

# “We are top of wood!”

**Bruno Abplanalp** | Chairman of the Board neue Holzbau AG

Bruno Abplanalp is the Chairman of the Board of Hidden Champion neue Holzbau AG in Lungern. The company is among the world leaders in the field of wood engineering and is expanding into new markets such as Great Britain. “Wood is the construction material of the future” and according to Bruno Abplanalp the neue Holzbau AG will continue to play a leading role in this.



**When did it become clear to you that the company „neue Holzbau AG“ in tranquil Lungern in the canton of Obwalden has the potential to advance to become a leading force in the field of timber construction engineering?**

Timber construction in Lungern has a very long tradition, as the first patent for timber element walls was filed by the brothers Gasser in 1916. Many wooden houses, kindergartens, school buildings etc. were built with the system from 1930 onwards. It was always clear to me that wood as a material has great potential in the construction of buildings. From the recruitment of employees from Interlaken to Lucerne, the Lungern site is a very interesting area for specialists. We want to play in the Champions League, this is only possible with good co-entrepreneurs who think like entrepreneurs and contribute their ideas.

**You are regarded as a visionary in timber construction, what are the limits from your point of view? Is there a construction project that could not be realized with wood?**

In the construction of buildings there are almost no more boundaries for the timber construction today, we already build skyscrapers up to 100m height and this is only the beginning. If we add all the environmental debates now and in the future, wood, which is always a renewable resource, will dominate building construction. However, the large viaducts in road construction with today's frequencies and loads are heavy and not cost-efficient to build with wood today.

**You have opened an office in London, what do you think about different markets? Like Asia?**

We are a small group in Lungern and must use our resources accordingly. London alone has more inhabitants than the entire country of Switzerland. It will take time to build up this market. The new Holzbau AG is the specialist in engineering wood construction and supplier of special wood components. There are around 1,000 wood-related architectural firms in the Greater London area - so we are only at the beginning of our trip to England.

Further markets will be added. At the moment we have beautiful projects in progress in Norway, and we were also able to supply beautiful wooden structures to Australia. The next market in which we would like to expand as niche players will be Canada.

**Wood lives! To what extent must this be taken into account during the construction process?**

Wood is a natural product with incredible characteristics: A lightweight material with great static properties, beautiful, comfortable, warm, harmonious, inspiring, activating and simply health-promoting. In timber construction, the client has process security through high prefabrication in controlled and air-conditioned production halls, cost and deadline security and a lifecycle approach.

**In your opinion, which was the most challenging project and why?**

There are three objects that spontaneously come to my mind: New construction of the competence centre for the Pilatus aircraft works in Bouchs with a free span of 52 x 200 m, two tennis halls on the Bürgenstock with a rhombic surface supporting structure, roof shape like a polished diamond and the new construction of the Matterhorn Glacier Ride „The highest 3S track in the world“ on the small Matterhorn at 3,821 m above sea level.

**Which object are you particularly proud of and why?**

The new school building in Sydney. Here the whole project was planned with Building Information Modeling (BIM). With Building Information Modeling (BIM), the physical building receives a digital twin. There,



those responsible can identify and solve existing problems in advance. This saves time and money. There was never an employee from the new Holzbau AG on site for a meeting. The transport of the special components in wood was shipped to Australia in large foot containers. The trip lasted about 3 months.

**Your role in the new Holzbau AG changed recently. How do you intend to strategically align the new Holzbau AG and where do you see the company in 10 years?**

During 2019, the structures in particular will be revised and adapted. Then we are involved in various interesting research projects in which new, forward-looking ideas are put into practice. Industry 4.0 will also be a major topic: What does this mean for the new Holzbau AG, where can or do we want to benefit from it? Together with the Department of Architecture, Wood and Construction (AHB) of the Bern University of Applied Sciences, we will submit a project to the CTI (Commission for Technology and Innovation of the Swiss Confederation) to help us introduce the digitalisation of industrial production in our company.

ferent types of wood extend the spectrum and application possibilities in architecture. In the forest grows a true miracle and supplies us the raw material sustainably, ecologically and always regionally renewable. For this we bind about one ton of CO<sub>2</sub> with each m<sup>3</sup> of wood used. There is no other building material that only approximately possesses all these positive properties.

Wood covers the question of aesthetics by nature, so to speak. The functionality is given with the structure of the wood and with new traversing techniques. As a result, aesthetics and functionality go hand in hand in timber construction.

**How do you see wood as an asset in a financial context?**

The climate debates and the demonstrations of young people all over the world will certainly have consequences and will not leave political and economic variables untouched. It may well be that major climate issues will become investment products in the future, i.e. we invest in the future and our environment.

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**Do you see aesthetics or functionality in the foreground in timber construction?**

Wood as a building material has a millennia-old tradition. Today, timber construction is more efficient than ever before. New processing and joining techniques have decisively increased the range of applications. With the development of the GSA® technology, the new Holzbau AG has achieved a leading position in fastening technology. Large spans, elegant arches and filigree structures are no longer a problem. Dif-

**What makes the new Holzbau AG Lungern unique?**

The new Holzbau AG accompanies its customers from the earliest stage (project idea) to the realization. We are the link between the builder, the woodworker, the carpenters, the architects and the engineers. We make sensible use of wood as a raw material.

We are TOPOFWOOD.



**Bruno Abplanalp**

Bruno Abplanalp originally completed an apprenticeship as a carpenter. After various further training courses in management and engineering, he was appointed CEO of the new Holzbau AG in Lungern in 2010 after working there for 12 years. This year Bruno Abplanalp moved to the Board of Directors, where he holds the role of Chairman.