

Life

Three domains under one roof

In the Octavo building in Zurich-Oerlikon there are no more fixed desks. We went to see what it's like.

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Heilbronn, here we come

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Dizzying heights

ETH doctoral student Christophe Ogier was one of the first people to climb Pumari Chhish East in Pakistan.

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ETH zürich



Sumptuous blooms and stolen goods

There's lots going on in the ETH gardens, p.10

Dear ETH community,

It's time to say goodbye to some familiar sights in the workplace, whether that be a framed drawing by a godchild on a staff member's desk, yesterday's mug – which is still sitting next to their PC – or a post-it reminder stuck to their screen. The idea of the personal workspace is becoming a thing of the past – at least for the ETH staff who are based at the Octavo building in Zurich-Oerlikon. Numbering more than 800, they have spent the past few months working under a new, flexible office concept. We asked them what life is like working in the building.

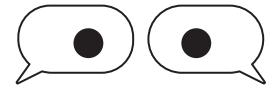
While on the subject of flexible workplaces: if you are looking for a great place to work or relax in the summer, you should try one of the many ETH gardens. But who makes sure that our gardens are bursting with greenery and do not die of thirst? In this issue, you can find out more about the people behind the sumptuous floral and herbal displays at ETH.

Happy reading!
Your *life* editorial team

A building for the healthcare of tomorrow

The Gloria Cube was officially inaugurated on 7 June. The new building will serve as a hub for research, teaching and translation work in the areas of healthcare and medicine. It will be home to a total of 16 research groups, providing them with an ideal environment for their research thanks to its striking, compact shape and facade made of translucent glass bricks.

Photo: ETH Zurich / Alessandro Della Bella



Standing shoulder to shoulder

ETH is giving its appraisal interviews a makeover. They now emphasise collaboration based on equality and respect, and encourage mutual feedback to foster a two-way conversation rather than make people feel scrutinised. Following a successful pilot phase involving around 900 people, the new "Dialog" interview format will start being rolled out for all ETH staff in August 2024. The core principles here are mutual support, looking to the future and, above all, maintaining a constant dialogue with staff and showing them appreciation.

→ ethz.ch/dialogue

We are: Better togETHER...

On 30 August 2024, we will be heading up the hill to the Höggerberg campus for this year's togETHER24 staff party. It promises to be an occasion full of good cheer, lively entertainment and delicious treats. Keep an eye out for your invitation, which will arrive by email.

→ ethz.ch/together-en

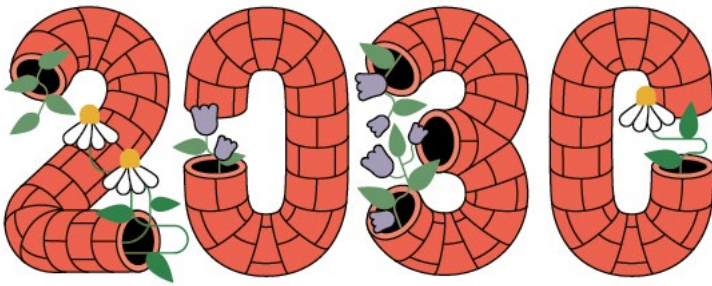


Photo: ETH/Cyathlon/Alessandro Della Bella

Helping hands wanted!

The 2024 Cyathlon is set to take place between 25 and 27 October. With competitions in various disciplines, this event promotes the development of assistance technologies for people with a physical disability. Volunteers are still needed to ensure that everything runs smoothly and to provide support for the teams and participants. If you want to get involved and help make it a success, please register here:

→ cyathlon.ethz.ch/en/cyathlon-2024/volunteers



By 2030, ETH needs to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50 percent compared to 2006. The target set is part of the ETH Net Zero programme. However, this is merely a waypoint as we journey towards net zero. Under the programme, further milestones are to be reached by 2040 and 2050. Achieving net zero is a joint responsibility that must be shared by all members of ETH Zurich. In keeping with its credentials as a forward-looking and innovative institution, ETH aims to act as a trailblazer in this area and become a real-life lab.

→ ethz.ch/net-zero

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Three Executive Board domains under one roof

IN FOCUS



What is it like to work in an open-plan office with no fixed desk? We visited the ETH Octavo building in Zurich-Oerlikon, where a flexible office concept was introduced a few months ago.

When Yannic Kälin arrives at work in the morning, his first port of call is a wall covered in lockers. One of them contains everything he needs for the working day: a felt bag holding his laptop, keyboard, mouse and headphones, along with a couple of personal items. After collecting them, Yannic heads into the open-plan office, known as the "open space". Some of his colleagues are already there. After taking a good look around, he chooses the workspace that appeals to him the most out of those that are free.

