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HISTORIC FENCES IN MÖSERN

Useful information about woven and ringed fence arts



www.seefeld.com | info.moesern@seefeld.com | Tel.: +43 (0)5/0880-20

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FENCES ARE THE HALLMARK OF OUR CULTIVATED LANDS

Fences are an important element of cultivated land, an integral part of our identity. They number among the oldest witnesses of farming customs and are an expression of legal and property relationships, as well as ways of managing the land.

Fences leave their imprint on the face of the earth. They structure the landscape and thus provide the viewer with certain visual borderlines. They have grown and evolved through centuries. They are the work of our own hands - our personal handicraft.

Fences border property - they fence in, they fence out. And they protect. They have long served to keep property at peace and to secure the herds, to protect crops or neighbouring fields. Each property owner's fencing rights have regulated the height, the type of construction, the use and maintenance duties, as well as the right of passage ever since the Middle Ages. These rights and duties are still recorded today in the property registers of the country.

Why were the old fence construction forms abandoned?

Why did they disappear from the landscape? There are a number of reasons for this. To begin with, the high cost in labour, materials and time is prohibitive. The time factor is of major importance when asking why modern fences are erected nowadays, when nails and boards can be purchased with ease. This was unimaginable a century ago, when there was little money for such things. And labour was amply available at the farmhouses to build these old fences.

The construction of historic fences is intended to revive the traditions of fence arts, the knowledge and the craftsmanship, as well as reinvigorate the rural character of our village. We hope we can thereby not only beautify the countryside, but also add a significant historic element to our scenery and our culture.

However, fences also remind one of limits. What is our modern attitude towards this aspect? Do we occasionally look over a fence to see whether the grass is greener? What is our attitude towards personal limits? What importance do bodily, spiritual and moral limitations have for us? Do we use them to create a home, peace and quiet, community? Or do we misuse them to keep out others and ward off intrusion?

The historic fences erected in Mösern are intended not only as exhibition pieces. They are still used by the owners. They were built in a communal effort. The property owners purchased (or felled) the timber and the construction was financed by a three-year project of the Tourism Association of Olympiaregion Seefeld. The Homeland Protection and Maintenance Club of North and East Tyrol assumed a part of the cost.



WHAT A FENCEBUILDER MUST KNOW

Preparing fence wood

Fence timber should be felled in the period between St. Michael's Day (29 September) and St. Sebastian's Day (20 January) when the moon is waning. Of course, it would be ideal if the moon were also in the zodiac sign of Capricorn.

The location of the tree also plays an important role in its selection for fence wood. Especially suitable is a regularly growing tree from groves in quiet areas. Wind and steep slopes both cause irregular trunk cross-sections and varying widths of age rings. Wood from mixed forests is more resistant to storms, snow, fungus and insects.

For the individual parts of the fence, differing types of wood are selected. In general, those parts which are stuck into the earth, i.e. carrying parts, are made from larch wood, which is highly resistant to moisture; while the crosswood is made of spruce.

The crosswood of spruce and the 'pillars' of larch are all split in the same way from the trunks, after they have been de-barked and had the knots removed. The prepared trunks are then cut to the right length: the crosswood 400 cm long, the vertical posts 180 cm long, and then with the help of wedges, wood hammers and axes they are split, then quartered, then split again, until crosswood has reached just the right thickness. The posts are then sharpened on one end with a hatchet. To weave the fence rings and produce the weaving of a woven fence, young and long spruce branches are used. After being cut, they are laid into water and carefully heated by fire before weaving. This makes the branches extremely pliable. While still hot, they can be woven relatively easily.



The woven "Spelten" fence - "Steckenring" fence

For this type of fence, first larch posts are set into the ground 3 - 4 meters apart. These are then fixed by a transverse staff about 1 meter above the ground, placed through a hole in each posts. Then the crosswoods are jammed into the ground along the transverse staff about 5 - 10 cm apart. With 150 cm long spruce branches which have been carefully heated, they are then woven to the transverse staff. There are a number of different ways to weave these branches. We have chosen the "crossover" method.

The „ring“ fence

For this type of fence, posts are set into the ground only at the corners, the openings and at the points where the fence sharply changes direction. The crosswoods are here set upon wood pegs and bound by a thin stick connected with a large ring to the stick wood. In between, pairs of larch posts are pounded into the ground 2 - 3 meters apart. Finally, one begins to build the fence upwards. Six to eight layers of crosswoods are laid horizontally between the pairs of vertical larch sticks, affixed every so often with prepared branch rings.