

Executive M.B.L.-HSG Alumni Reunion 2020 in Interlaken:

Discovering the Berner Oberland

Date: October 16-18, 2020

Participants: 20

With the breathtaking backdrop of the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau, the Executive M.B.L.-HSG Alumni Association invited to a picture-perfect E.M.B.L.-HSG alumni-timeout.

Instead of visiting the vineyards around Torino, Piedmont – a horizon-expanding trip to the Berner Oberland instead served as the COVID-19 alternative program for the Executive M.B.L.-HSG yearly reunion and conference. Instead of the Italian economic powerhouse Torino, we visited hidden business champions of the Swiss local economy in the Jungfrau area and the rest of the Bernese Oberland. The Alumnae and Alumni boosted their yearly learning and insights into current economic and legal challenges while enjoying interacting and spending time with fellow alumni.

By Matthias Schmid-Huberty with Mahoko Schürch, Ebony Busby, Michael Gruber and Markus Scheurenbrand

After a lovely evening 1322 meters atop the Harder Kulm, our E.M.B.L Alumni meeting began the following morning with a visit to Strasser Thun AG, a exquisite local carpentry in Thun. The CEO, Marcel Schwander and Flavius Jobin, Project Manager graciously welcomed the Alumni group and toured us around their richly decorated show rooms. We were able to marvel at the unique designs, hear the stories behind them and feel the various textures.

Strasser Thun sources more than 1000 materials from all over the world, including everything from metals, stones and flowers to Unesco Intangible Cultural Heritage-listed bark cloth from Uganda. They process these materials locally to create bespoke inspirational designs for businesses and homes in Switzerland. These beautiful creations have earned Strasser Thun numerous Swiss and German Design Awards.

The Alumni Reunion's very own host hotel, the Hotel Royal St. Georges, proudly displays Strasser Thun's creations in their tastefully renovated rooms.



Following a delicious lunch in the Taverne Interlaken with mouthwatering seasonal dishes, we visited the Rega helicopter base in Wilderswil. Our guide, a former alpine rescue specialist, showed us the on-duty helicopter Augusta AW-109, located on all mountain bases, the winch handling and the included medical material in such a tight helicopter. We were lucky enough to witness the non-emergency take off of the other rescue helicopter model, an H145 from only a few meters and then continued inside the hangar with the training helicopter H125 and another Augusta equipped for search missions with thermal imaging cameras - the full Rega helicopter fleet on perfect display.



The lively and hands-on demonstration of „rescue diapers“ used for evacuation from gondolas and a general presentation of Rega history to current state and next steps towards weather independent air rescue concluded an informative and inspiring visit.

The famous “Tropenhaus” in Frutigen was next on the Reunion’s menu. It originally was a project to solve the hot water flow from the Lötschberg base tunnel. To avoid disrupting the local river’s biological rhythm, a fish farm, and a tropical greenhouse were created using the tunnel’s flowing hot water. The project producing sturgeon meat, caviar, and exotic fruits received a sustainable development award from the Swiss petroleum industry.

