

**Zeitschrift:** Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Band:** 86 (2020)  
**Heft:** [6]

**Artikel:** Silvesterchläusen celebrations : celebrating the "Old New Year" in style  
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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-943922>

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# Travel | Reise: Silvesterchläusen



Silvesterchläusen | Men getting ready.



Silvesterchläusen | die Wüeschten.



Silvesterchläusen | The elaborate head-gear.



Silvesterchläusen | die Schöne.



**Travel | Reise: Silvesterchläusen celebrations**

# Celebrating the 'Old New Year' in style

If you were to visit the town of Urnäsch, or one of the neighbouring villages in Appenzell, like I did a few years ago over the Christmas holiday period, you might be wondering what you had stumbled into if you ended up in their idyllic part of the country during their Silvesterchläusen celebrations.

The Silvesterchläusen event takes place on two separate days – December 31, to celebrate the 'Neuer Silvester' and usually the second Saturday of January for the 'Alter Silvester'. The reason that there are two dates for this celebration goes back to the introduction by Pope Gregory XIII of the new calendar. Some Cantons refused to accept the new calendar and continued using the old one up to up the 18th century – hence the difference in dates for the festival! So if you were like me and missed the first round of celebrations in December, simply go along in January!

Whether it started from pagan traditions to scare away the bad spirits of the bygone year in hopes for a more fruitful one to come, or whether it was the melting together of Niklaus and Fasnacht traditions remains a topic of many conversations. The attire for the day stems back to the days when people begged in disguise, but now the Chläuse, as they are known, wear elaborate robes and masks as they wish everyone a Happy New Year.

The day is traditionally a family affair. First off, the Chläuse are always men. Even the Rollis, the ones that look like women – and you will see adult, teenage and even children Chläuse partaking in the days activities. The festival consists of processions throughout the centre of Urnäsch (or surrounding villages), with all these men dressed in amazing costumes, colourful masks and fantastic headdresses, as they go from house to house, basically creating lots of noise! There is always plenty of singing, ringing bells and lots of fun.

There are three types of people depicted in the 'Silvesterchläuse' processions.

The beautiful – die Schöne – wear brightly-coloured traditional dress and have masks that look like the faces in a traditional painting. They also wear giant head pieces that tell a story or show scenes from everyday life in the alps. The head-piece of the 'women' Chläuse can easily have a height of over 50cm, can weigh up to eight kilograms. It takes about three years to hand

make a new headpiece, which is the interval at which they are replaced. Whew!

The ugly – die Wüeschten – are typically covered in pine, cedar or other available tree branches, or straw. Their masks are ugly and typically characterized by googly eyes, ferocious looking teeth and sometimes horns. Though they look evil they are not meant to be regarded as such.

And the pretty-uglies, or the less ugly – die Schö-Wüeschte – are a mixture of the ugly and the beautiful. Their attire is made of forest elements like that of the ugly, but their masks are more human in appearance. They too have head pieces, but made from mother nature's bounty – leaves, nuts and straw and may also depict alpine scenes including barns.

In general, a costume can weigh anywhere from 20 to 30 kilos. All of the Chläuse wear large cowbells of different sizes and sing Zäuerli (songs without a text) in front of the homes they visit. As they go from house to house wishing people a good new year, they are given small presents of money to contribute towards their lavish costumes which involve hours and hours of work to make.

The Chläuse with the biggest bell leads the Schuppel, and the one with the smallest bell will ring his the last when the celebration ends late in the night.

Seeing and hearing the Chläuse, and the way everyone interacts with each other during this celebration, led me to have a

great appreciation of this tradition and an awe for the intricacy and beauty of the head pieces and costumes. It was also lovely to see how people open their doors not just to the Chläuse, but to neighbours and tourists (like me) alike.

Alter Silvester is a real community affair and I for one am so grateful I got to be there to witness such a fun and time-honoured tradition. I can happily say it is crossed off my bucket list, however, it is something I hope I can one day take my children to see, so they too can appreciate the Chläuse!

**Terese**



Silvesterchläusen | Children do it too.

**LOOKING TO EMIGRATE TO NZ**

My name is Sandra. I am 48 years old and my life partner Urs is 50. We would like to emigrate to NZ. My first contact with NZ was 7 years ago, when I stayed in Mount Manganui for 3 months, and fell in love with your beautiful country.

Urs is a qualified machine mechanic. All work with machines, mechanics, cars, trucks or where manual skills are required would be great for him. I'm a qualified radio and television electronics technician.

For the last 7 years I have worked as a technician for telecommunication and network technology.

We both are seeking employment assistance to be able to come to NZ and we are looking and willing to take up any kind of work. Please contact us at:

**av-service@bluewin.ch**

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