



querkraft

Profile



There are numerous architectural groups and offices in Vienna with handsome names and which in some cases have also become really successful: eisvogel., caramel, t-hoch-n, pool, the next ENTERprise, BWM, propeller z, AllesWirdGut, Bittersüss, 000y0 Architekten, feld72, silberpfeil... Striking group names such as these have several advantages. You do not have to list all the names of the members, which no-one can remember anyway, not even the client, and it creates an impression of unspent youth, a permanent, young architectural freshness.

The querkraft (lateral force) group is one of the most successful companies and has one of the most appealing names. It has been around since 1998, when four young graduates from the Technical University in Vienna decided to work together. In those days group-name studios were not yet a mass phenomenon in Vienna - querkraft was one of the first, together with propeller z architects. There was, however, quite definitely an Austrian tradition in this respect, which has in fact become highly prestigious: Haus-Rucker-Co, Salz der Erde, Coop Himmelb(l)au, missing link and ZÜND-UP were the names of some of the young architectural groups in the 1960s and early 1970s, all of which have achieved fame of some sort or other. Almost all the architects have become professors and even today most of them are still of interest as practicing architects - even if they are no longer utopian.

The new groups are no longer so concerned with creating utopia, although it is still lurking somewhere in the back of their minds. More than anything they want to build - but not at any price. They want to build such that something of the utopia in the back of their minds is actually visible: architecture as poetry, as fun, and as a human task. Anybody who has created a good building - and good here implies interesting in terms of concept and detail - has improved the world a little. In this respect, querkraft is no different from any other architectural group in the Vienna scene. But the three architects and their staff are indisputably the most forceful of all the Viennese studios. Who can dispute it: kraft (force) means young, strong, dependable. persevering, imaginative ... and quer (lateral): constructive, persistent, crossover, unconventional, at times rebellious but by no means stubborn or inflexible.

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Jakob Dunkl, Peter Sapp and
Gerd Erhartt



querkraft is Jakob Dunkl, Gerd Erhartt and Peter Sapp. Until 2004 founding member Michael Zinner, who has since moved to Linz to devote himself to training architects, was also part of the team. Peter Sapp teaches too; he holds the Chair of Interior Design at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich. Helmut Richter, who was recently described in a lecture by Peter Cook as the best contemporary architect in Austria, had an important influence on the querkraft architects. They value Richter, under whom they studied, and in whose company they worked, for his innovative solutions emanating from the structure. Richter applies the structural aspect aesthetically, with the impact of the aesthetics being underscored by the choice of unusual materials. These include so-called banal materials not usually used in architecture - such as the canvas covers used on trucks, formwork boards, wire gauze, and corrugated metal. querkraft never tires of reasserting how much they respect Richter and how much they have learnt from him.

BUH temporary roof
Gars am Kamp, Austria, 2001



The querkrafters first managed to grab the limelight with a Richter-style approach for a sun-sail at a street cafe in Vienna: Sailcloth was used in a cleverly constructive way - the solution was not just efficient but also inexpensive. The use of sailboat equipment later became a fashion, and fashion is not what querkraft is about. They look for and deliver individual solutions. They do not strive for a recognizable signature, nor an image all of their own unless, that is, it is one of calmness both in their way of working and in the language their buildings are made with. Composure reigned at the beginning of their career as well in terms of building costs, not upward, however, quite the contrary, downward. The more limited the budget was, the easier time they had - or so it appeared. You can see from the buildings that they must have cost little to build, yet they never look cheap. If anything quite the opposite: they are rather complex, with lots of thought going into the conception and design phase. The finished buildings provide a sense of this and likewise the long communal discussions which preceded the designs. In the beginning designing is a verbal process - instead of finding a democratic solution querkraft keeps on discussing until everyone agrees.

It was unusual, and hard to overlook, and thus it also drew attention to the humor and talent of querkraft.

querkraft became well-known with its temporary design for a major future construction site, namely converting the Messepalast in Vienna to a museum district. The assignment involved drawing attention to the upcoming event by designing the facade: A baroque monument, the former imperial stalls, was to be converted into a modern cultural center. In Vienna, where people and particularly city planners and local politicians suffered from the terrible horror vacui of the 19th century and everything has to be densely overgrown in the mistaken belief that it is nature, so beautiful, querkraft came up with a counter strategy. They had all bushes and shrubs removed from the forecourt of the future museum district. The cleared spaces were decorated with numerous running meters of scaffold netting. The installation looked like colored tennis nets hanging vertically in front of the facade. It was unusual, and hard to overlook, and thus it also drew attention to the humor and talent of querkraft.

