

**MORE** FROM WOOD.



# MORE

[www.egger.com](http://www.egger.com)

EGGER Group customer magazine

09



## Steering safely

How changing course can make a company  
strong in stormy times.

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# FORECASTS ARE BECOMING A FINE ART, SURPRISES A ROUTINE.



Rarely has a saying been so true: with the behaviour of the markets as it is today, things often turn out differently than expected. The conditions required for a company and its employees to make the right decisions are constantly changing – we are embedded in a close-knit, worldwide network in which information flows quickly, technical revolutions are rapid, and climate change, warlike conflicts and geopolitical upheaval are factors for concern. In an increasingly complex and volatile world, correct forecasts have become a fine art and surprises a routine.

The news about Brexit came to us in this way. Though we had considered the scenario, like a lot of people we were still surprised by the result of the vote. The resulting reactions on the world's financial markets to the Brits' desire to leave were foreseeable, but not to the extent witnessed. The financial world had never before seen a movement of the British Pound like the one in the moments after the referendum

result was announced. On the morning after Brexit, the media reported that **750 billion dollars** were wiped off shares on the Asian stock markets. Calm has returned in the meantime, yet the instant market response demonstrates the uncertainties and currency risks which an international company like EGGER has to deal with on a daily basis. It has also emboldened us to make certainty in changing times the focus of this issue.

Having the right strategies increases one's chances of navigating safely through stormy times. We have compiled the most important ones and look forward to a fruitful debate. At this point we would like to thank you for the praise and constructive criticism aimed at our past MORE issues and we hope you enjoy reading this one.

EGGER Group Management

  
**Walter Schiegl**  
(Production/Technology)

  
**Thomas Leissing**  
(Finance/Administration/Logistics)

  
**Ulrich Bühler**  
(Marketing/Sales)





### BROADER BASE

An impressive 48.7 metres long, nine feet wide and named “Frida”. With the installation of the ContiRoll® continuous press as part of the new MDF production line at the Gagarin site (RU), EGGER is expanding its presence on the Russian market. Chipboard has been produced at the plant situated around 180 kilometres west of Moscow since 2011 and, in 2016, so have MDF boards. As MDF and HDF boards are used for furniture and interior design as well as for support material for laminate flooring, EGGER is creating a broader base. An annual capacity of **350 000 m<sup>3</sup> is planned.**





## DIGITAL SITE VISIT

Developers can now walk through their spaces before they are built. The new technologies surrounding **Virtual Reality (VR)** are conquering the world of real estate. One **pioneer** of this development is Mi5VR. The recently founded architecture firm based in Madrid (ES) and London (UK) designs virtual spaces alongside real ones. For this purpose, game designers and architects are jointly optimising powerful software for Oculus Rift, Cardboard and Samsung Gear. In a project commissioned for a Spanish technology company, for instance, menu items float on the screen. The visitor uses this to change the wood decor and flooring design simply with a movement of the eyes.

[www.mi5vr.com](http://www.mi5vr.com)





### TIMBER FRAME CONSTRUCTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In August 2015, Douaihy Pour Le Bois in Zouk Mikael (LB) opened a new chapter in the construction history of Lebanon. The retail company erected the first ever commercial building designed with a timber frame construction in its home country and filled it with the complete EGGER range: from timber and OSB, decors on a wide range of support materials, through to laminate flooring. The showroom, offices and kitchen exhibition are spread over three floors. The company dedicated itself to the renewable raw material, wood, in 1982 and has been an **EGGER partner for 10 years**.

[www.douaihypourlebois.com](http://www.douaihypourlebois.com)





### SAFE ON THE TIMBER PATH

It takes two and a half hours to hike through the rugged mountain landscape that surrounds the Portuguese town of Arouca along the safe, **8-kilometre long path made of pine wood**, which follows the River Paiva. Engineers from Trimetrica used wood for nearly all the constructional elements so that the path blends into the scenery. The fascinating combination of wilderness and zig-zags inspired the architectural photographer, Nelson Garrido, to take breathtaking photos from a drone.

[www.ngphoto.com.pt](http://www.ngphoto.com.pt)



# E\_ INSPIRATION

“The world is more closely networked.  
The many connections make things  
unpredictably complex, ambiguous and  
turbulent.”

Rafael Ramirez, Scenario Planner, Säid Business School/University of Oxford  
Search for the next framework (Pages 18 to 19)

## Ideas for tomorrow



### TRAVEL APARTMENT WITH BIKE

[www.juustdesign.com](http://www.juustdesign.com)

Before the young architect, Stefan Prattes, from Graz (AT) set off for a work placement in Spain, two things became clear to him: 1. He did not want to buy any cheap furniture there to then throw it away afterwards, and 2. His bike had to go with him. The result is the “Olot” travel box, an aluminium-coated folding wooden box containing essential furniture and even room for a bike. At 2 m long, 125 cm high and only 40 cm wide, the prototype with all the standard equipment weighs just 60 kg. The increasing number of work nomads who move around for projects lasting a few months could give the travel box a golden future. After all, it allows you to sleep in your own bed.



### PAVILION WITH SEAMS

[www.icd.uni-stuttgart.de](http://www.icd.uni-stuttgart.de)

There are many ways of connecting timber – and yet new methods are still being discovered. For instance, professors and students from the University of Stuttgart (DE) have applied processes from the textile industry to wood processing for the first time and have sewn together a pavilion made of 151 beech veneer elements on their campus. The inspiration for the bionic structure was the lightweight, yet extremely sturdy shell structure of sea urchins. Alongside biologists, architects and engineers, a robot helped ensure precision: it shaped thin wooden strips into hollow bodies and passed them onto the special sewing machine.



### WOOD WITH TRANSPARENCY

[www.kth.se](http://www.kth.se)

Lars Berglund, a professor at the wood science centre of the Stockholm KTH Royal Institute of Technology (SE), has surprised experts. At almost the same time as a team at the University of Maryland (US), Berglund managed to make wood see-through on his own. In both cases, the brown lignin, which holds the cellulose fibres together, is first chemically removed and the cotton-like area is bound with a transparent polymer. This creates a kind of grainy opaque glass, which is less prone to break than conventional glass. According to Berglund, this also makes the elastic glass suitable for façades and solar cells.

FOCUS ON CERTAINTY

OVERVIEW OF THE TOPICS

- 12–17 Safety in motion
- 18–19 Expert interview: search for the next framework

You can't always see the way ahead. Modern technology makes sailing safe in any weather.

# Safety in motion

Digitalisation, networking and political upheavals are making the world complex and uncertain. We must not let ourselves be unsettled by this, however. Seven timelessly valid principles can help to make the most of the opportunities of our era.

AUTHOR Till Schröder

Is it just a feeling that everything is becoming less certain? Or has the world objectively become more unstable? To offer some consolation: you are not alone with this feeling. The media call the current changes “earth-shattering” and there is even talk of “epochal change”. Societies and companies worldwide are steering towards a future where nobody knows their way. A feeling of uncertainty lies in the nature of the beast.

Increasingly complex interactions are making the future appear more uncertain than ever before: the closer the world is networked, the more information flows and influences the behaviour of market participants, political interest groups and finance worldwide. The more ground-breaking, so-called 'disruptive' technologies and services that appear in the market, the faster one's product can seem outdated literally overnight. And the more abilities that robots master, closer comes the day when one's profession could die out. Words of advice, which actually trigger more stressful

feelings, are enjoying a boom: Learn your whole life long! Be prepared to think outside the box! Remain mobile for quick changes!

Even in times of digitalisation, unpredictable financial markets and refugee crises, principles apply that have always made a company more secure. So-called High Reliability Organisations (HROs) - for example, negotiation teams for hostage situations, emergency medical teams, crews on nuclear-powered aircraft carriers or fire-fighting teams tackling forest fires - always act professionally in challenging situations. A single mistake can trigger a catastrophe. Such companies are constantly developing their HRO principles – providing a wealth of experience that is increasingly being applied to the business world. HRO principles give rise to a corporate culture where mistakes are welcomed as an opportunity to improve one's own system. In this respect, changes rank higher than the routine as this is the only way to remain a “learning organi-

sation”. Employees act with the utmost caution and take responsibility. When it comes to making decisions, specialist knowledge counts for more than one's place in the hierarchy so that communication remains effective even in difficult situations.

Yet it is not only HROs who explore the culture of security. Quite a few occupational groups have long-since lived with the knowledge that one hundred per cent certainty does not exist. Sailors, stock brokers and the armed forces, for example, all work with elements that can be too powerful and complex to be fully understood or even controlled. Relying on basic trust and a good gut feeling, however, they keep a cool head and stick to seven basic principles, which have proven themselves when it comes to navigating a company through turbulent times.





## → 1 TAKE A BROAD STANCE

“Fluctuat nec mergitur”: “She is tossed by the waves but does not sink” – every Frenchman recognises this Latin phrase which appears on the Parisian coat of arms. It reminds people that France’s capital was originally founded by barge-men, men who didn’t allow themselves to be unsettled by unstable ground. Seafarers stand with their feet wide apart when waves swell and trust in their ship.

“The saying on the coat of arms of Paris should also be the maxim used by the stock market,” says the legendary stock broker, André Kostolany. The vagaries of share prices and exchange rates were an everyday occurrence in his long and successful professional life. Despite his wealth of experience, after almost 70 years the stock market remained “temperamental and unpredictable”. That is why, for all investors, the old sailor’s rule “Take a broad stance” should apply .

Spreading the risk over several products and markets at the same time is an important strategy adopted at EGGER too. For example, both the plant in Gebze (TUR) and the plant in Brilon (DE) now produce edging.

## 2 STANDARDISATION

“The key is to be prepared,” says military consultant, Richard Cohen, summarising the most important lesson he gained from the art of war and also applies to managing a company. With good preparation, if the worst comes to the worst you can still find your way through the “Fog of War”. This military jargon refers to the cloud of gun smoke and dust during battles, behind which essential information about important developments can disappear.

The expression has found its way into the terminology of many managers, as

it describes the flood of information and complexity in which market trends and the consequences of a decision are increasingly difficult to estimate. Experts can help the decision-makers. Having said that, expert knowledge is becoming more and more specific. “When it comes to complex issues like IT or the financial market, an expert today has 30 per cent of the total knowledge required,” says Sandro Gaycken, who works at the Digital Society Institute of the renowned ESMT (Berlin, DE), researching subjects such as the organisation of security against cyber attacks. This means that an increasing number of consultants are needed for a full analysis. These advisors must agree on a shared view of reality and then communicate this specialist knowledge in a way that enables those responsible to make a reliable decision. “This problem is not yet satisfactorily resolved in organisational terms,” says Gaycken.

