Olwo Group

Olwo, which started out as a sawmill, is now one of Switzerland’s largest commercial companies dealing in wood-based materials. A conversation with CEO Markus Lädrach. Page 04

Domaine de Montmollin

The de Montmollin family has produced wine since the 17th century. Siblings Benoit de Montmollin and Rachel Billeter are continually striving to improve their products. Page 12

Alpnach Norm

Starting from the ground up, Theo Breisacher founded a cabinet factory in Alpnach. With pride and gratitude, his daughter, CEO Brigitte Breisacher, is making the Alpnach name known across Switzerland. Page 26

Caffè Chicco d’Oro

At Chicco d’Oro, the Valsangiacomo family stands for continuity: Throughout the company’s history, the family’s values, like the aroma of coffee beans, have remained constant. Page 20
Tradition and progress

Dear entrepreneur

Today the Swiss economy is driven by high tech, automation, and innovation. So where do we find tradition? Everywhere, actually – as we learned. A company like Olwo, for example, combines the oldest construction material – wood – and three generations of family and company history with a willingness to try new things, and if necessary to discard the tried and true. Tradition, in a positive sense, means constantly rediscovering the things that are familiar and that we have come to rely on. Abandoning tradition for something new is the other side of the coin, and it often requires courage and the ability to overcome resistance. Maintaining tradition while seeking progress – that’s the recipe for long-term success.

At Credit Suisse, which has served its clients for 162 years, we are proud of our history. The knowledge and experience gained over the years guide us as we collaborate with you. They form the basis for a sustainable business relationship, built on mutual trust.

I hope you will enjoy this issue of Entrepreneur magazine.

Yours sincerely

Andreas Gerber
Head of SME Business Switzerland
Wood in motion
The Olwo Group’s roots may be in its sawmill and planing works, but the lion’s share of its revenue now comes from sales of engineered wood products. Whether it’s an auction in an open field, global trade, or the online shop – Managing Director Markus Lädrach is at home in any sales setting.

Mr. Lädrach, your grandfather founded Olwo AG in 1926. What do you think would impress and surprise him most if he were to see the company today? He would still recognize and feel at home in the sawmill, even if everything is much bigger and computer-operated – and everything happens at a much faster pace. He would be surprised to see that so many people work in offices nowadays and we have far fewer workers on the shop floor. He would be impressed by our business volume – we generate 70 million francs in revenue each year – and by our logistics.

You mentioned the fact that Olwo is far more than a sawmill now. You also trade in wood products. Can you give us a rough outline of what your company does? In very general terms, our operations break down into three areas. In the sawmill and planing works, we manufacture products from softwoods. Our main customers for these products are industrial firms, carpentry shops, and the construction industry. In the area of hardwoods, our main customers are joiners. And finally, we also sell products that we do not produce ourselves: engineered wood products, wood flooring, skylights, and decking materials. We have around 3,000 products in our catalog.

Olwo’s mills process fir and spruce logs. Harder woods require different saw blades.
Is most of your business local? You probably don’t export logs to China, do you?
No. But China’s not as far-fetched as you might think. Wood that’s traded comes from all over the world – and China is right up there at the top. The Chinese have state-of-the-art equipment and cheap labor and shipping is also quite inexpensive. That makes for a crazy situation: European wood gets shipped to China for processing and then the products are shipped back to Europe. For example, more and more wood flooring materials are coming from China.

As a layperson, I imagined wood trading to be done in a much more traditional way.
Sales of logs and high-grade wood are still very much done the old-fashioned way. We hold auctions directly in a field at the edge of the forest. The logs are laid out there for buyers – sawyers or timber merchants – to inspect. Some logs go for record prices.

Do the Swiss prefer to buy Swiss wood?
There is a definite trend towards Swiss wood. The government in Bern has made a clear commitment to buying Swiss wood and sustainability certainly plays a role. For us as well. I won’t send our trucks through the Baregg tunnel. That just doesn’t make sense. There’s a very clear market for our trade products, covering central and western Switzerland. But we buy our trade products on the global market: 60 to 70 percent of them come from Central Europe.

So, you import but don’t export?
Not quite. We export some of the wood from our mills to neighboring countries, primarily Italy, which is a wood-importing country. Italy has a large number of companies in the packaging industry that need lower-quality wood. This sector has practically disappeared in Switzerland. So, we don’t have a market here for the by-products that automatically arise from the milling process. Wood is a bit like meat: It isn’t all filet mignon.

What role does your bank play in your business abroad?
Our factors of production are calculated in Swiss francs, as are raw materials. For sawn timber, there is a global market price in euros per cubic meter. If the franc is too strong or moves outside a certain range, we have a problem. So we are in regular contact with Credit Suisse to hedge currency risks. Our exports to Italy also present a unique situation. There is a high risk of payment default and some customers take 90 days or more to pay. In collaboration with our advisor at the bank, we decided to use factoring to manage those risks.

Isn’t factoring a sort of liquidity guarantee?
Exactly. Factoring is actually designed for young, fast-growing companies that may not be in a position to pay their suppliers’ invoices as fast as they generate them. But it works perfectly for our situation. It allows us to protect ourselves against the risk of default.

