

"Trade and craft sector rationalises via logistics":

Mezzanine panel storage creates space

High-quality and very exclusive – such is the furniture of the Schlechter joinery in Wuppertal. One employee is responsible for the complex production of the exquisite items from start to finish. He accompanies the furniture from the parts list to assembly. Only cutting and CNC processing are "purchased" from his colleagues.

This production concept resulted from a restructuring of the cutting section: A new saw-storage combination by HOLZMA and BARGSTEDT combined with HOLZMA optimisation and offcut management, both being used for the first time, allowed for the new, significantly more efficient organisation of work. With pride, the two Managing Directors, Herbert and Jörg Schlechter, look back on what they have achieved.

"A company of our size cannot survive on business from Wuppertal alone," says Senior MD Herbert Schlechter. So, Schlechter serves customers from across the globe. A villa in Switzerland, a city apartment in Vienna, a showroom in New York – wherever exclusive furniture is required, the firm from Wuppertal is at the ready. In addition to these private interior fittings and furnishings (a total of around 40%) they also produce business furnishings (around 60%). "Around half of our orders come from invitations to tender," says Junior MD Jörg Schlechter. "All others come to us through recommendations." A lot is produced with a batch size of 1, but now and again we are also commissioned with small volume production runs of up to a maximum of around 50 units.

The company's positioning in the discerning upmarket sector works because quality is top priority at Schlechter. "Quality is more important than ever before,"

says Herbert Schlechter categorically, "the customer justifiably makes very high demands. And we are happy to meet these demands." These include promptness, a plausible price-performance ratio as well as reliable service: "Regardless of where something is – we will come by for it." It's no wonder then that the two Schlechters won't hand over the sceptre of customer care: there is no external sales force and they have set constant accessibility as top priority for themselves. You will not find pure "pen pushers" in this management squad.

The fact that the two Schlechters have kept their feet on the ground despite the company's good situation is certainly based in the long history of the company, which has also gone through some tough, uncertain times. In 1931, Lorenz Schlechter founded the joinery in Wuppertal. Shortly afterwards, the building was twice destroyed in the war – but each time it was courageously rebuilt. After a long search for a successor, Lorenz Schlechter's nephew, Herbert Schlechter, took over the company. In 1997, his son Jörg joined him and today the two men are managing directors with equal rights, who share all tasks.

"At some point in the course of these years we had to make a decision – 'remain small fry or not,'" says Herbert Schlechter. We decided on "or not" – and as a result, the company has expanded year after year. In the end, father and son purchased their own new building in Wuppertal Elberfeld in 1992. "At the time, I was firmly convinced that it was all much too big," smiles Herbert Schlechter.

But he couldn't have been more wrong for space soon became tighter – so tight that the employees were "tripping over each other": The paintshop grew with the result that cutting and delivery started to get in the way. "We lost a lot of time back then," says Jörg Schlechter. "One person always had to wait, because his path crossed someone else's." At the same time, the horizontal panel-sizing saw approached the end of its service life and a replacement investment was imminent. Ideally, or so we hoped, we would get a horizontal panel storage facility to go with a new saw.

But where would it all go? Herbert Schlechter comes to the point: "Height in a business like ours is never a problem, but it doesn't take long to use up the full width." Together with the employees, they searched for a solution – and ultimately came up with an unusual but ingenious idea: move the storage facility to a "mezzanine floor".

No sooner said than done: An additional mezzanine floor was installed in the production hall for the storage facility – with a sturdy wooden floor substructure. "We were able to gain an additional 275 m² of working area in this way," says Herbert Schlechter with pride. "In addition, we have enough space to purchase panels in bulk and therefore save money." Another advantage: previously, delivered panels used to pile up in front of the saw and make it difficult to achieve efficient processes. Today, everything piles up after being cut – because cutting has become so much faster that there are no longer any bottlenecks in the subsequent stations.

After intensive talks, the Schlechters chose their new cutting centre machines from the range provided by the HOMAG Group: the HOLZMA HPP 350 profiLine panel-sizing saw with the BARGSTEDT TLF 410 storage system. Herbert Schlechter justifies the decision: "We were familiar with HOLZMA, but not with BARGSTEDT. My son discovered the manufacturer at a trade fair and was impressed by the technology. In addition, we were impressed by the fact that all the products come from one company – so we have one point of contact and technical compatibility. Furthermore, we wanted to go with a German provider, in order to be able to access support services as quickly as possible when required. And another plus point: We are very satisfied with our HOMAG BOF 41K processing centre."

