her acting skills, and reward her with countless ovations following a performance. One of Opolais’ first significant roles was the title role in Antonín Dvořák’s Rusalka at the Bavarian State Opera in 2010. Even though this production forced her to spend long periods of time in water, she welcomed the challenge and reaped the rewards – from that moment on, her career has only continued to climb. And this is also a good, general characterisation of the singer – she is willing to take a risk and enjoys a good challenge.

Opolais is also known as the holder of a curious record – she debuted in two roles at the Metropolitan Opera within a period of 18 hours...and with only a five-hour notice before the second performance. She first sang the role of Cio-Cio-San in Madama Butterfly, and the very next day she replaced an ill singer to sing the title role in La bohème.
At first they are but fine grains of quartz sand that melt together under extreme heat, but in the hands of an expert glassblower, they suddenly become a resource for endless possibilities. That’s why an&angel designer Artis Nīmanis has never tired of glass as a medium. But what sets his glassware apart from others is its metallic coating, mostly made of stainless steel or titanium, arrived at after many years of experimenting with the help of innovative technologies. Parallel to existing collections, experiments on future models are ongoing, and vases may soon join the glassware as well. an&angel products are sold on the Internet, while visitors to Riga can drop by the showroom in the city’s Quiet Centre. It also stands mentioning that the company boasts more than 26 export markets where its products are sold.
Agnese and Artis Nīmanis, founders of an&angel, about composer Pēteris Vasks: “The first thing that comes to mind when speaking about this Latvian composer is that he’s not loud or ostentatious. He does his work professionally, and we are perhaps similar in the fact that, although we both focus on working beyond the borders of Latvia, we are, in reality, more active here. And we don’t talk much about ourselves. Vasks is level-headed in his approach, thorough and convinced. And his musical compositions are important to what Latvia sounds like beyond its borders.”
Latvians have no other composer who is as well-known globally as Pēteris Vasks. His compositions are played in prestigious concert halls to enthralled audiences.... But Vasks is loved in his native Latvia as much as he is abroad. He has won the Latvian Great Music Award several times, and he is an honorary member of both the Latvian Academy of Sciences and the Royal Swedish Academy of Music. In 1996, Vasks was awarded the University of Vienna’s Herder Prize for his significant contribution to cultural understanding. Vasks’ music is said to embody an unusual refinement and sensitivity as it expresses the composer’s desire to preserve the values articulated by the language of classical music. Listen to his meditation Tālā gaisma (Distant Light) or his album Gadalaiki (The Seasons), which features four pieces of music for piano: Baltā ainava (White Scenery), Pavasara klaviermūzika (Spring Music), Zaļā ainava (Green Scenery) and Rudens klaviermūzika (Autumn Music). Because, above all, Vasks’ music must first be heard.

Vasks’ father was a Baptist minister, and it is to him that the composer has dedicated the wonderfully beautiful composition Pater Noster.
Until now, pallet blocks were made mainly of solid wood. However, due to the fact that wood is a relatively limited resource, Baltic Block has gone one step further and offers producers of pallets a product made of leftovers from the wood industry that might otherwise not be used. This attests to the company’s prudent use of a natural resource, as well as its skill in using this resource to manufacture a high-quality product. With the help of modern technology, leftover wood is mixed with glue and, using a special extrusion method patented in Italy, three-metre-long sections are treated with steam, the glue hardens, and then the product is at the right consistency to be sawn into sections of the required length. Baltic Block began developing its business plan before the recent economic crisis, when it still owned a pallet manufacturing plant. But it was difficult for the company to obtain large-dimension EPAL pallet blocks for a reasonable price, so it began looking for other solutions. And so, step by step, the ambitious plan has come to fruition. Having overcome the economic and financial crisis, the business partners were satisfied that their business plan was correct. A second key to success is, perhaps, stubbornness – that they did not give up at the first, second or even third instance of difficulties. And, according to Baltic Block, its third key to success is undoubtedly its team of employees, which has grown by leaps and bounds since the beginnings of the company, when there were only two employees.
Edgars Šķēle, co-owner of Baltic Block, about the poet Rainis: “Rainis is the Latvian Goethe.”
The Latvian Goethe. That's probably the most appropriate comparison to describe this Latvian poet and the significance of his work and influence on Latvian culture. A poet, author, playwright, translator and politician. And – another connection to the German master – Rainis also translated Goethe's Faust into Latvian. Jānis Pliekšāns (Rainis was his nom de plume) was born to a family of farmers in 1865. Having graduated from the Riga City Secondary School No. 1, he headed to Saint Petersburg, where he studied law and began writing for the Dienas lapa newspaper. He was later accused of belonging to an anti-government organisation, tried in court, and deported to Pskov and Slobodsk (in modern-day Russia). He then lived in exile in Switzerland, all the while continuing to translate in addition to writing poetry and plays. In his poem Daugava (1916) he called for the founding of an independent Latvian state, which was achieved in 1918. Rainis returned to Latvia two years later and became actively involved in politics; he also served as the new country's Minister of Education for a while and led the Latvian National Theatre. On September 11, 1965 – the 100th anniversary of Rainis' birth – a monument dedicated to the great poet was unveiled on the Esplanāde in central Riga. Since then, every year on this date (which is usually a rainy day), people gather by the monument, huddled under umbrellas, to listen to readings of Rainis' poetry.
A cracking story

Balticovo is currently the leading producer of eggs and egg products in Northern Europe, and its chickens lay an average of 1.8 million eggs per day. It is also a full-cycle business, buying grain from local farmers and producing approximately 80,000 tonnes of chicken feed per year. Balticovo has more than 40 years of experience in the poultry business, but the most crucial point in its development was the period before Latvia joined the European Union. At that time, in order to continue operating as a business, it had to comply with EU directives, including veterinary directives and those pertaining to the welfare of animals. At that point, Balticovo decided to take a large, strategic step and significantly increase its operation, investing more than 30 million euros in its production units in order to engage more fully in exporting its products. By 2015, Balticovo was exporting almost 70% of its output. In 2016, the London Stock Exchange Group listed Balticovo in its first yearbook as one of the fastest-growing businesses in Europe. The Latvian business has also been a finalist in the import/export category in the prestigious European Business Awards 2015/2016 competition. Balticovo’s many years of experience in various markets play a large role in its success as a business. It is also important for its partners to know where its production lines and other equipment are made, and how they conform to animal welfare standards. Balticovo adheres to the well-known BRC quality system, which has the highest standards in the food products industry, and it also regularly undergoes special audits to ensure the quality of its production process. The intuition of the company’s leaders in making the right decisions at the right time has also been a key to its success.
Valdis Grimze, council chairman at Balticovo, about conductor Andris Nelsons: “We take pride in our Latvian treasures, especially in the cultural sphere. It’s hard to imagine how many gems from Latvia have managed to make the world a more beautiful place. Nelsons is one of the most vivid examples from our cultural circle, who with pride and honour keeps raising the prestige of Latvia in the world’s opera houses and concert halls. An Excellent example of intellectual export.”
Andris Nelsons is one of those conductors who can equally well conduct an opera or a concert, or even create unforgettable moments on a recording. Currently the music director at the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and also the new director of the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig, Nelsons has just signed a contract with Deutsche Grammophon for three ambitious recording projects. To that end, under the direction of Nelsons, the Boston Symphony Orchestra will continue recording Dmitri Shostakovich’s music – his symphonies as well as his opera Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District. Nelsons will also record Anton Bruckner’s symphonies with the Gewandhaus Orchestra. And with the Vienna Philharmonic, he will record all of Beethoven’s symphonies by 2020, in honour of the 250th anniversary of the composer’s birth. In early 2016, Nelsons won a prestigious Grammy Award for Shostakovich: Under Stalin’s Shadow - Symphony No.10, a recording the British newspaper The Times characterised as scandalously successful. But Nelsons began his career in music as a trumpet player in, and conductor of, the Latvian National Opera orchestra. In his youth, he also sang in the ensemble founded by his mother.
Cyclists – dreamers

It’s possible that they’ve completely reinvented the wheel...without even breaking a sweat. It’s also possible that the idea was conceived five or six years ago, perhaps even earlier, but that hardly matters anymore because what Brum Brum offers the market today is an absolutely unique product – a wooden balance bike for children that is height-adjustable as the child grows. The shock system on the Brum Brum balance bike (much like that of Finnish designer Alvar Aalto’s chair No.31) is built into the frame itself, as it is made from plywood pieces glued together into specially curved parts. The frame acts as the shock absorber and is made from curved birch and oak plywood with finishes of various hardwoods. The discs are cast from aluminium, the chamberless rubber tires are solid and impenetrable. Handlebars are made from natural leather and available in various colours. Four patents have been granted among the seven unique design forms created by the company. Moreover, the height of the bike can be regulated, without the aid of special tools, for use by children of various ages. Only one gasket and a few screws were bought at the store – the rest was created from scratch, just for this bike. Brum Brum has won prestigious design and business awards for its product in Latvia, Japan, Italy and Germany. Reputable big names in the cycling industry have also expressed accolades for a job very well done. Without any marketing or business plan in place, Brum Brum endeavours to sell its bike all the same. Their best exhibition halls are parks and playgrounds, where children make up their specific target audience, and so far they have been nothing but delighted with Brum Brum.
Krišjānis Jermaks, founder of BrumBrum, about athlete Laura Ikauniece-Admidiņa: “As a team of men, we are always happy about Latvian women who set their sights on a goal and persevere to reach it despite all difficulties. Professional sports has made Ikauniece-Admidiņa not only stronger but also more beautiful. We believe she’s the best symbol Latvia can have in the world – beautiful, intelligent, talented and persistent!”
Talented and persistent. Her seeming delicateness hides amazing strength, capability and tenacity. Both of Laura Ikauniece-Admidiņa’s parents were athletes; in fact, her mother, Vineta, still holds the Latvian record in several sprint distances. Ikauniece-Admidiņa, however, has chosen the heptathlon as her sport. In 2012 she won the silver medal at the European Championships, and she placed ninth at the Summer Olympic Games in London that same year. In 2015 she won the bronze medal at the World Championships, and she also set a new Latvian record with her results there (6516 points).