That sounds like an unconventional solution. Is that typical of Credit Suisse?
I don’t know if it’s typical but I can say that our client advisor is very interested in understanding our business and finding the best solutions for us. The thing I appreciate most about our bank is the great continuity. There has been very little change in our advisors in the last 20 years. That allows strong, long-standing relationships to develop. I like that.

How does Olwo rank in terms of the competition on the Swiss wood market?
We are among the top five sawmills in Switzerland. And we are one of the biggest wood merchants operating at a single site. We’re also not at any great risk of our business being eroded by global traders since shipping by mail or drone just isn’t practical for many of our products.

A trading operation probably requires a large warehouse …
Yes. It’s imperative. Our warehouse has grown as the company has grown. Meanwhile, our customers’ warehouses are shrinking. But we have to have the product on hand. Globalization is a real factor for us and we have to be able to deliver quickly. If customers order something today and I can’t deliver it tomorrow, they’ll go to another supplier. We have a lot of capital tied up in our warehouse but it’s worth it. We regularly check inventory turnover and streamline our logistics.
“You have to let go of some traditions to make way for new ones.”

Olwo makes use of the entire log. Timber waste is pressed into pellets and sold as fuel.

Digitalization has changed a sawyer’s work dramatically in recent years.
What options does automation open up for your business?
Automation is already quite far advanced in our production and logistics. We recently launched online ordering for our products. Our online shop is our way of positioning a traditional company in a modern marketplace.

Do you see the most growth potential there?
I firmly believe that there is enormous potential for growth in areas that we have not even imagined yet.

What direction do you think it could take?
Wood is a fascinating material. It's already possible to isolate individual substances that can be used in the food industry or in the chemical industry, for instance in composites or adhesives.

Is there not a problem with availability?
Wood is not an infinite resource.
There are many types of wood out there that are hardly being used today. For example, beech is still mostly used for fuel. We have to put more thought into these areas. In terms of really new territory, we are watching developments at the Swiss Federal Laboratories for Materials Science and Technology (Empa) and at the University of Applied Sciences in Biel. As I see it, it's up to us to keep our eyes open for new uses.

Does your company have any specific traditions that you're particularly attached to?
You have to let go of some traditions to make way for new ones. At our site in Worb, we will soon be tearing down the house our grandparents lived in. But there are also traditions we will continue. Our company gives every employee a package of Kambly biscuits and a five franc coin on their birthday – a tradition my grandmother started. Even if the five franc piece isn’t worth as much today as it once was, it’s a lovely tradition and we’ll stick to it.
You have been handling Olwo’s account as their client advisor for four years now. What is your experience with the company?
Olwo uses a great number of our products and services – for instance, leasing, factoring, mortgages, and currency hedging. That makes our work together intense and challenging. But it also gives me the opportunity to draw from a very wide range of options. The corporate structure is also interesting, since it consists of three companies. They may all be in the same general industry but each one is organized a bit differently.

Are you familiar with each of their business lines, down to the finest details?
No. I would be lying if I said I were. The important thing is to understand the client’s business model and know the challenges and risks they face as well as the opportunities. That is what makes it possible to give truly competent advice. I might involve a specialist depending on the matter to be discussed. As a large bank, we have huge potential there. For example, I brought a tax expert along for our last meeting to discuss Tax Proposal 17 and 1f pension plans.

How do you cultivate your relationship with a client like Olwo?
By trying to deliver the best, most competent, solution-based service I can. I want to understand what makes my clients tick and what can get them where they want to go. As the Bank for Entrepreneurs, we don’t want to just offer banking products; we want to provide the companies and their owners with holistic advice. Markus Lädrach, like many other successful businesspeople, is part of our Entrepreneurs Community, a platform that provides entrepreneurs with exciting, engaging networking opportunities.
Stage and spring board

The 100 most promising Swiss start-ups are recognized annually at the Top 100 Swiss Start-up Award Night. Making it onto the list may not mean that a company has made it, though it does provide official recognition of the company’s potential – which can be worth millions.

Zurich’s Maag Hall was packed to the rafters on a warm September evening in 2018. The atmosphere buzzed with excitement as the organizers from Venturelab open the ceremony. For the nominees, a spot in the prestigious ranking means much more than a trophy to display in the break room.

Business angels and Chinese backers
A start-up can be no more than five years old in order to snare one of the 100 sought-after spots, and 2018 saw 47 companies added to the list. A few figures show just how fast things are moving on the Swiss start-up scene. The companies have created 5,197 jobs since the list was first launched in 2011, with the six most successful raising investment capital totaling 235 million Swiss francs in the last twelve months.

Because, at the same time, the event focuses on bringing start-ups and investors together. In addition to established Swiss investors, the organizers facilitate contacts to investors from Silicon Valley and numerous wealthy individuals, also known as business angels. Interest in the young Swiss companies is also growing among Chinese capital providers, and this year’s event catalogue was published in Chinese for the first time.

Ava heads to China
An hour later, all eyes in the Maag Hall were on Andreas Gerber. As the Head of SME Business at Credit Suisse and President of the Swiss Venture Club, he represents two of the event’s most important key partners. He also had the honor of announcing the name of the winning business. “The winner of the 2018 Top 100 Start-up Award is – Ava!” Gerber proclaimed, congratulating the jubilant winners. Ava are no strangers to winning, as they also came away with the coveted trophy last year.