Rethinking the building

Yannic works in the Executive Board domain of Finance and Controlling. This means he is one of more than 800 ETH staff members based at the Octavo building who are working according to an office concept that has never been seen at the university before. It entails moving away from individually assigned fixed desks towards a model where people share them.

As Constanze Weihs explains, this is a concept that offers lots of opportunities. As a project manager in the Real Estate Management Department, she was closely involved in the new "Future of Work @ OCT" concept: "We launched the project in December 2022 – just two years after ETH had moved into the Octavo building. For us as a project team, it was another opportunity to completely rethink the building by asking our-

selves: 'What might a flexible office concept look like at Octavo?', 'How would desk sharing actually work here?', 'How should we design the open space?' and 'Which departments should we house within the building?'"

It soon became clear that the introduction of desk sharing was freeing up other areas in the building. As a result, the existing departments at Octavo were joined by some other teams and the entire Office of the Vice President for Finance and Controlling (VPFC), who moved in between February and June 2024. Alongside the VPFC, the entire Office of the Vice President for Personnel Development and Leadership (VPPL) and virtually the entire Office of the Vice President for Infrastructure (VPIN) are now housed under one roof in Oerlikon.

"Many members of staff were concerned about whether it would be too noisy."

↓ Yannic Kälin,
Executive Board domain for Finance
and Controlling



A hive of activity

The difference is that more than 800 members of staff are now sharing around 550 workspaces. Can that work? "It can – and it does," says Constanze. "Even after the coronavirus pandemic, home working remains very popular with many members of staff. An additional factor is that some of them work part-time. Consequently, all 800 people are never present in the building at any one time. Before the new concept was introduced and the other units moved in, there were quite a few days when the building felt extremely empty. Now the building is bustling with people, particularly from Tuesday to Thursday. Octavo is a real hive of activity," exclaims the project manager with delight.



Requirements of the Swiss federal government met

Another important thing to know about the flexible office concept is that it enables ETH to meet a requirement set by the Swiss federal government. In 2020, the Federal Council decided that desk sharing should be the norm for standard office workspaces within the Swiss Federal Administration. This decision also applies to ETH. By taking this step, the federal government wishes to promote flexible forms of working and make more efficient use of space. "The Octavo building offered us the opportunity to implement this occupancy concept at ETH for the first time," explains Constanze. "The only condition was that we were not allowed to alter the building in any way."

A place to come together

Instead of making changes to the building, existing furniture was moved, new furnishings were purchased, and the work area was upgraded through the addition of "modules". If two people want to discuss a matter privately or if some-

one wants to make a call without being disturbed, they can use the "think tank" – an enclosed glass box equipped with a desk and a monitor. If someone needs to work in complete silence, they can retreat to one of the "quiet zones" – workspaces where no phone calls and no talking are allowed, and which are separated from the open space by partitions.

More informal areas are available alongside these, such as kitchenettes, work lounges and break rooms where people can work or share their ideas. "Our objective was to turn the Octavo building into a place where people can come together and collaborate – including beyond the confines of their departments," remarks Constanze.

Spontaneous interaction instead of online meetings

But how does it work on a day-to-day basis? Can the envisioned flexibility be achieved when selecting a workspace, and does it encourage people to interact with each other? "Absolutely," responds Yannic from the VPFC wholeheartedly. "Networking within and across our various Executive Board domains is now much easier than it was before when most of us

The project in figures

Today, more than 800 people work in the Octavo building, sharing around 550 workspaces between them.

The building currently contains 72 think tanks, 39 meeting rooms and 12 kitchenettes.

The staff restaurant serves 300 to 400 meals a day from Monday to Thursday and between 100 and 150 meals every Friday.

Further information:
ethz.ch/oct-en

← Miro Kobas,
IT Services

worked in our own individual offices in Scheuchzerstrasse. Now, you are always bumping into colleagues from the various administrative departments in the corridor while on your way to the meeting room. It's the same in the restaurant. That means you can discuss things spontaneously, whereas previously you would have had to arrange a special meeting. As far as I'm concerned, that is a vast improvement."

For Miro Kobas from IT Services (ITS), it has been a similar experience. Although ITS moved into the Octavo building way back in 2020, they were initially spread over two floors. Since spring 2024, the entire department has been housed all together on floor G. The desk-sharing approach is also used here – factoring in the necessary flexibility: "Sometimes, someone will sit at the same workspace as the day before. But that's okay," recounts Miro. "We implement desk sharing flexibly according to our needs and requirements. If, for example, staff need to set up new computers or configure IT devices, then it's perfectly fine if they need to remain in the same spot for a couple of days. After all, we have to be able to organise our work processes efficiently and that also goes for desk sharing."