As a child, Ikauniece-Admidiņa participated in competitive dance, including hip-hop. Today, she still listens to motivational music on her way to athletics practice. Ikauniece-Admidiņa has a degree from the University of Latvia’s Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art.
In large part, insurance is a business of trust. One must prove oneself again and again, and only by showing one’s worth and fulfilling one’s promises will clients begin to value and trust the business. BTA began operating abroad in Lithuania already in 2002, after buying one of the Lithuania local companies. That was the company’s first step outside of Latvia. Now, after more than a decade, BTA is the market leader in Lithuania. It has also had significant successes in Estonia. After developing its business in the Baltic region, BTA decided to also expand elsewhere in Europe. Now, BTA has branch offices in France, Germany, Poland, and Great Britain, and it is also working in Italy and Spain on the basis of freedom of services principle. After all, the business has always yearned to develop and seek new challenges. This also applies to the distribution of risk, because each market situation can be completely different. In addition, the insurance laws in every new market are vastly different. But, by offering flexible, innovative solutions that are customised to clients’ needs, instead of merely providing standardised services, BTA has managed to break into several markets and change their prevailing traditions, for example, in Poland and Great Britain. Flexible, innovative solutions tailored to the needs of the market and clients are one of the elements of BTA’s formula for success. So is consistency in words and deeds. And the next three aspects of its formula are vision, focused action, and team strength. Because in order to provide a good-quality service, a business needs to be professional and have a high level of cohesion.
Lauris Boss, chairman of the board at BTA, about bobsleigh coach Sandis Prūsis: “Prūsis has worked hard to achieve high athletic results. Likewise, by working with Latvia’s bobsleigh team, he’s managed to bring them to Olympic and world championship medals. With a unique attitude, perseverance and hard work, one can achieve goals that 61 have been set, leading one’s team to excellence and motivating them towards giving the best they possibly can. It always demands being out of your comfort zone – both for yourself and for others. You can’t do it otherwise.”
Sandis Prūsis has accomplished something that doesn’t happen all that often in the world of sports – he has grown from a successful athlete (European champion in the four-man bobsleigh in 2003, and second place overall in the World Cup for four-man bobsleigh in 2000 and 2003) into a respected bobsleigh coach, under whose direction the national team earned a silver medal at the Olympic Games in Sochi, and a gold medal at the 2015 World Championships. That’s probably because he understands all the fine details of the sport, from A to Z, and because he enjoys being a coach. In a way, Prūsis can now also accomplish through his young athletes some of the things he was unable to achieve himself as a bobsledder.
It’s quite possible that the ability to take a broad view of global trends in both furniture design and manufacturing technologies is what has allowed Daiļrade Koks to thrive for more than 20 years and become one of the nation’s leading furniture exporters, capable of withstanding economic crises and also responding to the changes in consumers’ habits over recent years. Currently, Daiļrade Koks exports 90% of its output. The company produces furniture for the X X X Lutz K G and Hans Segmueller Polstermöbelfabrik GmbH & Co.K G retailers and the Otto GMBH & CO KG mail order company in Germany; in fact, Otto has been a client for more than 20 years. Daiļrade Koks also produces furniture for the well-known American company Oeuf LLC, which is based in New York but is very popular in Europe, especially France, and is now also available in China and South Korea. The Latvian company also enjoys a successful partnership with Oliver Furniture – when the Danish company moved its production base from China to Europe, it chose to work with Daiļrade Koks, which exports its products to more than 20 countries. Daiļrade Koks also won the tender to furnish the new National Library of Latvia.
Andris Jansons, chairman of the board at Daiļrade Koks, about pianist Vestards Šimkus: “I’ve had many opportunities to hear Šimkus perform in concert and see how much he gives of himself and his inspiration. And that inspires listeners. I can hardly think of a better way to bring Latvia’s name into the world. In my opinion, Šimkus’ example can serve us all – we can each strive to achieve more success, just like Šimkus is doing.”
His talent is as polished as a diamond. His performances are inspiring and exciting, and the energy he radiates is delightful. Vestards Šimkus has studied in Latvia and abroad; he has won competitions and received prestigious awards. He has collaborated with the BBC Philharmonic, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Kremerata Baltica and others. He has performed at the Vienna Konzerthaus, the Berlin Konzerthaus, Tokyo Opera City and the Olivier Messiaen Hall at the Maison de la Radio in France. He has worked with conductors like Andris Nelsons, Vassily Sinaisky, Karel Mark Chichon and Teodor Currentzis. He has recorded seven solo albums. But this is only a list of achievements and does not counterbalance the feeling one has when listening to this Latvian pianist play. Critics call Šimkus a temperamental, outstanding virtuoso with excellent technique. Together with his wife, Elīna Šimkus, he lives in the Latvian countryside and has now also turned his attention to composition, which he studied for several years under the illustrious Latvian composer Pēteris Vasks. One of Šimkus’ most notable works has been the music for Ausma, a film by well-known Latvian film director Laila Pakalniņa, which was recorded by the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra.
Contemporary retro: the story of a bicycle

An approximate translation of the German word Ehrenpreis is “an honest wage”, an award, a prize. But in Latvia, this name has but one association – the bicycle. In fact, Ērenpreiss stands for an entire bicycle-making industry that spans several generations, should we wish to remain humble and avoid the term “empire”. In Latvia, the name Ērenpreiss has long been a synonym for the bicycle – in pre-war Latvia, one didn’t ride a bike, one rode an Ērenpreiss. Now, almost a century later, these bicycles are once again being made in Latvia, and they are in high demand in bike-friendly regions like Scandinavia, as well as in such export-challenging markets as Germany. About 60-70% of Ērenpreiss’ total production is comprised of exports. Specifically, it’s the design, quality and excellence of Ērenpreiss’ parts that separates these bicycles from other makers. Though the frames for the Paula and Greta models inherited the geometry and design guidelines of those made by Ērenpreiss back in 1938, they aren’t exactly retro bicycles. Instead, they are quite well tailored for today’s riders. Still, the firm’s unique history does set it apart from the pack.
Toms Ėrenpreiss, founder and director of Ėrenpreiss Original, about artist Katrīna Neiburga: “Sometimes it’s surprising how Neiburga is able to express simple humanity in her artwork, which consists mainly of video installations. She does so without any artificial elitism.”
For her work Solitude, Neiburga received the first Purvītis Prize, which is currently the highest award for art in Latvia. And it is precisely because of this simplicity, which is the result of much hard work (it is much more difficult to achieve a sense of lightness in art than one would think), that Neiburga has been able to open many doors around the world – she has participated in various festivals in the United States, Ukraine, Italy and France, as well as in the Venice Biennale, where she participated with her multimedia installation Armpit, created together with the artist Andris Eglītis. Neiburga has also created set designs for productions at the Latvian National Theatre, the New Riga Theatre, and the Opéra Bastille in Paris. In the book Katrīna Neiburga (Neputns, 2015), she tells about herself: “I have been the founder of a society for kombucha growers, a taxi driver, a camera operator for documentary films, a singer, a set designer, a shoe seller, and I’ve never been bored. But for some reason, people call me an artist.”
Combining traditions with innovation

Food Union was created by uniting two of the largest and oldest dairy companies in Latvia, the long-standing Rīgas piena kombināts (established in 1927 and the source of fond childhood memories for many Latvians as the maker of the best ice cream) and Valmieras piens (established in 1971, it is one of the largest businesses in Vidzeme, and known for its high-quality Valmiera milk products). Already from the very beginning, Food Union’s goal has been to produce healthy food products not only for the local market, but also for export markets that provide opportunities for consolidation and growth. Currently, Food Union exports its products to more than 20 countries, including such distant places as Azerbaijan, Iraq and China. The group also owns dairy products companies in Estonia, Belarus, Denmark, Norway and Romania, and is building two new plants in China. Even though it has had to make many difficult decisions along the way, Food Union’s unified strategy, long-term vision and values have remained steadfast and have helped the company through trying times. These values are innovation, commitment, and fun, combined with enthusiastic energy, joy, and loyalty – to both the company and consumers.
Normunds Staņēvičs, chairman of the board at Rīgas Piena kombināts, and vice president for business development and strategy at the Food Union group, about opera singer Aleksandrs Antoņenko: “The highest class of mastery, attention to the finest details, and striving for perfection also match the characteristics of Latvian-made 79 Ekselence gourmet ice cream. That’s why we sought people and events with whom we share the same values to appreciate beauty and feel the same passion that we do. As a result, when Ekselence became the official ice cream of Rīga 2014, it was endorsed by two famous artists from Latvia, the tenor Aleksandrs Antoņenko and the conductor Andris Poga.”
Skill of the highest class, attention to the finest details, and an unceasing aspiration towards perfection. With his strength, energy and conviction, Aleksandrs Antoņenko is a tenor who draws audiences to the best opera houses around the world, from Covent Garden in London and New York’s Metropolitan Opera House, to La Scala in Milan. 20 years ago he began singing in the opera choir at the Latvian National Opera, and just a few months later, he debuted as a soloist in Handel’s Alcina. Roles in Don Giovanni (Don Ottavio), La bohème (Rudolfo), La Traviata (Alfredo) and other operas followed. But Antoņenko did not stay in Riga long; one after the other, European opera theatres began to invite him to sing on their stages, until in 2009 he made a splendid debut at New York’s Metropolitan Opera House in Dvořák’s Rusalka, together with the esteemed American singer Renée Fleming. However, one of the roles in which Antoņenko’s talent is best expressed is Otello, in Verdi’s opera of the same name.

