

Holger Miltz



Bio's at IRG-hm....Alan announced this year that this is the part of the newsletters what is clicked on most...and yes, I click on bio's as well! Perhaps it is the curiosity to get to know a bit more of the people you know since years, but mostly only their "business side". Of their scientific background, their career, but also their private life. Here we go...

Where to start with? Chronologically?

I was born in 1960 in [Waldbröl](#), a small town in the countryside in West Germany, 100 km east of Cologne, 50 km away from our former capital Bonn. A nice hilly area, surrounded by forests (btw: did you know that Germany is not mainly big cities but has a [huge forestry area](#) and that the forest-wood industry give jobs to more than 1 million people?). Our family owns a few ha of forests and we were always in the nature and this probably influenced my later career.

I had a great childhood and school time in a loving family, 2 brothers. From early childhood on sport was important to me. Football (some people say "soccer") and basketball were somehow played every day. Until today, that is. Nowadays more time is spent on the sofa but still playing football once per week with people from my faculty and my village, and once a year the big match of lecturers against students. It's always a lot of fun, but just don't ask me who usually wins....



I finished school at 18 and went into military service for 2 years. At that time there was still a closed border between East and West Germany. After completing my military service I started my studies in "Wood Science" in far away Hamburg. Those days the [University of Hamburg](#) was the only address in West Germany to study



Wood Science at the university level. Wood Science fitted very well to my interests, mainly because it did not have a narrow focus but involved a range of topics including biology, physics, chemistry, economy and technology. This wide interest in many topics involving our wonderful material "wood" was a major part of my further career.

Although after finishing my studies I was at first uncertain what direction to move into, there were job offers in the industry and in research. However, I was most attracted by a position at TNO Timber Research in the Netherlands as a project and team leader of a small research group. This position also allowed me to work on a PhD at [Wageningen University](#). With this opportunity I moved to the Netherlands for, what I thought would be a few years in 1987.

However, perhaps predictably, a “few years” became thirteen. During this time, organizational changes at TNO occurred that meant that the timber research area was marginalized or might be disbanded and I was asked by the certification body for wood products in the Netherlands, SKH, to build up an alternative research team. [SHR Timber Research](#) was born and I became director and led the organization for 10 years. With a team of 30 researchers and technicians, we performed research, testing and advisory for the Dutch government and industry. Those 13 years in the Netherlands were a very important phase in my life. It was exhilarating a businesswise, including having to settle in another country.



Personally this was also a time of wonderful change. I married with my wife Ute, who I met earlier during my studies in Hamburg, and we subsequently had two girls, Saskia and Alexandra. Saskia was born during IRG 1992 in Harrogate. She still complains about the fact that I was not there when she was born (btw: she came 4 weeks early...). Furthermore I missed quite some of her birthday cakes because of IRG conferences on her May 14th birthday.

In 2000 I received an offer of a full professorship at the [University of Göttingen](#) and took the challenge to build up a new research group and a new curriculum in Wood Science. The forestry faculty in Göttingen had been long known for its forest related research and curricula, but the university wanted to develop a wood program.

So, we left “home” in the Netherlands and settled in Göttingen. A lovely university city in the middle of Germany, very research oriented with the university and several Max-Planck-Research centers. Looking back on the last 20 years, I never regretted this step because the research funding for wood related research in Germany is very good and a professor here has a lot of freedom. It worked out well having a great team of people around, with lots of interesting research projects. The master program in Wood Science was installed successfully and is running very well, with many motivated students. So, who could ask for a more satisfying job?



Already in my function as research leader in the Netherlands, but as well in Göttingen, I could hold my broad research interests in many areas related to wood. My group now, with approximately 40 people in the team, is interested in wood composites, coatings, adhesives, and wood anatomy. And of course in the field of research which I am still active in (besides all the daily administration as group leader and having been dean of the faculty the last years): wood degradation and wood protection. My interest in wood preservation goes back to my time in Hamburg,

where my teacher in wood protection was [Hubert Willeitner](#) who gave his courses in his own enthusiastic way (those who remember Hubert, know what I am talking about). At TNO I was mainly hired in 1987 to run some EU funded projects (btw: the first ever EU projects), both of which were in the area of wood preservation. Consequently, my PhD was also in this area, on the improvement of impregnation of spruce wood by the use of enzymes to dissolve the pit structures. And this research area has stayed with me over all these years. Probably, because it covers such a wide area of biological, chemical, technological items what fit so well into my multidisciplinary view of this field.

However, another important reason why I am still active in wood protection goes certainly back to our organization “IRG” and the many great people I have met and friendships I have built at IRG. My first conference was IRG Madrid in 1988 and since then I not



missed many (gosh, is this really already 30 years ago??). From the beginning I felt home in this organization, where the older and more experienced researchers showed interest in the younger ones, where we could contribute with small or larger research items, where, in the course of the years, beside good business relations,



many personal friendships developed. In earlier years I was involved in organizational things of IRG more closely than nowadays, walking the “normal way” thru IRG via working party leadership, section leadership, SPC and EC until a few years ago. Nowadays, as one of the dinosaurs at IRG as Joris van Acker named himself (and by that, same aged, me as well 😊) I only can try to give back a bit of what I got from IRG in all these years, by still contributing with research presentations and sharing my ideas and knowledge with the others. And trying my best to holding IRG as it is and always was: a great research community.



Finally, no, my life is definitely not just work. The kids are studying far away and left home already some years ago. But we have a large group of friends



around and are active nearly every weekend. Hiking, biking, canoeing, all kind of sports, music concerts, and travelling a lot are a large part of our life. The week (and weekends) should have more days! And as often as possible up we spend up north at our summer cottage in Sweden. Life is treating us well!

Hope to see you all back in good health,

Holger

