

Some questions about MPREIS architecture and answers from MPREIS CEO Hansjörg Molk:

Why has MPREIS decided to use such unconventional supermarket architecture?

It all began with the friendship between an architect, Mr. Planatscher,
> and us in the early eighties. He then planned a few stores with us and
> inspired us to invest more into the quality of the room. It was (and still
> is) all a long ongoing development. It was no planned strategy we
> followed. But in the end it turned out to be something that made us very
> different from others in the business.
> In the beginning architects generally refused to plan supermarkets, it
> seemed to minor for them. So after the inspiration of Mr. Planatscher we
> started to work with young, local architects. Now it's the other way around,
> architects come to offer their ideas hoping to realize a project with us.

When did you begin doing it?

The first MPREIS planned by an architect opened in 1982 in Volders near
> Innsbruck.

How do you decide which firms you work with?

We try to find the best local firms to work with.

Do you have any input on the design or is it totally up to the architects?

It's always a dialog between us and the architects. It's a longer
> process, lots of discussions and talks - the architects and us being on the
> same level, having a constant exchange of thoughts and ideas. This process
> goes on to the smallest details of design, we are involved to all design
> decisions made.

Which stores stick out in your mind as the most successful, architecturally?

There are many, everyone different. I cannot pick some out. And in the
> end it's the customers who decide in what places they feel most comfortable.

What values to look for in the design of a new market? Openness? Light?

Yes, openness, light, (more) room. We consider a certain set of
> variables important: height of the rooms, "free-rooms" and the spare time a
> customer is spending in our market are equivalent - and therefore we are
> eager to transform those into our architecture. Every market is especially
> built for the landscape it is surrounded by. In general, when new
> supermarkets are opened the customers discuss about special offers. At our
> openings they discuss more the building, the architecture and its integrity
> with the surrounding spaces.. of course there is always a considerable
> amount of ambiguity involved in these discussions. But this is what we are
> aiming for because with conformity no discussion would arise. People start
> being more aware of the quality of the room they enter. For us, to invest
> in architectural space means to create value for our co-workers, our
> customers and the general public living in the area.
> People have to live with the design of our markets - they are a part of the
> landscape, part of their everyday-environment. To us this results in an
> obligation, a responsibility to co-design the living space of our
> customers, to improve the quality of life in our region!

It seems that MPREIS has opted for continuity instead of uniformity. The signage remains the same,

the café, he views of the Alps. But the architecture is different. How do you let people know that they're in an MPREIS or passing one on the street when all the buildings are different?

Because of our work with architecture and design over the last two
> decades this became the characteristic for our customers. Today, people in
> the Tyrol think of MPREIS when they pass by a construction site with modern
> architecture, like lots of wood, glass etc. We don't bring on a sign saying
> that the building is going to be an MPREIS store. People get curious &
> associate us with modern design & diversity. The stores all look different
> but have one sign in common: the red cube, our company logo.

The markets all seem to be in dialogue with the mountains. How important are they to the design?
How do MPREIS markets relate to their environments?

For us the communication between the building and the landscape is very
> essential. Every market is designed for the space it stands in. We try to
> be sensible & observe what every locality has to offer.
> Dialogue & communication is what we are aiming for - between our customers
> & employees, between the room & the goods offered, between the building &
> the surrounding landscape.

Do you have any markets in town centers or are they all along highways and mountain roads?
If none are in town centers why not?

Yes, there are many markets in town centers, especially "older" ones.
> Years ago supermarkets were build mainly in town centers. Later, when
> people started having cars and mobility increased, supermarkets needed more
> space for parking possibilities & we started to build our markets also out
> of the centers. In Innsbruck, the capital of the Tyrol, there are today
> about 35 MPREIS Markets. It's very important for us to be easily reachable
> for our customers to make shopping easy and comfortable - with or without
> cars.

When and how did MPREIS markets begin?

The family-owned enterprise started in the 1920s with one small store
> called "Therese Mölk", after the founder, my grandmother. In the 1970s me
> and my cousin Anton entered the company, opened the first self-service
> supermarket in august 1974 and gave it the name MPREIS.

Have any of your markets won architecture or design prizes? If so which ones?

We are constantly winning national (and some international)
> architecture and design prizes since 1993. They are listed on our website
> (<http://www.mpreis.at/standorte/architektur/auszeichnungen/index.htm>)
> MPREIS Innsbruck Hauptbahnhof, MPREIS Wengs, MPREIS Zirl, MPREIS Lienz,
> MPREIS Wattens, MPREIS Steinach and more ... In 2004 MPREIS was invited to
> the Biennale in Venice.

Tell me about MPREIS and the 2004 Venice Biennale.

Usually at the Venice Biennale the focus is on the architects. So it
> was quiet a surprise when Martha Schreieck chose us as owners to present
> Austria and take part in the exhibition.
> Her explanation was that we were working with a big range of architects and
> had a very unique and innovative approach towards the building of
> supermarket stores. This was a big honour & great pleasure for us, our
> employees & our partners!

Are there plans to expand MPREIS out of the Tyrol?

We opened our first market in the north of Italy in 2003 and will
> continue to expand over there.

You've worked with both up and coming Austrian firms and established architects like Dominique Perrault. Do you try to foster young talent or do you go with whomever submits the most compelling design?

We focus on working with young, dedicated local architects.

> Dominique Perrault came to Innsbruck to do the city hall. That's where I
> came into contact with him. He was immediately very interested in our work.
> It has been a great pleasure to work with him, he totally responded to our
> experience & to the special functions a supermarket has to fulfill.

What's in the future for the architecture at MPREIS?

Constantly working on communication, on quality of life. Being open to new ideas!

Why did you choose to design unique MPREIS markets each time, and not just replicate the same modern design again and again? Wouldn't that be less expensive?

Of course it would be less expensive to multiply a standard design,
but our understanding of architecture is that each MPREIS market has to be
integrated into its individual environment.

Do you find it less expensive to use small, local firms to design the stores?

It is not a question of price - it is part of our strategy to act regionally
sustainable which includes working together with small local businesses.

How many MPREIS markets are there total? How many of those have modern designs?

Have all of the new markets since the early 80s been done in a modern style, or do some new ones remain more traditional supermarket style?

There are now 150 markets. At the moment 80% of the markets are state-of-the-art.
And we are constantly redesigning existing markets to offer our clients the highest
quality. As to architectural form, to some extent we are bound to be restricted by
regional building regulations and the contracts with our landlords.

Is there a long history of this kind of design in the Tyrol? How have people reacted to the markets?

MPREIS did pioneer work in tyrolian architecture. The reactions to our markets
were varying, but a market-share of almost 40% proves the way of our architectural
strategy right.

Have you seen business increase since adopting this forward-looking modern architecture?

In the early 90s, our company started to build supermarkets in cooperation with
tyrolian architects. At the same time, business increased not only due to
architectural design, but due to the combination of it and a good price-performance-
ratio, friendly employees, customer proximity and a contemporary assortment.