

# WHERE THE BOSS OPENS THE DOOR

## A VISIT TO BOLEX

TEXT & PHOTOS: JÜRGEN LOSSAU

An arterial road in Yverdon, Switzerland. At first, all you see is an impressive sign with large letters, then a six-story high-rise which announces its owner over the entrance: Bolex. But those who enter the concrete building are startled – the ground floor is deserted. A small sign directs you up to the second floor. Bolex International S.A., the company that used to fill every floor, resides behind just one of the many doors with many different company names.



An arterial road in Yverdon: the home of Bolex at Route de Lausanne



► Here, the boss opens the door himself. Marc Ueter, 43, has run the company since 2001. Back then, his father Rene, now 79, asked him whether he could imagine continuing the world renowned name on a shoestring budget, especially since he didn't seem to care about filmmaking. Marc, who was a gas and electricity purchasing agent for the city, agreed. "I never regretted it," he mumbles.

The tour through the hallowed halls is quick. In the largest room, the shop, we find Otello Diotallevi, who has worked at Bolex for 36 years. He repairs cameras and projectors, but also assembles new 16 mm camera bodies. "From existing parts," says Ueter, "and what we no longer have, we make."

Right next door are two old wood-

en desks occupying ten square meters: Marc Ueter's domain. The last room is for storage: spare parts for Bolex, Beaulieu, and Eumig equipment. "Repairs account for half of our sales. We are able to repair all Bolex, Beaulieu, and Eumig Super 8 cameras. We also have spare parts for them. And we repair projectors for these brands, including Standard 8 and 16mm in addition to Super 8." Mr. Ueter already knows what it will cost before he looks at the defective boxes: "At least 150 Swiss Francs, rarely more than 300." However, 16mm cameras are more expensive: "400 to 1,500 Francs."

### 36 years at Bolex-Paillard

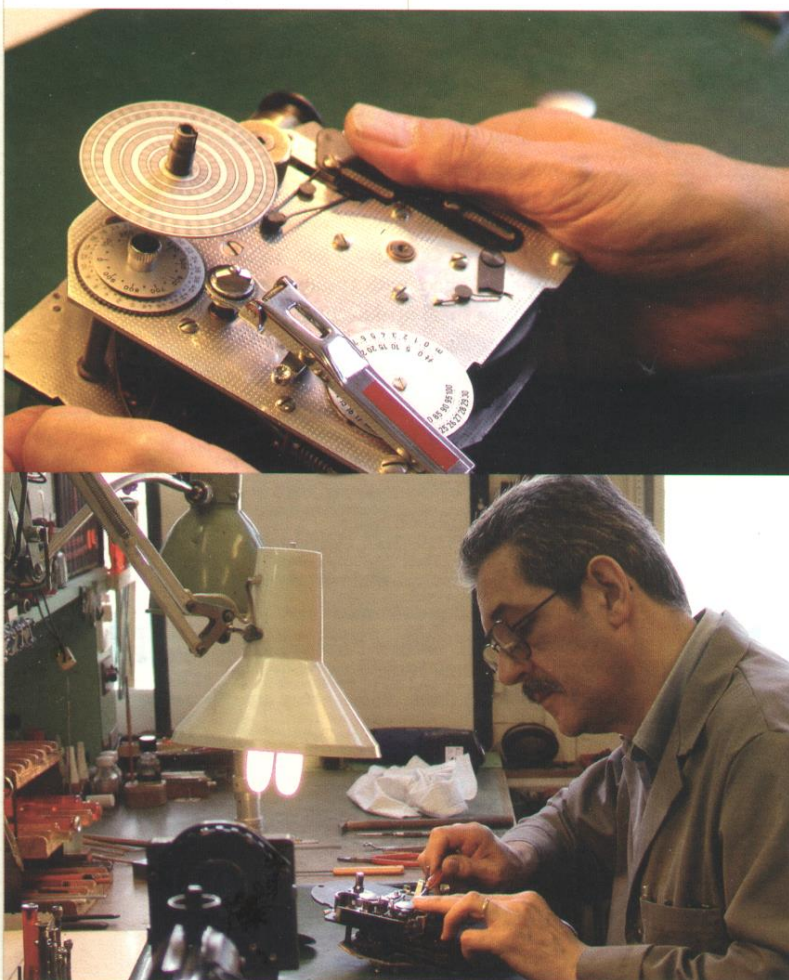
After the tour is quickly wrapped up, we watch over the shoulder of Otello,

the French-speaking technician. He has worked at Bolex for 36 years. A dark cloud descends. He is the only one left – the only one of 5,000 who worked for Bolex-Paillard in the mid 1960s. Back then, the name represented a global organization: professional cameras, amateur cameras, projectors, viewers, glue presses, typewriters, and record players. But the population of Jura, Switzerland, hidden behind the mountains, completely slept through the change from mechanics to electronics. Eumig in Austria purchased the film unit of Bolex and rode headlong into annihilation. The booming small format film industry drowned in a tidal wave of video. Eumig's other product lines had long since been sacrificed to preserve their supposedly indestructible film business. Mismanagement in Vienna also dragged Bolex down. It was Rene Ueter, who had worked in sales for Bolex since 1956, who convinced the Swiss banks that the solid core of Bolex would remain profitable. In 1980, he led the legendary brand out of bankruptcy and has focused exclusively on professional 16mm equipment ever since.