Two years later, in 2001, querkraft designed Prachner, a bookshop specializing in art and architecture books, in the museum district. They adapted the baroque space into a large reading arena. Major contracts followed, such as the office and operations building for Trevision in the Burgenland region, a timber family home for EUR 200,000, a double building on a cliff in Klosterneuburg and a residential building constructed in a gap between other buildings. Recent querkraft projects include the design of the Römermuseum in Vienna and the Adi Dassler Brand Center in Herzogenaurach, Germany. Not to mention the final coup, the Liaunig Museum in southern Austria. The building is regarded as one of the finest museum buildings in the whole of Europe. It enriches a wonderful hilly landscape - a rare case.

TRE industrial building
Grosshoflein, Austria, 2002



Interview



Jakob Dunkl, Peter Sapp and
Gerd Erhartt

At the beginning of the conversation you can choose one of these three questions:
1. What do you consider your best work and why? 2. What has hurt you the most?
3. What makes you different from other architects here in Vienna, Austria and the world? These are the three questions - everyone will have a turn so it does not matter which one you choose.

Gerd Erhartt

OK, let's start with the first.

What do you regard as your best work? Name it, describe it and explain why.

Gerd Erhartt

This is very subjective. "Our best work" by no means implies that it is a good work.

Jakob Dunkl

At present I would put the Museum Liaunig very high on the list, as everything there turned out pretty well: It is unbelievably efficient, it is poetic, it is radical. When a building is monumental or makes a strong statement in the landscape it could make people feel small and insignificant in it. And to our relief this is precisely what did not happen. I consider this the most important aspect.

Comparing babies with building projects is a fitting comparison: I cannot say which of my children is my favorite or second favorite.

KH exhibition installation
„a foot in the door“, Vienna,
Austria 2000



Peter Sapp

Actually, for me, the best work category does not exist with regard to your own projects, as they are subject to your own developmental process. The question should rather be: Which work means the most to you, and this would be the last one, our last baby, one that means an awful lot, the Museum Liaunig. But there are others, such as the street-cleaning brushes in the exhibition “foot in the door”. This also hits the spot.

Jakob Dunkl

Comparing babies with building projects is a fitting comparison: I cannot say which of my children is my favorite or second favorite. I imagine all parents are the same.

So is it true that you are all really devoted fathers, don't work overtime, you shut up shop at 5 p.m., and don't work at weekends?

Gerd Erhartt

That's right. Since we all had children. I work a 30-hour week

Jakob Dunkl

Even when we go to an architectural discussion in the evening we record every working hour. On average we work the same number of hours in a year as a normal employee. In terms of quantity we make a big effort to keep our recreational and family time high on the list. It's up to others to judge whether we are good family fathers. We look at it as an experiment, and decided that now that we all have children, how about we work less, and will this affect our careers? We are trying it out and actually we are satisfied with how it's working out. In fact I now believe that if we spent more time in the office we would be less efficient. I see no burnout danger on the horizon - my family provides a good balance.

Gerd Erhartt

Right from the start we got our employees very much involved. As such there is no need for us to be here all the time. We value personal initiative and responsibility and I consider this to be the right way forward. We are not a company that is proud if the lights are still burning at 9 p.m. We actually consider it rather unpleasant.

Let's now move on to the second of our initial questions: What has offended you the most?

Jakob Dunkl, Peter Sapp and Gerd Erhartt



Peter Sapp



Peter Sapp

I would not say hurt, but sometimes you get annoyed. We have the models here in storage and whenever I pass the Linz Opera I feel really annoyed that we did not get any further with our design. I can't understand why the project wasn't built. That annoys me.

Precisely. You have just answered my question about what hurts you. That pretty much answers the question, doesn't it?

Peter Sapp

Well, hurt, hmmm.

Annoyance is a symptom of being hurt. What else hurts you - architectural critique for example?

