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Conversion of the Papieri site in Cham, Switzerland

Housing, commerce and culture in the former paper machine production halls

Romanshorn, October 2025. Converted industrial buildings often have a special bit of magic. Spacious rooms, raw materials, expansive sites and the charm of past centuries form the canvas for a small-scale, lively new urban space concept. In the Swiss town of Cham on the northern shore of Lake Zug, a similar transformation is currently underway at the Papieri site. Part of this site includes the machine production halls of a historic paper factory, which was built at the beginning of the 20th century and was still in operation until 2015. The renowned Zurich-based firm Boltshauser Architekten has now transformed the PM 1-4 building complex into a unique address for culture, commerce, residential lofts and studios. Maintaining the industrial character was at the heart of the renovation process. This is accompanied by window and door elements with hot-dip galvanised steel profiles from Forster, which aptly invoke the existing architecture.

The tradition of papermaking in Cham dates back to the middle of the 17th century, when hydropower from the Lorze River was first used for a paper mill. Passed down through generations, the business became industrial in scope over time. With the arrival of the first Hollander beater – the machine that processes the fibres – the demand for adequate premises for the ever-increasing production also increased. The mixture of factory buildings, machine production halls, workshops and homes grew into an impressive industrial site. From 1913 onwards, the first Hollander beater building was built east of the Lorze, with paper machine production halls 1-4 added over the next 30 years. A new chapter in their use has now begun.

Master plan for a prestigious district

The ultimate relocation of paper production abroad paved the way for an important urban development project – around 4,000 people are expected to live and work on the 12-hectare Papieri site by 2030. To this end, an urban planning project is being developed according to the criteria of the “2,000-Watt Sites” label. This project involves the addition of towering new buildings around the existing buildings, some of which are listed. The ribbon development, new squares and the access concept master the balancing act between a modern urban district and a deep awareness of the local history.

Following a cooperative planning process with citizen participation, the master plan follows the urban planning concept from Albi Nussbaumer Architekten from Zug and Boltshauser Architekten from Zurich. The latter was responsible, among other things, for the conversion of the approximately 250-metre-long strip between the Lorze and Maschinengasse. The former, on the other hand, has now moved its offices into a studio loft in the old paper halls.

Refurbishment in harmony with history

Five commercial units, seven loft studios and 52 apartments have been built in the oblong site of around 2,620 square metres. Cultural, commercial and catering facilities are located along the ground floor area, which are intended to transform Maschinengasse into a lively urban space. The residential lofts and studios are located on the up to three upper floors. For the conversion, Boltshauser Architekten had the building stripped back to the supporting and ceiling structure, including the existing differences in level. The visible skeleton construction made of reinforced concrete shapes the structure of the facade even after the conversion and remains partially visible inside. Some of the removed materials were incorporated back into the renovation project. Infills made from cement, brick, sand-lime brick, steel elements and exposed concrete characterise the shells of the newly designed rooms.

Door and window elements made of hot-dip galvanised steel

The distinctive facade elements include mullion windows, glass blocks and steel windows and doors, all of which emphasise the industrial past. To this end, the architects had existing windows renovated or replaced with new ones that invoke the old design. On the west side of the building, facing the Lorze, a continuous loggia now forms a climate buffer to the inside. As a result, the original windows with their filigree profiles could be preserved or suitably supplemented.

The forster unico xs windows, the forster unico Hi door and portal elements and the forster unico EI30 fire protection elements used in the project combine high heat-insulating properties with the unique aesthetics of extremely slim profiles. These profile systems from Forster can also be hot-dip galvanised thanks to the absence of synthetic insulating materials. The hot-dip galvanising surface treatment guarantees long-lasting, durable profiles that retain their value. These underline the desired industrial charm thanks to their raw character, especially in the renovation project at the Papieri site.

For further information, please visit www.forstersystems.com

Project information

Products:	forster unico Hi hot-dip galvanised door and portal elements
	forster unico EI30 hot-dip galvanised fire resistant doors
	forster unico xs hot-dip galvanised window elements
Architecture:	Boltshauser Architekten AG, Zurich, Switzerland
Client:	Cham Immobilien AG, Cham, Switzerland
Realisation:	2023
Photography:	Damian Poffet

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Forster Profilsysteme AG develops and produces secure and energy-efficient solutions made from steel and stainless steel for doors, windows and facades. Forster is a partner in the property sector and offers individual advice and project support on site around the globe. The products and system solutions from Forster for the building shell and interior applications meet the most stringent requirements and standards, with heat insulation and safety features such as fire protection, burglary resistance and bullet resistance. The portfolio is rounded off by accessories and comprehensive services for customers and business partners in architecture, planning and the construction industry.

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Figures



East of the Lorze, the oblong strip with the former paper machine production halls forms the backdrop for a vibrant new urban space. Boltshauser Architekten from Zurich was responsible for converting the site into commercial use, cultural facilities and apartments. Photos: Damian Poffet



Towards the west, the large-surface glazing in forster unico xs and unico Hi is also a key design element in addition to the ubiquitous, raw materiality of the original load-bearing structure made of reinforced concrete and infills of sand-lime brick. Photo: Damian Poffet



Thanks to loggias and internal insulation acting as climate buffers, the filigree finish of the outer facade could be preserved. This also includes refurbished or new mullion windows invoking the originals with extremely slim mullions and window sashes in forster unico xs. Photo: Damian Poffet



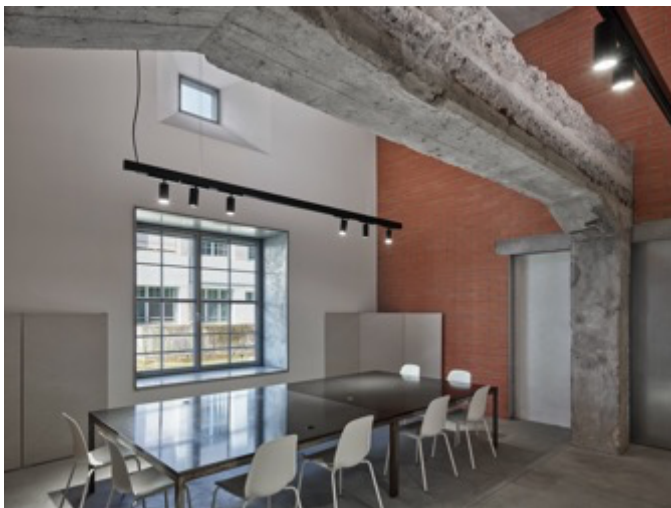
The entire range of materials can be seen on Maschinengasse – from exposed concrete, unplastered sand-lime brick, mullion windows and glass blocks to glazing, doors and portals made of hot-dip galvanised steel in forster unico xs and unico Hi. Photo: Damian Poffet



The entrances feature door elements from the forster unico Hi system made of steel with the hot-dip galvanised profile surface treatment. Photos: Damian Poffet



The slim face widths of the steel profiles of the door and portal elements in forster unico Hi and unico EI30 blend in perfectly with the raw aesthetics of the converted paper machine production halls. This creates a harmonious combination of large-surface glazed elements, small-scale glass blocks and mullion windows as well as the opaque walls with visible surfaces. Photos: Damian Poffet



The industrial character is continued in the interiors, which are up to six metres high. Load-bearing elements made of raw concrete, unplastered brick walls and the steel mullions remain visible. The extremely slim profiles of the forster unico xs system are made from 100% steel and offer outstanding heat insulation properties while also providing good acoustic performance. Photos: Damian Poffet