

# THE AMERICAN DREAM

*When Boris Miksic arrived in the United States in 1974, he had 35 dollars in his pocket. Today, the chemical business he started from scratch in his garage has evolved into a 100-million dollar multinational enterprise. This is the story of a young man from Croatia who made the American dream his reality.*

text Isabelle Kliger photo iStock

**B**oris Miksic grew up in humble circumstances in Zagreb, Croatia, in the country that was then known as Yugoslavia. Having excelled at school, he went on to obtain a Masters degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Zagreb. In 1972, just as he was about to graduate, Miksic's life changed forever.

An active member of the student movement against the Communist regime that ruled Yugoslavia at the time, Miksic had been identified as an agitator and blacklisted by the government. In practice, this meant he would never be able to work in Yugoslavia. He made a decision then and there to emigrate to the United States.

"I picked up my degree and fled the country, skiing across the border into Austria, before purchasing a one-way ticket to New York for me and my first wife, who was pregnant at the time," he recalls.

He arrived in New York in February 1974, with \$35 in his pocket.

"I did what all immigrants do, tried to find work. After three months of cleaning floors at McDonald's, I landed a job as an engineer with a company in Minnesota."

## Hard work in the cold

Miksic soon grew tired of working for the small construction company in St. Paul, Minnesota. He resigned, thinking he would find another opportunity.

"Turns out I was wrong, I couldn't find another job," he

admits. "In the end I started mixing chemicals in my garage. It was the winter of 1977, when temperatures reached -35 Celsius, and all I can say is that being that cold certainly makes you work harder."

Fast-forward to 2017 and the business Miksic started in his garage has just celebrated its 40th anniversary. Cortec Corporation and its subsidiaries is the world's largest privately held corrosion protection enterprise. Today, it has an annual turnover of USD 120 million, 350 employees, nine plants, distribution in over 100 countries on all continents, and has amassed more than 60 patents. In addition to the basic metals and mining, Cortec serves the automotive, oil and gas, metalworking, construction, electronics, MRO (maintenance, repair and operation), military, water treatment, heavy industry and packaging segments.

"I think you can succeed anywhere if you have the right mix of ambition and perseverance but, of course, being in the U.S. has its advantages," says Miksic. "Firstly, it's a pretty big pond, so, even if you're a little fish, you're doing ok. Another plus is that people here like it if you have something new and different to offer."

## Simple formula

Miksic says the secret to his success is a rule he calls "20-20-20": "Every year, we aim for 20 per cent growth, 20 per cent investment in new technologies and 20 per cent cost reduction. It's a simple formula but it works!"

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As an innovator and an entrepreneur, Boris Miksic is always open to new ideas. Last year, he started looking for a supplier of high-quality steel wrap. He soon came across Walki – a company he had previously got to know in the 1980s when it was called Meuwissen Industrie and he had been looking into the reinforced paper market.

"Most suppliers of these products come from Asia, but, when I looked at what they're selling, I wasn't impressed with the level of quality. U.S. manufacturers aren't making products like this any more, so I had to go to Europe to find a supplier with a product that was both competitive and good quality. I found that Walki offers the right mix of both," says Miksic.


Walki's Steelex metal wrap products are already well known in the steel market for their ability to meet the highest standard protective demands, providing effective moisture and rust protection during transport and storage.

A variety of solutions are available for different end uses and metal applications.


## Protecting covering for steel coils

Boris Miksic's idea is to purchase Walki's Steelex product, treat it with Cortec's patented Volatile Corrosion Inhibitors (VCI), and sell it to the U.S. steel industry for use as protective covering for steel coils and steel sheets, as well parts and components for heavy machinery.

Slowly but surely customers are recognising the benefits of Cortec and Walki's joint offering.

"Customers are shipping parts that are very expensive, so they need to be well protected. Walki's metal wrap paper, combined with our anti-corrosion technology, offers an outstanding level of protection," continues Miksic. "I call this a win-win-win partnership, because it benefits Cortec, it benefits Walki and it benefits the customers." 



 **Boris Miksic came to the USA as an immigrant in 1974. Today he lives the American dream.**

