

Luxury bathtubs made In Latvia conquer the world



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Latvian-made products continue to rise in popularity as global consumers opt for well-crafted European products using the finest materials over Chinese manufactured goods. Hollywood celebrities, top-tier developers & influential interior designers have fallen in love with bespoke bath and spa ware products that are manufactured by Aquatica Plumbing Group at a state-of-the-art factory in Jelgava, Latvia. Aquatica offers a whole new bathing experience, allowing bathers to enter a realm of ultimate relaxation with integrated Bluetooth, special hydrotherapy, chromotherapy, and aromatherapy healing features. Spa lovers missing out on their favourite pastime due to COVID-19 have the opportunity to create their very own spa without even having to leave their home. Aquatica is unique as the company does not only design, develop and manufacture materials and products in-house, it also operates an online one-stop-shop offering customers the best possible shopping experience for luxury bathroomware with 24/7 customer support. The company sells high-end baths, sinks, hot tubs, and bathroomware accessories to destinations across the globe, including the US, Canada, Mexico, Europe, Australia, Hong Kong, and the United Arab Emirates.

The brainchild behind Aquatica is Latvian-born Joseph Burnstein, who founded Aquatica Plumbing Group in Canada over 18 years ago. Since then, Mr. Burnstein has transformed the bathtub into a work of art by bringing together the best Latvian craftsmen, aspiring and talented industrial designers, and engineers from around the world to create truly innovative and aesthetically striking bathtubs. Aquatica's

philosophy of function, form, and fashion includes meticulous ergonomic design, advanced engineering, and proprietary materials. In 2016, Aquatica received the award for the "The Best Innovative Material of the Year" at the prestigious UK Kitchen & Bathroom Awards. The company's in-house developed stone composite material AquateX™ offers durable, hypoallergenic, non-toxic, 100% recyclable, UV and fire-resistant features, which is the result of extensive research and development. Mr. Burnstein is also launching a new product development services company, offering businesses the opportunity to create top-notch products using Aquatica's special materials, CNC machining center, cutting-edge composite technology, and in-house experts. Mr. Burnstein shares his success story and business expansion plans with **The Baltic Times**.

What inspired you to establish Aquatica over 18 years ago?

It was completely by accident. At that time, in 2003, I had been in the IT and the Telecom industries for over 14 years. The period of 2000-2003 was extremely turbulent in these industries. The dot com bubble burst, many early e-commerce ventures and telecom equipment and service companies were collapsing or downsizing. I decided it was time to explore a new industry. At that time, glass washbasins were the big new trend and I decided to start a business importing and distributing glass washbasins and bath furniture in Canada. I can tell you candidly that I made all the possible mistakes that one could possibly make upon opening a new business by starting it in a totally different industry and without any existing clientele.

How did you transform the company from a regular bathtub supplier into a one-of-a-kind



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designer and manufacturer of world-class bath and spa ware?

Back in 2015, Aquatica recognized that most bathtubs had few, if any, distinguishing characteristics. Our sales and design team recognized that there were very few, if any functional bathtubs that could fit in small spaces. This has become increasingly important for small inner-city dwellings in densely populated major cities. Aquatica engaged talented designers from four countries to create a series of new practical and functional products with well-thought-through ergonomics. The goal was to create a cross-over between a hot tub, bathtub and a major appliance. This product line was distinctively different from those of Aquatica's competitors. For nearly four years, we worked together to create a series of unique, very functional and distinctive bathtubs like no other in the marketplace. The resulting patented industrial design along with proprietary electronic controls, was the True Ofuro and True Ofuro Tranquility series Japanese style bathtubs that we have shipped to over 50 countries and territories around the world.

In 2017, Aquatica decided to take full control of its destiny by opening up a factory in Latvia. What were the driving factors behind this move?

The original plan in 2017, foresaw only limited manufacturing. Our business plan at that time called for a relatively small warehouse-like facility that would be used for received goods inspection and therapy system installation. Unfortunately, this period coincided with growing supplier quality problems and constant fighting due to various quality related deficiencies, late delivery issues as well as our suppliers increasing inability to engineer and supply products that would match our design and en-

gineering requirements. This was holding back our development and starting to inflict a severe stress on our organization. One year later, in the summer of 2018, we decided to start manufacturing all solid surface products in-house. Over a period of just six months, we purchased all the minimal equipment and started limited manufacturing around February of 2019. The process wasn't easy; we found ourselves with inadequate size manufacturing facilities, lack of expertise, and insufficient staff. After moving to Jelgava in January of 2020, we hired competent senior personnel to oversee crucial engineering and chemical processes, upgraded our manufacturing facilities and process according to the best industry practices, introduced about a dozen new products and eliminated the vast majority of external suppliers. Our product engineering and quality now match or exceed all established standards and best practices by crucial parameters like product whiteness, durability, cleanliness, scratch resistance (surface hardness), colorfastness, and UV resistance.