"It's still the same today," laughs son Marc, "we make 10 to 20 cameras a year at a cost of 3,500 Euros and up for the body." These days, it is rare to see an H16 RX5 built with three objective lenses on a classic revolving mount. A little more common is the H16 SBM with bayonet mount. Both models are traditional spring-based cameras. "During an expedition to the South Pole, where other old film and video cameras with power packs and batteries were carried along, only our Bolex was working at minus 79 degrees Celsius." Uninterrupted operation is guaranteed down to minus 30 degrees Celsius.

The electric H16 EL is also available. All of these cameras can be used to shoot old-school 16mm or Super 16. Just unscrew a plate and flip a lever and you are done. "Only the H16 RX5 cannot easily be switched back to its original condition after being configured for Super 16," emphasizes Ueter. All models

Otello Diotallevi assembles a new mechanical Bolex H16







Marc Ueter, René Ueter's son, took over the business

## Technical Data Bolex H16 EL

### Mechanics

- Electric motor, electronic pulse regulation
- Rotary shutter with 170° aperture angle
- 1, 10, 12, 18, 20, 24, 25, 32, 40, 50 frames/sec., 24 and 25 frames/sec. for sound
- Max. sound synchronization drift over 120m of film: 1 frame
- No over or underexposure of the first or last frame
- Camera stops with the rotary disk shutter closed
- Unlimited rewind
- Automatic threading with loop maker; roll eject
- Frame counter up to 1,000 individual frames, feet and meter counter
- 30 m roll capacity, expandable to 120m
- Front release for normal operation
- Side release for normal, extended, or single-frame release
- Flash connection
- Remote control connection

### Optical System

- Flicker-free, image always visible in the viewfinder
- 13x Zoom
- +/- 5 diopter adjustable viewfinder
- Closable viewfinder
- Viewfinder image matches projection image
- TV image: 8.4 x 6.3 mm, R = 1.7 mm
- Accepts most C-mount objective lenses
- Filter slot for gelatin filters

### Exposure meter

- Built-in TTL exposure meter
- Sensitivity 25 – 1,600 ASA, 15 – 33 DIN
- Center-weighted metering
- Manual setting and +/- 1 stop exposure correction

### Battery operation

- 12V/0.8 Ah for 240 m film at +20°C and 25 frames/sec. screwed onto the camera
- 12V/1.2 Ah for 480 m film at +20°C and 25 frames/sec. with shoulder belt or carried in a bag
- Charge unit with 12-hour charge

are always in stock. "If you are buying a camera, you want it fast," the businessman understands. The greatest number of buyers come from the USA, followed by England, Germany, Spain, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, and Australia. "We also have a good service network: three representatives in the USA, one each in England, Australia, The Netherlands, Singapore, and Canada. We are even represented in Tokyo. We can ship them spare parts within 24 hours from here."

### Even father Rene is still involved

Once a day, father Rene comes to the shop, which is his life, and looks around to make sure everything is running correctly. In an emergency, mother and sister Ueter have to pitch in. And thus, a global company became a family business. Otello Diotallevi puts the H16 SBM he is assembling aside because a rush order has taken priority. A French customer has delivered

a beaten up Bolex. "It was used for TV in the Iraqi war and dropped," reports Marc Ueter. Once in a while, TV stations still shoot with 16mm cameras from the small manufacturer, especially nature and animal films. "Apart from that, our customers are film schools, universities and film amateurs, as well as pros. Young people shoot music clips on Super 16, and advertising for the skateboard and snowboard scenes is often filmed on Bolex."

"I've never shot a movie," says Bolex Junior finally, almost defiantly, "I haven't been interested in it." He has to keep selling these legendary pieces. I say, pausing at the door on my way out. And I think: At least they are still available. ■

All of these Bolex models are still available today



## Technical Data Bolex H16 SBM

### Mechanics

- Spring drive
- Variable angle rotary shutter, maximum 135°
- 1, 12, 16, 18, 24, 32, 48, 64 frames/sec.
- Retractable crank handle
- Automatic threading with loop maker
- Frame counter; feet and meter counter
- 30m roll capacity; expandable to 120m
- Front release for normal operation
- Side release for normal, extended, or single-frame release

### Optical system

- Flicker-free, image always visible in the viewfinder
- 13x zoom
- +/- 5 diopter adjustable viewfinder
- Closable viewfinder
- Viewfinder image matches projection image
- TV image: 8.4 x 6.3 mm, R = 1.7 mm
- Accepts most C-mount objective lenses
- Filter slot for gelatin filters

### Exposure meter

The H16 SBM can be matched with a Kern Vario-Switar 100 PTL, which has a built-in exposure meter and automatically controls the shutter.

### Synchronous sound recording

When the camera is coupled with an ESM electric motor, synchronous sound recording is possible via pulse or crystal control at 24 or 25 frames/sec.