↓ Quiet zones for undisturbed working.



↑ Betty Friedrich-Grube,
Executive Board domain for Personnel
Development and Leadership

Dealing with noise

So does this mean that the new office concept is "all sunshine and roses"? Well, not quite. Mainly before its introduction, there were worries about how people might feel about the working experience afterwards. "Many members of staff were particularly concerned about whether it would be too noisy in the open space," reveals Yannic. "That is why we had frequent discussions prior to the move on the subject of how many quiet zones we would need. However, we now definitely have more than enough. In fact, I sometimes get the feeling that we are being almost too quiet in the open space. Out of a concern for not disturbing colleagues, there is a tendency to whisper rather than hold conversations at a normal volume. It is going to take us a bit more time to work out what should be tolerated in the open space and what should not."

Betty Friedrich-Grube is another person who has had to contend with the issue of noise in the open space. As a member of the support staff for the VPPL, she was already familiar with desk

sharing because most people at the VPPL had already been practising it for a couple of years. She too understands the importance of having consideration for others. "You have to realise that there is a constant background hum in any open-plan space. However, this noise is not usually a problem. But the situation becomes trickier if certain voices start to stand out. In this regard, I think it is extremely important to treat your work colleagues with respect. If you need to make a long phone call, you should go into a think tank cubicle to do it."

Colours to show the way

Prior to the move, some members of staff were also worried about whether there would be enough desks to go around despite sharing them with colleagues, how they were supposed to find their way around the building and whether they would even be able to locate the other members of their team when the desks were not permanently assigned to individuals. According to Constanze Weihs, these worries have also been dispelled. "Initial experience has shown that there

“Networking is now much easier than before when we worked in our own individual offices.”

are always enough workspaces available in the Octavo building. What’s more, people can usually locate each other easily thanks to the “home base” zoning concept. The home base shows which department is located on which floor and within which colour-coded zone – red, grey, blue or green.

It takes time to acclimatise

It is going to take the next few months for staff to get used to many aspects of

this new way of collaborating. Nevertheless: “Most of the feedback we have received so far has been positive,” asserts Constanze. Many staff members say they are surprised to find that the new working environment is brighter, friendlier and more generous than they had envisioned. However, some members of staff still need to acclimatise to the new circumstances – such as the fact that they can no longer keep any personal items on their desks. “An adjustment like this takes time – and so we intend to give staff members long enough for the transition.”

That is why the test phase for the “Future of Work@Octavo” project will run until autumn 2024. At that point, we will take stock of the first half of the year. For this purpose, we plan to conduct a survey among staff members. “In addition, we carry out targeted analysis of the data we are collecting at various points inside the Octavo building. These data points provide information via Bluetooth, revealing how many people are present inside the building at any given time, how frequently specific modules – such as think tanks – get used and how often meeting rooms get booked

without actually being used,” explains Constanze. This anonymised data is then used to create recommendations for the future.

No longer the exception but the norm

One important question remains: What might the future bring? According to a resolution of the Executive Board, the flexible work concept at ETH should no longer be the exception but the norm as far as office workspaces are concerned. “The important thing here is to view the Octavo building as a pilot project – but not as the definitive one,” states Constanze in a thought-provoking tone. “At ETH, not only do we have lots of different buildings – some of which are listed – but the requirements also vary significantly because of the needs of the different departments. For that reason, we cannot simply take what we have done in the Octavo and apply it directly to other buildings.”

Instead, the Real Estate Management/Workplace Consulting Team will be meeting with representatives from all departments soon to get an idea of their working practices. “We want to understand what kind of people work at ETH and how they go about it,” explains Constanze Weihs. It is only once their work has been analysed that there will be a roadmap outlining the future workplace concept at ETH – tailored to the requirements of users and the stipulations and guidelines for the efficient use of space. Constanze and her team are certainly not going to run out of work in the meantime.

↓ Flexible working with comfy seats and lots of greenery.



The future of work

To find out more about ETH’s current and future plans for the working environment, visit ethz.ch/future-of-work

Author
Mona Blum

Photos
Alessandro Della Bella

How is the Heilbronn campus project going?

What have you always wanted to know about the world of ETH?

Please send your questions to life@hk.ethz.ch

In December of last year, ETH Zurich and the Dieter Schwarz Foundation signed a letter of intent to establish a new teaching and research centre for responsible digital transformation in Heilbronn. Thanks to the donations provided by the foundation, around 20 new professorships are to be created in Zurich and Heilbronn over the next 30 years. What is the status of the project six months after it was announced?

