

Dynamic times

The entire steelmaking process is Howden/Chart's playground. The company is heavily engaged in everything steel, particularly greenfield expansion in India and the Middle East but also plant upgrades in Europe where decarbonisation is top-of-mind. We spoke to **Olivier Charmasson***

1. How are things going at HOWDEN/CHART? Is the steel industry keeping you busy?

To be honest, it's a very dynamic time for us, and yes—the steel industry is keeping us extremely busy. What's really striking right now is the level of activity linked to plant expansions and transformations. In North America, we're seeing new low-carbon steel plants being built to support reshoring strategies. In India and the Middle East, there's a lot of greenfield expansion with large integrated plants coming online. And in Europe, even if capacity isn't growing much, there's a wave of upgrades to decarbonise existing sites. So, we're involved both in building new capacity and transforming the old one—which makes it a very exciting time.

2. What is your view on the current state of the global steel industry?

I would say the industry is really at a turning point. On one side, you still have the traditional challenges—overcapacity, pressure on margins, geopolitical tensions. But at the same time, there's a major transformation underway driven by decarbonisation. What makes today different from the past is that this shift is really impacting the global steel market—regulators, customers, investors. So, steelmakers don't really have a choice anymore; they must adapt.

3. In which sector of the steel industry does HOWDEN/CHART mostly conduct its business?

We're quite unique in that we're present across almost the entire steelmaking process. Our equipment—such as compressors, fans, heat recovery systems, steam turbines—is essential anywhere air, gas and/or energy management are part of the process, which basically means



everywhere in a steel plant. Whether it's ironmaking, steelmaking, or emissions treatment, we're involved in critical steps that directly impact performance and efficiency.

4. Where in the world are you busiest at present?

Right now, activity is quite balanced globally but driven by different factors. You have India and the Middle East, where growth is still very strong with new capacity being built. And then Europe and North America are very active because of carbon emissions and energy reduction projects. China is recovering after some difficult years due to overcapacity and low prices. Each region has its own drivers, but overall, the level of activity is high.

5. Can you discuss any major steel contracts you are currently working on?

I can't go into details, but I can say that we're involved in many flagship projects that really illustrate where the industry is heading. We're supporting almost all low-carbon steel projects currently under construction from hydrogen or natural

gas-based DRI plants, carbon capture integrations, and major plant upgrades focused on energy efficiency. These are not small incremental projects—they're large-scale transformations that will define how steel is produced in the future.

6. What are your views on Industry 4.0 and digital manufacturing?

It's becoming essential. Steel plants are too complex and too energy-intensive to rely on traditional operation models. Digital tools allow you to run closer to optimal conditions every single day. Today, you don't just operate a plant

7. Artificial Intelligence: good or bad for steelmakers?

Definitely good. AI helps steelmakers run closer to optimal conditions. It improves maintenance, stabilises processes, and enhances quality control. In a business where margins are tight, those improvements are extremely valuable. I think AI will quickly become standard in modern steel plants.

8. In your dealings with steel producers, are you finding that they are looking to companies like HOWDEN/CHART to offer them solutions in terms of energy efficiency and sustainability? If so, what can you offer them?

Very clearly, yes. A few years ago, it was one topic among others—today it's at the top of the agenda. Steel producers are really looking for partners who can help them reduce energy consumption and emissions. What we bring is a combination of highly efficient equipment and system-level solutions—heat recovery units, turbines, fans, compressors, hydrogen-ready systems, carbon capture integration—that all contribute to improving both performance

and sustainability. Steel companies don't want components—they want performance improvement at plant level.

9. How quickly has the steel industry responded to 'green politics' in terms of making the production process more environmentally friendly and are they succeeding or fighting a losing battle?