“We are just thrilled,” exclaimed Pascal Koenig, CEO of Ava, thirty minutes later. As he was on stage with his team few minutes earlier, he made the audience laugh with his one-word response to what the young company makes: “Babies.” The medical technology company produces a device to track a woman’s menstrual cycle, with additional functions to be added in the future.

In Koenig’s words: “The Top 100 ranking provides the investors with security. It serves as a seal of quality.
Our win last year absolutely contributed to the 30 million Swiss franc investment round that we have just concluded. Soon, Ava will redeem the prize from Credit Suisse—an entrepreneur trip to China. “It’s a great deal more to us than simply a trip. We just opened an office in Hong Kong, and we feel there is enormous potential in China. We want to use this trip to talk to people who understand the Chinese economic system. We would like to meet key people and learn from others’ mistakes. Luckily, by winning in both 2017 and 2018, we’ve received two invitations,” Koenig said with a smile.

“The entrepreneur trip to China represents a great deal more to us than just a trip.”

Industries, regions, and more women making the list

Bestmile came away with second place in the Top 100 ranking. The company from Lausanne develops software for managing fleets of autonomous vehicles. Third place went to another company from Lausanne: Lunaphore. The medtech company is involved with something called personalized medicine. Specifically, that means that it develops tests aimed at making tissue analyses more efficient.

The first three spots on the list also reflect Switzerland’s two most important regions for start-ups. The canton of Vaud has 24 companies on this year’s list, and Zurich 46. As for the industries represented, software, biotechnology, engineering, and medical technology dominate the ranking with a total of 67 spots. Women are also on the rise on the 2018 list: 28 of the start-ups were either founded by a woman or have a woman on their management team. Organizers of the Top 100 Start-up Award predict that new investment records will be set in the months to come. The 2019 Top 100 is likely to be interesting.
The lunar calendar and spontaneous fermentation

Family-owned Domaine de Montmollin, now led by Benoît de Montmollin and his sister, Rachel Billeter, has been producing wine since the 17th century. The siblings are constantly working to make their wine even better – rediscovering traditions that had long been forgotten.

Text: Mariska Beirne

Time seems to have stood still in the winemaking village of Auvernier, nestled on the shores of Lake Neuchâtel in Switzerland. The Grand Rue, paved with cobblestones and lined with stately villas dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries, is as picture-perfect as a movie set. One of the buildings, with thick walls and a charming tower, belongs to the winery Domaine de Montmollin.

Winegrowers since the 17th century
“Our great-grandfather founded the Domaine de Montmollin winery in 1937, and our forebears have been vintners since the 17th century,” says Benoît de Montmollin, who shares the leadership of the company with his sister, Rachel Billeter. She opens the building’s heavy oak front door. A massive stone staircase leads to the upper floors, which house the company’s administrative offices – Rachel Billeter’s domain. At the left is the entrance to the cellar, where Benoît de Montmollin works. The racks in the cellar salesroom are filled from floor to ceiling with wine bottles, and in the middle of the room are three wine barrels that are used as tables for wine tastings. “About 50 percent of our wine is sold to restaurants. Another 40 percent goes to wine retailers and major distributors, and the rest to private individuals,” Benoît de Montmollin explains as we walk past smaller oak barrels, where wine – mainly Pinot Noir – is aged for two years before being bottled. Another room holds large chrome-plated fermentation tanks.

Rediscovering a venerable tradition
Fermentation takes place with the help of yeast cultures, which convert the sugar content of grape juice into alcohol. Originally, this process would occur spontaneously, triggered by the naturally occurring yeasts that – like other microbes – are present everywhere. Today vineyards are home to some 150 strains of yeast. The yeast feeds on the sugar that seeps out of even the tiniest cracks in the grapes’ surfaces. In the juice, the yeast continues to multiply until the sugar has been exhausted.
Family-owned Domaine de Montmollin, now led by Benoit de Montmollin and his sister, Rachel Billeter, has been producing wine since the 17th century. The siblings are constantly working to make their wine even better – rediscovering traditions that had long been forgotten.
About 100 years ago, however, almost all vintners began to use cultured yeast. That minimized the risk that undesirable microbes would take over the fermentation process and render the wine undrinkable. With naturally occurring yeast, which loses its potency more quickly, the fermentation process would sometimes stop prematurely. Despite these challenges, the de Montmollins currently rely on spontaneous fermentation in the production of roughly ten percent of their wine. “It’s a risk, but also an opportunity,” the young vintner explains. “Adding warm cultured yeast can destroy certain aromas, and we want to prevent that. Our focus is on quality, and fermentation is one of the many factors that can be adjusted to produce a better wine.”

