

# glass WORLDWIDE

**LARGEST EVER** July/August issue: interviews with AGC, Encirc, Guardian, NSG, SGD Pharma, Saint-Gobain, Sisecam & Verallia + technology and market reports

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# On the Spot...

## Alexis Underwood

Alexis Underwood, General Manager for Guardian Glass' Asia-Pacific region, discusses the organisation's latest investment priorities and its strategies for future success.

**GW: What was the motivation for Guardian Glass to open new Asia-Pacific headquarters in Bangkok at the end of 2019?**

Guardian first invested in Thailand in 1991, with a float glass plant in Nong Khae. A second plant was built in Rayong in 1996 and Guardian Glass has continued to invest and grow in the country. More than 50% of Guardian's business is now exported outside Thailand.

The new headquarters, in the centre of Bangkok, is a collaborative space that forms the base for Guardian's Asia-Pacific business. Approximately 50 Guardian employees work from the new hub, including general management, marketing, supply chain, sales, finance, customer service and HR roles.

The move enables Guardian

Glass to serve its customers more efficiently and effectively. Customers in the region will have a more seamless experience, dealing directly with a single customer service team, rather than communicating with individual Guardian Glass plants.

**GW: How will the enhanced set-up benefit customers in comparison to earlier times?**

We're now serving our Asia-Pacific customers from one regional location that houses team members and services that were previously located at our plants. This consolidation creates value for local customers because it has set up efficiencies and more importantly, transformed, recharged and sets up our Asia-Pacific team for success. We are better able to share knowledge quickly and create value for customers.

Our new Bangkok headquarters literally and physically positions us to be more effective in building stronger partnerships with our teams, our customers and the community. We're building preferred partnerships with superior service and quality and a future pipeline, by utilising the successes we see in other regions to grow domestic

customers and value-added products.

The move underpins our long-term vision to drive virtuous cycles of mutual benefit and commit to continuous improvement.

**GW: What are the recent highlights of Guardian Glass' performance in the region?**

Guardian has invested \$100 million in the past five years and is excited by future investment plans. This includes critical rebuilds of existing equipment and the addition of a state-of-the-art, automated laminated glass line. We continue to see large potential in Thailand and in the broader Asia Pacific region, which for Guardian Glass includes Japan and South Korea in the north, down to Australia and New Zealand in the south and spanning west to India. ▶



Guardian Glass has supplied glass to some of the most iconic new buildings in Bangkok, including the ICONSIAM Mall.



Guardian Glass Rayong completed a cold tank repair in 2017.

In managing our Asia-Pacific region out of the new headquarters in Bangkok, we are one of the first major companies to receive support via the International Business Centre policies in Thailand.

And we are proud to have our glass in some of the most iconic new buildings in Bangkok, including the ICONSIAM Mall and the SAMYAN MITRTOWN mixed-use complex.

**GW: What are the greatest challenges facing Guardian Glass in the Asia-Pacific region?**

What we have been through as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic – especially because it is still with us to a large degree – was the greatest challenge for Guardian and every other company. I'm so proud how our global and local teams stayed focused on the health and safety of our employees, stayed closely connected to our customers and worked to mitigate risk to Guardian Glass.

From a broader perspective, as a company, we believe Thailand can improve its competitiveness among Asia-Pacific nations by providing greater certainty for manufacturers around a future supply of natural gas at a competitive price. Manufacturing is one of the critical foundations of the Thai economy, so it continues to make sense to run energy-intensive processes here.

**GW: And the biggest opportunities?**

We are excited to support Thailand in creating an energy-efficient building

code that would provide at least 30% energy savings in buildings. This will also drive investment in more advanced technologies, consistent with the country's 4.0 Vision and 'green' economy initiatives.

In terms of products, we see opportunities to maximise mirror glass, laminated glass, tinted glass, automotive quality and thin and thick glass growth. We are always looking for ways to transform our business, products and processes to improve efficiency and create value for customers. We also have a number of initiatives in place that will move the needle into the future:

- Driving commercial and operational efficiencies that give Guardian Glass a competitive advantage.
- Developing new channels in the supply chain to create new opportunities.

- Strengthening the team by recruiting new talent and enhancing employee engagement.
- Embracing our Market-Based Management culture, which helps people to succeed and creates value for our company, our customers and the communities in which we live and work.

We believe that if we stay focused on creating value for our customers, while staying true to our guiding principles, our business and our employees will find success.

**GW: What are the current capabilities of your manufacturing plants in the region?**

In Thailand, Guardian Glass currently produces clear and tinted float glass, along with mirror and laminated products, which are used in construction, automotive and specialty applications.