Antoņenko speaks fluent Russian, German, Ukrainian, Italian, English and French.
Amidst the overwhelming noise, abundance and colour of the toy market’s endless offerings, GIGI Bloks’ modular cardboard blocks stand out as an absolutely ascetic and natural product. They allow a child to be his or her own architect, builder, designer, constructor and foreman, all at the same time. As research has demonstrated, these blocks help develop a child’s self-expressive talents, math skills, and visual-spatial thinking. After just two years, GIGI Bloks exports to twenty four European countries and USA. Moreover, in 2014 GIGI Bloks earned 2nd place at the global Creative Business Cup competition hosted by Denmark’s Centre for Cultural and Experience Economy in Copenhagen. Jury members included representatives from Microsoft, Google, IKEA and Lego, while contestants from more than 50 countries vied for the honour of being named the most creative business in the world. According to the jury, GIGI Bloks stood out with a product that gives children a chance to create something extraordinary out of a completely ordinary material. In addition, the competition opened the way for GIGI Bloks to meet with the Billund City Council (Billund is the home of Lego), which has drawn up a plan to become the capital for toy development, sort of a Silicon Valley for the world’s leading toy makers. GIGI Bloks is one of the few firms accepted into this project’s exclusive acceleration programme, allowing it to benefit from the knowledge and expertise at Lego, as well as collaborate with the Capital of Children research and development institute, where world-class specialists can be engaged to test GIGI Bloks products regarding the developmental benefits they offer to children.
Ilona Viļuma, chief builder at GIGI Bloks, about author Nora Ikstena: “Speaking very philosophically, I see a parallel between the way we and Ikstena use a resource that is available to all in order to create something new and original. Ikstena creates unique language with a unique sound and feeling; GIGI Bloks creates children’s cardboard blocks. Both of these things are so simple, but we transform them into a product that has value.”
Language – it seems like such a simple resource, available to everyone. But Nora Ikstena has used this resource and given a new sound to the Latvian language. Reading her works, one is continually surprised at how beautiful, sonorous and rich the language is. Ikstena’s vocabulary and skill at twining together words are enjoyable, and pull the reader into the vivid situations and characters she creates. One can only hope that the translators of her works are likewise able to reveal this linguistic richness to readers around the world. Ikstena’s best-known novels, Dzīves svinēšana (Celebrating Life) and Jaunavas mācība (The Virgin’s Lesson), as well as other works have been translated into several languages. She writes novels, prose and surprisingly stimulating and emotional biographies. She received the Baltic Assembly Prize and the Annual Latvian Literature Award for Nenoteiktā bija (The Indefinite Was), her biography of the Latvian poet Imants Ziedonis. Her short story Elzas Kugas vecuma neprāts (Elza Kuga’s Old-Age Dementia) was included in the Best European Fiction 2011 anthology of prose. Ikstena’s novel Dievmātes draudzene (The Friend of the Virgin) has also been published in Georgia. It records her emotions about her husband’s, Levan Beridze’s, homeland and its people.
Masters of virtual reality

Their strength lies in their ability to shape reality, even if it does not yet exist... in their ability to create a feeling of presence in places that are thousands of kilometres away... or even in the future. During the six years of its existence, Giraffe Visual has fulfilled over a thousand orders, from virtual tours for hotels and real estate projects – both existing and those still in the planning stage – to touchscreen presentations and applications for virtual reality headsets that let the user feel the future as clearly as if it were the present. Among Giraffe Visual’s biggest clients are the international Hilton and Radisson hotel chains, as well as Viking Line, YIT, and CBRE – one of the world’s largest real estate companies. Giraffe Visual’s advantages are experience (it has invested tens of thousands of hours in developing its products), flexibility, speed, and caring for the client. Even though everyone claims to care for their clients, Giraffe Visual truly takes this aspect of their work very seriously. From a small student-created business, Giraffe Visual has grown into a company that has steadily doubled its turnover every year, eventually becoming a leader in Northern Europe in creating interactive visualizations. Opelts made the decision to start the business in just a matter of seconds – because he was convinced that such a service would be in demand. And, over time, as digital technologies have rapidly developed, the service has indeed become a practically indispensable component in several business industries.
Mikus Opelts, CEO of Giraffe Visual, about poet Imants Ziedonis: “Ziedonis’ poetry is unique. It’s unique in the sense that it is able to address teenagers as well as senior citizens, and every person can find something personal in his poems. The Viegli foundation, established several years ago in Riga, uses Ziedonis’ poetry to encourage and support the development of creativity, and also organises various cultural projects.”
He is probably little known elsewhere in the world, but for Latvians, Imants Ziedonis is a very important poet. In his own way, he allows us to be aware of ourselves and our unique code. Ziedonis wrote poetry, short works of prose, and screenplays, and also translated literature. He was one of the most visible activists during our National Reawakening in the late 1980s, when Latvia, at the time still a part of the Soviet Union, was fighting for its independence. In their day, several publications of Ziedonis’ poetry created something akin to an explosion in society – his poetry hit straight in the heart and spoke to people of all ages. Plays have been written based on his poetry, and countless songs have been composed with his lyrics. As a social activist, Ziedonis led a group devoted to saving Latvia’s largest trees, and together with like-minded people he also established a competition for the best-kept farmstead in Latvia. Ziedonis was born into a family of fishermen in a seaside fishing village near Riga. But he never learned to love the sea...nor the city. He loved the fields and the meadows and the countryside.
Almost every room of the recently renovated Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam – now one of the most modern museums in Europe, after having spent 250 million euros and ten years on reconstruction – has practically invisible display cases made of glass by Groglass. Artwork in the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, the Louvre Museum in Paris and other museums and galleries worldwide are also protected behind Groglass glass. Artglass produced by Groglass was used in the Louis Vuitton Foundation building in Paris, which opened in 2015 and was designed by world-famous architect Frank Gehry; it is also used for many store display cases and windows, including the Porsche design shop in Munich, and Dior in Chicago. In addition, for over five years Groglass has been the exclusive provider of cover glass for televisions made by the Danish television and sound system manufacturer Bang & Olufsen. In fact, by being able to fulfill the demands of this last company alone, which are the leaders in the industry, Groglass shows its mettle and proves its quality.
Alexander Kelberg, chairman of the board at Groglass, about basketball star Kristaps Porziņģis: “Porziņģis is a rising Latvian basketball star, now proving himself to the whole world. The key to his success is a tenacious work-ethic, well-set goals, and an enormous will to achieve them. And this has led to his achievements – we can be proud that from such a small country comes such a gifted and purposeful athlete, one who can bring Latvia’s name to the world, and inspire and prove that, with the right attitude, one can achieve even unimaginable things. Groglass is also a relatively new company, but we are already known and highly rated around the world. We’re pleased with our achievements, but continue to work to develop and perfect our company and its products. And, like Porziņģis, we believe that our greatest victories still lie ahead!”
After his first season playing in the NBA, the Mecca of basketball, Porziņģis made many fans of the sport gasp in surprise – they weren’t expecting such a performance from him. The New York Knicks selected Porziņģis with the No. 4 pick in 2015, and now he holds the NBA rookie record with 1000+ points, 500+ rebounds, 75+ three-pointers and 100+ blocks. Even though Knicks fans weren’t initially very enthused about the new player, by the end of the season he had become one of the most popular players on the team.

Following an impressive season in the NBA, Porziņģis hosted a basketball summer camp for youths in his home town of Liepāja, Latvia. Helping him out were a few teammates from the Knicks and Baloncesto Sevilla in Spain, where Porziņģis had played the previous four seasons. Whenever he has faced crucial moments in his life, Porziņģis feels lucky to have always had people around him whose advice or example have helped him to make the right decisions and motivated him to continue working. And he wishes to do the same for others.
Back in 2011, Infogr.am answered a demand and solved a very specific problem, namely, it created a simple and easy-to-use tool that helped journalists and others who create Internet content to publish data in a straightforward and interesting way – in a way that users would find easy to understand. Today, 30 to 35 million people a month from all around the world see data that has been visualised with Infogr.am’s help. People from 14 different countries work on the Infogr.am team because Leiterts believes that a global company can only be built by working together with people from a variety of cultures and with different worldviews. In addition, Riga’s geographic location and well-developed aviation services make it an ideal location for such a company. Infogr.am has always focussed on the United States as one of its main markets because that’s where the world’s largest digital market is located, and because most Internet companies are based in Silicon Valley. Half of Infogr.am’s clients are American, so naturally, as a strong technology business and one of the leaders in data visualisation, the Latvian company has an office in San Francisco as well.