Jakob Dunkl

No, we have been lucky in that we have never been pulled to pieces, never been hurt by critics.

Does that not make you suspicious?

Jakob Dunkl

Yes, it is a bit strange.

Office querkraft, Vienna, Austria

One reason for selecting us was the humor in our architecture, the relaxed, easy approach.



I would like to finish with a question I was planning to ask later: You started off spectacularly, exploding onto the scene with your installations and with architecture that was not too far removed from art - though I do not consider architecture to be art. As a consumer I have noticed that you have become a little more pragmatic. You build in an orderly fashion, all very nice, but without the experiments that are fun, playing games with space etc. There's a bit of that in the Museum, but otherwise you have become well-behaved house producers.

(Quiet)

You're at a loss. Don't you miss it? Do you not have enough time? Should someone extend an invitation to you?

Office querkraft, Vienna, Austria



Gerd Erhartt

The assignments have changed. As a young company you don't really have instant access to building projects. In this stage many architects operate in the field of tension between art and architecture, with installations. With a certain career behind it the company grows and we are not given assignments such as these any more.

Jakob Dunkl

That is of course a harsh criticism. It reminds me a bit of what Peter Cook said. In 2004 we received the Young Architect of the Year Award, actually for lots of minor projects. One reason for selecting us was the humor in our architecture, the relaxed, easy approach. As chairman of the jury, Peter Cook asked us whether we could transform this into larger architectural projects, whether it was something we could maintain.

You just don't make these funny, fresh, refreshing installations and productions any more. Rather you are a company, as it should be, and you have your daily routines to be getting on with. Do you have the feeling that you lost this humor, which was certainly typical of your earlier works, because the everyday world of architecture is a rather humorless one? It wipes the smile from one's face, so to speak?

Peter Sapp

I wouldn't say that. There are always considerations, like with a large residential building we are currently working on. We are trying to stimulate the superimposition

brought by users to the building, by offering small collapsible laundry stands which can be mounted on the banister. In this way a very large residential building with 150 apartments suddenly receives a layer of fluttering tights, socks and underwear. This is an example of playful additions. If I think about Adidas, about building a high-performance machine for a company, the assignment allows less such playfulness.



Residential Buildings
Liverpool, UK

What are you working on at the moment? Regardless of how much fun it is.

Gerd Erhartt

At the moment we are mainly working on public housing

Jakob Dunkl

We decided to have a break from competitions and the majority of direct contracts happened to be in the field of residential buildings. We now notice that we are keen to get involved in other projects. Residential architecture is enjoyable and fun, but we would not feel fulfilled if that's all we did.

Jakob Dunkl



Does that mean that competitions are not just an opportunity for acquisition but sort of fun for the company?

Peter Sapp

Only in a very small dose. It can be rather frustrating as well when you put a lot of effort into something and then have to shoot in the air in the hope that you actually hit something.

Fun at a price.

Jakob Dunkl

The fun comes when you get an appealing assignment. It doesn't have to be a competition as far as we're concerned. In fact competitions aren't really the way to go for us as we have noticed that what particularly appeals to us is when we can search for the target together with the client or define the assignment with him. In the case of competitions you get a target, everyone has to shoot in that direction and a few hit the bulls-eye. This is what doesn't particularly appeal to us. Also, it is a completely absurd exploitation of our profession.

LEE residential housing
Vienna, Austria, 2004

Our main motive is building itself. We want to design only what we can then build.



Gerd Erhartt



Gerd Erhartt

The relationship between what the profession architect actually generates and what you get back in return is absolutely absurd.

Peter Sapp

Our main motive is building itself. We want to design only what we can then build. Given this perspective competitions are not really our thing.

Jakob, what you just said about clients and identifying the target reminds me of something Richard Neutra once said: he feels like a psychoanalyst who attempts to penetrate the client's subconscious in order to come up with what is best for him. Can you identify with this?

Jakob Dunkl

There is something in that.

Gerd Erhartt

It is important to understand the motive for someone wanting to do something. If you recognize this you can perhaps deliver different solutions. We consider this a part of our job, an important task: To redefine the task from the very outset.

Peter Sapp

We also consider reaching a common denominator, moving forward together with the client as one of our special features. You can't do that in a competition.

