

SCHERRER

Moving On

Interview with Beat Scherrer, Scherrer Metec AG, Switzerland

Headed by Beat Scherrer, fourth generation descendant of the founder, the Scherrer name still stands as one of Switzerland's proudest family businesses, though many changes are ahead.

The Scherrer family has been in the roofing material, metal, and façade business for the past 120 years. In 1896, founder Jakob Scherrer took a leap of faith and set up his own plumbing and roofing workshop in Zurich. The second generation brought brothers Ernst and Jacob Scherrer to the fore. They were very successful in the 1940s and, as a result, almost every well-known building in Zurich bears the Scherrer signature. Decades of innovation later, the business underwent a strategic realignment. In 2004, it was divided into Scherrer Metec AG and Cupolux AG. Headed by Beat Scherrer, fourth generation

descendant of the founder, the Scherrer name still stands as one of Switzerland's proudest family businesses, though many changes are ahead. Tharawat spoke to Beat Scherrer about roofs, realignment, and retirement.

Were you always interested in joining the family business?

It was always clear to me that I wanted to be a part of the family firm. I started in the business 33 years ago, when my father and uncle were in charge. When the time came, things went very fast. About 5 years after joining, leadership was handed to me.

PICTURE:

In 1896, Jakob Scherrer founded the Scherrer family business in Zurich, Switzerland.



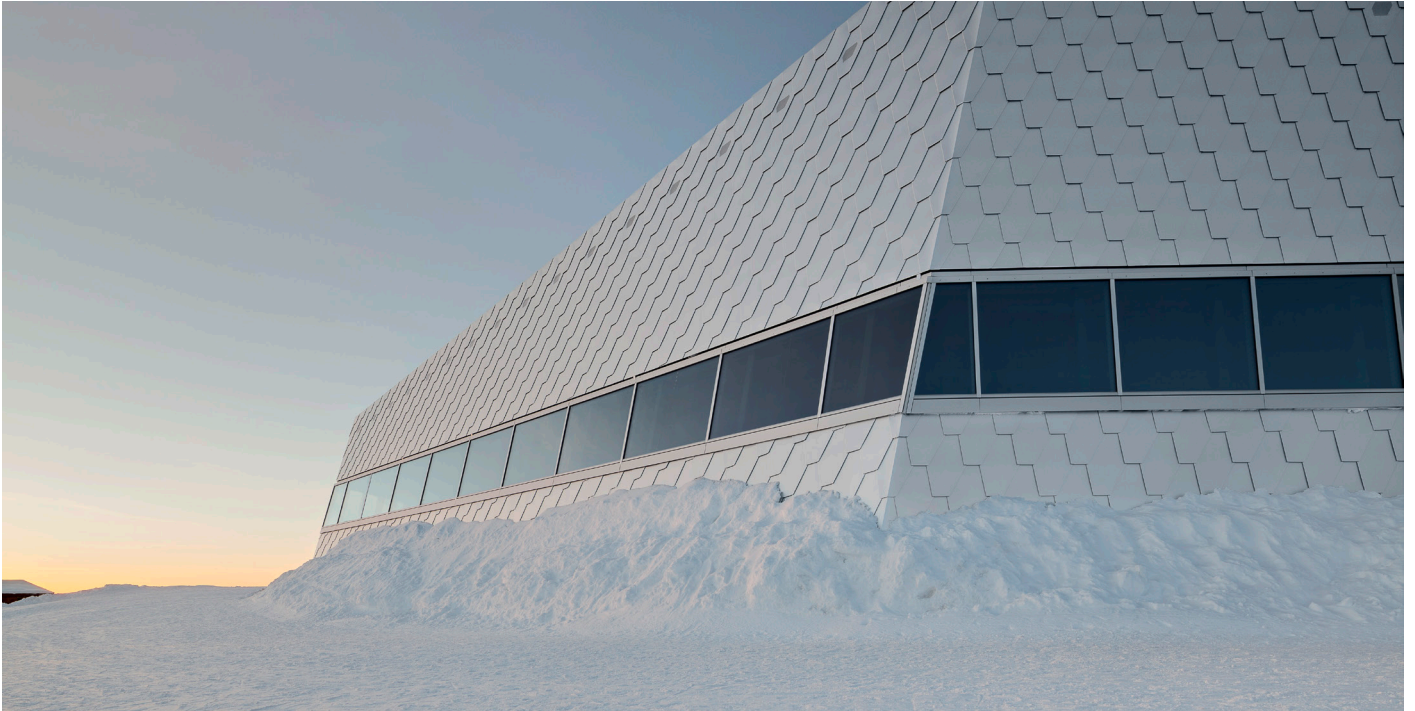
PICTURE:

Palais Rechberg, in Zurich. The historical roof, metal and wood elements were renovated by Scherrer Metec AG in 2014. (Photo Credit: zuegerpix)



PICTURE:

In 2012, Scherrer Metec AG developed and mounted the whole facade and roof of the Mountain restaurant Arosa Weisshorn at 2653 m.a.s.l. Architects: Tilla Theus & Partner AG, Zürich (Photo Credit: zuegerpix)

**PICTURE:**

*Scherrer Metec AG workshop in Zurich, Switzerland
(Photo Credit: zuegerpix)*



Is an early and quick transition usual practice?

Yes, it is. I think a great part of our family's success is that we always made sure the company was in young hands. The next generation always got a shot at it early on. No one ever held on until death. It is also part of the industry culture. People in construction get tired. It's an exhausting job, so retiring early is a good idea.

Does early retirement apply to you as well?

Yes. Next year, on the 120th company anniversary, I will turn 60 and will retire. I represented the 4th generation of the family. There will not be a fifth. There is no family successor.

Will ownership remain within the family?

Ownership will gradually be transferred out. When we knew there would be no successor, we made sure that managers could become owners. This will ensure the continuity of unity and vision well after the family transits out. We already have a non-family partner and it's working very well.

Looking back, what do you consider your greatest contribution?

I think my greatest contributions have been the introduction of IT and the expansion of the facade aspect of the business. We were working with good architects and demands for new solutions were always present, so we had to innovate. I helped optimise planning and production.

How do you think the business will change when the family pulls?

The history of the family business doesn't just disappear. There are 120 years of family legacy to base the future on. This will continue to be beneficial for business because construction is based on trust. The family name goes a long way in such cases. Even though there will be great cultural changes, I think it will be fine.

What do you advise other family business leaders to do after retirement?

First of all, I think that in family businesses, we need to learn that holding on for too long is not a good idea. You have to think of the company and not just yourself. What is best for the company has to come first. Plus, it is not motivating for the younger generation. I actually feel comfortable leaving at this early a stage because I joined and took over the firm very early on. I can let go now.

Of course it is difficult, but I am looking forward to new challenges. I will still be on the company board for a while, and will also look for other board positions, mainly in places where my thirty years of SME experience is useful. Maybe I'll also join a few non-profit organisations. I am also interested in learning more about digital solutions, which is something my son is active in. Who knows what the future holds?

What will you miss most about working in the family business?

It is not going to be the same, naturally. I believe that I will feel the loss of the position and status most. But like anything in life, these are things that you have to confront.

“When we knew there would be no successor, we made sure that managers could become owners.”

Beat Scherrer - Scherrer Metec AG

PICTURE:

Beat Scherrer,

Scherrer Metec AG

Switzerland

(Photo Credit: zuegerpix)

