BUGATTI IN THE MODERN ERA — 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ATELIER IN MOLSHEIM



Bugatti returned to its traditional location in Alsace in 2005. A place in automotive history that is still magical and unique.

When Bugatti resumed production of the Veyron 16.4 at its historic location in Molsheim, Alsace, 15 years ago, this represented the start of a new era — that of the modern hyper sports car. But this was about much more than creating a new vehicle that could only be described with superlatives.

2026 BUGATTI AUTOMOBILES S.A.S.

''With the historic buildings Château St. Jean, the South Remise and the North Remise as well as the newly built Atelier, Bugatti combined tradition with the modern age 15 years ago and showed that a long company history and an exciting future do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive,'' says Stephan Winkelmann, President of Bugatti. ''The buildings perfectly match our company philosophy and provide a valuable home for our vehicles. As a French company, we are proud of the brand's headquarters.''

PLANNING STARTED IN 1998

The plan to revive the brand at the site in Molsheim originated in 1998. Volkswagen had purchased the name rights to the Bugatti brand in April under its then Chairman Ferdinand K. Piëch, and the first discussions between him and the Henn architectural office started soon afterwards. Under the name ''Molsheim Project'', the company purchased the land with the three buildings from the Messier-Bugatti Group, which had a production facility directly adjacent. However, there was not much left of the old charm of the Château and Remises. The Château St. Jean, Ettore Bugatti's former representative office for customers, was in poor condition. ''The new company headquarters was to reflect the history of the company, which is why the historic Bugatti location in Molsheim was chosen,'' remembers architect Gunter Henn. In September 1999, Bugatti invited enthusiasts and responsible persons from the region to a celebration on the land in order to announce the plans. The idea was well-received: more than 1,000 guests came, and there were over 200 historic Bugatti cars parked on the site.

The work on rebuilding the site started shortly afterwards. However, at the start of the restoration work, it was not yet clear whether an assembly facility would also be built in Molsheim — the goal was first to restore the historic buildings to their former but new glory so that they could again serve their original purpose, namely representation of the famous brand. At the same time, Bugatti acquired antiques and works of art of the Bugatti family. Ettore's son Rembrandt was a sculptor, his father Carlo an architect and designer.

Only in 2001 did Bugatti announce with presentation of the first prototype that the future hyper sports car would also be built in Molsheim. Bugatti purchased neighbouring pieces of land and planned a modern production facility — the Atelier. The French authorities supported the project. Not just the new vehicle was to be unique, but also its birthplace.

MOLSHEIM: THE HOME OF BUGATTI SINCE 1909

Molsheim is located 25 kilometres south-west of Strasbourg, at the foothills of the Vosges mountains. It has been the home of Bugatti since 1909. It was here that Ettore Bugatti designed and built his exceptional cars, with interruptions, until his death in 1947. In 1928, Ettore Bugatti purchased the Château St. Jean with its six-hectare park. The mansion was built in 1857 by the Wangen de Geroldseck family on the site of a former Commandry of the Order of St. John from Jerusalem dating back to the 13th century. Two Remises from 1788 und 1853 supplement the idyllic park; the oldest building structure is the entrance gate from the early 15th century. Under Ettore Bugatti, the building served as a backdrop for his luxury cars and as a reception for customers. After the death of Ettore Bugatti, the work was continued by his son until the company went bankrupt in 1956. Vehicle production ended after a period of 47 years during which almost under 8,000 Bugatti vehicles were built.

When Volkswagen secured the name rights to Bugatti in 1998, this was initially met with scepticism. Because alongside the announcement of a vehicle with over 1,000 PS that was also to have a top speed of more than 400 km/h, production would also take place in completely new surroundings. ''The Château St. Jean was in a terrible state and had to be gutted and redesigned, and we had to demolish and rebuild the Remises,'' explains Gunter Henn. During the planning phase, the team of architects travelled to Molsheim and talked to Bugatti enthusiasts and former employees. They wanted to get a feeling for the company and the location. ''We quickly realised the fascination of the brand and the importance of its history. We wanted to preserve this history under all circumstances and at the same time create a place where a new, highly complex technical object could be built,'' he explains. Bugatti stands for outstanding engineering skill and aesthetics and unbelievable power, but also for a reduction to the essentials, timeless elegance and concentrated energy. ''All that has to be reflected in the buildings,'' say Gunter Henn and the project manager, Georg Pichler.

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CHÂTEAU ST. JEAN

The two-storey Château St. Jean with the high mansard roof was gutted and the interior restructured. As a result, the building with six smaller apartments was transformed into a spacious villa. The seven-axis facade structure with elevated median avant-corps makes the 22-metre long Château appear longer. In the lower area, a continuous room with two concave lateral elements opens into two sides, while there are staircases behind the wall structures. The middle floor lies on a central oval that is not completely joined to the exterior walls and thus appears to float, seeming to catapult everything into a new era.