About 50% of the output of these facilities is exported throughout the greater Asia-Pacific region, as well as to Europe and parts of Africa.

**GW: How has the company invested in its operations and are any major upgrades planned?**

Nong Khae completed a full cold tank repair in 2012, while Rayong completed its own cold tank repair in 2017. Nong Khae also added a wet coater in 2014 to boost mirror production capabilities, as well as a laminating line in 2018.

It is planned to upgrade the cold end at Nong Khae to further eliminate ►



Guardian Glass completed a full cold tank repair at Nong Khae in 2012, while adding a wet coater in 2014 to boost mirror production capabilities, as well as a laminating line in 2018.



waste and automate areas that will improve productivity.

We are excited by the prospects in Asia-Pacific and look forward to future investments.

**GW: Are any particular product innovations currently proving successful in the Asia-Pacific region?**

We continue to see an increase in projects that specify laminated glass for energy efficiency, safety, sound, security and decorative options. It's important that we can meet the needs of our architectural customers. We are always looking to find new ways to increase our focus on value-added products.

World class service is provided that reliably delivers top quality products in a safe, cost-effective and compliant way.

**GW: What level of expertise does the regional team possess and how does the company recruit and maintain local talent?**

The Bangkok office is home to our subject matter experts in HR, supply chain, logistics, customer service and sales and marketing and all these leaders stay closely connected to their global teams. Architects, interior designers and developers benefit from an integrated system, managed by a skilled team with shared knowledge and expertise centralised in a single location.

The unemployment rate in Thailand is one of the world's lowest. This puts added focus on both the recruitment of new employees and retention of the existing employee base. A shortage of skilled workers and engineers makes it important to retain good people, who

contribute by creating long-term value for the business.

We feel strongly that our Market-Based Management philosophy and culture based on our guiding principles provides a competitive advantage for the company and helps encourage employees to self-actualise, develop and expand their capabilities to produce results that create the greatest value.

**GW: How does being part of the global Guardian operation benefit proceedings?**

We benefit by having a large global footprint, so we are able to navigate economic and other challenges that can escalate from one country to another. This was especially true during the Covid-19 pandemic, as we had certain regions impacted at different times.

We also benefit greatly from being part of Koch Industries. This allows us to leverage the expertise of our global capabilities and share knowledge across the enterprise to glean best practices in innovation, compliance, HR and so much more.

Koch is a privately-held, financially stable company that takes a long-term view on value creation. This was reassuring to our employees during the pandemic and also it allows us to focus on developing virtuous cycles of mutual benefit with our preferred partners. We are not beholden to short-term thinking and results.

**GW: Looking towards the future, what are your expectations for the Asia-Pacific operation in the short- and medium-terms?**

Short-term, we will continue to focus on the health and safety of our employees, as we rebound through Covid-19. We have worked to stay very close to and supportive of our customers in this challenging environment. Flexibility has been key for us, as things have been changing rapidly and various countries throughout Asia-Pacific have been dealing with the pandemic in very different ways.

Despite the short-term challenges related to Covid-19, the fundamental growth drivers in Asia-Pacific remain strong. We have longstanding relationships that we plan to deepen. Construction will continue to be strong throughout the region and we are excited to be part of that growth.

**Alexis Underwood in profile**

Alexis Underwood relocated to Thailand for Guardian in 2018. Her career started at Koch Industries' sister company, Georgia-Pacific. In her 11 years at GP, she held various roles, ranging from supporting strategy and transaction work in business development, developing capabilities in pricing and commercial analytics, the origination and development of a pipeline of high value-added innovations for key consumer product categories, managing GP's display business and leading the cross-functional sales team for one of GP's largest accounts.

In addition to her distinguished career at Koch, Ms Underwood was a collegiate swimmer and competed for several years as a professional open water swimmer. She achieved All-American status in three consecutive years and won four national championships.

Alexis Underwood talks about swimming competitively and its parallels to her professional drive in the video [https://youtu.be/7XLQs\\_vkTOg](https://youtu.be/7XLQs_vkTOg)

**GW: And in the long-term, will Asia-Pacific still represent a cost-effective manufacturing hub for flat glass production?**

That is our intention. Activities for Guardian Glass Asia-Pacific include continuously working to find efficiencies with our customers that add value. For some, this may be unique service arrangements, for others it may be a unique pack size. We believe in the concept of a preferred partnership, where both partners are benefiting and driving value for society. We are also fortunate to be part of a global company that values efficiency and innovation. For example, we are transforming our infrastructure software to improve efficiencies and better serve our customers. ●

**Further information:**

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The SAMYAN MITRTOWN mixed-use complex in Bangkok features Guardian Glass products.