

DANIEL HEER

MATTRESS MAKER

THE SCION OF A FAMILY FROM LUCERNE WHO HAVE BEEN MAKING HORSEHAIR MATTRESSES SINCE 1907, IT WASN'T UNTIL DANIEL HEER SET OUT A DIFFERENT PATH THAT HE FOUND HE COULD CONTINUE THE FAMILY'S CRAFTING TRADITIONS ON HIS OWN TERMS.

The Heer name has been synonymous with leather saddles and Rosshaarmatrazen, or traditional horsehair mattresses, since 1907, when Benedikt Heer founded his workshop in Lucerne, Switzerland. Known for its durability and comfort, horsehair has long been considered a staple of high-quality upholstery, but its use has declined in recent times owing to the introduction of cheaper synthetic materials. After training as an apprentice with his family, Daniel Heer, Benedikt's great-grandson, moved to Berlin, and wondered for a while whether his days in the Rosshaarmatrazen trade were over. As is often the way with family businesses, the distance allowed him to reflect on his heritage, and when he finally decided to return to the craft, it was to be on his own terms.

Today he handcrafts mattresses and leather goods at Manufaktur Heer in his workshop in Mitte, Berlin. Horsehair is ordered in bales from Toggenburger & Co, the only spinners of its kind in Switzerland, who also supplies the white horsetail hair for the mattresses of the royal families of Sweden and England. Hair from the mane gives a medium firmness, while the tail hair is much firmer, and the customer's preference is taken into account before Daniel begins work on each piece. It requires the hair from more than 40

horses to create each mattress, a material particularly well suited to the task, owing to its elasticity, high tensile strength, and ability to absorb moisture. It also eliminates odors, acts well to conserve heat, and is of course a totally natural and sustainable product.

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To create each mattress, Heer carefully sculpts around 33 pounds of horsehair into three layers, two feet high. He's keen to emphasize the fact that the mattresses themselves are "built, not stuffed." Knowing instinctively when the mattress has reached the correct firmness and density, the horsehair is then covered in virgin fleece before being dressed in fabric (his preference is for Kvadrat wool) and the edges rolled to give the mattress its form. Expert needlework is used to refine the shape, with more

Swiss designer Daniel Heer in his Berlin workshop.