**Pesticide-free production**
The company decided to shift to Demeter cultivation methods in an effort to further improve quality. “Opting for biodynamic production, following the Demeter guidelines, takes us a step beyond organic farming,” says Rachel Billeter. Her brother explains: “In keeping with the Demeter approach, we follow the lunar calendar. There are two or three days every month when the grapes should be left alone. We use that time to repair our machines or take care of administrative tasks.” It should also be noted that biodynamic cultivation requires more work in the vineyard. The conventional approach is to apply herbicides, but the de Montmollins use mechanical means to control weeds. The grapes are also frequently sprayed – but instead of synthetic pesticides, the winery applies herbal sprays, which are not absorbed by the plants. In addition, less copper is used in the vineyards, although it remains impossible to eliminate it completely. “We’ve conducted tests, and they’ve shown that organic wine is more expressive and aromatic than conventional wine,” Benoit de Montmollin explains. “Also, we simply don’t want to have pesticides in our wine.” The many awards on display in the salesroom are evidence that customers appreciate this high quality.

**A challenge for the Credit Suisse experts**
What does their father think of natural fermentation and biodynamic cultivation methods? “He supports everything we do. In fact, he was the one who originally introduced organic methods,” de Montmollin says with a smile. The siblings officially succeeded their father as heads of the company on January 1, 2017. “Our bank, Credit Suisse, and its team provided outstanding support throughout the process,” Benoit de Montmollin recalls. His sister adds: “We were quite a challenge for the Credit Suisse lawyers. Not because our corporate structure was particularly complicated, but because there are so many agricultural laws to consider when transferring a winemaking business to new ownership. The Credit Suisse experts worked closely with the Office of Agricultural Affairs in the canton of Neuchâtel.” Since the process was completed nearly two years ago, contacts with the bank are now less frequent. “Now we interact with the bank only for brief periods, when we conclude a new lease – right now for five tractors – and things always go very smoothly. We leased our harvesting robot at first, but it’s since been paid off,” says de Montmollin.

**Experimenting with new grape varieties**
The winery uses its robot in the more level areas of the vineyard. The robot harvests about 80 percent of the grapes, but the de Montmollins still need to hire about

“My dream is to produce a wine without any sulfites at all. My head is full of ideas like that.”
25 additional workers for the harvest. "We are the largest wine producer in the canton of Neuchâtel that uses only its own grapes. Others produce more wine, but they buy grapes from external sources," de Montmollin tells us. "We don’t want to use grapes we haven’t grown ourselves; if we did, we wouldn’t be able to control the quality of our wine," says Rachel Billeter. While Chasselas and Pinot Noir are the grapes traditionally grown in the Lake Neuchâtel region, Domaine de Montmollin currently produces wines made from 11 different varieties. As de Montmollin explains, "We have 47 hectares of land, which gives us room for experimentation. We’ve planted Syrah and Viognier grapes, for example. Some say that a Syrah wine doesn’t suit the Lake Neuchâtel region, but we don’t pay them any mind. We want to find out what’s possible. Overall, climate change is certainly not a good thing, but it does provide us with new opportunities."

**Time to mature**

Billeter and de Montmollin have many plans that they intend to pursue in the coming years: “My dream is to produce a wine without any sulfites at all. My head is full of ideas like that,” de Montmollin says, smiling. Asked whether he would use microorganisms to accelerate the aging process, he is aghast: “We are very traditional in that respect. Wine needs time to mature, and we need time to produce a high-quality wine. At Domaine de Montmollin, we have a special relationship with time – but time is by no means standing still.”

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**Domaine de Montmollin SA**

The company, founded in Auvernier in 1937, is currently led by siblings Rachel Billeter and Benoît de Montmollin, members of the fourth generation of owners. The vineyard extends over an area of 47 hectares and produces approximately 300,000 liters of wine each year. Pinot Noir accounts for 55 percent of the total and Chasselas for another 25 percent. The remaining 20 percent is made up of nine other grape varieties. The company employs 17 people in the winter, an additional 10 in the summer, and 25 more during harvest season. [domainedemontmollin.ch](http://domainedemontmollin.ch)
In real economic terms, Switzerland is the world’s most progressive country. Still, the Swiss people would like to see even more progress – but to differing degrees in different areas. Their views vary by age, gender, and political orientation, as well as by occupation. Entrepreneurs representing small and medium-sized businesses are in favor of more progress in more areas. This is one of the findings of the 2018 Progress Barometer, a new survey conducted by the GfS Research Institute on behalf of Credit Suisse.

Issues affecting Switzerland have priority
The GfS Research Institute surveyed 3,133 people, including 68 entrepreneurs. The respondents shared their views about 30 issues related to the economy, politics, and society at large. In roughly half of these issues, the respondents were satisfied with the progress that is being made or wanted to move forward more quickly. They are particularly eager to see traffic in Switzerland moved underground. The strongest support came from representatives of SMEs, who believe that action is more urgently needed in this area than in any other. But they are not alone in their concern here. The rest of the respondents felt that expanding underground traffic was their top priority. However, they would be satisfied with somewhat slower progress, relative to the SME representatives.

Next on the entrepreneurs’ list of urgent concerns were several issues related to the economy, particularly those affecting Switzerland as a business location. Here they differ from the rest of the population. While the Swiss people overall agree that these topics are important, they are more concerned with progress in achieving a work-family balance. Entrepreneurs want to invest more tax revenues in research, and they find it almost equally important to maintain low corporate tax rates.

