

**Private equity****Cornell Capital to acquire housewares company WKI**

Buyout group snaps up owner of brands such as Pyrex and CorningWare



Glass in a Pyrex factory © Bloomberg  
Henny Sender in Hong Kong APRIL 3, 2017

Cornell Capital, a New York private equity group, is to buy housewares company WKI Holding, which owns brand names as Pyrex and CorningWare, in a deal valued in excess of \$500m.

Although far from the multibillion-dollar transactions that are the focus of the big listed [buyout](#) groups the purchase shows that even seemingly boring brands can offer great potential. For example, despite changing times, Pyrex is at present the most popular product on department store Macy's bridal registry.

The housewares business worldwide is worth \$80bn but today is highly fragmented, making it ripe for the sort of consolidation at which buyout groups excel.

Cornell Capital plans to use Illinois-based WKI as a platform to purchase other brands, and expand its presence in the fast-growing consumer markets of Asia at a time when 72 per cent of WKI's revenues still come from the US, according to two people familiar with the matter.

Henry Cornell, the founder of the private equity group, is no stranger to the region, having opened the merchant banking arm of Goldman Sachs there. He was also responsible for such lucrative deals on both sides of the Pacific as the group's investments in Kinder Morgan, ICBC and Ping An Insurance, making billions of dollars for the US investment bank in the process.

CorningWare and Pyrex have long histories. Pyrex was originally developed as temperature-resistant glass for railway lantern globes more than 100 years ago, while its properties as containers for baking goods were discovered almost inadvertently.

But in recent years, the company has had a more chequered experience.

Corning fell on bad times in part as the outcome of asbestos litigation and its consumer products division was spun off to raise capital to settle claims from litigants in the 1990s. KKR then bought the unit in 1998, renamed it WKI (for World Kitchen), and put large amounts of debt on it. WKI filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in 2002 and was taken over by creditors led by Oaktree Capital Management the following year. An attempt to sell WKI to a unit of GP Investments, Brazil's largest private equity group, a few months ago was unsuccessful. Today, the company is too small for a public listing.

Mr Cornell purchased WKI in a private transaction, which is expected to be announced on Monday in New York.

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2018. All rights reserved.

**Latest on Private equity**