The North and South Remises, two former stables, were also rebuilt within a year subject to strict monument protection requirements. They previously served as a shelter for pilgrims of the Order of Malta on their way to Santiago de Compostela. The buildings were measured telemetrically, demolished and then rebuilt true to their original design using many parts such as masonry and wood elements. The 41-metre long North Remise today accommodates a small exhibition of historic vehicles and offices. The 33-metre long South Remise now offers a customer lounge in which customers can configure their vehicles, a fireplace room and a library. ''In spite of their very special aesthetic characteristics, all buildings meet their purpose and are functionally designed. They are not just pure works of art, even if they give that appearance,'' say the architects.

THE ATELIER AS A MODERN MANUFACTORY

Series production of the Bugatti Veyron 16.4 was decided in 2001, and the next step was to find a production location. As a contrast to the historic buildings, architect Gunter Henn planned a modern, aesthetically appealing and visually interesting vehicle assembly — the Atelier. The venerable Château and the Remises represent the long tradition of the brand, while the Atelier stands for modern-day technology and the future. The architects Gunter Henn and Georg Pichler imagined different atmospheres, permitting immersion in the past without nostalgia, a path through nature as a corridor and journey in time, as well as a clear and free technical view for new developments. There was sufficient space for this on the site with an area of 84,500 square metres, including 52,600 square metres of forest.

The route from the Château to the Atelier passes the South Remise, a fascinating dialogue between history and modern times. There are oak trees in the forest that are almost 250 years old; among them fallow deer live on an area of four hectares. The most modern building on the site can be found on the other side of a historic wall: in the middle of a green field, in view of the Château, there is an apparently floating oval, consisting of a steel structure on a base. The 76-metre long and 45-metre wide building accommodates south-facing assembly bays. The engine pre-assembly area is located at the western end, and there are offices and staff rooms at the eastern end.

Three test modules for paint and leak testing in a reinforced concrete structure supplement the oval on the northern side. ''It is like being immersed in a modern world. The form is based on the Bugatti Macaron, the emblem of the brand. The spaciousness, abstract design and lighting conditions in the glazed, bright main hall create the appearance of an artist's studio. The Veyron and its successors, the Chiron and Divo, are essentially also works of art, and as such need an appropriate space,'' explains Gunter Henn.

The different light atmospheres and views from the different buildings still excite the architect today and make the location unique. Views such as that out of one of the many windows of the Château into the park, a fascinating fusion of tradition and nature. The light entering the rather narrow South Remise with its wood elements and the staircase to the library supports the feeling of intimacy, friendship and family. The view towards the Atelier and then out of the windows towards the south provides a contrasting feeling of spaciousness: open, spacious and technical.

Christophe Piochon has worked for Bugatti with interruptions since 2001. Since 2013, he has been the Site Manager at Molsheim and Member of the Executive Board responsible for Production and Logistics. ''The location with the Château St. Jean, the two Remises, the forest and the whole history is unique in the automotive world,'' says Christophe Piochon. This is complemented by the way Bugatti produces its hyper sports cars — by thorough hand craftsmanship. ''The initial planning challenge was to develop an idea as to how we as a company specialising in hand-built cars could guarantee the extremely high quality of the technically very sophisticated vehicles produced in very small quantities on such a greenfield site. This resulted in the Atelier with four work bays, in which employees assemble over 2,000 individual parts for the one-off vehicles by hand for up to five days,'' explains Christophe Piochon. This remains a unique way of working up to the present day, allowing on average two vehicles of the variants Chiron, Chiron Sport, Divo, and soon Chiron Pur Sport2 and Chiron Super Sport 300+[1] to be produced per week in the highest quality. ''I really enjoy the working atmosphere in this green environment and the spacious Atelier every single day, even after over 15 years,'' says Christophe Piochon.

In honour of Ettore Bugatti, the Atelier was officially opened around his birthday (15 September 1881) on 3 September 2005. Over several days, all those interested, friends of the brand, Bugatti enthusiasts and people living nearby were able to experience the rebuilt location. 450 Veyron vehicles were hand-built up to 2015. The Chiron has been assembled here since 2016, and the Divo since this summer.

''Molsheim is home to tradition, the modern world and the future. It is the concentration of time elements and functionality that are in perfect symbiosis with each other. Heritage next to high-tech'', says Stephan Winkelmann. Bugatti in Molsheim will also remain more than just the company headquarters and a car production plant in Alsace in the future. Bugatti in Molsheim still represents the realisation of a vision of the legendary Bugatti brand.