

# *Renate Thyssen-Henne*

Renate Thyssen-Henne nee Kerkhoff was born on 20 June 1939 in Bottrop, Germany. She is a member of the part of the Westphalian Kerkhoff industrial family (sawmill, gravel pits, textile and clothing company) whose founder was her grandfather Hermann Kerkhoff.



Renate Kerkhoff inherited her grandfather's entrepreneurial flair: after completing her secondary school education, she gained a work placement with a travel agency in Bottrop and at the age of 18, she started working as a secretary for the management of the American Honeywell company in Frankfurt/Main. She attended evening courses in business English, business economics and management and also worked as model. At the age of 20, she founded her first limited company (GmbH) with a start-up capital of DM 20,000.--. She invented the modern "Seifrisch" freshen-up tissues and started her own production. At the age of 24, she employed 150 people and supplied the retail trade as well as department stores, supermarkets, Lufthansa and catering companies including the restaurant chain "Wienerwald" with her "Seifrisch" brand product. At the age of 25, she founded the restaurant chain "Zum Gumpelmann" which soon expanded with 12 branches in Aachen, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Cologne, Heidelberg and other German cities.

At the age of 24, the young entrepreneur moved into a villa at Lerchesbergring in Frankfurt and gave birth to her first child. On 1 April 1963, her daughter Gabriele Renate was born, and on 2 June 1964, her son Joachim Helmut, both from her marriage to Helmut Friedhelm Homey, son of the Homey industrial family from Essen (brewery, restaurant business and one hotel).

In 1969, Renate Kerkhoff married the German industrialist and medical doctor Dr. Bodo Thyssen (businesses include Telefonbau & Normalzeit, Thyssen-Heizkessel, Melderwerke) and member of the well-known steel dynasty. Bodo Thyssen's father and his brother Heinrich were the sons of founder August Thyssen. Hans-Heinrich "Heini" Thyssen-Bornemisza was the famous cousin of Bodo Thyssen, whose legendary art collection is now the property of the Spanish state and exhibited in the Thyssen Museum in Madrid. At the beginning of the 70s, Dr. Bodo and Renate Thyssen established the "Thyssen Privatlinik" in Prien by Lake Chiemsee.

Renate Thyssen then focused her own business activities on the real estate market, as the developer and owner of many properties. She married for the third time to her divorce lawyer Dr. Detlef Wunderlich, whose career she promoted both financially and through her many contacts.

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In the mid-80s, Renate Thyssen acquired the at the time rather run down restaurant chain "Wienerwald" from a Swiss consortium of banks and initiated the necessary classic downsizing of the business. After the restructuring process, she sold subsidiaries in Germany, France, Sweden and Egypt that were not financially viable and focused on the core business in Austria which included 54 restaurants, 10 motorway restaurants, 5 hotels and a total of 1,500 employees.

Following her own motto of "*light, young, fresh*", she revolutionised the restaurant's cuisine and ambience. Under Renate Thyssen's management, "Wienerwald" blossomed to become a booming restaurant chain and the largest in Austria. As a result, in 1988, the Austrian "Erfolg" business magazine nominated her as manageress of the year. At the end of the 80s, she sold the successfully restructured company to the city of Vienna.

Since 1988, Renate Thyssen has been married to Ernst Theodor Henne, owner for several decades of the major German Mercedes representative of the same name. At the end of the 90s, Renate Thyssen-Henne bid farewell to her 12-hour working day and concentrated her business activities in the area of real estate and investments. She now dedicates her spare time exclusively to charitable causes.

In 2002, together with her husband Ernst Th. Henne and her daughter, the Begum Aga Khan, she founded the aid organisation SOS PROJECTS für Mensch und Tier e.V. in Munich. This private aid organisation promotes animal-assisted therapy for disabled and sick children and is also involved with animal welfare projects.

Despite her many different activities, Renate Thyssen-Henne has always been a caring mother and a committed head of the family. And of course her beloved dogs Jacky and Halifax are part of her close family.