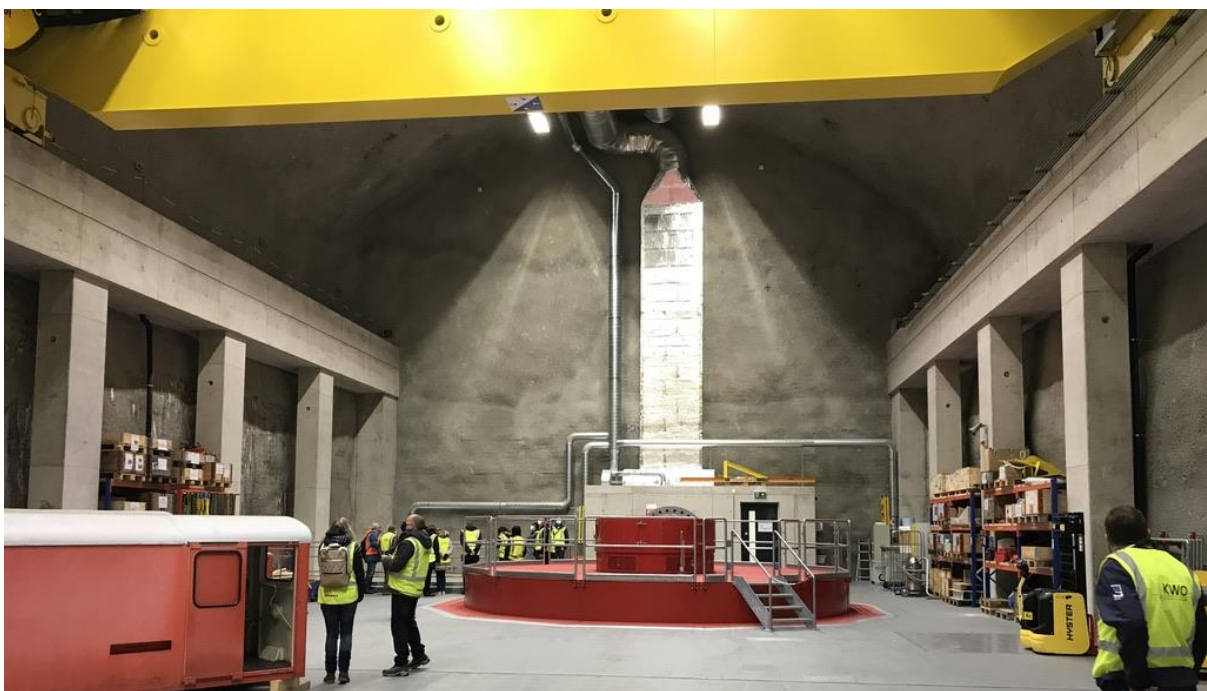


During the guided tour, we learned that this greenhouse contains 170 different kinds of tropical plants. Some of the highlights were banana with blooming flowers, passion fruits, calabash, cardamom, chili, cacao, guava, papaya, mushroom plants, bread tree, tomato tree, and curry plants. Our guide, Mrs. Brigitta Witzig, also explained the possible use of some plants as medicine and the use of papaya seeds. Another tip was *Synsepalum Dulcificum*, so-called "miracle berries" that sweeten our taste buds. Hearing that some parents use them to make their children eat vegetables, EMBL-HSG Alumni parents rushed to grab these incredible berries' brochures.

After the tour, we had an exciting workshop on making our chili oil. Some made super spicy chili oil, stuffing the whole bottle full of the hottest chilis! The grand finale of the first day was a lovely 3-course dinner in the center of Tropenhaus restaurant surrounded by calming plants.

The first agenda point on Saturday morning led us to the Hydro-Power-Plant Oberhasli (KWO), which has been producing electricity since 1925 and is one of the leading hydroelectric power companies in Switzerland. Most of the KWO plants are located deep in the Grimsel granite and can hardly be seen. These include the power plant caverns, surge tanks, water-bearing tunnels, pressure shafts, tunnels for energy transport and access tunnels to the power plants.

An impressive guided tour through some of these tunnels and the inspection of various - older as well as ultra-modern - turbines gave us an idea of the enormous forces at work when water produces as much electricity equal to the annual energy consumption of a good million Swiss residents in their own household. The electricity is mostly produced as peak and regulation energy - exactly when the consumers need it. When we left the caverns again, splendid weather awaited us in the Grimsel World - and fresh snow on the Grimsel.



Two keynote speeches stimulated the brains of the participants, before the stomachs were stimulated at the following Galadinner: Alumnus and Board Member Simon Berger enlightened the group with insights on “What to Do When Your Company Starts Losing its Memory?» while the host of the Royal St. Georges, Brigitte Kurzen impressively demonstrated, what it means to run a hotel during a pandemic.



Finally, on Sunday, the group set foot on a pilgrimage to the “Schynige Platte” to hold the yearly general assembly 2000 m above sea level. Since the preconditions for the E.M.B.L.-HSG Alumni program and with it its network have considerably changed, major forward looking decisions were taken, benefitting all active members of the chapter. The most important decision was taken with a clear majority: we will go to Piedmont in Autumn 2021!