Until a problem is solved, however, decision-makers must accept obscurity and expect that changes will arise. It follows from this that organisations must be able to react quickly these days. In this case, the old military rule applies, namely “Be prepared!” – indeed, be prepared for several probable scenarios. Reactions to these must be practised under the most realistic conditions. “The aim of realistic training is to develop smoothly functioning reactions to a variety of situations, which make us more effective and flexible for a genuine emergency,” explains Richard Cohen, who, as the Senior Defence Advisor, advised the Canadian defence minister. “The military has been doing that for centuries!”

Manufacturing companies can also react quickly if they prepare themselves with standardised modular systems. Standards mean: low production costs thanks to high unit numbers and the model of success of industrialisation. If the product is made up of different modules that can be combined, it is able to quickly adapt to changing demand. This is how


the architect, Bruno Moser, developed his prize-winning modular system using EGGER products. Not only did he use these products to build administrative buildings at several EGGER sites, but he also developed the EGGER concept house (see p. 29). All the buildings behave like siblings: similar but not the same. “Standardisation creates security,” says Ulrich Bühler, Head of Marketing/Sales, EGGER Group Management. “Standardised modules acquire the required high level of flexibility in this respect.”

## 3 KEEP ORDER

Safety is deemed to be invisible. “Freedom from unjustifiable risks” - this is how the international standard IEC 61508, which regulates the development of safety functions on machines, defines functional safety. Although technical safety can be implemented, there remains a residual risk. This is composed of various factors – the most difficult one to calculate is human risk.

Regulations, standards and safety devices on machines best take effect in conjunction with a corporate culture which places high priority on values such as tidiness, a sense of responsibility and attentiveness in the workplace. With this in mind, precautions against and sensitivity to the risk of accidents means that safety may not be immediately visible. It is, however, detectable in every detail of a tidy workshop or production building, a neat desk or well organised work procedures.

→



When a volcano erupts, it all comes down to evacuating in time. Early warning systems are becoming increasingly accurate.



→ **4 REMAIN OPEN**

We live in a “VUCA world”. VUCA, a new doctrine devised by the US military, stands for “volatility”, “uncertainty”, “complexity” and “ambiguity” – essentially, the conditions that make planning complicated these days. The reflex of shutting oneself off to the VUCA world is understandable, but dangerous. The opposite - openness - makes things safe. “The most successful players are those who build the strongest partnerships,” recommends the consultancy firm, Roland Berger, in the study “How to survive in the VUCA world”. Those who remain

Is a competitor going to bring out a product similar to mine? Which trends are influencing the market? “Invest in information, collect it and share it,” advises Bennett. This must be done using a system, however. The more information, the more complex the overall picture.

EGGER keeps an eye on all the important markets. When it comes to procuring information, the company's in-house specialists are attributed a special role. With their knowledge about the company's targets, information can be evaluated more reliably. “They think about further developments and come up with

stated reason is dissatisfaction with line managers.

The VUCA world requires new management qualities. This includes the ability to motivate employees. Rulers are on the way out; “enablers” are the new role model. “Taking away the fear from employees in the face of changes, and showing them how challenges can be turned into opportunities, sets the critical enabler apart,” says Marco Mancesti, Director for Research and Development at the Business School IMD in Lausanne (CH).

**7 FIXED VALUES**

The world is moving and repeatedly demands quick adjustment. It is all the more important for one's own stance to remain stable, and that arises from one's own set values. Personal convictions are formulated in much the same way as a gentleman with his principles, a country with its laws and a company with its core values. What is crucial is that principles are declared as binding. They are deemed to be incontrovertible, until changes in conditions require them to be revised. Fixed values make a brand solid and business relationships stable. Consequently, EGGER has committed itself to an unconditional quality standard. Even the respectful conversation tone and the validity of the handshake are non-negotiable for the employees of the Tyrolean company.

» *The most successful players are those who build the strongest partnerships.* «

Roland Berger, “How to survive in the VUCA world”

open to exchanges will find ideas that will lead down successful paths. According to the study, you do not have to share all your secrets. It says that companies who are successful in the VUCA world “are at the same time security-conscious in the way they handle key information”.

proposals about safeguarding them correctly,” says Hubert Höglauer, Head of EGGER Group Marketing.

**6 COMMITMENT**

To think about one's employer and make the business' success into a personal matter is called commitment. The relationship between performance and commitment is undisputed. Unfortunately, emotional attachment to a company is still the exception. On average, only 15 per cent of employees are prepared to “go the extra mile”, market research institute, Gallup, deduced. The economic loss caused by working-to-rule in Germany is estimated to be 73 to 95 billion euro. The most frequently

**5 LOOK AHEAD**

“You cannot fight against VUCA,” criticises Nathan Bennett who conducts research at Georgia State University into the effectiveness of management teams, “but only against V, U, C and A.” And what does he recommend in the fight against U for “Uncertainty”? Uncertainty, he says, emerges from lack of information about future developments:



Even during violent storms, people remain safe thanks to lightning conductors and overvoltage protection.





Framed reality: looking through a different frame can make new solutions visible.

# A question of perspective

Markets and work routines are becoming increasingly complex and dynamic. Can you still make reliable decisions under such circumstances? Experts say: No. That is why the decision-making process is being reinvented.

AUTHOR Till Schröder

“Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results” is how the physics genius, Albert Einstein, defined insanity. The choice of words is somewhat dramatic, yet the quotation is often mentioned in management training sessions. It also holds a piece of wisdom for all: as soon as you know how something does *not* work, you should try it another way. That also applies in the case of something that *no longer* works like it used to. When circumstances change, the way people think must also take a new direction. In times when situations are constantly evolving, more and more people are tackling the question: is it at all possible to plan and make decisions when the solid basis of information required to do so is lacking?

Complex matters can seem so unfathomable nowadays that even experts no longer understand them. Due to the high level of networking, the world moves in ways that are increasingly difficult to predict. In a recent study by the training and development company, Cognos AG, 92 per cent of managers described their

daily work routine as complex or very complex. 86 per cent feel the dynamism is “high to very high.” How do you keep a cool head and remain capable of acting under these circumstances?

**Where expert knowledge no longer provides certainty, new decision-making techniques are called for**

Providers of training and development events for decision-makers are aware of the problem. One approach encourages people to rely more on intuition when faced with complicated situations. The Management Circle Institute for instance, which operates throughout Germany, organises a congress on decision-making techniques that are not purely based on analysing data material. In this context, intuition is seen as a way of being able to make decisions in a short space of time, usually with little information. Others also call this “gut instinct” – a quality which has always set good businesspeople apart.

Remaining capable of acting when firm foundations for reliable decisions are lacking is also the learning objective of various training courses at the “Akademie für Führungskräfte” [*Academy for Managers*] in Überlingen by Lake Constance (DE). “Not every issue can be decided using expertise these days,” says Ilga Vossen from the Akademie für Führungskräfte. “We need a new kind of management which brings people together in discussions.” Essentially, employees and experts must structure the problem in such a way that it becomes manageable. “Nevertheless you have to tolerate the fact that the team will not come up with 100 per cent reliability.”

What is crucial during team meetings, according to Vossen, is to allow for various hypothetical possibilities and run through them: “In doing so, a manager must also be able to deal with group dynamics – the human element comes out quite nicely at times during such gatherings.” Companies with steep hierarchies still find it quite difficult to cope with this. Working with possibilities, simulations and scenarios requires a stress-free environment as far as possible. In the



**» It is important to create a safe space for looking at alternative actions. «**

**Rafael Ramirez**, scenario planner, University of Oxford

case of many decisions, inspiration can be found outside of the company. Many universities, for example, invite decision-makers to training sessions with scenario planning.

**Learning how to turn turbulent, uncertain, new and ambiguous situations into an opportunity**

One of the world's best known providers is the Saïd Business School at the renowned University of Oxford (UK). It describes the reality in which decision-makers often work these days with the word TUNA, an acronym for “turbulent”, “uncertain”, “new” and “ambiguous”. Managers from all over the world attend the Oxford Scenarios Programme (OSP) in order to give their decisions a new direction in a TUNA reality. “For this purpose you need a way of thinking that recognises these properties and adapts your understanding as well as the method of procedure to it,” says the head of training, Rafael Ramirez.

This new mentality is tested using real cases. “We enable the participants to reflect on their business practice using genuine cases,” Rafael Ramirez explains. “In this way we can try out alternative approaches for how to think, act and interact under safe conditions and compare these approaches with how things are done at one's own company.” These alternatives or so-called scenarios are contrasted, assessed and finally selected according to certain criteria.

With the distance provided by the scenario planning, solutions to seemingly hopeless situations are revealed,

turning potentially disastrous problems into promising opportunities. It is all a question of perspective: “We examine in which framework someone sees things,” says Ramirez. “As a rule you simply do something, it works, and so you continue. Yet when the current framework is no longer usable or is problematic – as is often the case with TUNA – then attention and effort have to be invested to assess the current view of the future and the way it is framed.” Framing - composed of basic assumptions, thinking patterns and specialist knowledge - is a key working concept used by Ramirez. He calls the correction of the viewing frame “re-framing”. It is like the hole made for a new window, which opens the view of new possibilities.

Uncertainty can trigger unproductive fears. “It is therefore important to create a safe space in which you can look at alternative actions,” says Ramirez. “In scenario planning we work *with* the future, not *for* it. That takes away the fear and helps to develop safe courses of action.”



# E\_SOLUTIONS

“E-commerce was the future. And that was suddenly realised by those who had become so comfortable in a present that was actually already the past.”

Harald Gutschi , CEO of Unito/Otto Group Austria  
Mut zum Kontrollverlust *[Courage to lose control]* (Pages 32 to 35)

## We are EGGER

### MYROSLAVA YURCHUK

Head of Sales, Kiev (Ukraine)

“I am a happy person,” says Myroslava Yurchuk. Her reasons: her husband and her daughter, her parents and work. “What more do you need in life?” At the same time, the political conditions in the Ukraine are certainly not easy. “The MTKT 2016 exhibition in spring showed, however, that the Ukrainian economy is coming back to life and trying to develop further.” Myroslava Yurchuk joined the company in 2001, when EGGER entered the Ukrainian market, and has helped to develop the subsidiary in Kiev over the last 15 years. She is now the head of the sales office. She discovered “a big family” at EGGER. Everyone helps everybody else. “In this way everyone can develop and grow as an expert.”



