

Kaufmann Country



photo Oliver Lorenzola

There is one family which has propelled Vorarlberg's wood scene to the forefront of European awareness: the Kaufmanns. Two of the current generation, architect brothers, Hermann and Johannes Kaufmann, talk about their respective practices and reflect on how three generations have become synonymous with the region's architectural and building culture

View across the meadows, the Kaufmann Reuthe factory from neighbouring village, Bezau

Top right: the Ludesch community centre head-on

Bottom right: social housing, Neudorfstrasse in summer, Wolfurt

IF THERE IS ONE SET OF GENES which has contributed to Vorarlberg's emergence as an exemplar of regional and timber architecture these must belong to the Kaufmann family. Within continental Europe Hermann Kaufmann and the wood-focused work of the Hermann Kaufmann Bureau is already synonymous with Vorarlberg. He has become a fixture at European sustainable architecture conferences. One recent keynote was Stavanger's City of Culture's Wood City *Norwegian Wood* conference opening this last November. The Bureau also won the French Carrefour timber international sustainable architect award last year, and the Bureau's project portfolio is gradually becoming more international with major projects in both France and Germany.

What is perhaps also known, though less written of, particularly outside the central Alpine European area in which Vorarlberg is nestled, is that Kaufmann is only the most visible head of a family at the heart of Vorarlberg's building culture. As one of four brothers – all of whom are involved in wood building either as carpenters, architects of one sort or another, or as in the case of the youngest, running the Kaufmann factory. And it is not only the current generation, but goes back two generations to their grandfather. Even by that time the Kaufmanns were already something of a household name in central Europe's timber industry. In 1952 Josef Kaufmann began manufacturing glulam timber at a small timberyard in Reuthe, one of the Bregenzerwald villages. Within six years the yard was to grow into one of the largest Austrian glulam producers, changing its name to Kaufmann Holzbauwerk GmbH in 1979. During the intervening decades, Kaufmann's grew to become easily the region's largest wood manufacturer and supplier, an early producer of glulam, supporting and