

170 YEARS OF ROYAL POLAK SPICES

The greatest adventures often happen when you least expect them. From its modest beginnings as a small shop in the Dutch town of Steenwijk, Royal Polak Spices grew into Europe's leading supplier of cinnamon to the food industry, with an outstanding reputation for flavour and quality.

1834

The roots of a global brand

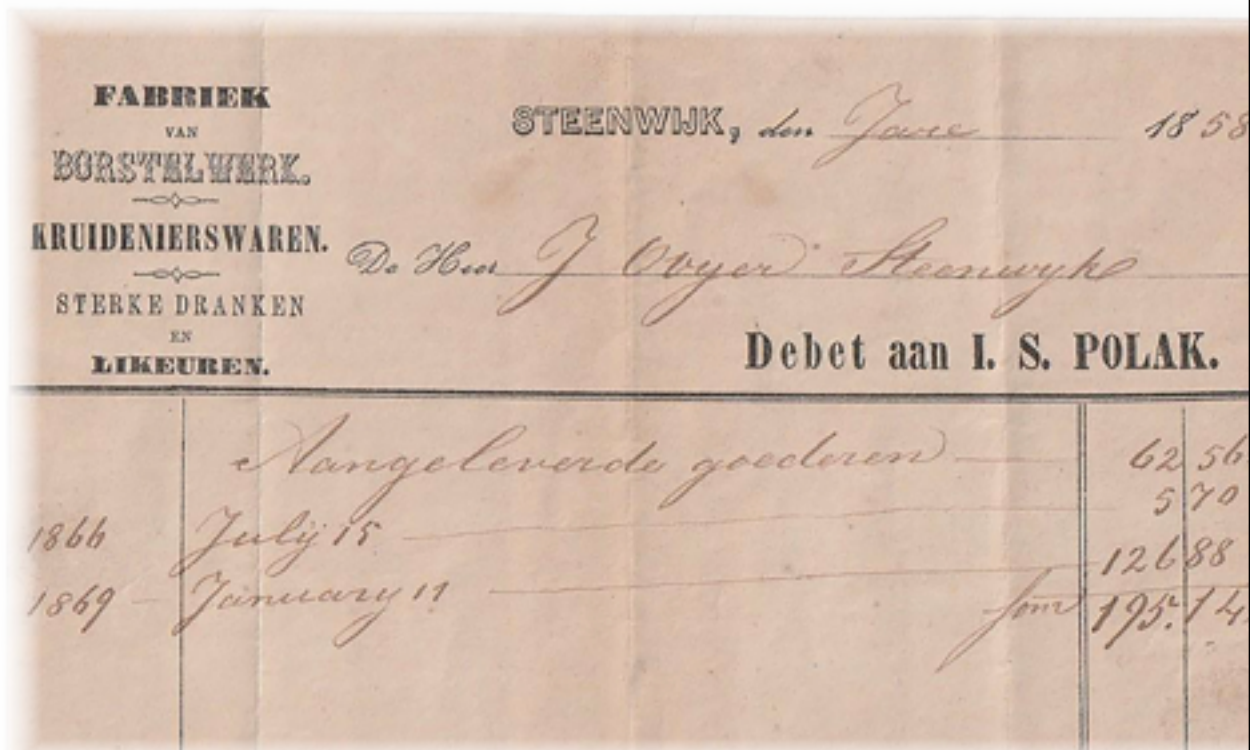
Big stories sometimes begin in small places. Salomon and Leentje Polak lived on Oosterstraat in Steenwijk, in the Dutch province of Overijssel, in the 1830s. They had eight children, including Izak, who was born in 1834.



1854

Entrepreneurship

They say entrepreneurs are born, not made, and this was certainly true of Izak Polak. At the age of 20, he decided to open a shop selling a variety of daily necessities, from brushes to alcohol and spices. It was a combination of a hardware store, a supermarket, and a liquor store.



