Allgemeine Entwurfsanstalt with Trix and Robert Haussmann Furniture for Rothlisberger Kallektion



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## **Preface**

#### First Encounters with Robert Haussmann

I was a small boy of seven. My father made his first contacts with Teo Jakob, whom he met through his friend Hans "Jöggu" Eichenberger. Eichenberger and my father knew each other from sports. Both at the time worked for the prestigious Bern company Jörns, which produced furniture and interior installations.

Hans Eichenberger later had a studio in Bern's historic quarter, three doors down from Teo Jakob. After my father took over the family business, our carpenter's workshop, together with Eichenberger, manufactured furniture and interior fixtures. Through his contact with Jöggu and Teo, my father then met Robert Haussmann.

Between 1959 and 1962, Hans Eichenberger designed the furniture series HE 153, which we manufactured and then marketed through Teo Jakob and later also through Wohnbedarf Zurich and Basel. At that time the furniture landscape looked very different: except for Knoll International, there were no furniture collections; a brand-name furniture collection was as yet unknown. Furniture dealers sold their own fabricated products, and buyers were not meant to know who made them.

As of 1958, we built Knoll International prototypes and began producing furniture for the Knoll collection. I learned of names like Florence Knoll, Marcel Breuer, Mies van der Rohe, Harry Bertoia, Richard Schulz, George Nelson, Charles Eames, Eero Saarinen and many others. As a small boy I naturally never realized what these names meant. I couldn't differentiate between design and fabrication, because from our workshop I only knew of fabrication. These names gradually took on shape; I became interested in the people behind the names, and above all in their work, though I didn't realize that they would accompany me my whole life long.

Knoll International was sold through Wohnbedarf Zurich; Ueli Wieser and Koni Ochsner were responsible for the Swiss Knoll design. It was a furniture collection adapted to Swiss needs.

It was at this time that I met Robert Haussmann. My father spoke of "Herr Haussmann", Teo Jakob's friend, who came from big, far-off Zurich. I remember very well the first time that this distinguished gentleman from Zurich came to visit us. He drove up in an impressive automobile, wore a fine hat and a handsome suit. Not till much later was it clear to me that the automobile was a Bentley. I don't know what im-

pressed me most about Robert Haussmann. Was it the car, was it the fine hats and suits, the foreign language (the Zurich Swiss dialect was a foreign language to a child from Bern), or the combination of all three? Quite certainly I was impressed by the precise lines he set down in his drawings. Robert had the talent and the skill to sketch realistic drawings, quickly and exactly.

Between 1960 and 1975 we manufactured specially designed furniture and interior installations for and with Robert Haussmann. Our first piece of furniture by Robert that was sold in specialist shops was a no-frills sofa table with a top of opaque glass. This table was sold by the same specialist traders as the HE 153 furniture series. I especially remember the early interior decoration he did for an IBM shop in Bern. The shop's room was very small and Robert, with mirrors, created an interesting geometrical perspective that made the room appear much larger. Up to 1977 we manufactured single furniture pieces and interior constructions for and with Robert Haussmann.

#### How the Röthlisberger Kollektion Was Born

During the years of recession between 1975 and 1977, our volume of sales for Knoll International slumped enormously. Knoll, as a stock-listed enterprise, was taken over by the Italian Knoll producers who, logically enough, wanted to manufacture as much as possible in their own facilities. Within a short time we lost fifty percent of our turnover.

My father was able to make my sister and me aware of the problematics of the situation and to include us in the decision-making process of how to react to this crisis. I was 21 at the time, was a skilled carpenter and in the meantime had performed various jobs for my father. At the time, I had no big plans about stepping into the family business. But things turned out differently. My sister Ursula, who had completed her business training at Teo Jakob's, worked at Wohnbedarf Basel.

Our goal was clear: we wanted to get away from dependency on a bulk purchaser and, with our own production, get closer to, and deal more directly with, the market. In tandem with our friends, with Teo Jakob leading the way, the idea of our own furniture collection was discussed and developed. Prior to the Röthlisberger Kollektion, we produced the *Mondrian cabinets* from a Koni Ochsner design, which, starting in 1976, we successfully marketed in Switzerland and Germany.