How much progress does Switzerland need? Where do we need more progress, and where less? Credit Suisse’s new Progress Barometer reveals that entrepreneurs are more progressive than the population as a whole.
Switzerland’s traffic should be moved underground: This is clearly the top priority for all of the respondents.
in order to encourage more international companies to relocate to Switzerland. Similarly, they favor progress in digitalization as a means of increasing efficiency in the workplace. They welcome the use of robots and support free and global trade. They are less interested in progress on social and political issues — with one exception: They feel strongly that the supply of non-family public and private child care needs to increase.

Differing priorities
In some respects, however, respondents would like progress to slow down. They expressed a somewhat critical attitude toward progress in about a third of the areas mentioned. Entrepreneurs, however, value change. Only in four areas — all of them related to society — would they prefer to put on the brakes. They are most concerned about the increasing regulation of our everyday lives. And they believe that it is important to halt the trend toward less media diversity and an increasingly polarized political climate. They also want to keep the gap between urban and rural regions from widening. The views of SME representatives are less clear-cut when it comes to the decline in cultivated land and the immigration of foreign skilled workers, but they tend to want to accelerate progress in these areas. They also support Switzerland’s evolution into an increasingly knowledge-based society and the investment of more money in higher education and less in agriculture.

Women have different priorities than men, and they want to see more progress on social issues. Both favor progress in political and economic matters, but men want it to happen more quickly. There are also differences by social class. People who describe themselves as being of lower social status are less eager for progress in the economy and the political sphere than their better-off counterparts. Overall, people welcome social progress, regardless of their social class. This is true of different age groups as well; both young and old want society to move forward.

A clear direction
The Swiss people agree: Progress must always move all of society forward, and the weakest among us must also benefit. The study shows that with these caveats, people are in favor of progress. They want to maintain the fundamental values that have made Switzerland successful, such as engagement in civil society, a consensus-oriented political system, maintaining Switzerland’s countryside and the country’s position as a place for value creation, free and independent media, a limited gap between urban and rural areas, and a lack of excessive regulation and immigration. However, there is disagreement as to precisely where a great deal of progress is needed.

Entrepreneurs and opinion leaders are among the groups that are most open to change, innovation, and progress.

Would you like more information?
The specific results of the study, including infographics and a detailed description of the methodology can be found at: credit-suisse.com/progressbarometer

The Progress Barometer
Our newest barometer was launched to coincide with the 200th birthday of the founder of Credit Suisse, Alfred Escher (1819–1882). It measures Switzerland’s ability and willingness to make progress in the economy, society, and politics, based on a survey of over 2,800 voters and 300 opinion leaders, including representatives of small and medium-sized enterprises. To detail the Swiss people’s ambivalent attitudes toward progress, we used a “progress wheel” to evaluate their responses. The respondents were asked whether they would prefer to slow down or accelerate a number of economic, political, and social trends. These attitudes are then compared with an assessment by Credit Suisse’s economists of Switzerland’s progressiveness in real economic terms, relative to other countries.
Loans: fast and unbureaucratic

In business, sometimes speed is of the essence. A decision is made, an order accepted and immediately carried out. Sometimes this means that another piece of equipment is needed. Or more space. Or more staff. Or all three.

Sometimes the necessary liquidity isn’t there at that moment. A loan could solve that problem, but that takes valuable time. Traditional loan applications involve at least one personal consultation, and submitting documents and waiting for a decision takes time. Many entrepreneurs simply do not have that kind of time. The new Credit Suisse Online Credits tool was created in response to the need for fast and uncomplicated loan decisions. In addition, entrepreneurs can find out in real time whether Online Credits can meet their current financial needs.

What is Online Credits?
Online Credits is the digital lending system from Credit Suisse, enabling corporate clients to apply for and monitor credit with a few clicks. Online Credits is available at the Credit Suisse Direct homepage, the online banking solution for companies and institutional clients.

How Online Credits works
Click on the corresponding widget on the Credit Suisse Direct homepage and enter the required information, and the application is automatically sent to your relationship manager. You can view the current status of your application via the online banking portal at all times.

Your benefits
• Less administrative cost and effort
• Easily monitor your credit lines and products
• Easily manage your credit documents
• 24/7 access to your credit portfolio
• You will be reminded to upload the annual report and other required documents in the online banking portal

Requirements
• You are a Credit Suisse corporate client
• You have an online banking contract
• You have inspection rights to view your company’s credit management

More information
Your client advisor will be pleased to provide detailed information. For further information please visit: credit-suisse.com/direct
Many Chicco d'Oro employees have been with the company for over 20 years. In some cases their children now work there as well.
Family-owned Chicco d’Oro has been a leader in the coffee business for nearly 70 years. The secret of its success? Tradition, innovation, and a love of coffee.

Text: Natascha Fioretti

When you visit Chicco d'Oro, it’s like entering the home of a warm and welcoming family. Dispensing with formalities, your hosts offer you a seat and a cup of coffee. It’s immediately obvious that the Valsangiacomo family makes no distinction between the personal and the professional. We are welcomed by Cornelio Valsangiacomo, chairman of the Board of Directors, and his wife Doriana, who has been at his side personally and professionally for the past 50 years and handles administrative aspects of the business. Just like their daughters, Carolina and Susanna: Carolina works in marketing and quality control; Susanna, too, is active in the company in addition to raising a family of her own.