### CHRISTIAN WITTE

Team Leader for Wood Purchasing Logistics, Brilon (Germany)

Ten years ago he started as a buyer of waste wood at the Wismar site, today the timber industry graduate is head of Wood Purchasing Logistics for all EGGER plants in Germany. Christian Witte and his team in Brilon make sure that there is enough raw material for production and always keep their eyes on the costs in the process. Digitalisation opens up new possibilities for this. He is responsible for IT solutions that improve the whole process chain from the forest or storage location to the plant, including wood stack management and material planning. To optimise the harvesting of timber, he looks after projects for navigating in the forest and digitalising the network of tracks. Variety is something he particularly loves about his work. He finds relaxation by spending time with his wife and children on holiday in his picturesquely-located log cabin in Sweden.

### YULIYA MOROZOVA

Paramedic, Gagarin (Russia)

One life, three professions: Yuliya Morozova is a trained medic with a degree in pharmaceuticals and one in psychology. Born in Gagarin, she drove ambulances for eight years. Since the medical centre opened in June 2015, she has been part of a five-strong team ensuring the emergency care at the EGGER plant around the clock. When injuries occur, she is on hand to provide professional first aid before the ambulance arrives. As a regular service, the centre also helps the 700 employees in case of minor complaints such as headaches and stomach ache. Yuliya Morozova likes to spend her free time with her family at their summer house not far from Gagarin.





## THE PLANT IN RAMBERVILLERS

# Refinement of a plant

When the plant in the French town of Rambervillers was taken into the EGGER family in 2000, it was like a rough gemstone. EGGER refined the plant investment by investment, bringing it into line with international standards and developing automation and sustainability. Now it starts to shine.

AUTHOR Jan Ahrenberg

A lump of coal is all that it takes to make a diamond in its raw state. It takes an awful lot of experience and imagination to sense the fire of a gemstone even in its unpolished state.

“When, in 2000, the EGGER Group became aware of the chipboard plant at the foot of the Vosges mountains in Rambervillers, it was exactly that: a promising stone in its unfinished state,” says Plant Manager, Guido Reid, responsible for production. Fascinated by the logistics set-up and the degree of automation, owner Michael Egger realised its potential. Back then, the plant was far from what it would one day become: a model plant. Rambervillers makes the most of its ideal location within the sales markets in Eastern and Western Europe and also the close-knit logistical integration from the preparation of raw chips to the finished board.

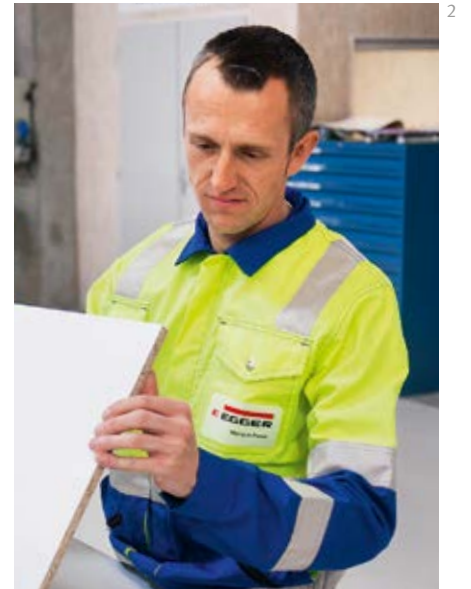
“Back then we came across a plant where the typical French delight in auto-

mation was noticeable in the elegant integration of the processes,” Reid recalls. Responsible for the plant's electrical system and for developing automation, Reid earned the first spurs during the conversion process in 2002. “At that time, however, full integration was barely more than an idea, a sketch which the previous owners had never strictly implemented.” The biggest challenge back then, he says, was the poor maintenance level of the machinery – and hence the quality of the products, which did not meet the EGGER quality standard. “The French state got the plant off the ground in 1974 as an infrastructure project for a region that was badly hit by the withdrawal of the armed forces and the decline of the textile and paper industry,” Reid explains. The unemployment figure was high and there was a lack of prospects. “In order to be able to produce more efficiently, the subsequent owners then made the most of the plant's good facilities – without serious-

ly investing in the substance, however.” The previous owners lacked a vision that would have been able to justify the high costs required to completely renovate the plant. You could also say they lacked new horizons.

### Opening up new opportunities beyond the French market

These were first discovered by EGGER: when it came to taking stock after the takeover in 2000, it soon became apparent that Rambervillers would only get a fair opportunity among the competition if it overcame its strictly national market alignment. Until then, only formats that were not consistent with the EGGER standard had been produced at the site. And the proportion of sand and other foreign matter was high – too high for customers east, south and north of the French border who were used to the consistently high quality of the EGGER materials, with reliable



**1** The new high-bay warehouse was built on the greenfield site within a few months.

**2** Pierre Morque, head of the new prefabricated components production in Rambervillers, checks the quality of a finished part.





from 65,230 to 80,675 m<sup>2</sup>. Whilst the ContiRoll produced 1,489 m<sup>3</sup> per day previously, its capacity today reaches 1,620 m<sup>3</sup>. And despite the progressive level of automation, the number of employees has grown from 304 to 381 during this period.

#### The central computer controls nearly all steps in the plant

Talking of automation: in the years after the takeover, the team in Rambervillers completed the programme in this discipline – the final polish. With a central crane-served warehouse and an automatic system for feeding the machines with materials controlled by a central computer, the concept was already identifiable at the time of the takeover. EGGER advanced the idea, however, and elevated it the strategic centrepiece of the plant: from the delivery of the wood, the timber yard, the flakers, the recycling facility and the dryers, onto the continuous press and through to the crane-served and maturing warehouse, where the rawboard is allowed to rest for at least five days, and the subsequent finishing processes, the flow of materials is structured strictly logically.

From the continuous press the plant performs a veritable ballet: the crane-served warehouse feeds all the finishing processes fully automatically. The cut chipboard reaches the short-cycle presses on computer-controlled transfer trolleys on a job-specific basis. Here they meet the matching impregnated papers from the high-bay warehouse, which is also automated and was erected earlier. The coating line, installed in 2012 when it was the most modern of its kind in the world, allows technically and aesthetically sophisticated textures to be produced with high efficiency. The first fully automated high-bay warehouse and the buffer storage with minimal supplies make it possible to react very quickly to new customer requirements. Rainbow pallets - orders with different decors in small quantities - are also possible as a result. Reducing costs is only part of the story: "Above all, automation makes us able to use the full capacity of the plant continuously and without major fluctuations," explains Jochen Schüler,

Head of Logistics in Western Europe for all EGGER Decorative Products. Every year about one million tonnes of materials are moved on the plant premises, according to Schüler. In the finishing processes alone, around 10,000 active materials are used. In terms of dimensions, the plant resembles a cargo ship, for which course corrections need to be planned far in advance – around 120 trucks unload their wood every day, seven more deliver glue, whilst 80 to 100



**» Over the next few years alone we are investing another 6 to 7 million euro. «**

Guido Reid, Plant Manager Technical/Production

trucks take the goods to the customers. The central control computer and the automated work processes give the plant greater mobility than a tanker, however. Quick manoeuvres are possible in tricky waters. "Customers are increasingly asking for a high degree of prefabrication in our products in order to reduce their



mechanical properties such as bending strength and density. So everything was started afresh: investment by investment, Rambervillers was brought up to the EGGER standard. The acquisition of two new short-cycle presses, the first in 2004 and the second in 2012, made the plant capable of supplying the German and Swiss market, as well as customers in the Benelux countries who preferred 5600-mm boards. "By internationalising the sales markets, the first step was taken to develop the actual strengths of the plant," says Bernhard Mair, Plant Sales Manager. "Combined with its excellent location in Europe, the plant provided an enormous competitive edge and a unique selling point within the Group." With the internationalisation process, the plant all of a sudden gained importance in the European market. With the quality of the products, however, this position would not last long. The site distinguished itself as having plenty

of potential. Yet some time was still required to develop this step by step and to turn the plant into a strong member of the EGGER Group.

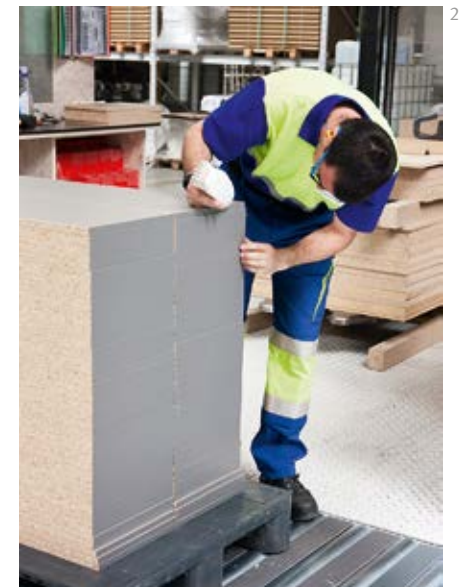
#### Standards first had to be adapted to those of the Group

To achieve these objectives, the installation of a modern waste wood processing facility was necessary. The investment took place in 2006. To anyone examining a catch tray (used to collect contaminants), it is clear how important screening material is for the quality of the product: foreign bodies like small stones would ruin the chip mass, which is subsequently formed into chipboard in the continuous press. With the processing facility in place, the plant has long since been fulfilling the high quality and ecological standards demanded by the EGGER Group. The levelling and smoothing in Rambervillers – just like

