

INTERVIEW

CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

BEHIND THE CONSTRUCTION FENCE

# Interview: A builder reports

18.07.2023 / Schweiz

## INSIGHTS



How construction has changed. The impact of climate change. And why foremen used to have to carry small change. Edwin Gisler, who has been with PORR SUISSE AG for 37 years, tells us all this and more.

## 37 years at one company, that's a long time. How has your career developed?

I started as a mason and overseer at the age of 20. A friend drew my attention to PORR SUISSE. At that time, it was a relatively small company that lacked qualified masons. I then completed foreman

training and was employed as a foreman. This was followed by further training to become a site supervisor and then a master builder years later. Nowadays I work as a surveyor and project manager.

## How have the requirements changed?

In the past, you had to work even harder because you didn't have the tools we have today. And working materials were packaged in larger units. Cement bags weighed 50kg, for example. Today, occupational safety stipulates that nothing heavier than 25kg may be lifted. In general, employees are valued more today. Thanks

to various events and other measures, people know much more about companies, workload, and numerous other issues. There's also the work clothes: in the past, employees were not provided with protective clothing. Everyone had to pay for their own equipment themselves.

# How have construction projects evolved?



(c) PORR

In the past, we mainly did small construction projects such as detached houses in the regional area. Employees and inventory could be made available for some consortium projects, but PORR SUISSE had no say in this. Today we are directly invited to participate in the implementation of construction schemes. And our area of activity has long since extended to the whole of Switzerland.

## Looking back, what changes can you see?

Concrete technology has become more complicated because the requirements have become more stringent. Components can be created that were previously not thought possible. In addition, the construction site used to take priority: we could also bring road traffic to a complete halt. Today, keeping road traffic flowing and the resulting construction site logistics have top priority. Things have also changed between clients and contractors. While in the past, many things were only regulated verbally and things relied on verbal agreements being strictly adhered to, today every detail has to be recorded in writing. And occupational safety was not a big issue back then. Fortunately, things are different today. Occupational safety is a top priority. There are precise regulations that must be strictly observed, and a safety concept and alarm scheme must be developed for each construction site.

## How important were the issues of ecology and climate change 37 years ago?

At that time, we were awarded contracts related to minor natural events and rock protection. But they were much more predictable than today. You could start with securing measures early on and knew what was going on with this project. Today, more and more unforeseen incidents are occurring,

the scope of which can only be fully assessed while the work is being performed. Sustainable thinking, which characterises the whole of PORR today, was still in its infancy back then. There has been a major rethink in this area in recent years.

## And what hasn't changed?

Building used to be exciting, and it still is today. Once a builder, always a builder.

## To sum up: how has construction developed?

In addition to all the technical and technological advances that come along every year, modern construction today is much more efficient. I would like to mention communication as an example. Back then, there were no mobile phones. The site supervisor had a radio in the car, the foreman at the construction site didn't have one.

So the foreman had to go to the nearest phone box. This meant you had to have enough small change with you. If the site supervisor wasn't in the office, you couldn't reach him and you left a message. Then the site supervisor had to actually come to the site. Simply placing an order or asking a question required military-style planning.