History made visible
Cornelio Valsangiacomo enjoys his first cup of coffee at home in the early morning – an espresso macchiato with a splash of milk, brewed by his wife in a moka pot. Joined by his closest
colleagues, he has his second cup at about 8 a.m. after arriving at work. “Coffee is a feeling, an encounter,” he says. On display at the counter of the company cafe are a company emblem from the 1950s and the first Chicco d’Oro logos. They are reminders of Rino Valsangiacomo, the father of the company’s current chairman, who founded the company in 1949. “My father died very young,” says Valsangiacomo. “After his death, my mother initially took over.” The company’s first location was in Chiasso, on the Corso San Gottardo. In 1967 the business moved to Balerna, and in 1997 to a modern building across from the old one. A visit to the tiny coffee museum at Chicco d’Oro headquarters reveals how important tradition is to the company. Everywhere you look are old – even antique – coffee grinders, as well as other objects that testify to the history and significance of this valuable beverage, some of them dating back to the 18th century. The museum also reflects the company’s love for coffee and the culture that has sprung up around it over the centuries – as manual production has gradually been replaced by modern, automated industrial production methods.

**Tradition and innovation**

Today Chicco d’Oro has 98 full-time and 20 part-time employees. “We have people who have been with us for over 20 years. In some cases their adult children now work here as well,” says the company’s head, who is happiest when surrounded by activity, burlap bags filled with coffee, roasting machines, and shiny chrome silos. That’s when he’s in his element. Even now, with computers that track every movement, control every process, and report every malfunction, he registers any irregularity – nothing escapes his notice.

“Last year we replaced two of our roasters with cutting-edge machines from the Swiss company Bühler,” he says. It was an important
step, one that was needed to keep up with the times, but also to comply with increasingly strict quality and environmental standards. Automation has brought with it enormous changes. Today production equipment includes two large, state-of-the-art industrial coffee grinders, several silos containing green and roasted coffee beans, and roasting drums, as well as sorting and cleaning machines. The large chrome tubes for transporting the coffee beans are particularly impressive. The coffee is visible only at certain points in the tubes where glass allows for quality control. But even now that production is automated, the aroma of roasted coffee is everywhere.

Coffee – a Swiss product
Chicco d’Oro has adapted to customers’ changing demands. “Without our Caffitaly machines and pods that are compatible with the Nespresso system, we wouldn’t be able to keep up with the times,” Valsangiacomo says. The product range is constantly expanding and customers are becoming more and more sophisticated, demanding better taste and quality. “People seek out information; they know coffee and they know what they want. Single-origin coffee and blends of beans from India, Indonesia, and Uganda are attracting particular attention. Many people care where their coffee comes from,” he observes. Most Chicco d’Oro coffee is from Central and South America, but some also comes from

“The coffee beans are hardly visible as they make their way through state-of-the-art roasters, grinders, and packaging machines. What remains is the characteristic aroma of coffee.

“Coffee is a feeling, an encounter.”
Vietnam, where a great deal of coffee is produced, and from other Asian countries as well as nearly every coffee-growing region near the equator. A large proportion of Chicco d’Oro’s production is intended for the Swiss market, while some is shipped to the company’s Italian subsidiary and its German branch in Hamburg. Several warehouses are located in the French- and German-speaking regions of Switzerland. Discussing the marketing of the Chicco d’Oro brand in other countries and other regions of Switzerland, Valsangiacomo makes one thing clear: “We take an Italian approach to roasting, but our product is still typically Swiss.”

A look ahead to the future
The relationship between Chicco d’Oro and Credit Suisse has a long tradition as well. The bank has supported the company from the very beginning – since the days when it was led by Renata, Cornelio Valsangiacomo’s mother. “Credit Suisse is part of our corporate history. We have always been well served by the bank. Throughout the decades we have consistently enjoyed direct and friendly interactions. Our relationship is one of mutual trust, and a contact person is always available to assist us, no matter what the issue. At present David Diotto is our client advisor.” A success story: Next year Chicco d’Oro will celebrate its 70th anniversary. The intention is to remain a family-owned company and to continue to work with Credit Suisse. Cornelio and Doriana Valsangiacomo have lost none of their passion for their work. They have no plans to retire – at least not for now. They are looking ahead with confidence to the future, as they further improve their processes and expand the success of their brand.

Caffè Chicco d’Oro
Caffè Chicco d’Oro di Er. R. Valsangiacomo was founded by Rino Valsangiacomo in Ticino in 1949. Today his son Cornelio Valsangiacomo chairs the Board of Directors, and he is supported by a reliable team of employees. The company has its headquarters in Balerna, with sites in Germany and Italy as well. chiccodoro.com
In brief

Employee benefits

Insurance:
lump sum or pension?

The question of how to withdraw retirement assets – whether as a lump sum or a pension – is becoming more important. Taking into consideration the conversion rate, the environment for yields, life expectancy and the tax burden for the insured, the Credit Suisse retirement provision study shows what option is most beneficial in each case.

Find out more!
Find out more about the study in a detailed report:
[credit-suisse.com/retirementstudy](http://credit-suisse.com/retirementstudy)

Enlightening studies

Swiss SME Survey

2018: Success in global competition

Global competition, exchange rate fluctuations, and digitalization are still the main issues facing Swiss SMEs in 2018. International rankings show that Switzerland is one of the most competitive countries in the world. How do the SMEs themselves rate competitiveness? Credit Suisse’s SME Survey provides the answers to this question.

