

N°14 ARCHITECT GÜNTER KATHERL\_CAMEL  
AUSTRIA



ABOUT THE PERSON

#1 PROJECT  
House Mesh  
near Linz, Austria



# CARAMEL



## FACTS

Caramel Architects is managed by three partners: Günter Katherl, Martin Haller and Ulrich Aspetsberger. The office focuses on successful participation in international competitions. This is also the reason for the latest construction contracts. Besides the implementation of major projects like Science Park Linz, Adidas World of Sports West Herzogenaurach, WIFI Dornbirn, a factory building in Ansfelden and a school in Krems, the trio is dedicated to design studies, room installations, experiments and innovative family home projects. Idealism and inventive spirit are at the top of their list. Highlights such as lectures, courses and art projects, e.g. the contribution to the Austrian pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2016, are enjoyed by Caramel and its staff in their everyday work as architects.



## ARCHITECT GÜNTER KATHERL IN THE INTERVIEW

I like to take a step back and observe things from afar.

### WHAT WAS THE MAIN REASON YOU BECAME AN ARCHITECT?

That is a difficult question. Because I had to go to Vienna to study. I originally come from Attersee. I think that time was so much better compared to now. Back then, not all children had to know at the age of 10 what they wanted to do later in life. We only knew which train to take, but not a single one of us knew what we wanted to study, let alone major in. I only knew I was going to take the train to Vienna. But at that time it was still very broad-based, because I had so many different interests.

### WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE CONTEMPORARY BUILDING AND WHO IS YOUR FAVOURITE ARCHITECT?

I like to go back to the beginning of the line and start with the architect. I like to take a step back and observe things from afar. Because, what is the architect? There is an architect of the currency reform, or Greta Thunberg could be considered the architect of the "Fridays for Future" movement. It's someone who gets something into their head and, above all, can put it into practice.

### THREE ELEMENTS THAT BEST DESCRIBE YOUR ARCHITECTURAL STYLE?

Individual, appropriable and, hopefully, human.

### WHAT MOTIVATES YOU? WHAT IS YOUR OWN PROFESSIONAL FOCUS?

I guess it is building for people and with people. And that is where I think you will always get to the next project, the next question.

### WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE PROJECT SO FAR? WHY?

Definitely one of them was the Venice Biennale Project, which took place in 2016. We worked with refugees back then and built a refugee shelter. Honestly, it is very difficult to say what the favourite project is. It is basically always the one that you are working on, but it is also many more, because I do not distinguish between the ones we do and the ones we want to do, we usually just do the ones we want to do. That should be our only relevance, that we help people or make them laugh with our work. With this answer, the matter was settled.

**WHAT SHOULD ARCHITECTURE ALWAYS STRIVE TO ACHIEVE AND WHAT SHOULD NEVER BE DONE?**

Always serve people and never patronise them.

**HOW MUCH GLASS DOES ARCHITECTURE NEED?**

As much as necessary and as little as possible. As little as necessary and as much as possible. That is always true. It is a difficult question, because with glass alone it is superb, but without glass it is even better.

**HOW DO YOU ASSESS THE CURRENT VALUE OF ARCHITECTURE FROM A CULTURAL-SOCIO-POLITICAL POINT OF VIEW?**

Well, let us say we are sufficiently involved in the artistic and philosophical discourse, if at all, but we certainly have far too little socio-political relevance. Projects like this one at the Biennale are an exception, and such a thing happens rather by chance. Much of what we have done now, we have only achieved because we dared to. The situation when we opened our office was far worse than it is now. The world is more open today, but far fewer young people are becoming self-employed than before.

**WHICH ARCHITECTURAL TASK IS PARTICULARLY APPEALING TO YOU?**

Anything as long as it has nothing to do with building. Architecture is much more than a means of definition. Architecture is simply much, much more than we imagine in our lives. I would prefer it to have less to do with the building aspect.

**ARCHITECTURE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE OR IN THE CITY. WHERE DO YOU DIRECT YOUR GREATER INTEREST?**

That is another question I find difficult to answer. In the countryside we fight against urban sprawl and in the city we fight for densification. In other words, we have these tasks both here and there, and we try to fulfill them in the best possible way.



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#2 PROJECT  
House Marie  
Baden, Austria



### THE FUTURE OF ARCHITECTURE? WHERE WILL IT GO TO?

Probably less new construction, but more reconstruction, or rather more conversion. I very much hope so. There is perhaps a slight tendency towards this already, but still far too little. There is still far too little appreciation of the old, and for us as architects, this also means that we have to plan and build more flexibly and with a better future, so that we can plan and anticipate these new uses a little better.

### A FEW SENTENCES ON THE SUBJECT OF SUSTAINABILITY?

At the moment sustainability is mainly inflationary and that is what is disturbing about it. In principle, it would be extremely important, but at the moment it consists only of catchwords and that is also what bothers me immensely. There is also the question of what sustainable architecture is. Do I now have to build out of wood, do I have to build out of concrete? Some people say that if the house is supposed to hold for 500 years, it will be no problem to build it out of concrete, but if it is rather short term, you will have to think more about the use of materials. We like to think about the materials and we also think a lot about their sustainability, but the issue of durability needs to be reconsidered, because at the moment most buildings are demolished after 30 years. So you should ask yourself the question: Is that really necessary? That is the time of amortisation and that is how we have to calculate it.

### DO YOU APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE OF GLOBALISATION IN ARCHITECTURE?

It is a bit of a shame that everything is being lumped together, but I do not think that it is 100 % true either. There are still local tendencies that we, as architects, also perceive. So there are local developments, fortunately. If everything came from just one source, that of a star architect who travels around the world, it would probably be bad.

### WHAT DOES THE TERM "GREEN BUILDING" MEAN FOR YOU? THE FUTURE, THE PRESENT, ONLY A TREND OR SIGNIFICANTLY MORE?

Well, sooner or later we will have to think about how we will come to terms with nature and our environment.