Jürg Brunnschweiler:

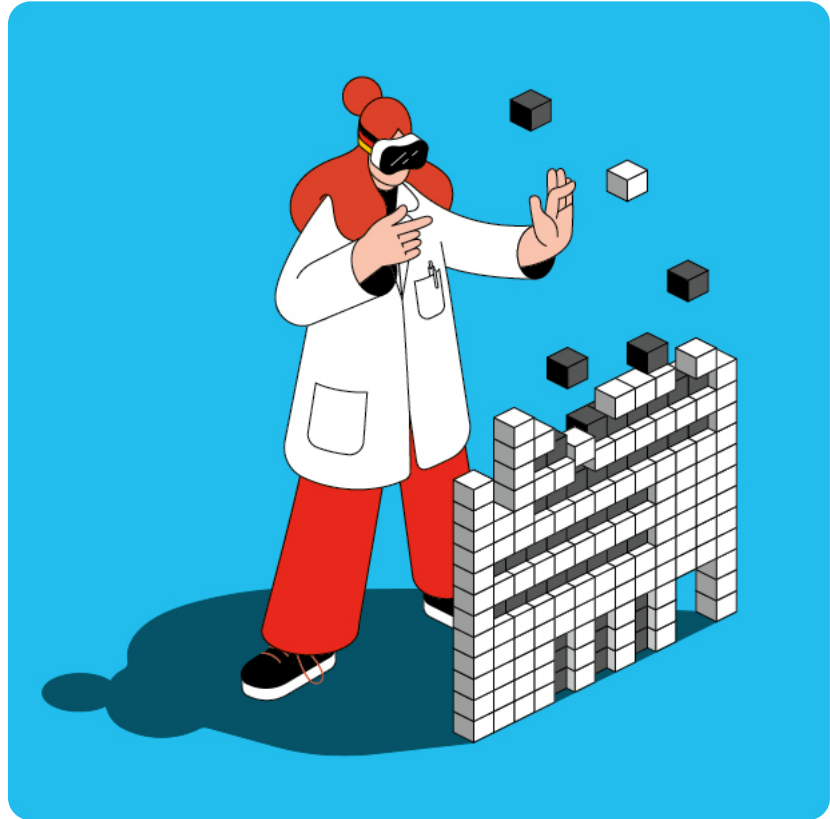
Both parties have signed an initial funding agreement to create a Professorship for Responsible Artificial Intelligence and a Professorship for Automated Intelligence, Logic and Semantics in Zurich. The two assistant professorships in the Department of Computer Science will be advertised before the end of the year. In addition, 10 million Swiss francs are going to be invested in the Zurich Information Security and Privacy Center (ZISC). This will be used to fund research activities for the next ten years and to connect ZISC to the Heilbronn teaching campus.

At the same time, the ETH Foundation is setting up an endowment fund. This will be used to establish the partnership long-term and to make infrastructure investments in Zurich. An important initial step in this process is recruiting a project team to oversee the establishment of the ETH Zurich Heilbronn campus. This team reports directly to ETH President Joël Mesot and is being led by me on an interim basis until we have found a project manager. We have already managed to recruit three experienced hands from ETH as

members of the project team: Agatha Keller, Romana Mayer and Silvio Bonaccio. Another position is being advertised at the Rectorate for a person responsible for defining the range of courses offered in Heilbronn.

ETH Zurich is currently working at full throttle to determine the governance arrangements and legal form for the ETH Zurich Heilbronn campus. In parallel with this, the next funding

agreement is being drawn up to cover the professorships in Heilbronn as well. We intend to launch the first continuing education courses in 2025. Further courses will then follow later. In recent months, representatives of ETH Zurich and Heilbronn have already been enthusiastically engaging with each other. We have been getting to know each other, bonding and building trust – the foundation of any successful partnership.



ASK THE EXPERTS

Illustration
Karin Hauser

Jürg Brunnschweiler
Chief of Staff to the President
and Project Manager for Heilbronn

Green oases full of surprises

BACKGROUND



Protected trees, a paradise for wild bees, edible fruits from the rooftop and an overgrown medicinal garden – the ETH gardens are as many-faceted as the people who tend and use them.

LFW building roof terrace Where Japanese raspberries ripen

Most people do not notice anything special when walking past the LFW building on Universitätsstrasse in Zurich. But some are aware of the special plants, shrubs and trees – many of which bear edible fruit – that are thriving around the building and on the roof terrace.