Find out more!
A video summarizes the most interesting findings of the SME Survey:
[credit-suisse.com/smestudy](http://credit-suisse.com/smestudy)

Promising innovations

A quick launch for start-up founders

Starting a business requires completing a great deal of administrative paperwork before the company is actually established. And that takes time. Time that you would much rather invest in the business idea itself. Online onboarding reduces the time needed to open a Capital payment account and a Corporate account from around two weeks to just 17 minutes. With just a few clicks, you can upload the necessary documents, and that’s it.

Multibanking: everything at a glance

For many accountants, the day-to-day work routine includes logging into the company’s various bank accounts to keep an eye on the company’s finances. Multibanking makes this cumbersome task a thing of the past. This new Credit Suisse online banking feature allows all bank accounts to be displayed, not just accounts held at Credit Suisse. That even includes relationships with banks around the world.

One overview and many features:

Credit Suisse Direct

Credit Suisse Direct, the digital portal for online banking through Credit Suisse, has been redesigned. Now there is a single portal tailored to the banking needs of all clients. This gives you a quick overview of the entire banking relationship. You can easily check your account statements from home, create a new leasing or credit request at the office, adjust the country settings for your Maestro cards before and after your vacation, and change the daily and monthly limits with immediate effect, pay bills or take a look at your safekeeping account while on the go.

Find out more!
Ready to jump right in? Or would you like a more thorough overview? Further information about our online banking solution is available here:
[credit-suisse.com/direct](http://credit-suisse.com/direct)
Working to bring us smart closets

At the foot of Mount Pilatus near the idyllic Alpnachersee in the southeast corner of Lake Lucerne, Alpnach Norm manufactures 37,000 built-in closets and cupboards each year. CEO Brigitte Breisacher talks about balancing tradition and innovation and her vision for smart closets. Text: Mariska Beirne
CEO Brigitte Breisacher stands in the high-bay warehouse where wood panels are stored. Alpnach Norm used to manufacture off-the-shelf closet systems and cupboards. Now, every closet and cupboard they build is unique – and the warehouse is one-fifth of its former size.

Your company's marketing slogan is “Individuality is our norm.” Do you feel you need to say that in order to distance yourselves from the word “Norm” in your name?

The concept of “norm” – as in “standard-issue” products – really hasn’t applied to our company for quite some time. These days, everything we produce is anything but standard. But it is still part of our name and part of our history. When my father started the company back in 1966, it was precisely the idea of a standard, off-the-shelf product that made him so successful. He invented the standard closet or cupboard that was built into thousands of apartments and houses from the 1960s through the 1980s.

And nowadays nobody wants a standard-issue closet. Is that it?

Nowadays, our customers all define their own standard. That’s what sets us apart from the furniture stores offering a two-door cupboard in five colors but with no further options. Every closet and cupboard, every kitchen we build is custom made. Our customers choose the features they want from an enormous range of options. The only thing that is always the same is the structure: It’s made of solid wood. Everything else is completely customizable – the surfaces, colors, additional materials like metal, mirrors and glass, door handles, and door design. We also offer an almost infinite variety of options for what goes inside. And most importantly, we manufacture our products with utmost precision. If a customer wants a cupboard to fill the diagonal space beneath the stairs, we can build it for them. We manufacture everything precisely to measure.

Do you identify with the name Alpnach – the name of the town where your facility is located?

Yes. Personally and professionally. My father came to the canton of Obwalden from southern Germany as a young cabinetmaker in 1954 with just 100 German marks in his pocket. The furniture factory here was hiring. A few years
Later, he started Alpnach Norm in an empty flooring factory in the town. My six siblings and I grew up in the house across the street. Today, the Alpnach Norm Group operates twelve showrooms covering every region of Switzerland and two additional production sites. But our headquarters are here in Alpnach, where we are a major employer. It is from here that we take the town’s name across Switzerland.

As you mentioned, you have six siblings, including a twin sister. Why were you the one to take over running the company?
Almost all of my siblings are self-employed. But nobody was interested in taking over responsibility for Alpnach Norm. They all agreed that I was the most suited for the job.

And how did you feel about it?
Even when I was a little girl, I was happiest when I got to sit in the boss’s chair in my dad’s office.

Taking on the family business sounds like a tradition worth keeping. Was that responsibility ever a burden?
I have never considered the company’s tradition a burden. It was more like security to me. The only thing I wasn’t allowed to tinker with was the quality. I still hold myself to that today. Otherwise, I am free to bring in my own ideas. I also look at it this way: I have to be open to change. If I were to hold unwaveringly fast to the old ways, we would soon be out of customers. I like a healthy mix of tradition and innovation. Nowadays, things move at a much faster pace than they used to. But the company’s roots keep me grounded.

Is your leadership style different from your father’s?
My father was an old-school patriarch. I take a different approach to leadership. I give my employees a lot of responsibility and also work with them to find solutions. The fundamental values that my father cultivated – honesty, integrity, and respect – are still at the core of everything we do today. But it’s also important to me that I communicate to my employees how much I value them and their knowledge and skills; that I don’t just want workers but rather team members who will think for themselves and take the initiative.