Main export markets:
United States, Great Britain, France, Australia, Canada
Uldis Leiterts, co-founder of Infogr.am, about architect Konstantīns Pēkšēns: “Konstantīns Pēkšēns was a notable Latvian architect who had great influence on the Riga cityscape in the early 20th century. With more than 250 buildings bearing Pēkšēns’ signature, the city’s historical centre has been included in the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites.”
The grandiosity of Pēkšēns’ work influenced several generations of architects and made Riga one of the most beautiful Art Nouveau (Jugendstil) cities in the world. Pēkšēns utilized several genres of Art Nouveau, and even synthesized Art Nouveau together with eclecticism, as can be seen in the Neo-Renaissance Bergs Bazaar complex of apartments, shops, and hotels – an urban planning concept which was decidedly innovative for its time. Later on, at the start of the 20th century, Pēkšēns veered towards Rational Art Nouveau and the National Romantic style. The building that Pēkšēns designed at 12 Alberta iela, in the Quiet Centre of Riga, now houses the Riga Art Nouveau Museum. Interestingly, Pēkšēns and Oskars Bārs were the only architects of Latvian heritage actively practising architecture in Riga at the end of the 19th century. Towards the end of his life, Pēkšēns worked in journalism, was a member of the Riga City Council, and was also a member of the board for a number of credit institutions and banks.
Today Karavela exports products to the East, where its Kaija brand was and still is very strong in countries formerly part of the Soviet Union, as well as to the West, where it sells its products under the Arnold Sørensen brand and also makes products for various private label clients, which include some of the largest store chains in Scandinavia. For example, there is currently not a single grocery store or gas station in Sweden that does not sell some Karavela products. The situation is similar in Great Britain. In Denmark, Karavela owns approximately 60% of the market in mackerel products. In Scandinavia, which Karavela now considers more or less its home market, the company is among the top three large producers. Karavela buys most of its fish from Scottish, Faeroese, Icelandic, Norwegian and Irish fishermen, but it also buys from Latvian fishermen fishing off the Moroccan and Mauritanian coasts. It gets its salmon from Alaska and its tuna from Papua New Guinea and Ecuador. Thus, it casts both its purchasing and marketing nets very widely – Karavela exports its products to 34 countries around the world.
Jānis Endele, co-owner and member of the board at Karavela, about Krišjānis Valdemārs, a seminal figure in the 19th-century Young Latvians national movement and the development of Latvian seafaring: “Through his patriotism and work in the Young Latvians national movement, Valdemārs inspired many in his time. It’s significant that he founded the first maritime training school in Ainaži, and dedicated his life to developing the seafaring sector. He is also known for the historic motto “Latvians, go to sea!” And this is what we do, both literally and figuratively, conquering ever-new waters.”
In 1864, during the time of the Russian Empire, the first democratic-style naval school for Latvians and Estonians was established in the village of Ainaži (in what is now modern-day Latvia) under the initiative of Krišjānis Valdemārs. Financing for the school was donated by the owners of local coastal trading ships. The founding of the school was not only a landmark event in terms of overall naval development, but also in terms of the emerging Latvian and Estonian national consciousness. Between the years of 1864 and 1919, more than one thousand men graduated the school as qualified seafaring captains and helmsmen. Valdemārs was also one of the leading figures of the so-called Neo-Latvian movement, a mid-19th-century group of Latvian intellectuals who immeasurably invested in developing the nation’s culture and education, refining the language, and creating literature.

At the time, Latvia was a part of the Russian Empire, but the landowners were of German extraction and still enjoyed great privileges. Valdemārs was also very active in Russia, which is where he spent most of his life. He researched naval economics and put together several utilitarian nautical dictionaries.
If you’ve followed the healthy lifestyle trends of recent years, it’s possible that chicken meat dominates your menu. The demand for chicken meat products and fish is continually growing by 3–5% worldwide, whereas the demand for pork is falling. This trend on the global market is one of the reasons why AS Putnu fabrika Ķekava, Latvia’s leading poultry meat manufacturer, has experienced such rapid growth and is currently one of the most promising export businesses in Latvia. For already 50 years, Ķekava has been a strong and much-loved brand in Latvia. Combining the highest quality with an innovative approach—that’s the key to Ķekava’s success. With a unified team, focused development of manufacturing, and the support of the Ķekava-owned and Lithuania-based Linas Agro Group, Latvia’s leading poultry meat manufacturer is determined to double its production volume for both its home and export markets, and thus make the entire Baltic region its home market.
Andrius Pranckevičius, chairman of the board at Ķekava, about conductor Māris Sirmais: “We take pride and are inspired by those whose talent and excellent, heartfelt work loudly and confidently resound both in Latvia and far beyond our national borders. Sirmais is one of the most significant names in Latvian music. As a pillar of Latvian choir culture, his mastery has united choir music traditions with new sounds, amazing newly appreciative audiences around the world. The conductor once said that he takes his greatest pleasure in bringing Latvian music to the world, together with his choirs. So it is. Any work we introduce outside of Latvia becomes an ambassador of our country. Let these words inspire the very best of new creations and offerings.”
At Song Festivals, which are one of the most impressive events in Latvian cultural life, he stands in front of a choir numbering in the thousands. The Latvian Song and Dance Festivals are included on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and they draw thousands of participants and thousands more viewers. And Māris Sirmais has become one of the active promoters of this tradition. Sirmais is also the creative director of the State Academic Choir Latvija, which is highly sought after on a global scale, and the recipient of several international awards. While still a college student, Sirmais founded the choir Kamēr..., which he directed until 2012. The choir has won countless competitions around the world and is known for its high-quality vocal performances and sensitive musicality. The choir collaborates closely with world-famous conductor Gidon Kremer and his Kremerata Baltica orchestra; it also performs music commissioned specially for the choir. For example, in 2008, under the direction of Sirmais, the choir released World Sun Songs, a recording with 17 new compositions for choir about the sun, written by such renowned composers as Sir John Tavener, Giya Kancheli, Sven-David Sandström, Leonid Desyatnikov, John Luther Adams, Steven Leek, Dobrinka Tabakova, Ko Matsushita, and others.
For more than 25 years, Komforts has been producing equipment for sustainable energy solutions in which various types of biomass is turned into effective and green energy. In addition, Komforts works solely in the renewable energy sector. It turns different kinds of residue from biomass production (wood, peat or other biomass) into water, steam or hot air, offering individual solutions in diverse combinations and adapting them to each client’s needs. Komforts’ largest clients are energy businesses, from international energy concerns to small, local heating companies. Other important clients include manufacturing companies in the food and agriculture sectors that wish to lower production costs by implementing effective and sustainable solutions. And a third main group of clients are companies in the timber industry who wish to make use of residue-free production technologies. The company also continues to develop emissions-reducing solutions, because climate change affects us more and more every day, and it is the responsibility of each one of us to find ways to reduce it. Komforts also continues to develop the positive dynamic its exports have enjoyed over the past ten years.
Vadims Umanovs, the chairman of the board and Ivars Liepiņš, board member at Komforts about philosopher Isaiah Berlin: “In the words of Berlin, ‘Almost every moralist in human history has praised freedom. Like happiness and goodness, like nature and reality, it is a term whose meaning is so porous that there is little interpretation that it seems able to resist.’ How Berlin’s concept of freedom is perceived and interpreted is, in our view, a good foundation not just for a free society, but for free entrepreneurship, too.”
There’s a plaque on one of the buildings on Alberta iela, that gem of a street in Riga’s Art Nouveau district, informing passersby that it is the home where the philosopher Sir Isaiah Berlin lived from 1909 until 1915. His writings significantly influenced the further development of the philosophy of liberalism. Berlin’s Four Essays on Liberty, written in the 1950s, when the world found itself in the Cold War and a new geopolitical situation, holds a special place among all his works. The philosopher criticised totalitarian doctrines and was famous for his anti-authoritarian political philosophy. Berlin was born in Riga into a wealthy Jewish family. During the First World War, however, the family evacuated to Russia, where they endured revolutions and also witnessed violence perpetrated by the communist regime, which left a lasting impression on the young Berlin. He and his family later moved to London, where he studied at Oxford and was also accepted into the prestigious All Souls College. Berlin was a witty and skillful conversation partner, and he became a popular guest among the British elite. For several years now Riga has hosted Isaiah Berlin Day, an event dedicated to the philosopher, and organised by the Isaiah Berlin Association of Latvia.
Latvia is a country rich in various natural resources. Approximately 45% of the country is covered in forests, but its peat bogs (covering almost 11% of its total area) are just as valuable a resource. There are approximately 9600 peat fields in Latvia, 75 of which are used for extracting peat, and many of the country’s bogs are protected natural areas. Laflora is one of the businesses working with the greatest piety towards this natural resource, in addition to managing a full operational cycle – from the preparation of peat bogs to the production of high-quality peat products. Peat products are used for a large variety of purposes, from small private gardens, flower growers and landscape architects, to the use of peat substrate in professional nurseries. Laflora currently manages three bogs with a total area of 1866.2 hectares, and exports 95% of its output. The company’s clients are located as far afield as Australia. One must never stop looking forward. One must do the best possible with nature’s gifts and enrich them with additional value, in order that they not only serve humans, but also return to and participate in the never ending cycle.
Uldis Ameriks, chairman of the board at Laflora, about biologist Ernests Foldāts: “The scientist we’ve selected to honour was a doctor of biology who discovered and researched various species of orchids and wrote several books. He was an exiled Latvian who spent his life in Venezuela, and he specifically represents our company’s field of horticulture.”
A scientist, a doctor of biology, and an author of books who spent most of his life studying orchids. But Foldāts had a difficult journey reaching the beautiful flowers. Like thousands of other Latvian young men, he was conscripted into the German army during the Second World War. When the war ended, he surrendered to the Allied forces and was taken prisoner, but upon his release he did not return home to Latvia, which had by then been annexed by and become a republic of the Soviet Union. Instead, Foldāts emigrated to Venezuela, where he studied biology at the Central University of Venezuela. He later organised expeditions to study orchids in Venezuela and went on to discover 70 new orchid species.