Emma Lindberg is the Degree Programme Coordinator for Agricultural Sciences and works at the Institute of Agriculture and Forestry (LFW). She is familiar with the garden and knows what ripens when. She points out the cherry tree in front of the neighbouring LFW building that bears fruit as early as mid-May. She is familiar with the Mediterranean plants running along the building's southern facade, which include various fig trees, a medlar tree, a strawberry tree and a bitter orange tree. Right next to these, there is a cork tree and one of Europe's biggest holm oaks.

A little further on, there are some beds containing experiments by students working under the supervision of Consuelo de Moraes, a professor at D-USYS whose research focuses on interactions between plants and insects. There's also a kaki tree growing in the warm microclimate on the southern side, where it yields an abundance of fruit year after year.

“Due to all the rain, we are behind with cutting the grass.”

This bounty is harvested by Lindberg and one of her colleagues in consultation with Christian Băni, the passionate landscape gardener at the Zentrum campus who is in charge of the green spaces. He looks after all the plants and trees, and even helped to design many of the gardens (see the article on page 13).

These include the southern roof garden, arguably the most beautiful open-air spot at LFW. This is another place where you will always find something edible at virtually any time of the year. The wild strawberries have just ripened. Later, these will be followed by white and red mulberries, Japanese raspberries and grapes. And the apricot-coloured blossom of the rambling multiflora rose will eventually give way to edible rose hips.

Lindberg, who is a graduate of geography and agricultural ecology, doesn't just like the gardens at LFW because of the fruit they produce. Year after year, she loves being able to watch the vegetation grow less than five minutes from her place of work and right in the middle of the city.



↑ Fritz Graber

Albert-Steiner Garden

Do not keep off the grass!

Fritz Graber can immediately spot when something does not belong in “his” garden – even while posing for a photo. Kneeling down next to the pond in the heath-like landscape of the Albert-Steiner Garden, he exclaims with delight: “Wow! A St John's wort! A useful weed for treating sunburn and depression,” he explains as he pulls it out.

Graber has been looking after the green spaces on the Höggerberg campus for nearly a quarter of a century. The head gardener with a federal diploma seems to know the Latin name of every plant and has an anecdote

to offer or an explanation of its possible uses. Once the photographer has finished, Graber stands up – his hands full of freshly plucked green weeds.

In the Albert-Steiner Garden, nothing is left to chance. “Of all the green spaces on the Hönggerberg campus, there is none that is more intensively managed than this one,” says Graber. Resembling a park, it is located on the oldest part of the campus between the physics, biology and infrastructure buildings, and is classified as a listed garden.

This means that there are rules dictating which tree must stand where in the garden named after ETH Professor Albert Heinrich Steiner – the former master builder of the city of Zurich. Even the border has to be planted in accordance with a specific design. The underplanting is kept to various shades of green to prevent it from standing out.

Despite its listed status, walking on the grass is expressly permitted. To ensure that the large lawns can cope with the footfall, they have to be mowed regularly. “Due to the large amount of rain in the spring, we are behind with cutting the grass,” explains Graber.

He stops next to the herbaceous borders. The gardener is particularly fond of the borders planted with hardy plants like rudbeckia, bluestars and asters. “You can achieve a tremendous amount of variety with herbaceous perennials.”

Variety is also what the landscape gardener loves about his job at ETH Zurich. By this, he does not just mean his day-to-day work but also the sumptuous floral displays in the garden that change from season to season. At Easter time, the daffodils bloom in a radiant display beside the pond; in late spring, the dogwoods burst into white and pink blossoms next to the Mensa terrace; in summer, the herbaceous borders are awash with flowers in various shapes and colours; in autumn, the sweet gum trees dazzle with their fiery vermilion leaves. And in winter, the trees look absolutely stunning in their “beautiful frosty coats”.



Hönggerberg Campus medicinal plant garden

Neglected oasis gets a facelift

When Roland Riek, Professor of Physical Chemistry, walked past the medicinal plant garden on the Hönggerberg campus a couple of months ago, he thought to himself, “This won’t do!” The garden looked sad and neglected with its overgrown beds, information signs lying on the ground and trampled plants.

Laid out in concentric circles and located between the HCI and HPH buildings, the garden was established in 2004 by the Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences. “The garden is intended to help pharmacy students acquaint themselves with the individual plants physically and not just theoretically,” says Bernhard Pfeiffer, a lecturer at the Department of Chemistry and Applied Biosciences. “But it is not much use in this state.”

