

## LAMELLO: A PROFILE IN PRECISION



### THREE GENERATIONS STRONG

Woodworkers have an innate professional curiosity, always looking for a better method, a better end result. Hermann Steiner was no different as he wrestled with the process of joining chip board panels, an interesting new material for cabinetmakers in the early fifties. Bedridden with a winter fever, he concentrated on the problem until a solution came to him as he stared at his shutters: cut small opposing grooves into the panels that wouldn't weaken the chip board and connect them using small wooden biscuits. Simple, yet game-changing.

A cabinetmaker, his ambition was not to found a big company, but to make a better product. Steiner shared his revolutionary idea with other cabinetmakers who faced the same issues, and the biscuit approach caught on. Thus in 1955 Lamello was born; the name coming from the German "lamelle," or translated literally, a shutter slat.

"For him it was a natural to share the solution with his colleagues," Susanne Affolter said of her grandfather. She is the third generation owner and Managing Director. "From the very beginning, the company's inspiration has always been solving joinery problems for cabinetmakers and woodworkers, showing customers how to be more productive, how they can get to the next level."

Next came the first stationary biscuit joiner, then different size biscuits. The first hand-held Lamello biscuit joiner was introduced in 1968.

Company growth and innovation continued under Affolter's father, Karl Steiner, with a gluing system and other types of connectors, all revolving around the idea of the biscuit and better joinery. And inspiration always came from listening to customers and solving problems.

"It's customer feedback that drives Lamello innovation and the next generation of connectors," Affolter explained. "Now we're focusing on understanding how cabinetmakers will be working in three, five, seven years. What's the problem for joining in the future? We want to open new horizons, help customers maximize productivity."

In addition to cabinetmakers, today's Lamello customers come from many industries: bespoke furniture, office furniture, interior fittings, kitchen installations, as well as window and door construction.

### WHAT MAKES LAMELLO DIFFERENT?

It's a philosophy that today we'd call customer-centricity, but that has been ingrained in the company since its founding. First you take care to understand the customer problem, then you bring in the service to make them happy, then you worry about earnings.

Key to achieving that goal is Lamello's family culture. They are



*SUSANNE AFFOLTER,  
MANAGING DIRECTOR AND OWNER OF LAMELLO AG*

a small, family-owned precision manufacturing company where the family culture is a large success driver and the CEO knows everyone, and everyone knows her.

“Every employee is equally important no matter the function he or she has in the company. It’s not just a saying, it’s the way things have always been, the way my grandfather taught us. In German, it’s verdienen. There’s no direct translation, but it’s a sense of earning what you put into it, how you treat your people that results in happy workers who are inspired by customer feedback and become more productive, make a better product,” Affolter said.

That feeling is evident throughout the factory floor. There’s a definite aura of concentration and focus, but it’s not tense or rush-rush either. There’s a sense of ownership; employees are proud of the product they make and the contribution they bring to the company. For Affolter, it’s not anything learned in business school, it’s a philosophy handed down from her parents and grandparents.

“For me, it’s an honest thing. It’s just the way we are. It’s a given that you should compliment the team, that superior performance should be acknowledged. But also that if a mistake is made you can admit it, even at the highest levels of management. If you can admit that you’re not perfect, that goes a long way.”

When Lamello brings in new people, they work hard to ensure the new person is a good fit and they agree with the company philosophy. “People who join us are positive about the product and that plays a large role. Many come with a wood design and wood science background, and they understand the culture,” said Raffael Gomez, Sales Manager. “We have them work for a day, you can tell so much more about them than in an interview.”

Another success factor is the company’s focus and specialization. “We are focused on cabinetmakers and woodworkers, offering joining systems solutions for machines and connectors. There are not that many companies with that focus. Other companies pursue so many verticals instead of specializing. When you specialize, you become the best at what you do,” explained Gomez.



## SWISS PRECISION, QUALITY

Being the best at what they do shows in product quality in both connectors and machines. On the factory floor, quality control and micro-tolerance at every step of the manufacturing process is a trademark. There is no such thing as cutting corners to save time. Everywhere you see a person, there is a quality control touchpoint. Every machine is hand-assembled, undergoing strict checks for precision and exacting performance that have stood the test of time.

