**Alter Rundofen, Zell am Harmersbach:**

**Stunning piece of porcelain production history**

***Almost 200 years of manufacturing porcelain have left their mark on the town of Zell am Harmersbach. The Rundofen circular kiln constructed on the site of the “Obere Fabrik” (Upper Factory) in the mid-19th Century bears witness to a time when the local porcelain production facilities employed around 450 people – an incredibly high number even back then. The Rundofen circular kiln has now been skilfully reframed as an historic industrial landmark, with a VISS façade from Schüco Jansen Steel Systems stretching the whole height of the building and functioning as a display window which makes it visible for miles around.***

**Ceramics firing across three floors**

Originally there were five kilns on the site of the “Obere Fabrik”, but only one has survived. With an external diameter of 10.3 metres and measuring four storeys – or 16 metres – in height, it is the largest porcelain kiln in Germany and one of the few to remain largely in its original state. A little over a hundred years ago, from 1839 to 1942, porcelain was fired here on three of the storeys. In 1942, production was stopped due to a coal shortage and was never resumed following the war. However, that was by no means the end of ceramic production for Zell am Harmersbach. The “Untere Fabrik” (Lower Factory) has existed for a long time, gradually being expanded over the years, and is currently renowned throughout Germany and beyond for its “cock and hen” motif. It is largely down to this poultry pair that Zeller Keramik continues to exist today.

**Showcasing the industrial landmark**

The fact that the Rundofen circular kiln is also still standing today is thanks to some dedicated local people who were determined to stop this historic landmark of porcelain production from falling into disrepair. They made sure that the remains of the Obere Fabrik were declared an industrial heritage site back in 1989. But it took almost another 30 years before this industrial heritage site was put to new use. The architectural competition that went out to tender in 2016 was won by Biberach-based architectural practice wwg-architekten. The judging panel liked their design in particular because the angled façade of the new extension creates a clear break with the existing building while also providing a view of the historic Rundofen circular kiln from afar. Three intermediate floors were arranged around the circular kiln as an open gallery, enabling you to view it from all sides and to even go into each of the different levels.

**Large-scale VISS steel façade**

The construction works began in 2019. As part of the renovation, the existing outer brick walls were strengthened with reinforced concrete pillars that were mounted in front of the walls inside and colour-matched to the bricks. The outer walls of the extension have been constructed as a double-skin, coloured exposed concrete construction with core insulation. The load-bearing roof structure, an untreated timber construction, emphasises the industrial feel of the interior. To create the large glass façade, the architects opted for the VISS façade steel system because “a steel façade can accommodate more slimline dimensions and steel profiles better reflect the old industrial style,” explains Stephan Wussler from wwg-architekten. In his opinion, the benefits of a steel façade come to the fore when large module dimensions are involved, such as those of the circular kiln's ‘display window’. The façade modules measure 2.50 metres high by 2.50 metres wide, with the exception of the top row, which is connected to the floor below with trapezoidal fields (also angled inwards).

**Pre-assembled mounting brackets**

In the end, fabrication of this unusual mullion/transom façade proved to be the biggest challenge of the project for the Haslach-based façade engineers from Haser Metallbau GmbH, particularly when it came to concealing the attachment of the glass façade to the exposed concrete of the walls as much as possible. Haser Metallbau resolved this complex issue with the help of pre-assembled mounting brackets to connect the mullions to the primary structure at the top attachment point. The fields were then glazed with a double insulating glass that provides thermal insulation and sun shading. The glazing is designed to withstand soft body impact and the large panes weigh 55 kg per square metre, which amounts to around 350 kg per module field. Extra-high, automatic side-hung doors ensure barrier-free access. They were made from the Janisol steel system, which can be combined with the VISS façade with no visible transition.

**Double-vent windows in line with the existing historic building**

The architects also chose the thermally broken Janisol steel system for the windows. The 20 double-vent windows match the originals in terms of their shape and glazing bar position. By using double insulating glass for the glazing, a balance was struck between the thermal insulation required by law and the heritage preservation required by the building authorities. To form the slimline glazing bars, a steel flat was attached on the outside and a tubular profile on the inside. Sheet metal panels mounted at the top window attachment point follow the contour of the brick lintel – compared to curved steel profiles, this is a simple yet stylish solution which also reflects the history of the construction.

**An outstanding fusion of newbuild and existing building**

By renovating the Rundofen circular kiln and converting it into a multifunctional event space, the repurposing of the Obere Fabrik site is complete. The town of Zell am Harmersbach has not only prevented an architectural treasure from falling into disrepair, it has also brought a piece of Zell's industrial history to life. The many awards that the project has since received are testament to the success with which the renovation and conversion of the Rundofen circular kiln fulfils the demanding design and heritage preservation requirements. The accolades include awards from the Baden-Württemberg Monument Foundation (named Monument of the Month for May) and the State of Baden-Württemberg (bronze plaque for an outstanding urban regeneration project) through to the Badischer Architekturpreis architectural award in the category “Renovating existing buildings”. With the invitation to “Denk-mal-neu!” (lit. “think again”), Christian Driemel is quoting the judging panel and lauding this project, further elaborating that “Heritage architecture and the archetype of a bygone industrial era are retained and preserved in the fabric of the building. New elements are carefully added, with the museum-like character being retained but also brought into the modern day. This creates an exemplary symbiosis between the old and new period.” It would be difficult to find a more fitting description of the metamorphosis of the dilapidated industrial site into an architectural gem.

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