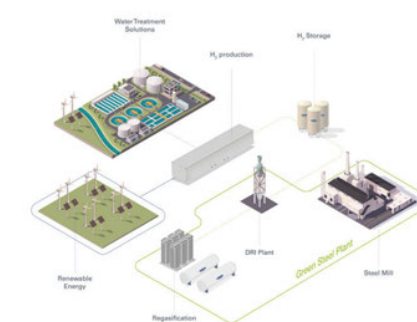
Quite fast, but not evenly across the board. Some regions and companies are moving very fast; others are more cautious. The challenge is that this transition is very capital-intensive and depends very heavily on things like energy availability and regulations. So, while the direction is clear, the pace varies a lot.

10. How are things going with the 'green transition'?

The transition is definitely happening, but it's not a straight line. Hydrogen-based steelmaking is clearly the end goal for many, but there are still challenges around cost and availability. So in the meantime, a lot of steelmakers are taking a pragmatic approach—improving existing processes while preparing for the next step. It's more of a journey with multiple steps than a switch you turn on overnight.

11. Where does HOWDEN/CHART lead the field in terms of steel production technology?

Our leadership lies in enabling the critical processes of steelmaking through highly engineered solutions. These systems are essential for both traditional and low-carbon production routes, and our ability to integrate them into complex process environments is a key differentiator. Increasingly, we are also playing a role in enabling new value chains such as hydrogen and carbon capture.



12. How do you view HOWDEN/CHART's development over the short-to-medium term in relation to the global steel industry?

We see strong growth potential, driven by the ongoing transformation of the steel industry. Our positioning at the intersection of energy efficiency, decarbonisation, and process optimisation gives us a clear role to play. As investments accelerate in both new plants and upgrades of existing assets, we expect sustained demand for our technologies.

13. China dominates global crude steel production. How should the industry react to this situation?

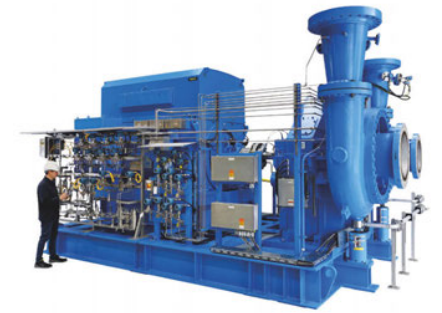
China's dominance is a structural reality that will not change in the short term. The appropriate response for other regions is not to compete on volume, but to focus on differentiation through technology, sustainability, and high-value products. At the same time, ensuring fair competition and addressing market distortions will remain key at a policy level to ensure smooth transition to low carbon steel production.

14. Where do you see most innovation in terms of production technologies – primary, secondary or more downstream?

The most visible innovation is happening in primary steelmaking, particularly around alternative reduction processes such as DRI and emerging technologies. However, equally important innovation is occurring at the system level, where integration of energy systems, digital technologies, and process optimisation creates step changes in efficiency and emissions reduction.

15. How optimistic are you for the global steel industry going forward and what challenges face global producers in the short-to-medium term?

I remain cautiously optimistic. The industry faces real challenges, including overcapacity, cost pressures, and the capital intensity of decarbonisation, but it also has strong fundamentals. Steel remains essential to modern economies, and the transition towards sustainable production will ultimately strengthen the industry's long-term prospects.



16. What exhibitions and conferences will HOWDEN/CHART be attending over the next six months?

We will continue to be present at key industry events such as the Future Steel Forum, AlSTech, Middle East Iron & Steel and other major regional conferences. These events are important platforms for engaging with customers, partners, and technology providers, and for staying at the forefront of industry developments.

17. Apart from strong coffee, what keeps you awake at night?

What keeps me awake is the execution challenge associated with the energy transition. The industry has clear ambitions, but delivering them requires alignment between technology, economics, and policy. Ensuring that steelmakers can decarbonise while remaining competitive globally is one of the key challenges of our time.

18. If you possessed a superpower, how would you use it to improve the global steel industry?

If I had a superpower, I would make clean energy abundant, stable, and affordable everywhere. This would unlock the full potential of low-carbon steel technologies, accelerate the transition, and remove one of the biggest barriers facing industry today. ■



*Global director, metals and cement, Howden/Chart