

Pioneering spirit from the Black Forest: Braun & Würfele goes international with the “German quality” trump card

Technical expertise, innovative products and a fresh pioneering spirit are the triple pillars underpinning the extraordinary success of the company Braun & Würfele in Baiersbronn. With the new BOF 311 5-axis machine, the company has now taken on board a whole new high-tech capability. From crash barriers to special click connections and bespoke solutions, this multifaceted specialist firm supplies everything to do with timber for gardens, roadways and around houses – across the whole of Europe.

Like his grandfather and company founder Ernst Braun did before him, today's Chief Executive Jochen Würfele focuses on the raw material timber as the central element of its 100-year company history. It is first and foremost experience gathered over several generations that distinguishes Würfele and his company today. Braun & Würfele began its career in 1920 as a timber yard, processing round timber for the production of posts, and an impregnation plant, going from strength to strength with the production of frames, ceiling beams, stakes and palisades. Over almost a century to the present day, this family firm has become a multifaceted specialist in timber for gardens and sophisticated terrace construction systems with ideas for gardens, landscapes and architecture.

The company's present product portfolio addresses every conceivable requirement, encompassing round timbers, terrace timbers, WPC, decorative and windbreaker elements, fences, palisades, carports, pergolas, garden accessories, playground equipment – in fact anything to do with timber in the open air. Braun & Würfele presents its extensive product range to its customers with a comprehensive 170-page catalogue, but its real strength lies beyond the printed page: The standard catalogue range is complemented by add-ons,

bespoke products and unusual solutions produced individually to customer order.

New trends – a new machine

The purchase of a new HOMAG BOF 311 5-axis machine around two years ago paved the way for Jochen Würfele and his 27 employees to develop and market an array of new products. The purchase decision was sparked by underlying changes and trends in the product spectrum, as well as customer expectations. As Jochen Würfele explains: “It was inevitable that the palisade trend would grind to a halt eventually. This prompted us to look for ways to extend our portfolio. Added to this was pressure from Eastern markets.” Since investing in the CNC machine, the company’s product range has increased enormously. “There is practically nothing we can’t produce today”, enthuses Würfele.

Road crash barriers and horse racing tracks

Alongside the focal business area “Garden timber – innovative products and systems for specialist wood retail”, Braun & Würfele is also keen to develop new products and services. Whether parts are simple or highly complex to manufacture makes very little difference. One example are components for decking systems made of wood or mobile barriers for city horse racing tracks in Italy, equipped with a specially developed puzzle-like flexible locking connector system. “This type of connector would have been impossible to produce before we acquired the new machine”, continued the Chief Executive.

Right decision: 5 axes

The BOF 311 5-axis machine from HOMAG has a five-meter processing length and is fitted with a high-powered and durable DRIVE 5+ 5-axis spindle. Würfele can use this to process any optional type of connection: “I am really glad I opted for 5-axis processing. It allows me to produce individually – the emphasis here is not on mass production. We need to process a lot of short components, which allows me to load “our HOMAG” with two parts at once for alternating

operation. We can also process several different levels in a single clamping process, saving an enormous amount of time and ensuring extreme fitting accuracy, particularly with round timber.”

These were the considerations which decided him against investing in a typical joinery machine. Particularly against the backdrop of unrelenting changes to the product spectrum, this would have offered him far less flexibility and less scope for application than the processing center.

The all-rounder among machines

The HOMAG BOF 311 has now become the highlight of the Braun & Würfele machine base. Previously, Würfele worked exclusively with simple machines such as trim saws and slot mortising machines. “Against this backdrop, deciding to invest in a CNC machine was a major step forward for us. The BOF 311 is a whole new departure for our machine base, which is otherwise made up of standard machines”, explains the CEO. Bespoke production is nothing new for the company, but producing to customer order has now moved onto a whole new dimension of speed and flexibility.

Everything hinges on the software

Not only the machine but naturally also the right software plays a key role here. Using variable 3D programming with wood**WOP** 6.0, it is a simple matter to produce to individual customer order or make specific adjustments as required. “This facility has made us unbelievably fast. We can actually check the feasibility of any customer request right at the enquiry stage”, says Würfele. The processing simulation tool wood**Motion** also comes into its own here: On the basis of the real machine model, it simulates the machine’s work steps, depicts the processing operations graphically at the workpiece and calculates the processing time precisely to the second – all at the office PC screen. This allows the programmer to check whether all processing steps are actually possible as early as the production engineering stage. This facility also produces important information for capacity planning and cost estimation. “The

results produced by wood**Motion** are impressively accurate”, explains Würfele.

From the Black Forest to the rest of the world

Braun & Würfele enjoys a reputation far beyond Baiersbronn and the surrounding area. Over 50% of Braun & Würfele’s production output now finds its way from the heart of the Black Forest to France, Italy, Austria and Switzerland. This represents a major benefit for the company, which is now able to work towards two high seasons. In Germany, its main season is the spring, while Braun & Würfele also receive a large influx of orders from its other export destinations also in the autumn. Its customers across Europe include primarily specialist retailers and distributors as well as playground equipment producers and processors.

History in the making: Black Forest quality in demand

The family firm looks back on almost a hundred years of corporate history – and is set to continue its upward development. 1986 was a particular milestone for the company, when it moved from Baiersbronn to its current production facility extending over two hectares. The next target Jochen Würfele has set himself is to further extend the ratio of articles produced in-house. “We took the first step in this direction when we decided to invest in the HOMAG BOF 311. The second is due to take place in mid 2012, when we construct an additional new assembly hall.”

Würfele and his staff are currently working to 100 per cent capacity. Many parts have to be processed at weekends due to lack of time during the week. The CEO takes stock: “Acquiring the 5-axis machine has meant a quantum leap for us in terms of flexibility and processing quality. We are now able to tackle projects which would never have been possible, and are producing in-house many of the articles we previously had to buy in. The investment is already paying dividends!”

Pictures courtesy of: HOMAG Holzbearbeitungssysteme GmbH



Fig. 1:
5-axis head DRIVE5+



Fig. 2:
The HOMAG 5-axis processing center BOF 211



Fig. 3:
CEO Jochen Würfele



Fig 4:
Processing round timber elements



Fig. 5:

Puzzle connector system for mobile barriers at city horse racing tracks

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