

In **1923** Mr. **Joseph Molteni** came to live in **St Uze**, France.

Here, he married Miss **Madeleine Bonneton**, and set up his first workshops in premises belonging to his wife.

With just a few workmen, he started production of the "**Boiler ovens**" which quickly made his reputation locally

(3 uses for a single appliance – Cooking, Heating and Production of hot water).

We were at the very start of the central heating era.

In **1937** he took over a former factory and installed his workshops there.

Over the years, he himself transformed this factory into what was a **modern building** for the times, with wide bay windows looking out onto the river in the place of the old narrow bricked windows.

The new building has 3 floors, 1 sheet metal workshop, 1 assembly finishing workshop with loading platform and offices, and 1 storeroom for spare parts.

The "household" boiler oven was rapidly transformed into a **professional oven** for restaurants and catering establishments. We are now at the time of coal and wood, and it was these first professional ovens which established the business's excellent reputation. These ovens were truly "volcanic", just as he was too! The most Italian of Frenchmen and the most French of Italians.

Cast iron was used mostly on ovens, so as to produce the famous "**hot plates**" so sought after by all top-class chefs. Here again and so as not to be dependant on anybody, he set up his **own foundry** in his workshops at St Uze, and in the process, long before there was talk of pollution, he bought a sawmill right out in the country and a long way out from the town, which he also transformed with his masons into a modern foundry which is still in operation today, and where he could smelt the 3 materials necessary for his manufacture - cast iron, aluminium and bronze. He also put up a resurfacing and chroming station, and for his own personal pleasure a trout hatchery!

The **coal ovens** installed in the **biggest local restaurants** (Pic, Point, Barattero, etc...) provided him with his first calling card. Times were moving on, change was on the horizon, coal was becoming scarce and soon to disappear. Molteni thought about the new combustibles envisaged such as **gas** (town propane gas and then natural gas) and **electricity**. However he considered gas to be dangerous. There was no safety system on the first appliances except for the pilot lights. Rather than have bad publicity caused by possible accidents (Molteni's advertising was by word of mouth which in fact had a snowball effect) he stopped manufacturing gas appliances for a while and dreamed of a **positive safety system on all burners** (concealed as well as open). The **Kingsaf** (king of lighting) lighting and safety system helped to further improve his reputation. In fact competitors have never been able to reproduce this system.

In order to arrive at the pinnacle of manufacturers (the Molteni "pianos" were compared with Rolls at the beginning!), Mr. Molteni was careful to look after his **best workers and managers**. He frequently involved himself first hand in the work and was more often found in the factory than behind his desk. This factory and his "pianos" were his life and also his reputation of which he was justifiably extremely proud. **He wanted to know all his new customers** and sometimes visited them incognito for lunch. When he got back to the factory, people would be waiting for his verdict: "You can go ahead with his piano!" or else "Not on your life!". If he was disappointed, then they had a lot of trouble convincing him. Fortunately, there were far more good "restaurateurs" than "soup kitchens"!

To work at Molteni, you had to have the "Molteni spirit" and above all **believe in the product** and **provide customer satisfaction in terms of equipment as well as advice**.

Improving the kitchen, ventilating the chef's working place, using the equipment down to the slightest detail, choosing the method of combustion... every oven was studied in line with the customer's requirements and often with their menu and preferred work stations. Every item was truly unique.

Alongside changes in rules of hygiene, kitchens were made **"open" to the public**. They were moved up from the basement, sometimes into the dining room itself. It was then that the ovens, as in the **world of luxury and fashion**, were dressed up, and **coloured enamels** replaced stainless steel finishes. They were also to be **personalised with a bronze plate** showing the establishment's coat of arms. Molteni truly became the prestigious name for the great Chefs. Mr. Molteni was considered to be an ambassador for his equipment. At his name, the doors of the **best star-rated establishments** swung open. In the 80s, he was the only one to be in 12 of the 3-star restaurants out of the 18 in the Michelin guide at that time. Many today are still equipped with Molteni appliances (a Molteni is made to last, and twenty years on it is not unusual to see this equipments still ensconced in the middle of the kitchen).

He was also a pioneer for installing ovens in the middle of kitchens, and designed **the first central gas oven with cross chambers**, as he had done earlier with coal ovens. He was constantly in contact with restaurant Chefs and tried to design appliances in line with their needs, desires and specialities. **The design of an oven was intended to be the mirror of the Chef's Menu.**

For the electrical equipment, he followed the same principle, i.e. not being dependant on anybody, and he himself produced his own electrical hot plates, resistors, even removing control systems away from the appliances to work at a distance under low voltage away from heat and moisture. This made it possible to fit some cruise ships and even nuclear submarines (still in service today).

Throughout his career, Mr. Molteni had luck and above all the **enthusiasm for things that were beautiful and long-lasting**. He seemed to have been born under a lucky star although he never took the easy option and always wanted to make things **better, more beautiful, stronger and heavier**. His favourite test was to climb up onto the oven doors and often customers weighing more than 100Kg imitated him...). He was well aware of the cost price of equipment, but what was even more important for him was the satisfaction of his customers. **The customer had to be the reflection of his oven, the oven of his image and Molteni the guarantor of this image for life.**

Sadly, he disappeared in **1982**, before having been able to achieve all his desires, although the name Molteni will remain a sure value well beyond that date for great and professional cuisine, in France as well as abroad. Mr. Molteni has made his mark on generations of Chefs and the heritage of their passion is immutable for life. He has caused more than one to **dream** and his legend can only continue to live on.



France, depuis 1923