We set up the goals and the guidelines of the Röthlisberger Kollektion that, for the most part, are still valid today. "We develop and manufacture furniture whose production is neither purely industrial nor purely artisanal. A product from the Röthlisberger Kollektion is situated between being handmade and factorymade. We do not want to hold the designers to any technical manufacturing specifications, but instead give them leeway to develop ways and solutions to transform a design into a finished product. A new product for the Röthlisberger Kollektion must be distinguishable from an already existing product."

In the summer of 1976, we invited Susi and Ueli Berger, Hans Eichenberger, Teo Jakob, Koni Ochsner, Robert and Trix Haussmann and Ueli Wieser to a visit in Gümligen and presented them with our ideas. All of them were enthusiastic, Under these above-noted guidelines, the Röthlisberger Kollektion was born. Teo Jakob and Ueli Wieser put together a wish-list of furniture for the first edition of the Röthlisberger Kollektion. To decide on the products, a jury was set up with Ernst Röthlisberger, Teo Jakob and Ueli Wieser. I was allowed to take down the minutes; my opinion was not in demand. When the jury decision was not clear and unanimous, we built the furniture anyway: the market was to be the final judge. At this time, I was working in the enterprise and was able to develop and fabricate selected prototypes. We developed 36 new pieces of furniture that in June 1977 were presented to select dealers and prospective buyers in Switzerland and Germany. The presentation was a complete success. The Röthlisberger Kollektion had survived its baptism of fire.

We launched new pieces of furniture, each within the framework of an edition. Thus in 1979 and in 1982 and from then on, we brought out an edition of eight to twelve new pieces every five years.

At the time I was only vaguely aware of how important this constellation was to become for my future life and my professional career. But suddenly everything became clear: I wanted to take over the company; I wanted to develop innovative furniture and I wanted to blaze new trails.

After completing my training with a degree as master carpenter, I joined my parent's company in 1981. In 1982 I assumed responsibility for the Röthlisberger Kollektion. We presented the 3rd edition and began exporting furniture to the U.S. Within a short period of time the Röthlisberger Kollektion was well known to insiders in Switzerland, Germany and America.

As of 1979 we, together with Trix and Robert Haussmann, produced many experiments involving artistically designed and handcrafted furniture. It was clear to me that these exclusive designs could not be compared to the normal furniture found in specialist shops and that they would have to be marketed in a different way.

With the collection /objekte/, in 1984 we launched an assortment of Haussmann's furniture pieces called *manierismo critico*, which we produced in a limited edition of 15 each: pillar stump, pillar cabinet, wall cabinet and bridge desk. All the pieces were made in grained olive-ash veneer and colour-coatings. Developing the details for these objects was extremely demanding, i.e., in their mechanical and handcrafted production that required a great deal of innovation, new techniques and a high degree of skilled craftsmanship.

As a result of this collaboration, I became better and better acquainted with Robert. Between the "distinguished gentleman from Zurich" and me, a close friendship evolved. Robert was a good teacher and mentor to me. Above all, he taught me that developing a product is not dependent on one person alone, but that close collaboration and the relationship between producer and designer make up the finished product. On the other hand, Robert sufficiently recognized the quality of my skills to appreciate and promote them.

In preparing for the 4th edition, Robert Haussmann, Hans Eichenberger, my father and I took a trip to Italy. We hoped to find inspiration from the great Italian manufacturers. We visited different furniture stores and makers of veneer. In one of the veneer factories we were given a look at the yellow-black striped tiger. We were all immediately enthusiastic about this special veneer that was made of natural wood but, through a new kind of industrial process, was given a new look. Robert named this tiger the "bastard". And I remarked: "If you design furniture with this 'bastard', we will manufacture it and adopt it into the Röthlisberger Kollektion." The hollow-profile table by Trix and Robert Haussmann and the curtain sideboard by Hans Eichenberger are the expression and the result of this trip to Italy.

