

Inside HEINEKEN's Sustainability-Driven R&D Revolution

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As global preferences evolve, consumers are increasingly seeking healthier and more diverse beverage options. In response, HEINEKEN is focusing on innovation that is grounded in its rich heritage. Leading this transformation is Hubert te Braake, HEINEKEN's Research & Development Director, who oversees the company's global R&D strategy. He skillfully balances cutting-edge science with the craftsmanship that defines the brand.

In an exclusive interview with NUFFOODS Spectrum, te Braake discusses the strategic opening of the Dr. H.P. Heineken Centre in Zoeterwoude, Netherlands. This state-of-the-art facility is designed to accelerate product development, sensory research, and innovative packaging solutions. He explains that the Centre not only advances HEINEKEN's EverGreen sustainability strategy but also fosters the next generation of low and non-alcoholic beverages, explores natural ingredients, and promotes global collaboration. Through a blend of heritage and forward-thinking, te Braake illustrates how HEINEKEN is shaping the beverage landscape for both today's consumers and future generations.

Could you elaborate on what the opening of the Dr. H.P. Heineken Centre signifies for HEINEKEN's overall innovation and growth strategy, both within the Netherlands and on a global scale?

Diversified drinking occasions stoke new flavours, and more natural ingredients, and consumers increasingly seek low and non-alcohol options. With cutting-edge labs, sensory research facilities, packaging development departments and other resources, the Dr. H.P. Heineken Centre accelerates product development and brewing advances to meet these changing needs. Whether those innovations are the next evolution of Heineken® 0.0, a premium lager like Heineken®, or entirely new occasions. HEINEKEN aims to stay ahead of changing consumer choices and contribute to how beer evolves. The goal is to shape the industry and set the standard for quality and excellence, ensuring that HEINEKEN continues to craft drinks enjoyed by consumers worldwide, now and for generations to come.

Are there specific research or development areas that the Centre will be focusing on to address evolving consumer preferences, such as the increasing demand for low/no-alcohol beverages and natural ingredients?

The Dr. H.P. Heineken R&D Centre plays a vital role in driving innovation across all of the below categories, ensuring HEINEKEN meets diverse consumer demands while maintaining the quality and taste traditional and new beer drinkers expect.

Beyond Beer and the Future of 0.0

Researching and testing new natural ingredients and their potential positive effects in beverages.

Taste and nutritional value

How will the new sensory labs and packaging development facilities at the Centre improve HEINEKEN's ability to introduce new products to the market with greater speed and efficiency?

The Centre serves as an important part of HEINEKEN's global R&D network, which includes hubs in Mexico, South Africa, and Southeast Asia. The Dr. H. P. Heineken Centre coordinates research activities, shares best practices, and works on product and process development together with these international hubs. Specialist departments within the centre, such as sensory research, packaging development, and process optimisation, collaborate directly with departments in other regions. This ensures that innovations and improvements are shared and adapted for local markets with more speed and efficiency.

What is the strategic importance of the Zoeterwoude location in connecting the Centre's research and development activities with HEINEKEN's production operations and global supply chain?

HEINEKEN chose to build the Dr. H.P. Heineken Centre in the Netherlands because of its strong heritage in the Netherlands and its position as a global leader in food technology and innovation. Being located here provides access to advanced research infrastructure and highly educated talent.

Considering the changing landscape of drinking habits and consumers' desire for a wider range of beverage options beyond traditional beer, how will the Centre contribute to shaping the next generation of beverage experiences offered by HEINEKEN?

HEINEKEN's core business remains focused on brewing high-quality beer, which continues to represent the majority of the portfolio (60 per cent). HEINEKEN maintains a strong commitment to its heritage and loyal beer consumers through global brands such as Heineken®, Desperados and Amstel. At the same time, HEINEKEN recognizes that consumer preferences are ever-changing and that the demand for variety and healthier options increases. As a result, HEINEKEN has expanded its portfolio to include non-alcoholic beers like Heineken 0.0, which account for around thirty per cent of the portfolio in key markets. Beyond-beer innovations, including nutrition-focused beverages and other alternatives, currently make up about ten per cent of the portfolio.

The Centre is named in honour of Dr. H.P. Heineken. In what ways does his legacy of innovation and brand leadership influence the current work being conducted at this new facility?

The Centre is named after Dr. Henry Pierre Heineken (1886-1971). As a Doctor of Chemistry, the second-generation brewer developed and implemented quality improvements and innovative, laboratory-fueled ideas. His profound knowledge of chemistry and sharp business acumen positioned Henry Pierre as the first successor to HEINEKEN founder Gerard Adriaan Heineken and his wife, Mary Tindal, in 1914.

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