How do you encourage your employees to take an active role?
Our transition to lean production several years ago definitely played a key role. It impacted not only our production processes but also attitudes throughout the company. But, as everywhere, some people want to be more actively involved than others.

What prompted you to switch over to lean production?
First, we face enormous external price pressures. The economy isn’t the same as it was when my
father founded the company. We have intense competition from big furniture stores and from producers here and abroad. Second, I firmly believe in the concepts behind lean production, which was developed in Toyota’s factories in Japan to increase efficiency.

It probably wasn’t easy at first. How did you convince your employees that the changes were for the better?
I had thoroughly researched the issue and was 100% behind it myself. At the start, we worked with some external consultants and I hired an employee who had prior experience with lean production. One morning, I called all of our employees together and explained that we would all have to step outside our comfort zones. That saying “We’ve always done it that way” just wouldn’t cut it anymore but that we would be keeping the things that were already working well.

Where did the biggest changes happen?
The most visible change from the transition is in our warehouse, which is now one-fifth of its original size. Otherwise, it was mostly processes that we changed – or are still changing. The project doesn’t have an end date. Every third Friday we shut down production and focus on lean. At 6:45 a.m., the whole team meets to discuss theory. Last week, we talked about the Japanese term “Gemba” as it applies to lean. Gemba refers to having a couple of people observing someone at work for two or three hours and taking notes on what they see. They might note that materials are located too far from where they are used, that a machine has too much downtime, or that tools aren’t positioned as well as they could be. Then, we all sit down together and talk about these items and work together to figure out what can be improved in order to increase value creation and set a new standard.

To have 50 people not producing anything for an entire day every three weeks is a huge investment. But it appears to be paying off …
There are stations that were previously making 60 parts per hour and are now making 90. Our production facility is 20,000 square meters. People used to travel unnecessarily long distances to get or even just to ask about materials or components. Now, everyone has a screen at their workspace that shows where the respective parts are at any given time. That helps minimize idle time and unnecessary trips. I’ve also seen significant changes in my staff. Before, when we had staff meetings, everyone sat listening while I stood up front and spoke. Nobody asked questions. On our Lean Fridays, every team reports on how things are at the moment and how they want them to be in the future.

Even our apprentice stands up and explains to the 50 people in the room what he has accomplished.

You are heavily pushing innovation when it comes to processes. What about products?
Does the lean mentality have an effect on your products?
That is more challenging. A new surface or sophisticated lighting isn’t exactly innovation. But we do want to push innovation. That’s why we’ve been working on collaborating with a university.

What would you consider a real innovation?
V-Zug already offers cabinet ventilation systems. I’d like to take that a step further and make it possible to hang a wrinkled blouse in the closet and pull it out neatly ironed the next morning. Of course, a closet that cleans your clothes overnight would be a real innovation. Or one that picks out my clothes for me – the perfect outfit based on my mood or my schedule. Some might say a closet is just a closet. But maybe it’s not – not if we are willing to think outside the closet walls. We have to keep moving forward, being creative and flexible. We can never become complacent. That applies in equal measure to my employees and to me.

Alpnach Norm Holding AG
Alpnach Norm was founded in 1966 by Theo Breisacher, whose daughter Brigitte Breisacher took over the company in 2008. The holding company includes Alpnach Norm Schrankelemente AG, Alpnach Küchen AG, and Zurag AG, which produces partition walls. Alpnach Norm employs a total of 180 people at three production sites and 12 showrooms in the German- and French-speaking regions of Switzerland. They manufacture around 37,000 closets and 1,800 built-in kitchens each year. The parent company, based in Alpnach, includes a production facility covering 20,000 square meters and is a major employer in the area. [alpnachnorm.ch](http://alpnachnorm.ch)
Climeworks: smart and ambitious

“Climeworks is a new company that is striving to mitigate climate change. This ETH spin-off, founded by Jan Wurzbacher and Christoph Gebald, produces devices that remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide, along with other greenhouse gases, contributes significantly to global warming.

Climeworks takes the gas filtered from ambient air and pumps it underground, where it bonds with the basaltic bedrock without damaging the environment. Potential clients include countries, because their representatives are responsible for achieving international climate protection goals, as well as companies that are committed to sustainability and being climate-friendly. With the help of Climeworks, even individuals can transform their projected carbon dioxide emissions over their lifetime into stone.

Since its founding in 2009, the company has already grown to 60 employees, but the two young CEOs have even bigger plans. In several years, they want to have hundreds of thousands of devices installed worldwide to realize their vision. Climeworks is projected to filter out one percent of global CO₂ emissions from the Earth’s atmosphere by 2025.”

Need more information?
An in-depth profile about the ambitious company can be found here: credit-suisse.com/entrepreneur

The Climeworks founders Christoph Gebald (left) and Jan Wurzbacher on the roof of the Hinwil refuse incinerator. The CO₂ filter units can be seen in the background.
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“Our recipe is not a secret: For us, it’s about quality, quality and more quality.”

Bénédicte and Vincent Tyrode, owners of Fromagerie Tyrode Sàrl

Entrepreneurs need vision, innovative spirit and perseverance. As well as a reliable financial partner. credit-suisse.com/entrepreneur