



THE FALLS 061 ARE ALIVE

In our ceaseless sweep through the world's supermarkets, we've been distinctly underwhelmed by grocery-store design. Mpreis of the Tyrol, however, has conquered a new summit in retail architecture excellence

There are supermarkets, there are super markets and then there is Mpreis, a chain of inspired stores we found in western Austria. We all know the supermarket category is not exactly famous for its contribution to progressive architecture, but under the enlightened guidance of the family Mölk, this provincial grocery chain has succeeded in ringing the changes to an unsightly yet time-honoured tradition of prefabrication, neon signage and corrugated steel.

Because Mpreis is a family business and not in thrall to an anonymous, publicly accountable conglomerate, its development from cold functionality to winsome aesthetic has been smooth, having escaped the critical scrutiny of a bespectacled multinational accountant. Founded in 1920 by Therese Mölk, the company remains firm to its decades-old promise of personal service. So much so that when a new Mpreis is built, local shopkeepers are accommodated within the building. The

Mpreis and Super-M (larger stores) developments are so popular with residents that the store in Pfunds by architects Pendl and Senn was built as a direct result of a request by local people.

Hansjörg Mölk, group co-manager, says: 'Grocery stores are visited more often than any other public space, so we cannot afford to be indifferent to how these spaces look.' Hansjörg is convinced that quality architecture can itself become part of a corporate identity. For this reason, only Tyrolean architects design the Mpreis stores (not least because they often have to be on hand to reassure nervous town mayors), and a tradition for employing young architects is emerging.

Given the current architectural state of the world's Safeways, Sainsbury's and Konsums, we only wish the Mölks had greater, imperialistic visions for their modernist chain of markets. For now, we'll have to fly to Innsbruck for our weekly provisions. ✱