I recently gave a lecture in Munich on psychoanalysis and architecture during which, among other things, I showed the Museum Liaunig. I maintained that it features a lot of what can be described as erotic symbolism in construction. There is a vaginal element, a uterus, and a phallic element, aspiring to get back into the ground.

Jakob Dunkl

That's hard to deny.

ML museum liaunig

Neuhaus/Suha, Carinthia, Austria,
2008



Peter Sapp

Although we didn't really consider this.

Jakob Dunkl

But it's true: There's the small vagina, the guest apartment. And an emergency exit vagina too.

The museum also has an internal appendix.

Jakob Dunkl

The gold collection.

So the body metaphor is quite applicable.

Jakob Dunkl

When we are working we tend to think about different metaphors

But it's true: There's the small vagina, the guest apartment. And an emergency exit vagina too.



**Jakob Dunkl, Peter Sapp and
Gerd Erhartt**

ML museum liaunig
Neuhaus/Suha, Carinthia, Austria,
2008



Which ones?

Peter Sapp

At Museum Liaunig we came across two pieces of ground and a flattened hill between them, this plateau. We came up with the idea of placing the exhibition room as a sort of bypass between the two sections of ground and thus offering the visitor the chance to arrive at both pieces of land on his tour, and to perceive the outside.

Where do metaphors come from? Are they created before the design, before the visible form, or afterwards? Are the metaphors important for a project, as guidelines?

Jakob Dunkl

Sometimes this is so. For the Römermuseum am Hohen Markt we sought images which illustrated what we wish of a museum. A photograph for the caption "arouse curiosity" depicted somebody opening a barn door. A beam of light penetrated the opening, which was just a few centimeters wide. The photo constituted a metaphor at the beginning of the process and ultimately we covered the facade of the Römer-

Römermuseum
Vienna, 2008



One metaphor displaces another and a metametaphor arises, a metametametaphor.

VIT industrial building
Asperhofen, Austria, 2003



museum with aluminum panels. The slits admit a little light and allow you to peep in the museum from outside.

Vienna, an observer of history. To recapitulate, the metaphor certainly has its uses.

Peter Sapp

Yes. It often happens gradually or overlaps with other metaphors. A metaphor you start off with may become less important as things proceed and be superseded by others.

Jakob Dunkl

One metaphor displaces another and a metametaphor arises, a metametametaphor.

Peter Sapp

That's getting a little too complicated.

Anna Soucek was born in Vienna and studied History of Art and Philosophy. She has curated exhibitions such as "stadt in sicht: Neue Kunst aus Bratislava" (City in View: New Art from Bratislava) and "Niemand's Land. Modelle für den öffentlichen Raum" (No Man's Land: Models for public Spaces). She is a co-founder of the "forum experimentelle architektur" (experimental architecture forum) and works on the editorial staff of Radio Österreich 1 for the Austrian broadcasting corporation ORF in Vienna.

Jan Tabor was born in Podebrady in the Czech Republic and lives and works in Vienna as an architectural theorist, publisher, and curator. The exhibitions he has curated include "Kunst und Diktatur" (Art and Dictatorship), "den fuß in der tür", "(a foot in the door)" "mega: manifeſte der anmaßung" (mega: manifestos of arrogance) and most recently "Die Enzyklopädie der wahren Wert" (The Encyclopedia of true Values). Jan Tabor teaches in Zaha Hadid's studio, at the Academy of Applied Art and the Academy of Visual Arts in Bratislava. He was a co-founder of "forum experimentelle architektur" (experimental architecture forum), has given numerous lectures and published widely in Germany and abroad.



Works

Karree St.Marx
Vienna, Austria



LEE residential housing
Vienna, Austria, 2004



ML museum liaunig

Neuhaus/Suha, Carinthia, Austria,
2008



Römermuseum

Vienna, 2008



**ADBC adidas adi dassler brand
center**
Herzogenaurach, Germany, 2006



LEE residential housing
Vienna, Austria, 2004



VIT industrial building
Asperhofen, Austria, 2003



TRE industrial building
Grosshoflein, Austria, 2002



BUH temporary roof
Gars am Kamp, Austria, 2001



KH exhibition installation
„a foot in the door“, Vienna,
Austria 2000