The fine details were agreed together with Maschinen Kaul from Düsseldorf, the regional retail partner of the HOMAG Group. The TLF 410 horizontal panel

storage system by BARGSTEDT measures 30 x 8 m and has 15 storage positions as well as an advance stacking position. The stack height of 600 mm creates sufficient storage space. The traverse is equipped with a turning device in order to drop the panels onto the saw – which is on a raised platform on the ground floor – in the right orientation. The saw itself is a single saw with storage control connection. It has some extras such as grooving and labelling. This latter option provides specifications for the subsequent processing steps. The storage system and saw are controlled conveniently from one workstation. The HOLZMA Cut Rite optimisation software is likewise operated from the saw's monitor. Cut Rite also handles offcut management, resulting in additional savings.

Kaul sales manager Hans-Jürgen Marx: "Anyone in the cutting business today has to give thought to rationalisation. In the trade sector, it is not the volume that is crucial, but the logistics." And thanks to the joint planning, Schlechter was actually able to record improvements. Jörg Schlechter: "Before, we used to work in two shifts in peak times, but today one shift is enough. In other respects it's difficult to measure in figures, but we are certain that the work procedure is more efficient, more effective and more compressed."

No wonder, for with the new saw-storage combination, the production organisation has changed completely. Today, proposals from customers, designers and architects arrive in the work preparation department. There, the ideas are converted into technical drawings. Jörg Schlechter: "As a special service, all our customers receive true-to-detail CAD plans." Once given the go-ahead, the finished plan goes to the responsible employee in the production hall. He then uses one of the laptops directly in the hall to create the parts lists (Excel) and sends them to the saw via WiFi. There, they are optimised using the HOLZMA software Cut Rite, the panels are prepared in the storage area and the saw then works through the plan. The finished, cut parts are collected by the employee and conveniently rolled, on a carriage, to the next processing station. He stays with "his" order until the end.

Well-trained employees are the key to this principle. "More than half of our employees have been with our company for more than 15 years," reports Herbert Schlechter proudly. "We prefer to train our own staff." And Jörg Schlechter adds: "We were happy to put up with the initial problems, until everyone was familiar with the laptop and the new system – we view this type of system change over the long term."

Pictures

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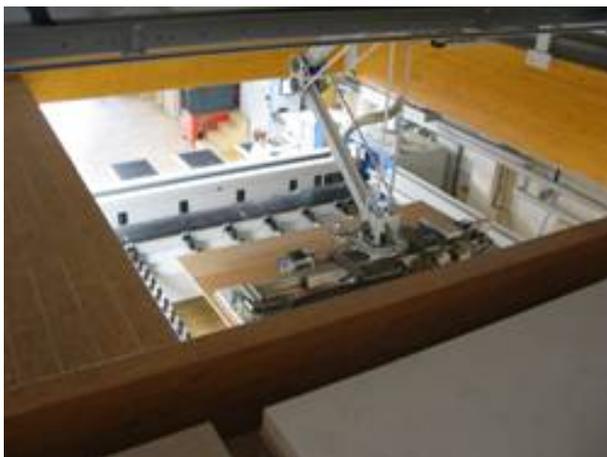
HOLZMA HPP 350 profiLine with storage control connection and extras such as "labelling"



Above the saw is the intermediate level: the proprietary wooden construction accommodates the 30 x 8 m BARGSTEDT TLF 410 storage system with 15 positions and an advance stacking position. This created 275 m² of additional working area on the ground.



View from the storage area to the production hall



View from the storage area to the rear machine table of the saw



The parts list is created in the hall: The employee responsible for the order fetches one of the laptops, creates the parts list based on the plan and sends it

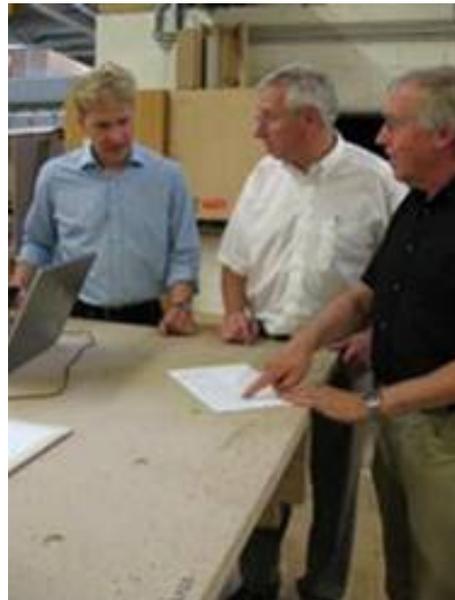
via WiFi to the saw for optimisation.



The Managing Directors Herbert (left) and Jörg Schlechter (right) with the consultant from Maschinen Kaul, Hans-Jürgen Marx.



The Managing Directors Herbert (right) and Jörg Schlechter (left) with the consultant from Maschinen Kaul, Hans-Jürgen Marx.





High-quality furnishings by Schlechter

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