

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 79 (2013)
Heft: [5]

Titelseiten

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HELVETIA



MAGAZINE OF THE SWISS SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2013

YEAR 79

HIGHLIGHTS:

- **New Zealand-Swiss life histories:**
Sandra Clair
- **Swiss watchmaking**
- **New Swiss King of Wrestling crowned**

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Switzerland's Watch Valley

Like mountains, cheese, chocolate and banking, watchmaking has long been synonymous with Switzerland. For centuries, Switzerland has been renowned for its quality timepieces. The Swiss watchmaking industry is concentrated in western Switzerland, in the arch formed by the Jura mountains (arc jurassien) between Geneva in the south to Basel in the north.

Swiss tourism authorities have quirkily named the region Watch Valley in an allegory to Silicon Valley in California, although it looks as if the name may not have "stuck" all that well - the valley may be too mountainous! Watch Valley is not only the heartland of the Swiss watchmaking industry, but also one of country's most scenic regions along the western fringes of Switzerland.

About midway in Watch Valley, the towns of La Chaux-de-Fonds and Le Locle form a local watchmaking hub. Here, some of the world's most renowned watches originate and continue being made. Pierre Jaquet-Droz, celebrated Swiss watchmaker and mechanic from the 18th century was born here, known for his elaborate watches and

mechanical, human-like devices - the origins of modern robots. The local company Girard -Perregaux initiated the first ever major commercial production of a wristwatch in 1880, ordered by German Kaiser Wilhelm I for his German naval officers.

La Chaux-de-Fonds and Le Locle are famed for more than their watches. They have jointly received recognition from UNESCO for their exceptional universal urban planning approach adopted during the re-building of both towns in the 19th century, following extensive fires. This created formerly unknown industrial-scale and social development opportunities where traditional farming had been limited by the high altitude and porous limestone. It resulted in strong population growth and industrial manufacturing towns that are still well preserved and active today.

La Chaux-de-Fonds also lays claim to famous sons such as Le Corbusier, Blaise Cendrars and Louis Chevrolet.

Sources: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Chaux-de-Fonds, http://www.swissworld.org/en/switzerland/swiss_specials/swiss_watches/watch_valley/



Espace de l'urbanisme horloger - la Chaux-de-Fonds

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