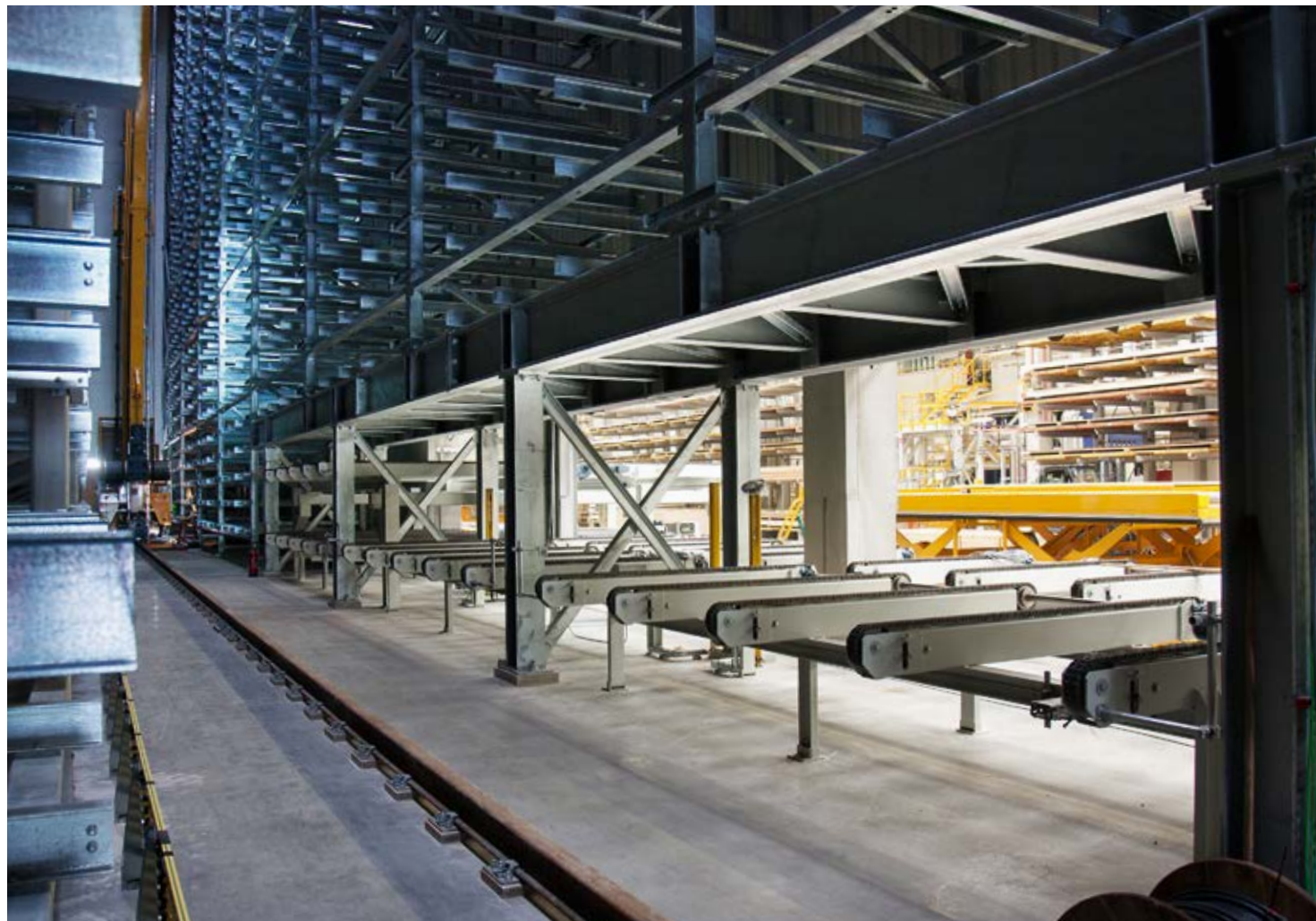
the work of the gemcutter – was done in various stages. A key phase was the renovation of the continuous press, which at the time was prone to breakdowns. "It looked like gutted whale when our engineers gave it a thorough overhaul in 2007," says Plant Manager Technical/Production, Guido Reid. Every little screw was undone, tested and replaced if necessary. "It was a huge amount of work lasting four weeks, but worth it. Since then we have been running the machine installed in 1994 non-stop with almost no problems – cost efficiency and capacity utilisation have shot up accordingly." Yet as necessary as these investments were, the plant was still a long way from sparkling.

The conversion and expansion of the plant has cost more than 100 million euro so far. Since the takeover in 2000, the area of the plant has grown from 54 to 73 ha and the building floor area

**1** Streamlined: The EGGER Group decided to produce prefabricated parts in Rambervillers in 2015. In the spring of 2016, the first orders were already coming off the production line. **2** Units instead of cubic metres: particular care is called for when handling prefabricated furniture parts.







2



3



**1** Flowing transfer: the materials are carried on automated conveyor belts from the new high bay warehouse to the short-cycle presses in the adjacent hall. **2** Plant Manager, Guido Reid, and logistics boss, Jochen Schüller, inspect the buffer stocks ... **3** ... which feed the short-cycle presses.

→ own warehousing costs,” says Schüller. “We have reacted to this by installing a production line for prefabricated parts this year.” This drills, mills and glues the edges – the customer just has to assemble the delivery and the product is complete. “We can only do this because we work closely with the customers. We visit our logistics colleagues on the customer side regularly to enquire about potential optimisations, such as packaging standards and production tendencies.” Without optimising – in other words automating – our own processes, this service would be difficult to provide to the customer. In this way, the computer-controlled workhorses leave the employees free to work on other jobs.

And that can be seen at Rambervillers, as at all EGGER plants, not only in terms of pure profit maximisation – there is also a need to show one's colours in terms of sustainability. EGGER optimises the way it handles raw material and energy in closed-loop cycles. When processing raw timber and waste



» ***With internationalisation, the first step was taken to develop the actual strengths of the plant.*** «

**Bernhard Mair**, Plant Sales Manager

wood, by-products like wood chips and sawdust are produced. These can be fed back into production by using them as sources of energy. For instance, the Rambervillers plant has been converting sawdust into energy for the indirect steam dryers in the raw chip production facility. The thermal oil for the continuous press is also heated internally. A steam turbine is also expected to be added to the cycle by 2018, in order to harness energy that has remained unused and feed it to the public grid, thus making EGGER an energy supplier.

“Over the next few years alone we are investing another 6 to 7 million euro,” says Plant Manager Technical/Production, Guido Reid. “The development of the finishing processes, with the installation of the prefabricated parts facility this year, is complete for now. The money is now going into environmental technology, such as the new filter system and the modernisation of the plant's own water treatment facility.” Is the effort worth it? Certainly. As with any good piece of jewellery, not only the surface shines at EGGER.

#### THE STORY

##### RAMBERVILLERS SITE

The manufacturer, Isorel, founded the plant with support from the state in 1974. On the 14-hectare premises with a multi-daylight press and a cutting saw, 100,000 m<sup>3</sup> of chip-board was produced a year.

After various changes of owner, the EGGER Group took over the plant in 2000. Four years later, a new coating line was put in place and in 2006 a recycling facility for waste wood.

In 2012 an ultra-modern coating line and a new warehouse were added. The entire plant logistics were modernised in the same year.

In 2015 the plant installed a facility for prefabricated parts, whilst a high bay warehouse was built at the start of 2016. Over the coming years, a total of 6 to 7 million euro will be invested in environmental technology among other things.



# Mobile property

1 The first EGGER concept house was built as a showcase at the headquarters in St. Johann in Tirol.

Considerations as to how EGGER could make a contribution to the refugee crisis brought about the concept house.

Developers themselves were surprised at how many new doors this opened.

AUTHOR Jörn Käsebier

Crisis has many faces. In 2015 and 2016 it was the bewildered faces of thousands of people who had fled to Europe to escape war and hunger, risking their lives in doing so, to then sleep in tents and gymnasiums. Fast solutions for their basic need for a safe personal sphere had to be found. A lot of feverish thought went into this at EGGER and the “concept house”, made of EGGER products, was developed. Although the wood-based materials manufacturer didn't act as the building contractor itself, it did provide its partners with the concept and the necessary expertise, including sample, detailed plans as well as technical descriptions of the elements involved. As a result, the first projects were able to be put into practice in 2016, firstly in Germany. A refugee housing project made of 18 modules was built in the Stuttgart area.

EGGER is very familiar with the philosophy of the concept house. It is based on the company architecture, which the Austrian architect, Bruno Moser, developed for EGGER buildings at several sites belonging to the family business. The headquarters in St. Johann in Tirol, for instance, consists of 200 modules. In its simplest form, one module provides space for a living and dining area, a bathroom and one bedroom. Yet by adding more modules, the concept can also be used for larger accommodation units, making room for families, but also bigger communities. In this way, houses of various sizes can be produced. “As long as they are covered by the local build-





→ ing regulations and the fire protection regulations, the modules are suitable for construction projects up to three storeys,” says Carsten Ritterbach, Head of Sales/Marketing for EGGER Building Products.

Thanks to a high level of prefabrication, the construction of a concept house including assembly takes just a few weeks. Building whole modules saves more than time: the insulated panel elements are delivered in a dismantled form, which also minimises transportation costs. The elements - ceiling, walls and

al apartment buildings for the social housing sector. “In regions with high property prices, such flats are certainly an interesting alternative for average earners,” says Carsten Ritterbach.

The idea also lends itself to educational institutions; the modular design makes the concept house an individually adaptable solution for nurseries and schools with a short-term need for space. The dimensions of a module are relatively small. This accords with the current demand in many cities for student flats and micro apartments. And finally the concept house is suitable as an office space, especially for temporary projects.



» *In regions with high property prices, such flats are certainly an interesting alternative for average earners.* «

Carsten Ritterbach, Head of Sales/Marketing for EGGER Building Products

floor - are standardised and guarantee a consistent quality. Which designs are selected for the floor and façade depends on their ultimate purpose, the concept house is therefore kept flexible. In its simplest form, it is used to erect accommodation for refugees, be it as an initial reception centre or a hostel. Yet when developed further, it also offers an alternative to building convention-

A major time saver, a concept house solution has many other benefits. It is also particularly sustainable. First of all it is made from a renewable raw material - wood. Secondly it can be flexibly adapted to new uses in a variety of ways - a benefit of the modular design. For instance, the façade elements are suspended and can therefore be replaced easily. The interior walls can also be dismantled, by which the floor plan can be changed and adapted to a new use. It is also possible to panel the walls later, with plasterboard panels for example. The modules can even be completely dismantled and reassembled in another place. The concept house is therefore mobile.

EGGER shows that it is uncompromising when it comes to quality: “Even if the modules are inexpensive in the basic

THE CONCEPT

**SIZE**  
One module has the dimensions 11.40 x 2.80 x 2.80 metres and provides a total floor area of around 38 m². It can therefore be designed so that one accommodation unit fits in with living and dining area, bathroom and bedroom.

**COMBINATIONS**  
Several modules can be easily combined with each other. Two modules can provide space for one family, but larger units are

also possible for communities, stacked on top of one other with up to three storeys.

**BASIC VERSION**  
The EGGER OSB 4 TOP forms the basis of a module. The triple-glazed wood window frames are made of larch, as is the façade consisting of 3-layer sandwich panels. The sanitary module consists of a shower, wash-basin and WC as well as a hot water boiler and an exhaust fan. An infra-red heater is used for heating.



2 The concept house is put together from prefabricated individual pieces. To make transportation easier, they are flat.



3 The clear, straight-lined architecture gives the concept house a modern, contemporary appearance.

version, our high standards remain,” stresses Ritterbach. After the concept was presented at the start of 2016, enquiries came mainly from Germany and Austria. In the meantime there is also interest in countries from very different parts of the world, for example Lebanon and South Africa. Living in cities is global trend, as is the demand for affordable living space that can be built in the short term. This makes for good prospects for the timber construction market, as modular designs in particular meet the desired criteria.