What are the most important features for consumers at the moment, and how do you accommodate their needs?

The majority of consumers don't care about overrated and overpriced Italian brands and famous, big-name designers. They do care about products that look great, yet are practical and functional with novel technical features. Many advanced features that are part of our product portfolio, such as electronic fill and drain, have been around for over a decade but remained unpopular due to their meaningless application. For instance, offering an electronic drain for a common tub is pointless, but instead we offered the same electronic drain for a tub installed in a wet-room (sauna). This actually solves a problem

as it is the only option to have a tub there; hence, this feature is in high demand.

You are passionate about creating products that solve problems. Can you describe some of your most popular bathtubs that address bathers' needs?

In general, we focus on creating products that solve problems. The stylish, lowstep Coletta is the perfect solution for reduced-mobility bathers, while the company's first walk-in bathtub, Baby Boomer, has a transparent resin door. We employ the science of ergonomics to create bathtubs for all shapes and sizes to ensure the most comfortable bathing experience. We also have an app and videos on our website to help customers choose the right bathtub to suit their needs.

What are the latest products you have released?

We recently launched our new Downtown Hot Tub Spa collection featuring four different types of ultra-luxurious hot tubs. These luxurious outdoor spas are equipped with 32 powerful hydromassage jets and 12 air-based massage nozzles that massage the entire body and activate blood circulation from the soles of your feet to your entire back. The Downtown Spa can also be equipped with optional features, such as integrated Bluetooth audio; a second hydromassage pump for Dual Hydromassage power; electrical fill and drain system, and Aquatica's own aromatherapy package. We believe that our genuinely designed Downtown hot tub is among the most beautiful, minimalist hydro-massage spas on the market. Ideal for couples, it will find a place in suites or superior hotel rooms, but also in private homes. The Downtown model is the perfect choice for anyone interested in buying a top-of-the-line, high-performance spa for romance,

family enjoyment, partying, or socializing with friends.

Has COVID-19 had a positive or negative impact on business, and how are you adapting to the changing times?

Initially, we saw the COVID19 crisis as life-threatening. It happened very fast; there was no time for any contingency planning, the payments from our clients all around the world froze completely, which was unprecedented. However, just 2 months later, we found ourselves in a new and totally different world. This new world had severe inventory and delivery problems as Italy and China were closed for two months, plus the new Cold War between the US and China led to increasing costs of Chinese-made products. To our big surprise, we held the advantage since the quarantine in Latvia was mild, we never stopped manufacturing, we had a substantial inventory in the US and in Europe. Over a course of just a few weeks, we sold out our entire US inventory and were shipping 40ft containers every week in an attempt to keep up with the demand.

Identifying gaps in the market and exploring new business opportunities seem to be part of your success story. You are also launching a new business venture, offering your product development services to other companies, can you tell us more about this?

We were able to expand our production capacity by investing in a more spacious manufacturing facility, new cutting edge-technology and hiring more experts and master craftsmen. This provided us with an opportunity to offer product development services to other brands and businesses searching for an efficient and reputable European manufacturer. Aquatica Manufacturing offers companies, start-ups, and entrepreneurs the opportunity to create a world-class product from scratch using our proprietary materials, state-of-the-art machinery and industry know-how. Businesses can select the full service from concept creation to manufacturing of the final product, or select any standalone service they need, such as industrial design, mechanical engineering, CNC machining, rapid prototyping and custom moulding. After working in the industry for over 20 years, I understand the importance of quality and service for brand reputation. I am passionate about Aquatica's customer centric philosophy, ensuring that our customers always receive the care and the attention that they truly deserve.

THE BALTIC
Times

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The Baltic Times is published monthly
Published in Kretinga, Lithuania

Chairman:
Gene Zolotarev
Editor in chief:
Linas Jegelevicius
Production design:
Vilma Dainiene

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