Like a fine Swiss time piece still made by hand, Lamello’s emphasis on precision is perhaps best illustrated by one of the last steps in the Zeta’s manufacturing process. “We have some technology, yes, but overall we have a craftsman’s manual process,” Affolter explained. “That’s what creates the quality. For example, a machine can’t hold a Lamello, like the men who are assembling, and tell you if the vibration is off. That’s impossible.”

“It’s what customers expect from the Lamello brand,” Gomez added. “They would never accept that it would break in two, three years, and neither would we. It’s not just a machine, it’s our reputation, our service philosophy.”

Lamello quality generates customer loyalty far beyond the norm; once you become a Lamello customer, you’re a customer for life. For example, their U.S. distributor, Colonial Saw, received a call from a customer whose grandfather had left him his Lamello in his will and he needed a spare part, and Colonial Saw was able to take care of it.

“We go for premium quality because in the end, the customer benefits,” Affolter said.

Lamello has earned a raft of innovation and design awards, including the prestigious Interzum several years in a row. Interzum is the world’s leading trade fair exhibition for furniture production and interior design. They have also been awarded by Ligna, the worlds’ leading trade fair for machinery and tools.



## EFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Today's focus on eco-friendly methods and sustainability have been in Lamello's DNA right from the very start, without putting a name on it.

"Sixty years ago, no one in Liestal was thinking of importing wood. You worked with your neighbors, your town, materials you could find locally without transporting. We value resources and never want to waste anything. It's a Swiss thing, related to every aspect of your life, when you're cooking, planting your garden, you use most of what you have and recycle the rest. Everyone's talking about sustainability now, but we've always been doing it. It's just the way you do things, period," Affolter said. "It saves a lot resources from the natural world."

At the plant, her father developed an innovative heating system to use every bit of scrap from the biscuit manufacturing process, saving tons of fuel oil. Even the sawdust is recycled into bedding for farm animals. In fact, 98% of all waste in the entire plant is recycled, right down to all types of paper and plastic in the cafeteria.

Efficiency, focus, service, quality, it all adds up, Gomez said. "It's hard as a small company to fulfill all these expectations, compared to some big companies who have a department for everything. At the end, we need our people to have a spirit to offer great service, but also to have fun at work. I really think that when you are happy with what you are doing you can offer a great service, a better product, and the customer can feel it."

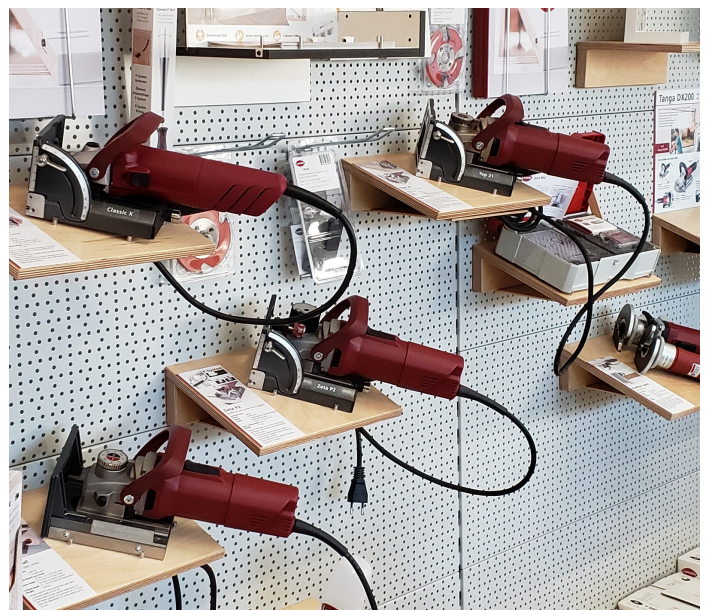
## CONTINUING A LEGACY OF INNOVATION

The Lamello shop was a second home for Affolter, who grew up watching her father in the production area or helping her grandmother in the office after school. The passion for precision and the desire to be the best was instilled.

"I'm proud of the risk my grandparents took to leave the security of an operating cabinetmaker business and take on the adventure of something new. I'm also proud my father trusted me to continue their story with development and innovation," Affolter said.

Starting from a small cabinet shop to the first manual machine to the latest Cabineo CNC connector, the company's growth has accelerated on an upward trajectory. As the industry becomes more connected and information becomes more available, they are able to reach a larger, international audience. Headquartered in Bubendorf, Switzerland, they are represented in more than 40 countries with offices around the world.

What's next for the company? Solving the next joinery problem, innovating accordingly and inspiring more customers.



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