4 Flexible combinations: five modules make up a whole unit in this floor plan.





# Courage to lose control

The Otto group of companies has arrived in the digital age – the only catalogue retailer in the world to do so. Today it is the second biggest online retailer in Europe. We spoke with Harald Gutschi, CEO of the Austria Otto subsidiary, Unito, about refrigerators, inertia tendencies and the power of the crisis.

AUTHOR Clemens Niedenthal

**MORE: Mr. Gutschi, your company, the Otto Group, is often cited as a prime example of a major brand that has successfully migrated to the digital age. I would like to turn the question around, however: are we still talking about the same company?**

Harald Gutschi: That is the crucial point. The Otto Group today has almost nothing in common with the former mail order catalogue. I would go even further: if it was, Otto would no longer exist today. We are the only mail order catalogue company, not only in the German-speaking area but in the world, that has managed to make the paradigm shift to the digital age. In short: any company that has not radically reinvented itself in this industry is unlikely to have survived.

**Otto lives on and is more vital than ever. What have you done differently?**

I would like to answer by giving an example to which I will come back to later: if I install an electric motor in a VW Golf,

I am a long way off having a Tesla. At the historic turning point where mobility finds itself at the moment, Volkswagen therefore ought to re-think the car completely. And we have completely re-thought the retail sector in precisely this way.

**The Otto Group was, to keep with this image, more like Volkswagen. You were the established corporate group of modern industrial times. Can a company be re-invented with ongoing operations?**

The whole thing was a process. And I am deliberately talking about a process here and not a project. In a process, the end and result are not foreseeable. You have to want to commit yourself to the uncertainty that such an upheaval always entails.

**The group committed itself?**

Looking back, I would like to distinguish two phases here. At the beginning, so towards the end of the last millennium,

e-commerce was laughed at. Somewhere in this huge company, a few e-commerce people sat around and worked on supposedly special things. There was the thick catalogue – the Big Book, as it was always called in the industry. And there was the online business with a share of one, two and later maybe five per cent. Peanuts, many people thought.

**And then?**

Then the online market grew and we were suddenly fighting battles internally. E-commerce was no longer the exotic thing. E-commerce was the future, and that was suddenly realised by those who had become so comfortable in a present that was actually already the past.

**So not only did you have to establish the online retail sector in the market, but firstly in your own corporate culture?**

In any company – especially in one that has been successful for so long with one and the same business model – there are →

## ABOUT

### HARALD GUTSCHI

Born in Upper Styria in 1964, as a spokesperson for the management board he has been responsible for the sales and marketing department, including e-commerce and category management, at the Unito Group since 2007. He is the mastermind of digital strategies in the Group.





→ inertia tendencies. The catalogue business kept on losing more market shares, whilst the online business kept on gaining it. So by 2008, 2009, the issue was over. Nowadays we are talking about an online share of more than 90 per cent: the retail sector is digital these days ... **... and that has changed more than just the sales channels ...**

Today Otto sells luxury products and the cheapest entry-level brands – Miele just as much as Medion. In the catalogue segment we stand for the centre. Back then the profile of the company was as equally clearly outlined as that of our customers. This reliability no longer

view, none of that is a problem.

**So let's look at it from a technical point of view. How does that work?**

It is all about only offering the customer those products, as far as possible, in which they are actually interested. We utilise the phrase: "Customers who bought this product are also interested in ..." Reference data is needed for this, in other words ratings from other customer profiles that are as similar as possible. So in order to get really meaningful results and a tailored, personalised range of products as far as possible, you need size. Size is relevance.



**» The manager of tomorrow must be able to lose control – only then can he resolutely exploit the intelligence of the team. «**

Harald Gutschi, CEO of Unito / Otto Group Austria

exists today. But therein lies a great opportunity – theoretically, everyone can be our customer now. Just one number: we sell 5000 different brands these days. Whatever there is, people have to have it. That is e-commerce.

**E-commerce is also, however, the greatest possible simplicity. Ordering new trainers on your iPad in the evening or on your smartphone during your lunch break. With one click.** In the end, therefore, it is all about having a personalised online shop, a world of goods that is relevant to the customer and where he or she intuitively feels at home.

**How exactly did you build this home for your customers?**

At the start was the realisation that the old Otto company still shook things up in the market: in e-commerce it is no longer about the profile of a brand, but rather that the brand re-invents itself for each customer. From a technical point of

**But don't we yearn for the small, owner-managed retail trade?**

The more emotional products become, the more the customer wants to take them in their hands and feel them. Both sales channels complement and support each other. We also put a lot of thought into stationary flagship stores operated by our individual retail brands. But: today every fifth euro is spent online, by 2020 it will be every third euro. There are markets, South Korea for example, where the share of couch commerce is already 50 per cent.

**South Korea is the future?**

Who still goes into a shop, for example to buy a refrigerator? There will be three, at the most 30 models there. On the net you will find all the refrigerators possible. And by using an intelligently programmed search filter, the customer will arrive at a tailored model in three or four steps. Your refrigerator problem is solved in three minutes.

**Nevertheless, businesses and investors still happily invest in shopping malls and electrical stores.**

That is why most companies need cultural revolutions. The complete business culture has to change away from hierarchically dominated management structures. Because in cases of doubt, they reproduce what was successful years ago and has been usual for decades.

**Are you calling for flat hierarchies?**

I am calling for flat hierarchies. But by that I don't mean that everyone can do what they want. By that I mean that the communication and decision-making channels must not be determined by hierarchical structures. The manager of tomorrow must be able to lose control, and only then can he resolutely exploit the intelligence of the team.

**Loss of control as a business recipe for success?**

Let's put it this way: I have successfully learnt to accept this feeling. I would have done a lot of things wrong if I didn't have any employees who understand a lot, lot more than me about certain topics. So I have to let these employees do their thing. Technology companies were the first to grasp this, in the retail trade and even in the finance sector this idea is slowly taking hold. The manufacturing industry is still getting to grips with it.

**With what consequences?**

Within the next five, maybe ten years, four out of five top players from the respective top ten in their industry will disappear, machine construction, automation etc. They will suffer the same fate as Nokia. On the other hand, someone will come, think Elon Musk\*, and completely re-think the subject on a blank sheet of paper. Digitalisation makes that possible too.

**In other words, Volkswagen could soon have much bigger problems than the exhaust scandal?**

Or vice versa: the crisis is possibly the best thing that could have happened to Volkswagen. The breach is there now. The success has gone, the usual has to be radically reassessed. If the right decisions are made now, structurally and actually in the product policy, then this crisis will have made VW fit for the future.

\*Elon Musk is, among other things, the founder and CEO of Tesla, a Californian manufacturer of electric cars. The business magazine, "Forbes", voted Tesla number one of the most innovative companies in the world in 2015 and 2016.

THE COMPANY



**UNITO**

- Unito Versand & Dienstleistungen GmbH based in Salzburg is the largest mail order group in the Alpine region and part of the worldwide operating Otto Group.
- Besides Otto-Versand for Austria and the Eastern European markets, five more mail order brands belong to Unito.
- Company turnover in 2015 was 336 million euro, the online share at more than 90 per cent.

**OTTO GROUP**

- The company was founded in Hamburg in 1949 by Werner Otto. Otto is the only mail order catalogue business worldwide to manage the paradigm shift to the digital era.
- With an annual turnover of at least 12 billion euro altogether, the Otto Group, is now the second largest online retailer in Europe after Amazon.



# E\_NATURE

“Wood will always stay with me.  
I cannot guarantee a wood-free  
book.”

Lars Mytting, best-selling Norwegian author  
Knowledge From The Woods (Pages 38 to 43)

## Sustainable living



### SAUNA ON THE LAKE

[www.gocstudio.com](http://www.gocstudio.com)

Seattle is famous for Microsoft, Amazon and the weather: it rains an awful lot in the city in the north-west of USA. The temperatures are low, the property prices high. And so, on a wet January day, the idea for a floating wooden sauna was born. Since Autumn 2015, people can sweat it out on Lake Union and cool off by diving from the deck. The architectural firm, goCstudio, financed the project with funds collected from a campaign run by the Internet service, Kickstarter. Architectural critics see it as a further example of the worldwide trend towards floating buildings.

### EMOTION ON FOUR WHEELS

[newsroom.toyota.eu](http://newsroom.toyota.eu)

Toyota is seen as one of the most innovative car manufacturers in the world. There was a big sensation, therefore, when it appeared at the Milan Design Week 2016 with an antithesis to the high-tech aesthetics of modern cars. The “Setsuna” two-seater convertible is made of Japanese cedar and birch wood. The reasons for the choice of material: wood is light and emotional. “It was chosen as an expression for the fact that love grows and time passes,” the manufacturer explains. “Wood changes its colour and feel depending on how much love and attention has been given.”



### OLDEST ISLAND FOREST

[www.revolution-jungsteinzeit.de](http://www.revolution-jungsteinzeit.de)



For years, geologist Peter Giesen, used his detective-like vision to examine the finest details in the study of fossilised plants, so-called “calamophytos”, found near Lindlar in the Bergisches Land region (DE). At an exhibition in 2016 he was able to show the public what the first forest in the world looked like. It grew 390 million years ago on a sand island in a shallow sea. Trees were no higher than three metres and resembled tropical plants. This is no wonder: before shifts in tectonic plates, the Bergisches Land used to be close to the equator.



WE TALK TO LARS MYTTING

# Knowledge from the woods

After two novels, the best-selling Norwegian author, Lars Mytting, wrote a non-fiction book about his beloved subject: wood. *Norwegian Wood. Chopping, Stacking, and Drying Wood the Scandinavian Way* was a worldwide success. An exclusive interview about flamed birch, the magic of success and the most expensive wood in the world.

AUTHOR Meike Wöhlert

## THE PERSON

### LARS MYTTING

worked as a proofreader and a journalist before his career as a writer. His non-fiction book *Norwegian Wood. Chopping, Stacking, and Drying Wood the Scandinavian Way* was one of the biggest sales successes of all time in Scandinavia and a best-seller in many other countries. The practical, lyrical guide to firewood combines tradition with modern, scientific discoveries. For his new book – the novel *Die Birken wissen's noch* [*The Birch Trees Still Know It*] – Mytting won the Norwegian book prize. Forests, trees and wood play an important role in this book too.

**MORE: Mr. Mytting, you live in a small town 150 kilometres north of Oslo. What do you see when you look out of your kitchen window?**

Lars Mytting: A small lake, my neighbour's little yellow house and many, many pine trees. The pine is a blessing for Norway. It grows very slowly and produces excellent, dense, heavy, robust wood. It is tall and straight, ideally suited for the sawmill and construction industry.