He defended his doctoral thesis at Harvard University in the United States, and received many awards and honours for his thesis and life’s work in orchid research. Even after retirement, Foldāts continued to work.

He visited Latvia after it regained its independence, and the University of Latvia awarded him an honorary doctorate degree in 1991. Foldāts has donated orchid collections to the Botanical Garden of the University of Latvia and the National Botanic Garden of Latvia.
The global trend for foods that are healthy and free of artificial additives, which has made many people revaluate their eating habits, has also influenced the manufacturing of potato crisps and other popular salty snacks. The Latvian leader in this segment was Latfood, which became a part of Orkla Confectionery & Snacks Latvia in early 2016, and together with sweets manufacturers Laima and Staburadze, it is now one of the largest manufacturers of sweet and salty snacks in the Baltic States. The company operates according to worldwide trends and its own internal standards regarding quality of ingredients and products, manufacturing processes, food safety and, of course, outstanding flavour, healthiness and comfortable use. In fact, Latfood even offers a special Nutrition Class that teaches participants how to enjoy snacks while keeping the principles of healthy nutrition in mind. It is precisely this skill at collaborating with clients, as well as the high quality of its products and manufacturing processes as dictated by various export markets, that have made Orkla Confectionery & Snacks Latvia a strong player in this segment.
Baiba Pužule, export representative at Latfood, about composer Artūrs Maskats: “The artist inspires with his lifelong work at the Daile Theatre and the Latvian National Opera; he’s created music for more than 100 different productions on many Latvian theatre stages. His works reach audiences easily because he composes them in the faith that music must, first of all, be beautiful in order to address people. His music is full of optimism, beauty, and the positive.”
Artūrs Maskats has been the artistic director of the Latvian National Opera and Ballet for almost 20 years. During this time, he and former director Andrejs Žagars put the Latvian National Opera on Europe’s musical map, making it into an opera house that artists visit with particular pleasure. Maskats has composed the music for almost 100 different productions of Latvian theatres and films. His Tango for symphony orchestra took third place at the Masterprize composing competition finals in London in 2003. He has written works for symphony orchestra and choir, as well as music for the ballet Les Liaisons Dangereuses.

Maskats’ opera Valentina – which debuted in Riga in 2014, and is based on the life story of film historian Valentīna Freimane – was also shown at the Deutsche Oper Berlin during Latvia’s presidency of the Council of the EU. Contemporarily romantic and expressive - these and similar descriptions have been used by fans and critics alike to describe Maskats’ music.
The fact that Latvia has one of the fastest data transmission rates, as well as excellent internet access is largely to the credit of Lattelecom. In the past 20 years, the company has not only revolutionised Latvia’s telecommunications sector, but has also grown to become an expert in modern information and communications technologies solutions, a leading provider of electronic communications services in the Baltic States, and a competitive exporter of services internationally.

Thanks to Lattelecom’s highly professional team and strategic decisions made at the right time, more than 70% of Latvia’s residents now have access to high-speed broadband internet. In 2007, Lattelecom began offering interactive television services to its clients, and in 2015 it began developing content for two television stations of its own, 360TV and STV Pirmā!. In 2016, Lattelecom became the first telecommunications operator in the Baltic States to open an OTT entertainment platform, named Shortcut, which allows viewers to watch the newest films and television series, as well as live broadcasts and other popular programmes on their smartphones, tablets and computers. Over these years, Lattelecom has also actively promoted internet access outside of the home or office by setting up approximately 4500 free Wi-Fi access points throughout Latvia. Capital city Riga has the most Wi-Fi hotspots, making it the European capital of free Wi-Fi.
Juris Gulbis, chairman of the board at Lattelecom, about rallycross driver Reinis Nitišs: “Reinis started his career at the age of seven, earning third place in Latvia’s go-cart championship. In 2014 he was named the most popular athlete in Latvia and the year’s best athlete in a technical sports field. On March 1, 2016, Lattelecom officially announced its cooperation with Nitišs and Latvia’s RX round of the FIA World Rallycross Championship. With his persistence and determination, he has earned his place in the hall of fame of Latvian motor sports. We are proud of having one of the world’s fastest Internet speeds, as well as one of the fastest rallycross drivers and the most enthusiastic fans.”
Fast and furious. Nitišs by age 19, in 2014, he had already placed third in the FIA World Rallycross Championship. Nitišs began the 2016 racing season with the World Championship in the SuperCar class, as a member of the All-Inkl.com Münnich Motorsport team; he finished the season, however, as a member of the Olsbergs MSE team, and participated in the season’s last race in Riga, in front of all of his fans.
Bed linens made of summery cool linen and gentle satins, clothing made of knitted fabrics, colourful curtains, tablecloths and other textiles – together, they create that warm feeling of home. “Mežroze” is the Latvian word for the wild rose, which brings to mind a strong, pleasant aroma, but also vivid colour and lightness...a description that fits Mežroze’s products well. The company currently produces more than 50 different fabrics, and its design studio collection boasts more than 6000 print patterns. Mežroze’s history stretches back to 1929, when the Rīgas Manufaktūra cotton manufacturing association was established. It continued to operate during the Soviet era, and in 1993, Mežroze was founded. At the time, only the yarn dyeing facilities were active, but over the past 20 years, the company has grown to become the leading manufacturer of fabrics and household textiles in the Baltic States and Scandinavia.
Artūrs Kārlis Dreimanis, president of Mežroze, about ballet dancer Māris Liepa: “Liepa was one of the world’s best-known ballet dancers of his generation, and he came from Latvia, from Riga.”
Māris Liepa is remembered as a vibrant ballet dancer – for his engaging character, for his emotion, for his conviction. He began dancing at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow in the early 1960s, which was the highest achievement for a ballet dancer at that time. There, Liepa’s career developed rapidly. He danced in performances such as Swan Lake, Raymonda, Romeo and Juliet, Anna Karenina, and The Spirit of the Rose, but he was perhaps best known for playing Crassus in Aram Khachaturian’s Spartacus, for which he won several awards (as was the practice in the Soviet Union). Crassus, however, turned out to be Liepa’s last role at the Bolshoi Theatre; he was no longer given roles by the theatre after criticising head ballet master Yuri Grigorovich in an interview with Pravda, and so was forced to retire at the age of 45. But Liepa continued to work as a ballet teacher, and he also performed in several films.

Liepa began his career in Riga. As a child, his parents sent him to ballet lessons in order to improve his health. Later, while studying at the Riga Choreography School, he engaged in sports and became an accomplished swimmer. Liepa died in Moscow and was buried in Vagankovo Cemetery. His children, Ilze and Andris, likewise became well-known ballet dancers.
“When I saw this number, this very big number, I actually had to recount the zeros several times because it was just so unbelievable,” says Liene Dambiņa, the director of the Children’s Hospital Foundation in Riga. And the surprise can still be heard in her voice during that interview on television, even though some time has already passed since the foundation received the more-than-generous donation in late 2015. Probably each one of us would recount the zeros if such an amount showed up on our bank statements. One million euros. Less than a year later, the same benefactor donated just as large a sum of money to the University of Latvia, which had already previously received half a million euros for the implementation of projects in the Faculty of Computing, the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics, and the Faculty of Medicine. This generous donor is the company Mikrotīkls – known outside of Latvia by the brand name MikroTik – which develops, produces and sells routers to clients around the world. Mikrotīkls has plenty to be proud of. According to publicly available information, the company had a turnover of 202 million euros in 2015, with a profit of 61.3 million euros, thereby making it the second-highest earning company in Latvia in the real economy behind the energy company Latvenergo.
Most breakfast cereals are made of maize, which is a crop that Europe allows to be genetically modified. But maize has a relatively high sugar content and lacks natural vitamins. In addition, the competition’s marketing campaigns are based on the slogan “eat and lose weight”; consumers, however, are mainly interested in eating healthy foods – two very differing views. MILZU! therefore decided to make a usually unhealthy product healthy. Their cereals are made of Latvian-grown rye, oats and wheat, and the recipes have been developed in cooperation with nutrition experts from the Latvia University of Agriculture. Currently, MILZU! makes twelve different kinds of cereal, but there’s more to their story than that. MILZU!’s main market is children, but it understands that mothers are usually the ones who make the final decisions in the grocery store. Ence called together a group of children from his circle of friends and family for a brainstorm session, and together they created the MILZU! logo, which went on to win the 2014 award for the best brand logo in Latvia. The company has also now reached one of its initial goals, namely, taking back certain niches of the breakfast cereal market from importers. Ence says he doesn’t know what those children encoded in his brand’s logo, but, judging from how quickly grocery store shelves empty of MILZU! cereals, the code is clearly working.
Enno Ence, the chairman of the board at MILZU!, about accordion player Ksenija Sidorova: “In order to create a path, one must walk along the same route many times, repeating a familiar routine, until the path begins to show itself. And, in order for something to change or take place differently in one’s life, one must begin acting differently oneself because, if one doesn’t change the way things happen, everything will continue as it has before.