Another person involved, besides Riek and Pfeiffer, is Matthias Baltisberger. The retired ETH professor and botanist is there to offer help and advice. Accord-

↑ Finn Arn (l.) and Roland Riek

ing to Baltisberger, the garden needs a thorough makeover. “Lots of plants are missing.” Others such as sage and sedum have taken over. “We are in the first five minutes of a multi-year project.”

Biology student Finn Arn is helping the men to give the garden a new lease of life. Together with Professor Riek, he is digging up the weeds and other wild plants from the circular beds. Meanwhile, Baltisberger (the botanist) and Pfeiffer (the chemist) are taking stock of the situation: What should stay, what needs to go, what new things do they need to buy?

“We are in the first five minutes of a multi-year project.”

Instead of categorising the medicinal plants according to the eight main groups of active ingredients, a better method in the future will be to plant them based on locational requirements. "Although the existing concept makes sense from an educational and a pharmaceutical perspective, it does not take account of the needs of the individual plants," clarifies Baltisberger. For instance, the European wild ginger needs shade – and therefore a different location than before. In his view, this is important to keep maintenance to a minimum.

Pfeiffer, who is responsible for coordinating the redesign process, stresses that the little garden with the small bench in the middle is not just an educational tool but also somewhere you can relax. "When I'm here, I feel miles away from the HCI building with its modern laboratories and high-tech research. The garden is a true oasis, even while in this state."

↓ Christian Bäni

IFW building

Attracting more desirable guests

"This here was made by a carpenter bee – I recommend keeping your distance because they are a real humdinger of an insect," exclaims Christian Bäni as he points to a hole measuring roughly a finger's width in a piece of deadwood that is serving as a wild bee nest. The carpenter bee is one of many species of wild bee that can be found nesting in the garden next to the IFW building on Zurich's Weinbergstrasse. However, there is apparently no need to be afraid of them because they are good-natured and, like their smaller relatives, are not prone to stinging people.

Bäni is responsible for green space management at the ETH properties located on the Zentrum campus. But the "green" in his job title doesn't quite cover it because the narrow border between the Liebfrauen church and the IFW building at ETH is bursting with every colour of the rainbow. That's what you'd expect in June, but it's actually true all of the time. As soon as the wild

bees leave the nest – when the air reaches a temperature of 7 degrees or more – they are able to find blossoms. In February, they can already be found on willows; after that, it is the turn of the crocuses and daffodils to flower. And even in November, asters are still in bloom, along with bellflowers or – thanks to some strategic pruning – wild roses.

When Bäni starts talking about diversity, he gets excited. And that's because wild bees are just the beginning. The little patch of land next to IFW also attracts reptiles, as well as lizards and slow worms. A whole ecosystem is being created. Bäni joined ETH more than twenty years ago, is a master landscape gardener and has pursued further training in the area of biodiversity. Previously, he used to drive large construction vehicles before going on to run his own gardening company with more than a dozen employees. At ETH, he is responsible for the green spaces at 78 properties on the Zentrum campus – this includes gardens, as well as green roofs and plants on/inside the buildings.

He has seen a lot in his time, and one of his stories sounds more like a crime thriller ... There used to be some large boxwoods and lots of ivy growing here before the area was turned into a wild bee garden in 2017. They wanted the space to be as low-maintenance as possible. However, some criminal gangs started using the boxwoods as a cache for their stolen goods. Consequently, there was a need to create a garden that would attract more desirable guests. Bäni joined forces with a former ETH doctoral student – and the latter's company – to develop the concept for a new wild bee paradise. Nowadays, the publicly accessible garden is frequented by groups of schoolchildren and by students, who use it for their Master's theses. Much to Bäni's delight, the only thing being stashed away in the deadwood now is nectar.



Authors

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and Michael Walther

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Michel Büchel

Cornelius interviews Ela

In the Dominoes column, an ETH member can interview a colleague of their choice. In the next edition, this person then goes on to interview someone they know or want to become better acquainted with.



DOMINOES

Cornelius Senn

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Electrical engineer in D-BAUG
Has been at ETH for 38 years

Ela Burmeister

44

Laboratory manager/technician
in D-BAUG
Has been at ETH for 10 years

Ela Burmeister tells Cornelius Senn what the highlights have been during her time at ETH and how she came to play the ukulele.

Cornelius Senn: You originally hail from Poland, don't you?

Ela Burmeister: Yes, that's right. I was born in Poland. However, at the age of 22, I emigrated to the USA as soon as I had finished my Master's degree studies in human genetics, and settled down in Michigan.

Cornelius: And how did you end up in Switzerland?

