

Caramel

Caramel Architekten's work has its share of spectacular modernist one-off houses, but it is an interest in industrial typologies that marks this practice out as one to watch.

The most significant of these projects is the *Central Garage* in Ansfelden, Austria, completed in 2006, which uses a limited palette of industrial materials to striking effect. The complex consists of 1,300sq m (14,000sq ft) of automotive garage, with three large mechanics' pits, vehicle hoists, and various other infrastructure, along with surrounding facilities of other workshops, paint shops, warehouses and a two-storey office building.

Caramel won the project in a limited competition in 2002 with a scheme that ignored the organizers' request that the buildings should be arranged in a linear manner, preferring a courtyard arrangement featuring an interior yard with a transparent covering. This creates an internal street, flooded with light from a transparent ETFE membrane roof, which can be accessed from either end.

The building was constructed in just 18 months, despite a very harsh

winter, using an advanced steel-frame construction method. Long spans of 20m (65ft) were achieved with 1.6m-high (5ft) plate girders, and the whole building was made using mass-produced, standard beams and posts. Transparency is a feature of the building, but it is the reflective section of façade that really catches the eye. This may look like steel in the pictures, but it is in fact a synthetic EVA plastic membrane, and the rivets holding it in place make it look like a quilt, almost like a piece of fabric. What the architect describes as an 'industrial vernacular' continues inside the building, apart from the bathrooms which are entirely painted in green.

The practice's work ranges from art projects (their radio-controlled rain cloud was a low-key hit at the Venice Biennale in 2004) and small-scale installations to industrial buildings, but at Ansfelden they have showed themselves to be masters of a glamorous form of modernism.