I have used both of these principles in creating my business – creating a brand, going step by step, and producing something different from the rest. I may be wrong, but I think that the distinguished artist Ksenija Sidorova has gone a similar route. It’s her selfless work – her going down a certain path – in order to cultivate a talent, and it’s also the vivid way she presents her art. So, it’s no wonder that, in creating a brand, people say that one should avoid saying ‘me too’ at all costs; instead, one should decidedly strive towards ‘who else?’”
Ksenija Sidorova makes the accordion sound completely different. More precisely, she makes people listen to this musical instrument in a different way, revealing exciting nuances of sound and filling concert halls worldwide. In the summer of 2016, the prestigious music label Deutsche Grammophon released Sidorova’s album Carmen – an album based on motifs from Georges Bizet’s opera, and recorded with the Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic Orchestra. Sidorova graduated from the Royal Academy of Music in London, where she was awarded with an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music diploma for her significant contribution to the music profession. She has also recorded her own version of the popular song Roxanne together with Sting and Bryn Terfel. Sidorova plays classical as well as contemporary music, and has always emphasised that her goal is to introduce as many people as possible to the accordion. It was Sidorova’s grandmother who encouraged her to play the instrument, when Sidorova was only eight years old.
The Latvian company Nordic Plast is one of two companies in Latvia that recycles plastic packaging materials. It was established in 2001, and specialises in plastic film and hard plastics, including the recycling of plastic bags. Nordic Plast belongs to the Eco Baltia group, which is the largest waste management group in the Baltic States in terms of turnover, and ensures a full cycle of waste management – from trash collection and recycling, to the logistics, wholesale trade and processing of recycled materials. Nordic Plast receives most of its raw materials from local Latvian waste management companies, although about 30% is imported from other European Union countries. Nordic Plast exports approximately 90% of its output to Europe. Manufacturers appreciate the high quality of Nordic Plast’s pellets, which is achieved by separating the plastic film and HDPE materials by hand. This is the only way to ensure that no inappropriate materials are mixed in with the plastic film and HDPE material in the granulator, and the only way to guarantee a high-quality end product. Nevertheless, processing polymers by hand is a fairly rare practice in Europe, which is why Nordic Plast’s products remain competitive.
Kaspars Fogelmanis, chairman of the board at Nordic Plast, about composer Raimonds Pauls: “Latvia’s outstanding popular music author and pianist Raimonds Pauls is famous even beyond the country’s borders. His music has been heard in countless countries and in the most prestigious concert halls, his albums have been released in Eastern European and the CIS countries, Finland, the United States, Canada, Japan, Israel and elsewhere. And this is all thanks to his unique melodic abilities. Maestro Pauls’ rich creative imagination combines the intonations of Latvian folk music with jazz, blues, and rock’n’roll elements, as well as various foreign folk melodies and relevant contemporary musical trends.”
He is one of the all-time favourite Latvian pianists and composers; he has written music for theatre productions and films; he has created superb melodies for singers in Latvia and beyond; he has written songs for choirs; he has been featured on many, many recordings. He has also been the artistic director and conductor of several bands. Raimonds Pauls’ music is loved, and it is loved for its melodies. Pauls was already known for his skill at improvisation, variation, and swaying audiences while still a student at the Emīls Dārziņš Music School. At the age of 14, he began playing in restaurants and clubs together with saxophone virtuoso Gunārs Kušķis, which provided him with many life lessons; it was at this time that Pauls also developed an interest in jazz. Pauls’ improvisation skills are still unmatched. In his teens, Pauls played in several different ensembles and orchestras, and in the late 1950s, he gradually began composing his own music as well. Despite celebrating his 80th birthday in 2016, Pauls continues to write music to this day; he also participates in a variety of projects, and plays together with the Latvian Radio Big Band. And his concerts are always a celebration.
The fertiliser producer NPK Expert was established in a former logistics centre in Liepāja, which is one of the largest ports in the Baltic States. The centre packaged and sold fertilisers, but eventually the shareholders no longer agreed on the direction the business should take. At that point, then-director Ģirts Cēlājs and a partner bought out the business and turned it into a successful producer of fertilisers for crops such as tea, coffee, cocoa, citrus and tobacco. NPK Expert’s turnover has increased threefold for the past three years, and it exports its output to 25 countries around the world, including the Dominican Republic, Rwanda, Zambia, Malawi, Kuwait, Cameroon, Burundi, Burkina Faso and Mali. The company has offices in Finland, the Dominican Republic, Cameroon, Togo, Sudan and Switzerland, and plans to also open an office in Peru. It can ensure delivery of its products anywhere in the world.
Ģirts Cēlājs, chairman of the board at NPK Expert, about tennis player Ernests Gulbis: “Gulbis is Latvia’s all-time best tennis player, the only one who has broken into the world’s elite rankings, causing the competition to take him seriously. NPK Expert still has a way to go to achieve top positions, but in certain markets, even NPK Expert has managed to outperform the global giants.”
Ernests Gulbis reached the highest point of his career in the summer of 2014, when, after several wins at ATP tournaments, he reached the #10 position in the ATP ranking. He still regularly participates in the largest and most prestigious tournaments. But Gulbis is also known for his strong and emotional personality, as well as his sharp wit, openness, and unusual views at press conferences. Thus, while discussing match fixing in a recent interview with Ben Rothenberg for The New York Times (May 26, 2016), he said that no one has ever approached him with an offer: “They also know my character; maybe I’m going to take him by the neck and bring him to justice, you know? This is why I never got approached.”
Olainfarm, which produces medicaments and chemical pharmaceutical products (its product portfolio contains more than 60 finished dosage forms, 25 active pharmaceutical ingredients, and more than 20 intermediates), has a history spanning back more than 40 years, and is one of the largest manufacturers of finished drugs and pharmaceutical intermediates in the Baltic States. The company exports its products to more than 40 countries around the world, and its partners include such companies as Novartis, Dr. Reddy’s, and Glenmark Generics. Since 2011 it has also provided anti-tuberculosis medications for the World Health Organisation. One of the directions in which Olainfarm is developing is the research of new active pharmaceutical ingredients and finished dosage forms, both for its original products and for generic drugs. Olainfarm became a joint stock company in 1997, and its shares are listed on the Official List of NASDAQ OMX Riga. In early August 2016, Olainfarm was invited to ring the closing bell at the NASDAQ MarketSite in New York’s Times Square. This honour was bestowed on the company because at the beginning of 2016, Olainfarm received the special Baltic Market Award for Top Performer of 10 Years – for the greatest increase in share price and rise in ranking over the past decade. Since its first analysis, in 2006, Olainfarm’s ranking with Baltic Market Awards has grown by 25%, while the share price has grown 448% in the same period.
Valērijs Maligins, chairman of the board at Olainfarm, about opera singer Inese Galante: “The classical music genre in Latvia is at the highest world-class level, and Galante is one of its brightest stars. We appreciate that she cares not just for developing the musical tastes of listeners through her concert performances and the Summertime – Inese Galante & Friends festival, but also for discovering and nurturing Latvia’s young, new talent. She shines and helps others to do so, too. We at Olainfarm try to do the same.”
Her repertoire includes all of the most beautiful roles written for a soprano: Violetta in La Traviata, Lucia in Lucia di Lammermoor, Adina in The Elixir of Love, Rosina in The Barber of Seville, Micaela in Carmen, Mimi in La Boheme, Cio-Cio-San in Madama Butterfly, Liza in Queen of Spades, Liu in Turandot, and on and on....

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Inese Galante was the first opera singer from Latvia to make waves on European stages. Her voice has an unforgettably warm timbre, and her technique is still superior to that of most other singers. Having once heard Galante sing, you will never confuse her with another singer. She broke into Europe at the perfect moment – she had already matured as an artist and had developed a stable voice and much experience on stage. In 1991, she began singing in Germany at the National Theatre Mannheim and the Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Düsseldorf. She has also sung with the Royal Swedish Opera in Stockholm, the Estonian National Opera, and many others.