Ela: I got to know my husband through some friends in the USA while he was over on a visit. We quickly realised that we wanted to give our relationship a chance, and so I decided to move to Europe. As my husband works in southern Germany, the only universities I could consider were in cities such as Tübingen, Basel or Zurich. I ended up getting a job at ETH in January 2014.

Cornelius: What do you like about Switzerland?

Ela: Overall, my answer would be its natural environment. I like the mountains and the lakes, but most of all the fact that everything is so close and readily accessible. Within the space of an hour, you can be somewhere completely different and feel like you're on holiday. By contrast, when I was in Michigan, I had to spend up to four hours travelling to experience the same thing.

Cornelius: What do you miss now that you're here?

Ela: I miss doing water sports. In the USA, I did a lot of sailing and surfing. I also miss the open and straightforward nature of the people. It took me a lot longer to establish a personal network here.

Cornelius: Where do you keep finding fresh motivation for your work at ETH?

Ela: In the changes. Research is constantly evolving. When Master's students come to us, they are right at the beginning of their academic careers; within the space of a few years, they make huge strides before earning their doctorate and moving on to the next stage. Being able to accompany them on this journey is very rewarding.

Cornelius: What have the highlights been during your ten years at ETH?

Ela: I have had the privilege of setting up two laboratories, which was very enjoyable but also challenging. I know that I have had an impact on these young people in one way or another. And then there are the outreach activities, which enable us to open the doors of the laboratories to children and teenagers. In my view, the activities aimed at girls are particularly important.

Cornelius: What aspects of ETH would you change if you could?

Ela: I have seen and learned a tremendous amount. My head is bursting with ideas and suggestions for improvement. But once I've committed them to paper, they have to pass through a long chain of hierarchical levels. One day, I would like to be in a position where I have more influence over the decision-making process.

Cornelius: What advice would you give to someone who has just arrived at ETH?

Ela: Speak to people! And I mean to everyone. My network helps me with my work and in my career. I know the structures in the department and can manoeuvre within them. Once you are familiar with your colleagues' strengths, you have something to build on.

Cornelius: Is it true that you are musical?

Ela: Yes, that's right! My husband is a songwriter, and so we spend a lot of time making music together. I sing and have also learned to play the ukulele. We enjoy it so much that we have formed a trio.

Cornelius: And what style of music do you play?

Ela: The best way to describe it is as folk with elements of blues and rock. We also love performing in various locations.

Cornelius: We now know quite a lot about your work and home life. How would you describe yourself as a person?

Ela: Ah, well, there are many sides to everyone; it depends on the context we find ourselves in. In the laboratory, I also have to be strict at times. But, in general, I have a real zest for life. I am curious and ambitious. I always want to experience everything and don't like confining myself. It is this curiosity that makes life exciting.

Cornelius: I can happily second that without any hesitation! Thank you for allowing us to get to know you.



PORTRAIT

On fire for rock and ice

ETH doctoral student Christophe Ogier and two friends have completed the first successful ascent of a six-thousand-metre peak in Pakistan.

With his right foot resting on a climbing hold, Christophe Ogier uses his arms to grab two holds on his left that are located below and – in a flash – is suddenly hanging upside down on the climbing wall at the Hönningerberg campus. He has just finished working in his office in the HIA building. “I have been sitting at the computer all day. What I need now is some exercise to recover,” laughs the 32-year-old Frenchman.

Climbing is Christophe’s passion. Two years ago, he travelled to Pakistan with two friends with one destination in mind: Pumari Chhish East. Numerous mountaineers had already attempted to climb the 6,850-metre peak in the Karakoram mountain range without success.

Unfortunately, the expedition by the three young Frenchmen did not exactly get off to a flying start. Their visas only arrived hours before their flight to Pakistan. At the Hispar Glacier base camp, it snowed almost incessantly – and the three friends and two local cooks were forced to sit it out for 27 long days in the middle of nowhere.

Even harder than expected

When the longed-for window of good weather finally arrived and they stood directly under the 1,600-metre rock face for the first time, the only thing Christophe could do was gulp. “Despite all the preparations, I hadn’t expected the route to be so steep and technically demanding.” They spent the next five days and four nights on the rock face with their equipment. With the help of a camping stove, they melted the snow and used it to prepare their dehydrated food.

“Every night we went to sleep thinking that the next day would present us with a section of route that would take too long to complete or that we would not be able to get past,” recalls the ETH doc-

toral student. And yet, on the morning of 29 June, the three friends managed to achieve something that no one else ever had: they made it to the top of the Pumari Chhish East.

“In my head, I have an image of the three of us standing on the summit full of joy and jubilation. But I realise that my brain was playing tricks on me because, although we were happy at that moment, we were also tired, hungry and anxious. We still had the descent ahead of us.”