**Nevertheless, Norway has a relatively insignificant forestry industry.**

Because of the mountains. We have huge forested areas, but few, widespread, endless forests. The rugged landscape makes it very difficult to chop down trees. In a flat country like Sweden, it is much easier to develop a forestry industry on a large scale.

**How is it with the furniture sector?**

We use a lot of pine for construction purposes. But for decorative grains we have to import a lot of timber from warmer countries. It is simply too cold in our

country for a large variety. Unfortunately there is very little oak, the queen of trees. To make up for that we have birch trees, especially in the south.

**Do you also look out on a large woodpile from the kitchen window?**

No, I am a bit shy in that respect. I stack my wood behind the house where nobody can see it.

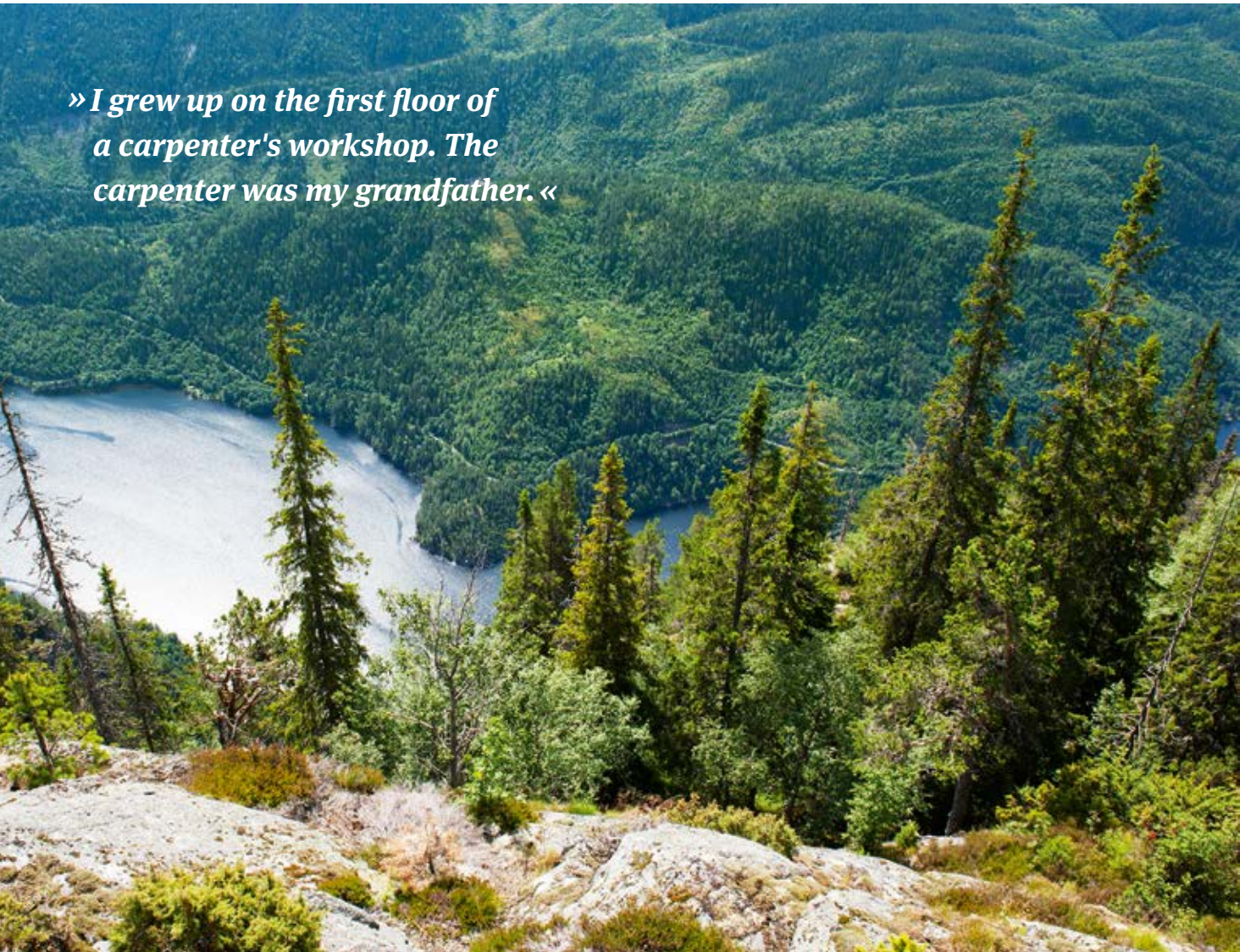
**When and why did you decide to write a book about wood?**

A publisher that I was on friendly terms with came up with the idea of an illustrated book which would show Norwegian backwoodsmen with their wood stacks. But I didn't like the project, so I let it lie for a few months – until one day I watched how my old, frail neighbour, Ottar, stacked up his woodpile. He was literally blooming; that is the story at the beginning of the book. Then I suddenly thought: what would it be like if I put together all the knowledge and art behind chopping wood and lighting fires and wrote a book that Ottar would like to read? Instead of looking at things from



The writer also presented his new novel *Die Birken wissen's noch* in Berlin. This photo was taken near the striking building complex of the Norwegian Embassy.





In the impassable terrain of the Norwegian landscape, man and machine reach their limits. Only about half the forested area in Norway is manageable.

→ the perspective of a city-dweller, I wanted to put myself at eye level with the people who would appear in the book.

**And what did your neighbour say after he read *Norwegian Wood* ?**  
Nothing unfortunately. He died when I was half-way through writing the book. But his widow is still alive and has really enjoyed the parts featuring her husband.

**When did it become clear to you that your concept would be well received by readers?**  
Once, when I was talking about my second novel at an event. Normally people fall asleep after 45 minutes during a reading. But then the moderator said: You are also working on a book about wood. Suddenly everyone woke up and lifted their heads: Really? Is it already finished? Can I buy it?

**What did the publisher say about the result?**  
Well, I wouldn't say they were shocked. But it was completely different to what they had expected.

**Did they recognise the book's potential straight away?**  
Not all all. Because they had inspired it, they felt obliged to see the thing through. But every publisher in Norway to whom you would have offered a book about wood back then would have thought you were drunk. None of us saw the magic before the layout was finished, the text with the illustrations. Then the knowledge came out of the woods all of a sudden. Despite this, we had no idea that it would sell so well. We reckoned on maybe 1,000 copies.

**How big was the first edition that came out in September 2011?**  
4,000. It wasn't advertised, and no book shops were interested in it. I know tales about booksellers that received a box, opened and closed it straight back up. A book about preparing wood? They found it absurd. In the end, during the pre-Christmas period, two printers and a bookbinder were solely employed with the production of the book, and it was still sold out for Christmas. The demand was enormous.

**In the meantime, 500,000 copies have been sold worldwide, 160,000 in Norway alone. Apart from the fact that it is very well written, with plenty of humour and specialist knowledge: what nerve did you strike?**  
A lot of people do it. It is an expression of the love and appreciation for an

activity which many Norwegians identify with.

**But why then was it such a success in many other countries? Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Germany, the Netherlands, the USA ... in Great Britain it was even voted the best non-fiction book of the year in 2016.**  
If only I knew! I think that every person feels instinctively attracted by fire and heat. If you look at the history of our species, we have only been using energy sources other than wood for a fraction of a moment. The connection with the camp fire is deep rooted in us and firmly linked to our sense of safety and belonging. Your home was where the fire was. All around was darkness, dangerous animals and evil.

**So do people also see a wood stack as a symbol for safety and security?**  
Yes. It is true that firewood can never replace electricity. Electricity is superior to wood in many respects, also in terms of cleanliness – apart from when there is a power cut. Wood is reliable, even in a wider sense. The Norwegian title of the book is *Hel Ved*, which means solid wood or also healthy wood, which is neither hollow nor rotten inside. The expression is also used as a compliment for a person, however. If you are “hel ved”, you are someone that can be trusted.

**You write that a house in Norway, from a certain size upwards, must have an additional source of heat. Usually that is a wood-burning oven. Does the regulation come from the fact that a power cut during a snow storm at minus 30 degrees can soon become a question of life and death?**  
Exactly. That is why a woodpile is such a reassuring sight. If, on the other hand, someone starts to panic because he is in danger of freezing, that is not a very nice sight. Anyone who is particularly cold will become extremely irritable and cannot think clearly any more. The standard is supposed to ensure that people stay warm for long enough until their problem is solved. Even if you, let's say, only gain four hours in this way, in a town with 5,000 inhabitants, that

is a valuable length of time. Normally the power supply is restored after half a day. But every year there are also power failures that last 18 to 20 hours.

**Apart from the climate, does the archaic act of preparing wood also have a romantic element?**  
Not in Norway, perhaps in other countries. For us, cutting and drying wood is matter of fact: real, useful. On the other hand, its sober nature definitely creates an inner calmness. You fell a tree, chop it up, let it dry – and then you use it. The whole thing is an organic process, where you are in close contact with a living thing, and you immediately see the results of your work. All this is naturally in stark contrast to the digital lifestyle, where a lot of intellectual capacity floats around aimlessly in the virtual sphere.

**You mean a woodpile also fascinates people because it represents an opposite pole to our complex, ever changing, technology-driven world?**  
I think so. You can see it, you can touch it, you lend parts of it to your neighbour. You can create it yourself, with simple tools, effort and sweat; no person will ever have their own coal mine or hydroelectric power station. It is made astonishingly quickly – and then the result of your efforts simply sits there and waits for the moment when you need it. The fact that you can store wood for as long as you want is an fabulous property.

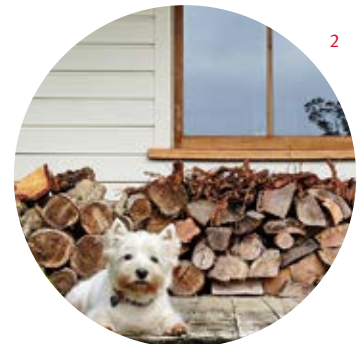
**Let's move on to your new book. *Die Birken wissen's noch* is a novel, but the story of the main character, Edvard, is closely linked with an ornamental carpenter and with a 400-year old walnut forest. Where does your knowledge of wood come from?**  
It is partly obsession. The firewood aspect only became relevant after my 40th birthday, when I had children and my own house. But wood itself has fascinated me since my childhood. I grew up on the first floor of a carpenter's workshop. The carpenter was my grandfather. That is also the link to the novel.