1856

The first generation

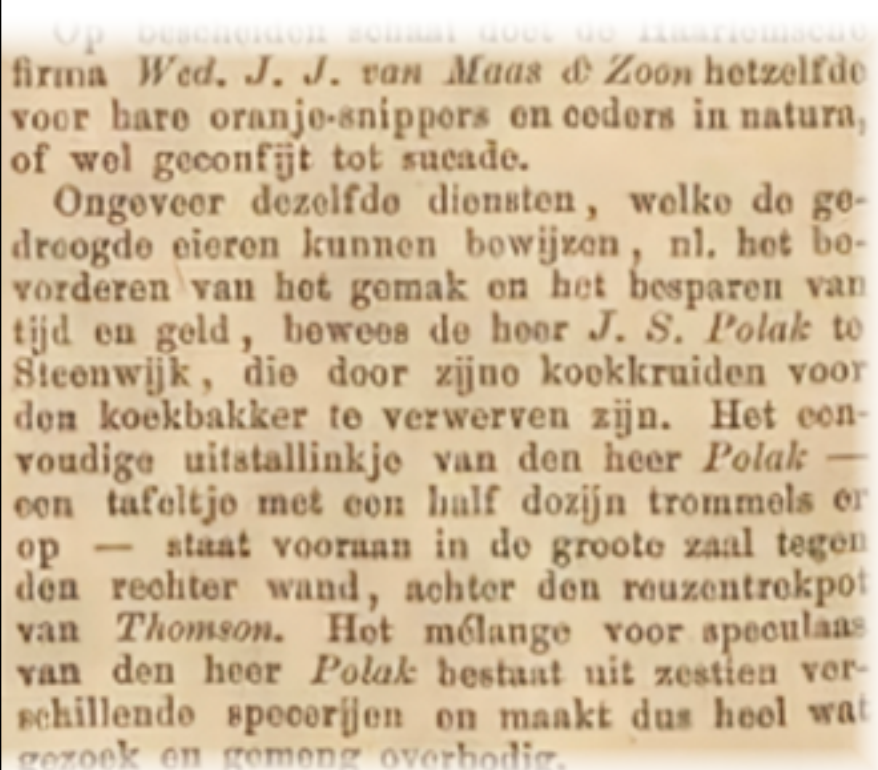
Things were going well for Izak, both in his business and his personal life. He married Lotje Keijzer in 1856, and the couple had twelve children, four of whom sadly died at a young age. The family lived in Oosterstraat, opposite Izak's parental home.



1870

Expanding the product range

As the family grew, so did the business. Izak's shop was running out of space as his product range expanded over the years. Advertisements from the time show that he sold buckwheat, rye, coffee, flax flour, lard, grease, and even petroleum.



1894

Spices from Polak

In 1894, a Haarlem newspaper reported on the product that made the company what it is today: spices. It praised the convenience of a sixteen-ingredient blend developed specifically for speculatis, the famous spiced shortcrust biscuits. "Mr J.S. Polak's spice mix ... renders a great deal of searching and mixing unnecessary."



1894

The next generation

In 1894, Izak's son Bernard Polak (1871-1942) took over the business. It went from strength to strength as it began to focus on spices, and its biscuit and speculatis mixes won many awards at national and international baking trade fairs.

1897

It's almost 130 years

An 1897 order from the leading Dutch biscuit and chocolate manufacturer Verkade. Polak still does business with the company today.



1902

New building

In 1902, Bernard Polak built new factory spaces on the Scholestraat in Steenwijk. The existing storage area was no longer big enough, and the new one was intended to prepare the growing company for a great future. The foundation stone was laid by Bernard's three-year-old daughter, Charlotte Polak.



1905

A new home

Once the new factory on Scholestraat was complete, Bernard decided to build a new house for his family. He called it Villa Zonnehoek and found a beautiful location between the town's canal and the River Aa, within walking distance of the train station, his factory, and the town centre. They lived here for nearly forty years. The villa overlooked the town's main church, and when the town council decided to reinstall the spire, Bernard was able to watch the construction work from his living room. There was a family story that the tall new spire inspired Bernard to come up with a slogan, Aan de spits staat Polak's fabrikaat, Polak's products are the tops. This was a play on spits, which means both 'top' and 'spire'. From now on, the slogan and the spire appeared on Polak's letterheading and all its posters



1924

A change of name

In 1924, the company's name was changed from J.S. Polak to N.V. Handelsmaatschappij J.S. Polak, so that the family name would always be associated with the company's successes.



1939

Polak and Son

Bernard's son Frits began working for the company at an early age, and the plan was that he would eventually take over. In 1939, he married Rijka Beekman. Things were looking bright for the family and the business.