It was only on return to base camp that the feelings of unbridled happiness and relief kicked in. “I was so proud of my climbing buddies – and also of myself. We had managed to reach our destination without any mishaps. It was an incredibly powerful feeling.”

Last year, the three Frenchmen received the Piolets d’Or in honour of their historic first ascent, an award that recognises outstanding achievements in the sport of extreme mountaineering.

Water rushing downstream

Christophe’s passion for mountains is also reflected in his choice of research field: glaciology. Working under the supervision of Professor Daniel Farinotti at the Laboratory of Hydraulics, Hydrology and Glaciology (VAW), Christophe has done his PhD research on glacier water pockets – which can spontaneously surge. Given that they generally form undetected inside the glacier, they pose a serious danger to areas located downstream. “Very little is still known about the phenomenon of water pockets,” says Christophe. “We have attempted to characterise them and systematically analyse them.”

As far as the doctoral student is concerned, climbing and glaciology go hand in hand. “If I were to devote myself wholly to my research, I would miss the relaxation I get from climbing. And without my work, I would miss the in-

tellectual stimulation and collaboration with my colleagues. I need them both.”

Christophe Ogier lives with his girlfriend in the city of Zurich. They often go climbing at the weekends, sometimes heading for the Jura mountains. At other times, they go to visit Christophe’s father and friends in Chamonix. Occa-



↑ Christophe (right) and Jérôme heading up to the Pumari Chhish East (visible in the background).

sionally, Christophe works as a mountain guide – but only on selected tours or as part of projects that allow him to give people a better understanding of the world of mountains and glaciers.

Together with his friend, who is a geomorphologist, Christophe organises research projects with non-experts in the area around Trient. With their help, the researchers are monitoring glacial melting in-situ. “In September, we are going to drill stakes into the ice and, the following year, we will measure the extent to which they have become visible.”

Deglaciation is a subject that preoccupies him at certain times more than others. “There are days when I concentrate solely on my practical and academic tasks. And there are other days when I am deeply saddened by the disappearance of the glaciers. At the same time, I am aware that I am contributing to the problem through my own lifestyle. So I have mixed feelings about it.”

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“Who or what has had a major impact on you at ETH?”



Matteo Pariset (25)
Master's graduate and research assistant at D-INFK until 2023, now the co-founder of STRAINTEST

“For me, simply knowing that the Student Project House existed was a crucial factor in establishing my start-up; it is the perfect environment for taking those first important steps. It is a place that encourages innovation and you are free to pursue your plans without any pressure. It brings together so many exciting people and so much knowledge. When it comes to new projects, that's absolutely invaluable.”



POINTS OF VIEW



“Even though we are only in our first year, we are really enjoying the many new friendships we have formed (including with people from other countries), the conversations we are having, the motivating environment and the structured daily study routine.”

Norina Wetzel (21) and Anja Erdin (20)
Bachelor's students at D-HEST





Janik Born (22) and Erik Pérez-Gallardo (20)
Bachelor's students at D-CHAB

“The many options and wide range of work placements have had a real impact on us. It is often claimed that students do not learn any practical skills. However, the work placements at ETH are very effective at combining what has been learned at a theoretical level with what happens in practice. What’s more, it makes everyday student life much more interesting and shows us where we can apply our skills at a very early stage.”



Eduardo Gallestey (57)
lecturer at D-ITET and engineering
director at Honeywell

“The thing that has had the biggest impact on me at ETH Zurich is the plethora of knowledge that is enabling our society to make strides in so many areas, such as the environment, automation, electronics, chemistry and physics. That is why I am so happy to be part of ETH Zurich.”



“The great working conditions at ETH have had a huge impact on me. In other workplaces, I have experienced misogyny and xenophobia but that has not been the case here. On the contrary, I find the environment positive and highly appreciative. As both a cook and a mother, it has not always been easy to manage my working hours. The set working hours at Polysnack were actually the reason why I applied for a job here in the first place.”



Angelika Menzel (46)
staff member at Polysnack





Freshly restored artwork

Over 100 years ago, Zurich's university district was dominated by the old chimney towering above the machine laboratory. At that time, the current emblem of ETH – the dome – was only just being built.

However, the northern facade of the Main Building (at the top of Clausiusstrasse in the centre of the picture) was already adorned with elaborate sgraffito designs some 160 years ago. Among other things, the mural depicts the roles

of the university and the various subjects taught here. The sgraffito is currently being restored and should be ready for you to admire, refreshed in all its ancient glory, at the end of August. It will definitely be worth taking a look!