## STACK TYPOLOGY

The size and arrangement of a woodpile can tell a lot about its constructor. According to *Norwegian Wood*, a straight, stable stack stands for solid candidate for marriage, a chaotic pile for a drunken novice. However, be careful: if you stack too high, the risk of collapsing increases: (1) The Solid Type, (2) The Lazy Type, (3) The Chaotic Type, (4) The Over-ambitious Type.



1



2



3



4

→



→ **Is that a fact?**

Yes, he founded a furniture-making business in 1947. At the time, birch was fashionable – especially the peculiar grain which is described in the book: the flamed birch.

**Did he apply the technique mentioned in the book to create the special pattern: clamping metal rings around the trunks?**

No, I added that. My grandfather used wood that had grown naturally. But it looked exactly like that.

**What became of his business?**

He died in 1972 when I was four years old. Until then he had ran the business successfully. I was born at the end of this era, but I remember all the machinery and furniture well and with a warm feeling. I own a whole load of cabinets, chairs and tables that my grandfather made. He also left the curiosity behind in me – on the one hand about the patterns of different types of wood and how their beauty is expressed, on the other about the craftsmanship behind them.

**Your affection and admiration for wood as a material is tangible on every page. Did you deliberately stay with the subject after the major success of *Hel Ved*? Or did the subject stay with you?**

Neither one nor the other – the idea for the novel came about much, much earlier. Many elements have accompanied me my whole life, long before they came together to make a story. For example, as a teenager I read about the very valuable walnut wood, from which the English gun stocks used to be made, in a Swedish magazine. It is the most expensive wood in the world.

**Why then is the title of the book in the original *Swim with those who sink*, when it is more about the forest than about water?**

The working title was *Flamed Birch*. But in Norwegian you would also use this wording for a birch tree that is literally in flames – and the novel would thus have acted like a parody of *Norwegian Wood*.

**EGGER is a family business – just like the Winterfinch's in your new novel. It is over 500 pages long and spans the whole of the 20th century ...**

Isn't that the magic of the forest? Trees are very old living things, silent witnesses of time, which experience everything but cannot express themselves. You can see the signs of life that a tree has lived through, indeed not only in furniture or a beautiful wood floor. As with people, it is often those who have had to withstand a lot of suffering that are the more interesting, perhaps even the more attractive. I was recently in a hotel where there was a floor made of gnarled olive tree wood. It had wonderful black shadows, was irregularly shaped, very dramatic and much more interesting than the appearance of that straight, strong tree that had a simple life.

**Then it is probably no coincidence that the story itself resembles growth rings. The protagonist goes looking to find out what happened in the past.**

That is a good comparison. You start in the today, and the more you go into the centre, the further you go back in time. That is exactly what Edvard has to do.

**And what does Lars Mytting have to do next? Write about something completely different?**

I think, to a certain degree, wood will always stay with me. There are so many connecting points, from a historic and a narrative view. I cannot guarantee a wood-free book.

**So it doesn't bother you that as a writer you have become so closely associated with wood in the meantime?**

Hardly. What alarmed me was the huge success of *Hel Ved* – after I had already published two novels and was sitting on the third one. My biggest fear was that the new book would be a flop. And that, when I die at 90, people will only remember this firewood guy who also wrote three mediocre novels. Fortunately, *Die Birken wissen's noch* – the story of a man who makes ornate furniture out of wood – is even more popular in Norway in the meantime than *Norwegian Wood*.



The non-fiction book *Hel Ved* (*Norwegian Wood*) has been translated into numerous languages since it came out in 2011. Mytting followed up with the novel about wood *Svøm med dem som drukner* (*Die Birken wissen's noch*) in 2014.



Successful, down-to-earth, likeable: anyone who meets Lars Mytting discovers a straightforward, humorous person.



## FIVE THINGS ABOUT

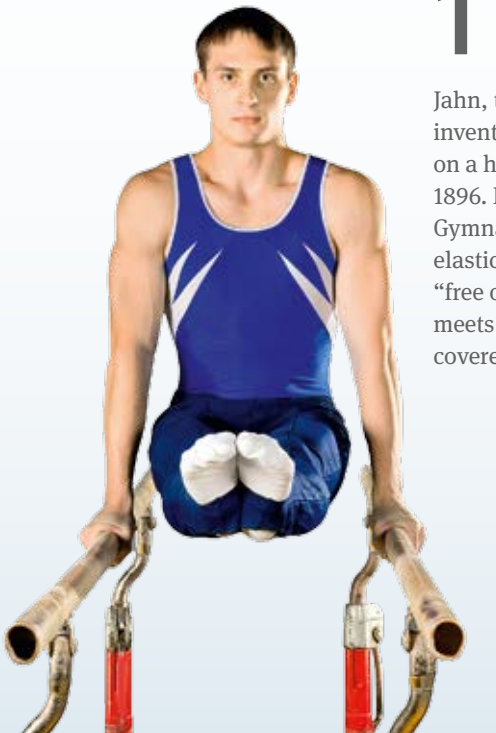
# Wood in sport

The right material can decide between winning and losing.

Consequently, only the latest materials are used for the major sporting competitions. Yet those who think that wood has become obsolete here are wrong. It is even irreplaceable in many cases.

## 1 PARALLEL BARS

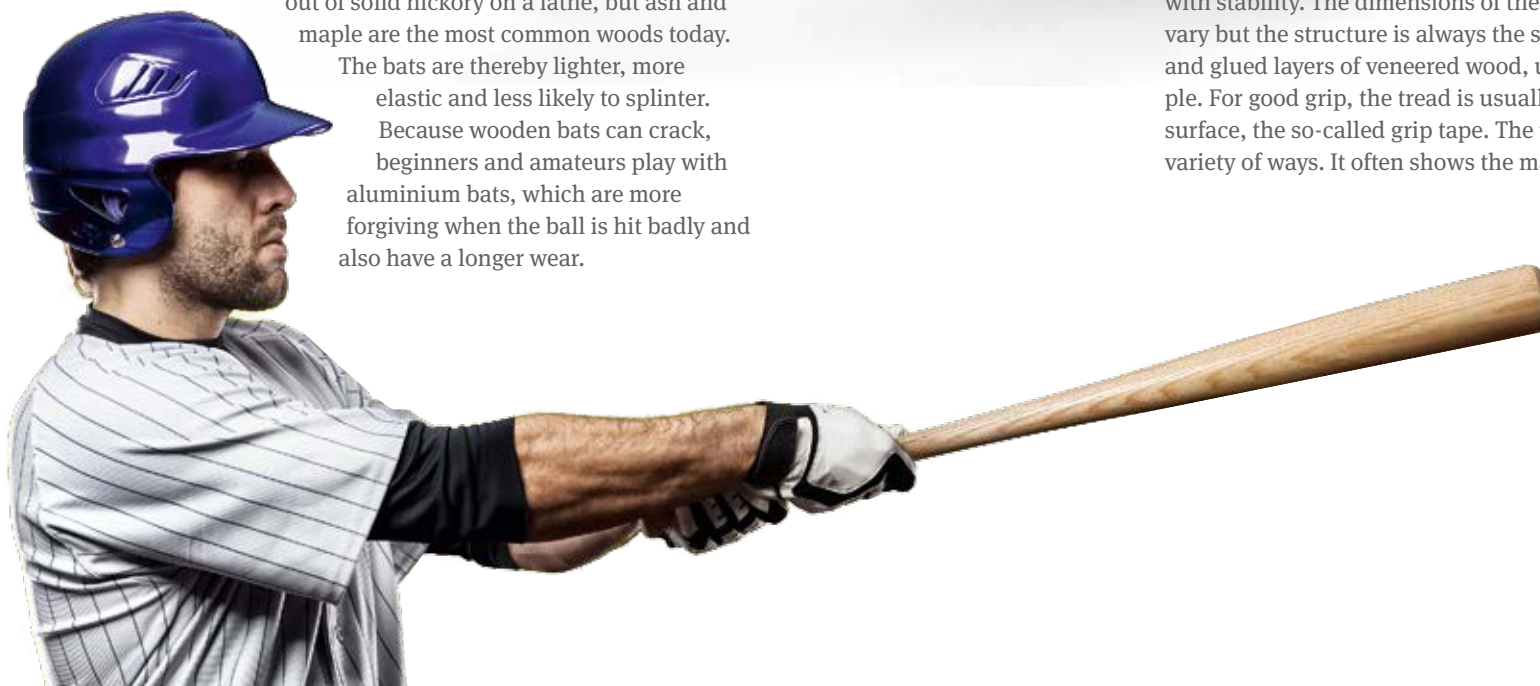
Jahn, the legendary German father of gymnastics, originally invented the parallel bars to prepare for gymnastics exercises on a horse; this was turned into an Olympic discipline in 1896. In their regulations, the Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG) requires that the bars be break-proof, have elasticity and a hygroscopic surface made of wood that is “free of errors”. The high performance equipment used today meets these requirements with a core made of glass fibre rods covered in wood veneer.



## 2 BASEBALL BAT

In baseball, the ball hits the bat at around 160 kilometres an hour and is then accelerated again by the impact. The batter feels straight away how well he has hit the ball thanks to the material – in professional leagues the use of wooden bats is prescribed. 100 hundred years ago bats used to be made out of solid hickory on a lathe, but ash and maple are the most common woods today.

The bats are thereby lighter, more elastic and less likely to splinter. Because wooden bats can crack, beginners and amateurs play with aluminium bats, which are more forgiving when the ball is hit badly and also have a longer wear.



## 3 POOL-BILLIARD CUE

The World Pool-Billiard Association doesn't prescribe the materials to use in the cue, but instead simply sets out requirements for the length, weight and width of the tip. Traditionally, however, the percentage of wood in a cue is high. The shaft on the top part is made of several pressed layers of maple on high quality, two-piece cues. This provides the necessary firmness and enables accurate striking of the ball. Players who work with a particularly high amount of effect also go for cues with softer wood on the top part. Varnished wood is also often used on the bottom part of the cue, which is sometimes adorned with exotic woods.



## 4 SKATEBOARD

When it comes to the skateboard, 'board' is already in the name. Wood, like no other material, combines dynamic vibration properties with stability. The dimensions of the board, also called the deck, can vary but the structure is always the same. It consists of seven pressed and glued layers of veneered wood, usually made of Canadian maple. For good grip, the tread is usually covered with a rough, black surface, the so-called grip tape. The underneath can be designed in a variety of ways. It often shows the manufacturer's logo.



## 5 TABLE TENNIS BAT

Table tennis players have had to change the type of ball used in years gone by – plastic replaced celluloid as a material. When it comes to the bat, on the other hand, the same still applies: “At least 85 per cent of the blade by thickness must be made of natural wood,” according to the rules. Attacking players opt for hard types of wood like beech, whilst defensive players prefer soft woods like birch. Professional bats consist of various layers: a laminated core made of soft wood, layers made of harder wood and a soft top layer. The glue and surface are also critical to the quality of the bat.