1940

Confiscated by German occupying forces

Polak is a very common Jewish surname, and after the Germans marched into the Netherlands, Frits hurriedly went into hiding to escape persecution. In 1940m the Nazis appointed an administrator to the company, which in practice meant that it was taken away from the family and their property seized. The Germans replaced Bernard as the director, and he ended up isolated at home. He died in April 1942, not knowing what would happen to his family and his life's work.



'40-'45

The war years

When the war broke out, Frits and his employees very sensibly dismantled and hid some of the machines, including a complete mill, and a large quantity of raw materials. Although the company was confiscated and plundered, the curageous workforce enabled key parts of it to remain in the Polak family's hands. Alongside the sadness of Bernard Polak's death, there was one piece of good news for the family: in 1943, Frits and Rijka had a daugther, whom they named Maryszka.



1945

Liberation and reconstruction

Frits survived his perion in hiding, and the company returned to work on the day after liberation. After the death of his father and the shutdown of the business during the occupation, Frits became its director. As in the rest of the Dutch economy, the first few years after the war were a time for rebuilding.



1955

Further expansion

In 1955, Frits took on a talented young employee, Joop Draaisma, initially as a bookkeeper. Later on, he entrusted him with the task of managing the company's international expansion. Joop took a course in German, and then set off with an atlas and a streetmap to visit bakery factories in Germany and Switzerland. He was appointed to the board on 1 February in 1967.



1972

The move to Groot Verlaat

The business had outgrown it Scholestraat premises, so Frits relocated it to a new industrial estate, Groot Verlaat, in Steenwijk. Polak was the first company to arrive, and initially the rest of the site consisted mainly of a large grassland.



The 70's

Acquisitions and expansions

Around 1970, Joop Draaisma decided to wind down the company's nuts and exotic fruits business and specialise in spices. During the decade that followed, Polak acquired the Van Amster Visser & Co. brand, which included various bourbon vanilla products and gave it a central position in the spice sector.



1979

Royal charter

Just in time for the company's 125th anniversary, Queen Juliana allowed the company to include the word 'royal' in its name. This distinction is not awarded lightly, and it took Joop Draaisma four years to comply with all the conditions attached. J.S. Polak became J.S. Polak Koninklijke Specerijenmaaldertij, meaning Royal Polak Spices, and its logo was changed to include a crown on the church spire.

1989

International specialisation,
continued growth

During the 1980s, Polak became the leading specialist spice supplier to the bakery sector in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland. Ten years after its previous expansion, it now needed more room to keep pace with its rapid growth.

More changes followed. In 1989, Polak began working closely with De Weerd Spices, and the two became sister companies. De Weerd's owner, Jac Sars, took three of his five workers with him to Steenwijk, and from 1991 to 1993 he and Joop were joined directors.



1993

Jac Sars becomes director

Jac's arrival marked the beginning of a period of growth and innovation, with the aim of becoming Europe's most trusted specialist spice supplier to the biscuit and patisserie industry. It succeeded in this objective, and become the only one of its kind in the world. Its staff also began making regular visits to the spices' countries of origin.



1999

Progress and innovation

Under Jac's leadership, Polak continued to expand. From 1999 onwards it built a new laboratory, several storage facilities, a modern factory, and expanded its milling capacity. It also acquired state-of-the-art machinery, and improved its processes.



2008

Demolition and construction

The old factory was demolished and replaced by new offices. The company also installed a test bakery, 624 solar panels, modern changing areas, and sound insulation for the factory. Its investments in sustainability, people, capacity, and quality were further important steps towards a healthy future.



2017

New managing director

In 2017, Hielke van Dijken became the new managing director of Royal Polak Spices and De Weerd Spices, taking over from Jac Sars, who remained the owner and majority shareholder.



2020

New milling line

In this year, the factory gets a new, innovative crushing line. A major step towards significantly increasing production capacity: where previously they could grind 2 tonnes of spices per day, production suddenly skyrocketed to 2.5 tonnes per hour.

2020

New owner

In 2020, the company's name was changed to Royal Polak Spices. And in October of that year, Jac Sars sold it to Barentz International, a worldwide distributor of life science ingredients specialising in human and animal nutrition, pharmaceuticals, personal care, and high-quality materials. As the world's leading cinnamon specialist, Polak was an important acquisition for Barentz, giving it a strong position in the fast-growing spice market.

Barentz.

Always a better solution.