#### Sägeweg 11 in Gümligen: Allgemeine Entwurfsanstalt

Because of the development and the success of the Röthlisberger Kollektion and because we increasingly carried out special interior installations, our workshop had become too small for us. In the summer of 2000 we were able to take over the

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2002, New factory building of Röthlisberger Schreinerei AG, Gümligen. Architecture: by arb Architekten Bern in collaboration with Trix and Robert Haussmann. premises of the Flückiger carpentry workshop at Sägeweg 11 in Gümligen. A new production site was to be built as quickly as possible. We made up a ground plan for the factory and worked out a service profile for the new building. I asked my friend Robert whether he would help me set up a profile of our requirements for the architects and if he would accept working on a jury. Robert replied to my request: he would be glad to be a member of the jury in assessing the factory building, but he would prefer to collaborate as architect and planner.

For the planning of our factory, we invited three architectural offices to participate in a competition. We were sent three outstanding designs which were all worthy of the award. arb Architects in Bern, together with Trix and Robert Haussmann, won the competition and were entrusted with the planning and execution of the new building. The decisive factor in favor of the arb Architects/Haussmann project was the straightforward, clear form, the absence of material and constructive experiments with their attendant risks and the clearly defined and verifiable costs.

Kurt Thut, Roland Keller and I were judge and jury; my father and Jürg Scheidegger advised us.

Our collaboration with the Haussmanns thus not only encompasses the design of furniture for the Röthlisberger Kollektion and interior installations. Trix and Robert Haussmann are also responsible for the aesthetics and the architecture of our factory building.

#### The Role of Alfred Hablützel

In connection with Robert, I often heard him speak of his friend Alfred Hablützel who was a self-taught graphic designer and photographer and in 1955 worked for Theo Jakob and who, with a stroke of the pen, deleted the "h" from Jakob's first name in the new logo.

It was he who also not only photographed Robert's first pieces of furniture, but in the following years also kept a critical eye on the designs created by others of his generation. Above all, he documented all the works of his friend Kurt Thut, for whom he, with his photographs, put together an exhibition in 2001.

Under Hablützel's direction, the *Forum kreativer Fabrikanten der Schweiz* was established in 1985, which presented itself at the Swiss furniture fairs as a quasi design center. He was also the initiator and curator of the exhibition *Mobilier Suisse.Création.Invention* at Centre Pompidou in Paris. For the later formation of *Forum 8*, he played midwife and active

nursemaid in their exhibitions at Galerie Jamileh Weber in Zurich and at Kunsthalle Bern.

Hablützel always knew how to question our works critically and to hold a mirror up to us. His refreshing critique was and is always reliable. He puts his finger exactly on anything that is not in sync and, with his suggestions, knows how to stimulate us to greater deeds. At the end of 1995, I asked "Teddy" if he would help us in the selection and the development of new products. The 1997 and 2002 editions came about in collaboration. For over ten years, Hablützel was also responsible for the photography and public relations at the Röthlisberger Kollektion.

It is therefore natural that Hablützel – contemporary witness, protagonist, publicist and friend of Robert – is destined to be the right one to honour the work of Trix and Robert Haussmann.

Robert, many thanks for your friendship! Peter Röthlisberger

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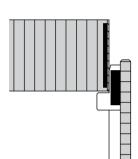
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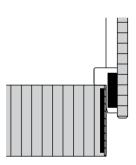
### Jeux des Panneaux – How to Play Them

It was a patented bonding procedure for a magnetic slideway, developed by Peter Röthlisberger, that inspired and occupied Trix and Robert Haussmann in 2000 at the beginning of a work. Their three, four or five story shelf Jeux des Panneaux has been constructed along the lines of the bonding pattern of ashlar masonry. It creates recessed niches

closed partially by sliding doors. As whim and need take you, the position of the gliding "panneaux" of mirror glass or other materials can be varied horizontally. How does this happen with no rails or metal fittings in sight? The secret lies in a thin invisible steel band under the veneer of the horizontal board's front edge. It is a