Every summer since 2005, Galante has organised the Summertime – Inese Galante & Friends festival in Latvia’s spa town of Jūrmala, to which she invites her friends as well as young, rising talents. The festival is one of the most exciting events on Latvia’s music scene. Interestingly, after graduating from high school, Galante began studying in the pharmacy department at medical school. At the same time, she also began studying at the Jāzeps Mediņš Music School. She did not become a pharmacist, however, as music took the upper hand. And aren’t we lucky that things turned out the way they did?
Polipaks has been in the packaging business since 1996, when it launched its polymer film extrusion process and began manufacturing various types of product packaging based on that technology. Although, looking even further back, the company’s business had already been tied to the product packaging trade for some time...until at one point it was unable to buy a product demanded by clients. The company then made the decision to begin manufacturing the product itself and install the first extrusion equipment for making department-store shopping bags. In 2000 the first printing equipment was installed, and in 2002 the company transitioned from serving shopping centres to a B2B model. In 2005 the first equipment for forming high-quality printed bags was installed, at which point Polipaks began offering its product to export markets. Thus, step by step, by modernising its technology and expanding its offerings, the company has grown into one of the largest packaging manufacturers in the Baltic States and Scandinavia. But the company’s main developmental milestone came in 2015 with the opening of its modern manufacturing and logistics complex, allowing for a doubling of production capacity and an increase in its activity in Western Europe. Until that point, Polipaks’ main markets had been in the Baltic States, Scandinavia and Russia. Consequently, turnover in Western Europe has grown by 70% in just one year’s time. Currently, the company exports around 80% of its product to 20 countries, while the Baltic States are now viewed as the local market.
Viktors Kornenkovs, head of the sales department at Polipaks, on film director Sergei Eisenstein: “The legendary film director Sergei Eisenstein was born in Riga. In addition, his father was Mikhail Eisenstein, an architect whose ideas and vision helped the city gain the traits it has today.”
Born in Riga into the family of architect Mikhail Eisenstein, Sergei Eisenstein left an indelible mark in cinema history and is considered a pioneer of film editing. His frame-building principles were followed by such masters as Alfred Hitchcock, Francois Truffaut, Francis Ford Coppola, and many others. One of his best-known works is the film Battleship Potemkin (1925), which he made as a revolutionary propaganda film to test his editing theories and evoke as great an audience response as possible. Eisenstein’s approach was revolutionary for its time, and he surely achieved his goal, though the film was banned in some countries. Eisenstein was also a teacher at the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (GIK) in Moscow, and wrote several works about film editing. He died in 1948 and was laid to rest in Moscow.
It was 65 years ago that the Riga Medical Institute first opened its doors to students. Over the course of history, its name and location have since changed, but it remains the origin of one of the most prestigious medical universities in Eastern Europe. The number of international students at Riga Stradiņš University (RSU) has gradually grown in recent years, and currently they make up about one fourth of the student body, or approximately 1900 students. Competition is also becoming stiffer, with the university presently accepting only about 30% of applications. But the rise in international students at RSU is no coincidence. Just the opposite – as one of its strategic goals, the university intends to increase its proportion of international students to 25%, and this target has now almost been reached.

Initially, considerable interest was shown by students from Middle-Eastern countries; then, many students from Asian countries came to study at RSU; in the past decade, however, Europeans, especially students from Germany and Sweden, form the majority of international students at the school.

Main export markets: Germany, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Portugal
Jānis Gardovskis, rector of Riga Stradiņš University, about painter Vilhelms Purvītis: “Just as in education, the arts reach across the borders drawn on maps. After studying in Saint Petersburg, Purvītis travelled across Europe to draw inspiration, and then returned to Latvia to later not only surprise the European capitals with his talented artwork, but also to help the work of other Latvian artists reach Europe as well.”
Purvītis’ paintings are characterised by the painter’s superb technique and skill in revealing and depicting a universal sense of Latvia’s natural environment and the way it changes through all four seasons. Purvītis painted many new motifs, from flood waters to snow, thereby establishing his own style and also school of painting.

Purvītis was born in 1872 and studied at the Saint Petersburg Academy of Art. After graduating from the academy, he won a contest with his painting Pēdējie stari (The Last Rays), as well as a study trip to Europe and the opportunity to participate in exhibitions there. Following his European exhibitions, his paintings were bought by the Russian art collectors Tretyakov, Botkin and Princess Tenisheva.

When the Art Academy of Latvia was established in 1919, Purvītis became its first rector and remained in that position until 1934. During his time there, he organised many exhibitions abroad of Latvian art, not only aweing audiences with his own artwork, but also introducing them to other Latvian artists. Unfortunately, many of Purvītis’ paintings were destroyed in 1944 during the air raids on Jelgava, where he lived at the time. He had carefully stored many paintings in his apartment instead of exhibiting them publicly.
Co-owner Sandis Kolomenskis notes that Squalio has never been just a seller of software. The company’s prime mission has always been to help create a culture of legal software acquisition and use. Squalio was founded in 1997 as part of the Squalio group, however, it has grown most rapidly during the past three years, doubling its turnover in this time. The growth is largely attributable to Squalio’s branches in Lithuania, Belarus and Georgia, which were established before 2013. Squalio is a market leader in each of these three countries, providing customers with a broad range of software, cloud solutions and licensing services, as well as consultations and training. It knows how to work towards the formation of a culture of software purchasing there. It is this approach that sets Squalio apart from other similar companies. Just like the fact that Squalio works only with software, and allows no other thoughts to distract it from its goal. Experience, ambition and boldness are the three values driving the firm forward. For almost 20 years the company has specialised its services in this field, and its experience has now become an invaluable advantage.
Sandis Kolomenskis, co-owner and chairman of the board at Squalio, about ice hockey player Sandis Ozoliņš: “After Latvia regained its independence, ice hockey player Sandis Ozoliņš was one of the first to carry the name of our country out into the world. But after playing in the NHL for many years, he returned to Latvia. Such a path also characterises the vision and conviction of our company. Ozoliņš is synonymous with hard work, big ambitions, and a confidence of victory. Besides, the two of us share a first name.”
Even though he has already retired from playing ice hockey professionally, Sandis Ozoliņš will always be one of the most popular and successful Latvian ice hockey players. Ozo – that’s what they called him. He’s still the only Latvian ice hockey player to have won the Stanley Cup, the highest award in the sport. That was back in 1996, when Ozoliņš played in the NHL club Colorado Avalanche. In addition, over the course of his NHL career – from 1992 to 2008 – he played in seven All-Star Games. His trump card was an almost unbelievable ability to unite a successful defence with offence, which is why he was often called an offensive-style defenceman.

Ozoliņš also played on the Latvian national team at three Winter Olympic Games. At the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, he was chosen to carry the Latvian flag at the opening ceremony of the Games – an expression of gratitude to this athlete for the inspiration he has given to hundreds and thousands of young athletes.
No wonder this company chose to call itself after the lynx, an animal that lives high up in the mountains under the cover of forests and thick foliage. It is a quiet animal that is very alert and observant, but rarely ever seen itself; it is often called the keeper of secrets. And this is also, perhaps, a suitable description of the way in which SmartLynx Airlines operates, because the best service is the kind that customers don’t even notice. SmartLynx is an airline, as well as a charter and ACMI (aircraft, crew, maintenance, insurance) operator, based in Riga that holds Latvian and Estonian air operator’s certificates. As a European Union-based airline, SmartLynx upholds IOSA and EASA quality standards and has access to Open Skies. It currently has eleven aircraft in its fleet in Latvia and two in Estonia, which are mainly leased to other airline companies for passenger transport. Charter flights make up a relatively small part of its operations.
Aleksandrs Gusevs, member of the board at Smartlynx Airlines, about opera singer Ėlīna Garanča: “As a singer, she is an excellent example of the skills and abilities of the Latvian people. She is an example of how through hard work, targeted goals and ironclad self-discipline, one can reach the highest summits in the field of one’s choosing. Garanča has a stable place among the world’s leading opera stars, and along with her name, so is the name of Latvia heard convincingly around the world. For this we are grateful to Garanča, and proud of her achievements.”
No one can resist the power, charisma and energy of her voice - she electrifies the audience as well as her partners on stage. As reported in Opera News, Elīna Garanča has earned her place in opera history. Born in Riga, Garanča continued her musical education in Austria and America. She triumphed at the Salzburg Festival in 2003, and since then she has performed in the world’s largest and best-known opera houses. She debuted at the Vienna State Opera in the role of Lola in Cavalleria Rusticana, and would go on to sing in The Marriage of Figaro, Der Rosenkavalier and Werther there. Garanča then performed at London’s Covent Garden and the Berlin State Opera until 2008, when she debuted at New York’s Metropolitan Opera House, as Rosina in The Barber of Seville. She returned to the Met the next season in La Cenerentola, another opera by Rossini. Carmen has been another significant role in Garanča’s career. In 2009, she sang the role opposite Roberto Alagna in both New York and London, and these performances once again revealed her great talent. Garanča hosts the annual Elīna Garanča and Friends festival in Austria.
The Latvian company Stali, which currently exports more than 80% of its output, was established in 1993. And it began very modestly, at first only producing and exporting sawn lumber. The early 1990s were not an easy time for the new business, or for the Latvian economy, which had only just begun to develop independently. A business had to prove itself and endure a variety of difficulties; on the other hand, this gave it some necessary hardening and a chance to stand the test of whether it was able to successfully overcome obstacles, solve complicated situations, and develop itself. Stali’s export business quickly increased after it expanded its range of products because the European market demands variety in the window and door business. Stali proved that it could manufacture new products at a very high level of quality, and clients appreciated this fact. By working intensely and gaining new clients, the business began to experience rapid growth and progress. Flexibility and quality are one thing, but the main factor in Stali’s success is the company’s management and team of employees, who all cooperate effectively in order that the business can continually move forward.
Sanita Stīpniece, executive director at Staļi, about engineer and architect Mikhail Eisenstein: “Eisenstein was one of Latvia’s top architects and building designers, who left a legacy of Art Nouveau (Jugendstil) gems of indescribable splendour. An architect who strived for excellence, just like Staļi strives for excellence in making wood windows and doors. Our manufactured products fit wonderfully in both contemporary buildings and those with a historical value now experiencing a rebirth; they would fit just as well in the buildings designed by Eisenstein, which are characterised by very ornate and unusual window and door constructions.”
Mikhail Eisenstein (Mihails Eizensteins), the father of the famous film director and theoretician Sergei Eisenstein, designed more than 15 buildings in Riga, half of which have now been deemed “protected architectural monuments”.

