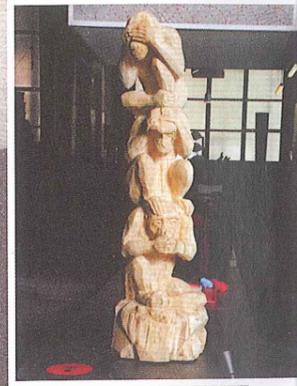
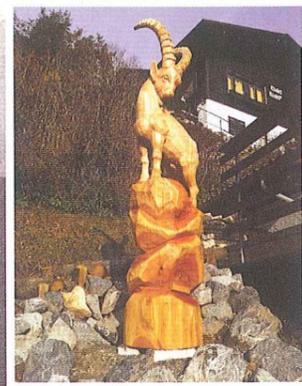
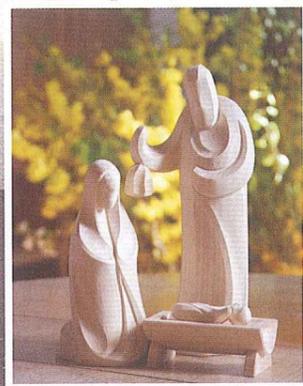
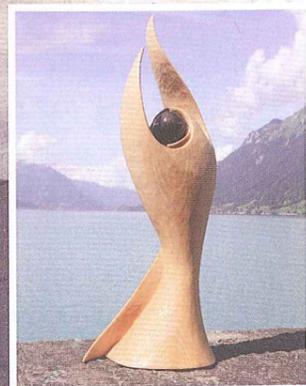




Left, main image: The centrepiece of the roundabout by Markus Flueck

Left, bottom: Huggler sculpture on the shores of Lake Brienz; This season's most popular products, the nativity candles; A sculpture like this one of the mountain goat takes a lot of concentration; One of Markus Flueck's favourite sculptures - the three monkeys of wisdom.



## Traditional woodcarvings flourish in the 21st Century

The small, centrally-located Swiss village of Brienz is home to a mere 3,000 residents yet is internationally renowned for its woodcarving. Little over 150 years ago there were no fewer than 2,000 active woodcarvers found brandishing their tools in the region and this legacy continues today with Huggler Woodcarvings.

TEXT: EMMIE COLLINGE | PHOTOS: HUGGLER

Brienz, the birthplace of woodcarving, came to the fore in the early 19th century and today Huggler Hozbildhauerei keeps Brienz on the map as a prominent force in this field. Led by the stable hand of the young Markus Flück, Huggler Woodcarvings is paving the way in the world of modern wood-carving, whilst ensuring that it does not forsake tradition. The village, rich in the art and tradition of wood-carving, is home to Switzerland's only educational establishment dedicated to wood-carving and it is in this cradle that

the next generation of passionate wood-carvers are fine-tuning their skills.

Huggler Woodcarvings has been running for over a century and its nativity figurines are still created following the original designs; testament to its commitment to wood sculpting heritage in Switzerland. The name Huggler is synonymous with the highest quality woodcarvings in Switzerland, as Hans Huggler-Wyss, the founder of Huggler Woodcarvings was a direct descendant of one of the founding fathers of woodcarving.

### Perfecting their technique over the past century

The ardent woodcarver Huggler-Wyss originally set up the company to pursue his passion of producing one of Switzerland's most popular exports: wooden nativity scenes. These traditional carvings, says Flück, are still "the foundations on which the company is based." Flück's passion is unbridled as he outlines his beginnings in wood-carving: "On the one hand I would say that I've been gifted with talent and on the other hand I was perhaps born to work with wood as my great-grandfather was a wood-carver himself." Flück has been working with wood for the past 17 years and has quickly earned the respect of his peers, exhibiting his work internationally. Today, thanks to the newer part of the company, Huggler Designs, he is free to design and create as he will. However, he also takes care to guide the younger generation in his company. The traditional flat-cut technique, once carried out by candle-light by Hans Huggler-Wyss, says Flück, "is a very complex skill to learn and it's one that takes a lot of time and effort so we like it when our apprentices remain with us. Just last year, a wonderful man celebrated 40 years woodcarving with us."

"Wood-carving is still a very traditional art; everything, absolutely everything is done by hand. Our sketches, our preliminary moulds in plasticine, and then the 2D sketches, right up to the actual carving itself," explains Flück. Although each mem-

ber of the Huggler team is encouraged to come up with their own designs, it is Flück who really excels with modern wood-carvings. "We often get requests to design and create large sculptures for public spaces or private gardens. Sometimes we're approached with just a vague idea of what the customer would like and then it's up to our creativity."

The largest undertaking by Flück was at the request of the village of Brienz to design the centrepiece of a roundabout; a commission that he is understandably proud of. "I designed a sculpture with 4m high wooden planks with wild animals carved out of these, it makes for an eye-catching roundabout." Flück's designs, in particular the 4-hand relief jigsaw-style piece, have proved to be highly popular and sold well globally.

### Woodcarving in action

For visitors to Brienz, Flück recommends a visit to the workshop of the woodcarvers as it is "an incredible opportunity to experience the art first-hand" and a chance to get to know the woodcarvers. Visits to the workshop must be made in advance but the on-site shop and exhibition hall always have two woodcarvers carving. The exhibition area itself is the chance to see the designs in person, ranging from the traditional nativity figurines, to chic, minimal lampshades, from children's toys to stylish wall hangings that would not be out of place in any hip design store. With such fine detailing every

stroke of the artist's tools is visible, giving a purposeful yet fragile effect. The selection of wild animals and human figures are so intricately detailed and authentic that it is nigh on impossible not to be astounded by the sheer concentration that surely goes into making these products.

The highly skilled team use linden wood for the majority of their realistically-constructed, hand-made pieces. Fortunately for them, Linden wood is one of the main tree type present in the region and the village's location on the shores of Lake Brienz at around 600m above sea level guarantees that Huggler Woodcarvings will long be able to make good use of the wood for in the future.

[www.huggler-woodcarvings.ch](http://www.huggler-woodcarvings.ch)  
[www.huggler-design.ch](http://www.huggler-design.ch)

Below: Putting the final touches to a nativity character  
Bottom: Huggler Woodcarvings