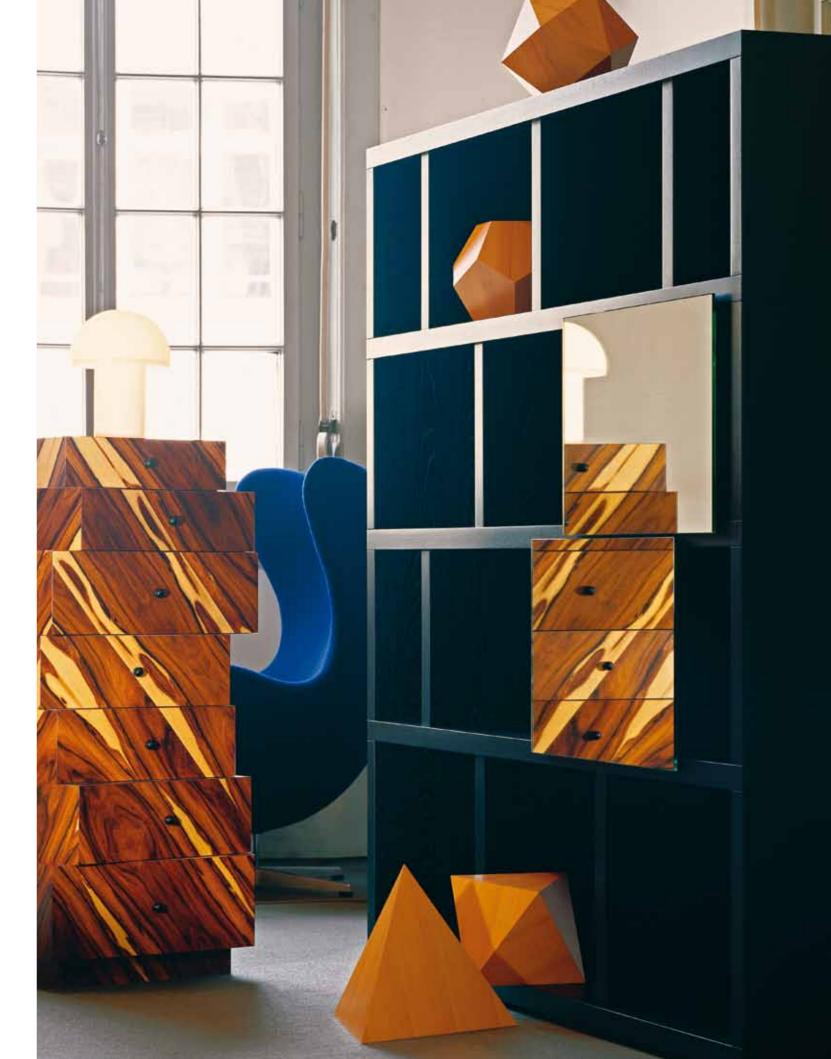
magnetic slideway that operates by grace of the magnets mounted behind the "panneaux". Their adhesive capability is apportioned in such a way that the "panneaux" can be as easily slid open-closed as relocated.











# The Candidness of a Computer-Controlled Vocabulary of Forms

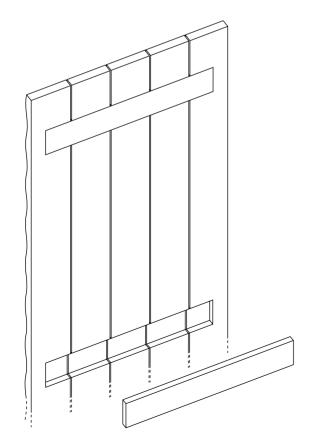
The history of the way furniture was developed runs parallel to the history of the way the materials, technologies and tools developed in their use. Still today, the sum of these aspects is what primarily determines the form. The switch from an analog to a digital era also at Röthlisberger's presents a new creative challenge. With the models Credenza, Trix and Robert Haussmann, together with the technicians at Röthlisberger's, took up this challenge. Contrary to archetypal massive cabinets, they designed the

fronts with a clever wavy relief of unmistakably solid wood. However, such work was not the result of weeks of a carpenter's hard labor but the result via the formal vocabulary of an ingeniously programmed, computer-controlled automaton. A new candidness. It is striking that the insides of the doors fused from five panels are missing the otherwise necessary traditional crossbars fitted with a wooden clamp. In their place the crossbars are flush with the doors and contribute to their stability. They are firmly bound only to the

two outer vertical panels.
For which reason the
solid wood's natural traverse
forces – that vary according
to temperature and humidity – are only effective
within the fixed width of
the door. Peter Röthlisberger
patented this technique,
which is similar to that of
a door construction made
from frame and filling.









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