# Houses in buildings

The use of a building can change quickly these days. Modifying the structure is not always the right solution. Room-in-room concepts are setting a precedent.

AUTHOR Jan Ahrenberg

A ceiling height of around four metres gives plenty of freedom above one's head – yet converted Berlin industrial lofts rarely feel truly cosy. “Loft living” was one of the buzzwords in the property sector at the turn of the millennium. Living on former factory floors was seen as 'chic'. Even back then, however, interior designers joked that such a property was almost given away in terms of purchase price – compared with the heating costs and vast quantities of carpets, sofas, wallpaper and decorations that were necessary to make the cool halls halfway inhabitable.

An alternative to the decorative approach is currently leading to a very interesting trend: people are building indoor houses for spaces that are too big, like the architect, Sigurd Larsen. In December 2015 for the fashionable Berlin Michelberger Hotel, he designed two apartments in a typical Berlin building that used to accommodate workshops and manufacturing businesses – they featured just those kind of high ceilings and window fronts. “The task was to create a place of retreat,” says Sigurd Larsen, “where people who live in a hotel room for longer periods could feel at home.” The clientele for a temporary home-from-home tend to work in the

neighbourhood, with the Michelberger located around the corner from creative companies like MTV, Universal Music, fashion designers and TV production companies. For the design-loving guests, the Danish architect came up with something special: instead of creating artificial cosiness with opulent furniture, Persian rugs and cherubs, he preferred to build a complete home into the hotel room. Out of wood, of course.

“The construction houses a bedroom, a kitchen, a bathroom and a sauna,” explains Larsen. A staircase takes the residents to the second floor, where another bedroom is located – the guest room. There the home theme continues: large hinged windows open up a view to the bathroom and living room, which in context form the pool and patio, so to speak. “On the outside I opted for elegant white in order to retain a clear style. By contrast, the warm tone of the wood dominates the inside, radiating the cosy Alpine hut character.” This clear separation further underlines the architectural statement of the room-in-room solution, which reinterprets the floor plan with the simplest of means and thus leads to a new usage.

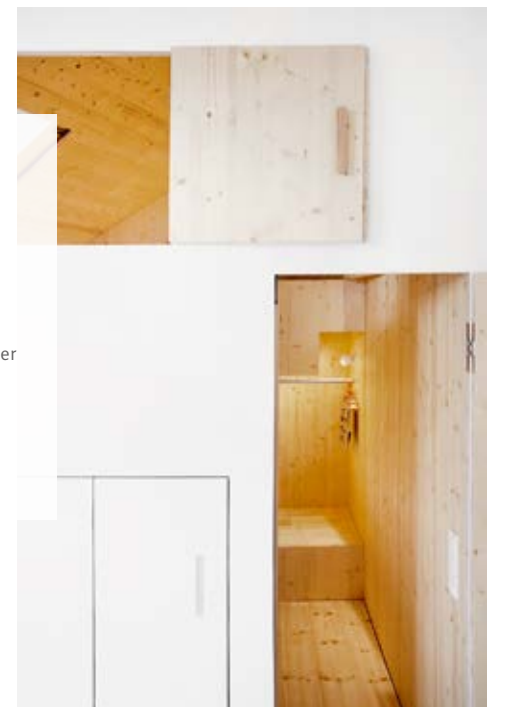
“As a material, wood was ideal for this task as it allows a high degree of prefab-



## HOTEL IN THE HALL

Place of retreat at the Michelberger

The architect, Sigurd Larsen, was expected to design two new apartments for the hotel in order to meet the needs of long-term residents. And where do you feel more at home than in your own home? Prefabricated in a joinery, Larsen's design was put together on site like a puzzle – only faster. Since December 2015, guests at the Michelberger have been able to stop the night in the two modern huts with an Alpine flair. And at the same time enjoy the view of the bathtub pool and patio sofa.



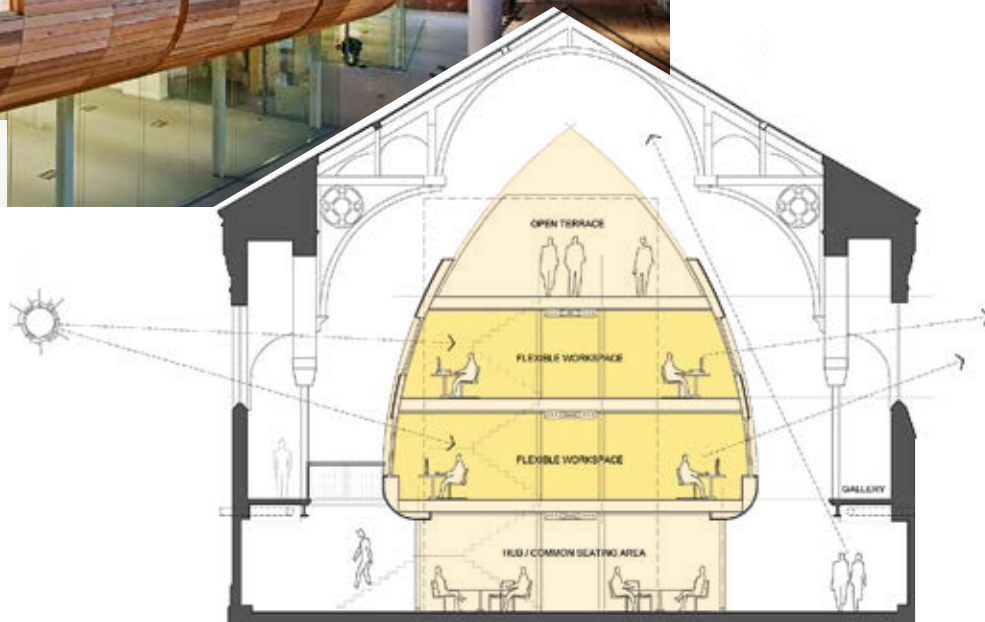




### OFFICES IN THE BATHS

A listed building as a home for start-ups

Ashton Old Baths is one of the most beautiful, still preserved public baths of the Victorian age in the British Isles. Although under listed building protection, it has been in ruins since the 1970s. An initiative in 2005 created new prospects for the building as an office space. The financing slowed the process. However, when the architectural firm MCAU came on board in 2015, things developed quickly: after just ten months, at the start of 2016, the conversion was complete – the effective room-in-room concept made the completion possible.



### BOX FOR OFFICE SLEEP

Sleepbox offers peace and quiet for the stressed out

Really a by-product of their work, over the last few years the Sleepbox has developed into a best-seller for the Arch Group, a Russian architectural firm. What was merely a design and an experimental idea in 2009 can now be found in more than 60 locations in airports, trade fairs and office buildings for short-term recuperation. After certification and standardisation for the American market, architects are now hoping for the final breakthrough. Boston is home to the first Sleepbox on American soil.



→ rication, thus meaning the room could be converted within a few days without closing the hotel,” the architect says. The playful interpretation of space thus also made business sense for the client.

Financial aspects were also part of the considerations for an in-house solution developed by the British architectural firm, MCAU, Modern City Architecture & Urbanism. Keeping the public baths in Ashton-Under-Lyne, not far from Manchester, from ruin required a cost-effective solution – they had stood empty as far back as the 1970s.

“Designing the whole building so that it could have been heated economi-

cally without destroying its structure, would have been impossible,” says the architect, Neil Brown, who was involved in the plans. When it was built in 1870, nobody gave a thought about energy efficiency. But they did about design: the Old Bath enjoys listed building status, meaning that huge interventions into its substance were prohibited from the start. “Our solution is completely independent of the existing structure, which remains untouched. Lines of sight have also been preserved.” Nevertheless, MCAU created around 650 m<sup>2</sup> of highly modern office space on four levels with flexible workstations, meeting rooms and a generous roof terrace – specially

designed for start-ups in the creative and Internet sector. Completed in February this year, the once dilapidated monument has since become a beacon of the district, which radiates into the newly emerging business quarter at its feet.

The fact that room-in-room solutions have what it takes to be standardised is demonstrated meanwhile by the Arch Group, a Russian architectural firm. Since 2009 it has been producing autonomous hotel rooms under the brand name “Sleepbox”, which, with a floor space measuring 3.7 square metres, can be installed in any indoor area. They are often found in places where intensive

work commitments meet a lack of opportunities to retreat. More than 60 are already in use worldwide at airports, trade fairs and conference centres. “We have to arrange our life in more and more flexible ways,” explains Mikhail Krymov, CEO of Sleepbox. “Living and working worlds are merging – at the same time we are confronted with cities that are sometimes centuries old, whose buildings cannot easily be adapted to our changing lifestyle.” In his view, room-in-room solutions fill the gap in the market perfectly: “They provide the necessary flexibility wherever existing spaces do not satisfy the needs of the users.” The Arch Group now has the American mar-

ket in its sights: since mid 2016, the first Sleepbox has been in use in a Boston co-working space. These are communal offices, where young entrepreneurs rent a workplace on a temporary basis. Until now, after working for hours, their heads have often ended up on the desk. Now they can indulge in a power-nap from time to time and then continue with their work refreshed.

So far, homely ash veneer has dominated in terms of design, although laminated MDF panels allow greater creative freedom. For the American business, Krymov is expecting more white-green models that would fit better in modern

working environments. Admittedly, that does not change anything about the properties of the material: affordable and climate-friendly, wood remains the material of choice. And it is also highly flexible – like the users of room-in-room solutions themselves.





PICTURE PUZZLE

Who is hiding in the forest?

He had to deal with a client who kept him in the dark and did not pay, but also knew exactly what they wanted: a three-storey construction made of cypress wood, with exactly one window and one door. He had no more than seven days to erect his construction and only the help of his family. The building was ultimately expected to accommodate non-paying residents with fundamentally different needs for months. What sounds like any other architect's nightmare, was for this righteous man simply the start of an even bigger adventure. But for whoever can still beget three sons at the age of 500, presumably no challenge is too big.

**Who was the blessed master carpenter?**

Send his name to **MORE@egger.com**. We will enter all the correct entries into a draw to win a pair of grenadilla “Alfons” sunglasses made by Kerbholz. The closing date for entries is 31.03.2017. The judge's decision is final.

In the picture quiz in MORE 08, the Viennese coffee shop chair was invented by Michael Thonet: master carpenter, design pioneer and founder of the bentwood furniture factory run by the Thonet brothers. Thank you for your answers. Thomas Janz from Neuenkirchen (DE) won the wooden watch made by WeWood.

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