He contributed several beautiful gems of Jugendstil architecture to Riga, especially on Alberta, Strelnieku and Elizabetes streets in the district known as the Quiet Centre. His buildings are known for their decorative details, including brightly-coloured glazed brick and ceramic tiles; unique, geometric forms; large female heads; and unusually shaped window openings.

Eisenstein was a civil engineer by training, and although he was born and educated in St. Petersburg, he moved to Riga at the end of the 19th century. His buildings were as colourful as his own character - Eisenstein is said to have loved playing cards, listening to music, and entertaining guests in his home. His son, Sergei, was born in Riga, in 1898.
The street lighting along Ulmaņa gatve is made in Latvia by the Vizulo, which specialises in the manufacture of street and industrial LED lighting products. Even though lighting products were produced in Latvia during the Soviet era, Vizulo did not attempt to take over where that industry left off; instead, it has forged its own path and currently exports its products to Estonia, Finland, France, Israel, New Zealand, Slovakia, Greece and other countries. In 2015, Vizulo won a competition in Estonia in which the lighting in seven different cities was changed simultaneously. Tartu also uses Vizulo lighting, as do several suburbs of Athens in Greece. And Vizulo lighting has likewise been installed at the Latvian National Museum of Art, which was reopened in May 2016 after a major reconstruction. As a matter of fact, the company’s name, Vizulo, comes from the Latvian word vizuļot, which means to sparkle, to glisten, to shimmer with light.

Main export markets:
Estonia, Finland, France, Israel, New Zealand
Linda Zeltiņa, R&D director at Vizulo, about artist Janis Rozentāls:

“In the late summer and autumn of 2016, this master of Latvian art was honoured with an extensive retrospective exhibition in the Great Hall of the Latvian National Museum of Art’s main building, in which artwork is also illuminated with lighting produced by Vizulo. In response to Rozentāls’ appeal from more than a century ago – to produce household items in Latvia instead of importing them, Vizulo has also created products that take the place of imports in our home market; in addition, our high-quality and aesthetically designed products are also appreciated and valued as exports to other countries.”
The 150th anniversary of the artist Janis Rozentāls’ birth was celebrated in Latvia in 2016. Rozentāls’ artwork is now considered a national treasure, exhibited in notable art museums and galleries worldwide. Having audited courses at the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, his diploma work No baznīcas (After Church, 1894) was the first such work at the academy that reflected a national theme. He also painted portraits and fascinating compositions of scenes from mythology, the Bible, and Latvian folklore. His genre paintings have a direct, ironic view of life. His Art Nouveau and Symbolist paintings, for example, Princese ar pērtiķi (The Princess and the Monkey, 1913), are also noteworthy. Rozentāls grew up in a time of great change – the countless inventions and discoveries of the 19th century led to the technological development of the 20th century. Rozentāls also participated in this so-called revolution, encouraging Latvia to manufacture simple and unpretentious household objects whose aesthetic quality would keep abreast with imported items, which he saw as often lacking in taste. Rozentāls was married to the Finnish singer Elli Forssell. He died in Finland at a relatively young age.
Wenden specialised in making chairs from birch and oak wood, which grows locally in Latvia and are very popular materials in Scandinavia. 60-70% of the birch chairs available in stores there are made by Wenden. A good chair is one that one does not feel when sitting in it. The main thing is that the chair be comfortable and ergonomic. From the manufacturing point of view, a chair is the most complicated piece of furniture to make – it consists of 15 to 20 different pieces, and it takes quite an amount of skill to put those pieces together correctly and precisely. A good chair can last 30 to 50 years. Wenden’s principles for successful manufacturing and marketing are simple: produce quality, produce it on time, keep in mind the numbers, and make a profit. Those principles are set in stone – because no one needs a low-quality product, and no one needs a product that cannot be delivered on time. When manufacturing chairs, numbers don’t mean only the number of chairs produced. They also mean a watchmaker’s precision in regard to measurements, angles, degrees and even seconds. But the team of employees that has grown together with the company is just as important a factor in Wenden’s success. When the company began, most of them were young men in their very early 20s. “My team is my greatest pride,” says Brēmers.
Normunds Brēmers, chairman of the board at Wenden Furniture, about hockey player Kārlis Skrastiņš: “An iron man – that’s what they called Latvian hockey player Kārlis Skrastiņš. He was respected on and off the rink. Skrastiņš inspired us with his effort and refusal to back down. His example has become a legend.”
In the hockey world, Kārlis Skrastiņš was known as the Latvian Iron Man. With his game he proved that one can accomplish an unimaginable amount through hard work – during his NHL career, which lasted from 1998 to 2011, Skrastiņš played 495 consecutive games, thereby bettering Tim Horton’s record from 1968.

But Skrastiņš was respected for his endurance in the hockey rink as well as outside the sports arena. With his attitude towards work, his values and his athletic achievements, he set an example for many. He played his first game with the Latvian national team in 1992. He played his last game with the national team at the Olympic Games in Vancouver in 2010, where he was also the captain of the team, as he had been in many other tournaments. But no one knew at the time that Vancouver would be Skrastiņš’ last time playing with the national team. He died in an airplane crash in September 2011 together with his new team, Lokomotiv Yaroslavl (Russia), which he had joined only a few weeks earlier. Thousands of people turned out to pay their last respects to Skrastiņš. He was only 37 years old.
Clear skies in the data world

First, you have to see it. Open the ZoomCharts website. Most likely, it will completely change your ideas of how to present data, and of how data can help decisions be made more effectively and precisely. At least, that’s what’s happened to ZoomCharts’ clients. ZoomCharts was created out of necessity. Gints Ernestsons, the co-owner of ZoomCharts and other IT businesses that continually develop new products, came into contact with the problem that there was nothing like a library of data visualisations that allowed one to work effectively with a large amount of data on a computer or tablet. Most libraries offered visualisations as the self-evident end result of datasheets. None of the existing libraries, however, allowed one to literally immerse oneself in the data through a visualisation, for example, by opening each separate pie chart section and seeing what it consists of; by comfortably browsing geographic maps that are actually full of business information and graphically demonstrate a number of connections, such as those between different businesses; or by looking at complex networks of information and analysing them according to a variety of criteria. ZoomCharts’ interactive visualisations allow one to look at data in a completely new light, to find answers and see connections quickly, comfortably and effectively, with just a few clicks or swipes.
Jānis Volbergs, CEO of ZoomCharts, about inventor Walter Zapp: “Zapp was an outstanding inventor and autodidact. Even though we live in a different era and work with different technologies, independent learning is also critically important in our business in order to continue developing, inventing, and creating new and unique solutions. The association with this autodidact and constructor is deeply linked with the philosophy and basic values of our company. In continuing what Zapp began, we are also promoting Latvia’s name in the world with unique technological solutions.”
Walter Zapp, who was born in Riga in 1905, is known in Latvia and abroad as the inventor of the Minox, the so-called spy camera. The camera began to be manufactured in 1938 at VEF (State Electrotechnical Factory) in Riga, and was exported to Europe as well as the United States. It weighed only 125 grams and measured 15x27x80 mm. Zapp was a self-taught man. He did not attend school regularly due to his poor health, but already as a child he was fascinated by various mechanisms and constructions. The idea for the Minox came to him while he was working as an apprentice in one of the best photography workshops in Tallinn, Estonia. In 1942, when Latvia was occupied by the German armed forces, the whole Minox production plant, materials and sketches were ordered to move to Germany and continued manufacturing there. Zapp, an ethnic Baltic German, repatriated to Germany that same year. After the war, he and his business partner Richard Jürgens founded the Minox GmbH business, which still exists today. Although this was not Zapp’s original objective, because of its small size and impeccable quality, the secret services of many countries used Minox cameras until the 1980s. Zapp regularly visited Riga after the restoration of Latvia’s independence in 1991. The inventor died in Switzerland, at the age of 97.
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