



The story of Mobimo:
how a bold idea became one
of the leading Swiss real
estate companies.

25 YEARS OF MOBIMO

25 YEARS
MOBIMO

MOBIMO

25 YEARS

MOBIMO



"A GREAT SHOW IN
ZURICH WEST",
ABOUT MOBIMO
TOWER, 2011

FOREWORD

Mobimo is celebrating its 25th anniversary. What started off as a vision of the two founders and driving forces, Alfred “Fredy” Meili and Karl Reichmuth, has grown into one of the leading real estate companies in Switzerland.

I think that we can state with justified pride that Mobimo has done many things very well in the past 25 years. The stable environment in this country and the characteristics of “real estate” as a commodity in itself certainly guarantee the success of a sector as a whole. But we had the skill to set our course for steady growth and long-term success.

From the beginning, Mobimo’s aspiration was to differentiate itself both in terms of the quality of its developments and its own portfolio as well as its strong sense of aesthetics and high-quality architecture. The name Mobimo – deriving from the German for mobile real estate – was also intended to stand as a promise of consistent quality.

Of course Mobimo’s own portfolio and condominium projects have evolved significantly over the course of the past quarter of a century. Additional properties were added and others, in turn, sold. Properties that were still seen as attractive and avant-garde 20 years ago are viewed quite differently in retrospect. But a building always has to be viewed through the lens of its zeitgeist, and that is what we want to do in this book.

This magazine for Mobimo’s 25th anniversary is a “stocktake”. Its aim is to commemorate the first 25 years of Mobimo with selected stories, anecdotes, buildings – and above all the people behind the stories.

Mobimo bears a responsibility. We shape townscapes and cityscapes with our buildings and sites. The 81-metre-tall Mobimo Tower, for example, is a landmark building in Zurich West. And there’s the Aeschbachquartier in Aarau, witness to an impressive industrial history, but an area that subsequently lost some of its lustre. It was Mobimo that breathed new life into the site with its development expertise.

Mobimo’s head office is in Lucerne. Since the merger with LO Holding in

**“IT’S THE
PEOPLE
WHO FILL THE
SPACES
WITH LIFE.”**



Chairman of the Board of Directors Peter Schaub (left) and CEO Daniel Ducrey.

2009, however, we have also been a “Suisse romande” company. The Quartier du Flon, the vibrant work, shopping and leisure district in Lausanne: Mobimo was able to turn this “rough diamond” into a jewel, both for its own portfolio and for city living in Lausanne.

And that is the crucial part of our responsibility. We create the spaces, and we create them with passion, but it is the people who actually fill them with life. They turn them into spaces for living, working and relaxing. And that is why people and their needs will continue to be the focus of our work for the next 25 years.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank all those people on Mobimo’s 25-year road to success who have built with us, worked with us and supported us. Thank you for the trust you have placed in us time and time again.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Schaub".

PETER SCHAUB, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

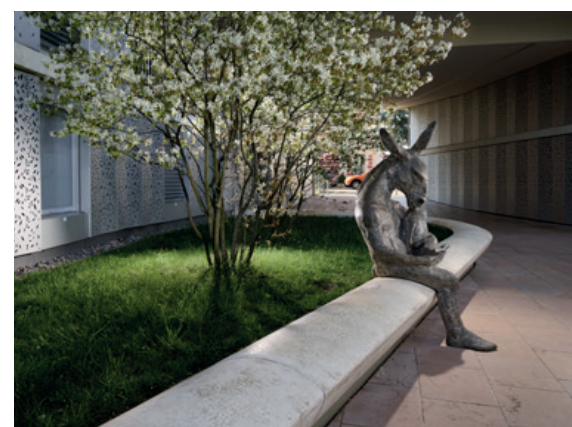


Page 6
Almost a family

A friendship,
an ambitious idea
and the obstinacy of
the Central Swiss:
how the story of
Mobimo began.



Page 24
Milestones
Three projects,
three cities,
three landmarks.



Page 58
Art on buildings
What is beautiful?
Happily,
that's open to debate!



Page 12
Highs and lows
An – incomplete –
insight into special moments
at Mobimo.



Page 76
Lasting
What a
so-called
gelatine glaze and
buildings with no
chimneys
have in common.

CONTENTS



Page 82
The key points
Facts, facts, facts!
A speed read: Mobimo at a
glance.



Page 88
Outlook
The next 25 years:
looking ahead to
the future.

UNANIMOUS: MOBIMO
GENERAL MEETING,
2009





ALMOST A FAMILY

A friendship,
an ambitious idea and
the obstinacy of the Central Swiss:
how the story of Mobimo
began.

**“A NAME IS MADE”,
ABOUT MOBIMO, 2001**

To understand Mobimo, you need to understand Alfred Meili. Or at least try to. Of course the real estate company is no longer the same business that the Lucerne native co-founded more than two decades ago; it has evolved. But he is still in it, in its DNA: the man who sells skis as a student and buys his first plot of land with the profits.

Noted down neatly on a sheet of A4 paper are the anecdotes that Alfred “Fredy” Meili will recount about Mobimo’s early years. How he claimed prior to the public offering that he didn’t speak English – to annoy the UBS bankers who had sprinkled their presentation with Anglicisms. Or how he persuaded the City of Zurich with his persistent visits to let him place the company signage on Mobimo-Hochhaus. “Just for two years,” he asked, “to support the IPO.” The name has been written there ever since.

“Do good, earn money, enjoy life,” is how Meili explains his credo. Later he says, “My story shows that it is possible to work your way up from any social class.”

You just have to know the market. And have ideas.

Meili has plenty of those. He is tireless, works seven days a week. His flashes of creative inspiration won’t let him rest. Or other people, either. “At the weekend, when the Grasshoppers had a home game, we could calculate it exactly: end of the match plus driving time to Zollikon – and then the first emails started arriving, even on Saturday evening or Sunday afternoon,” Paul Schnetzer, late former CEO of Mobimo, remembers. “He was the driving force behind the company.”

Fate has a twist in store for everyone – the son of a Lucerne native who had worked his way up to own a hairdressing salon finds this out when he can barely walk. In 1948, when Fredy is only just one year old, his parents divorce.

His mother takes a position as a restaurant manager in a hotel and has to send her little boy to live with distant relatives in French-speaking Switzerland. When she finally brings him home, the two of them move into a little flat in Sântihof in Lucerne, which becomes too cramped for mother and son after a time. Spatially, but also emotionally. “I am sure,” Alfred Meili writes in his biography, “that these cramped conditions were the source of my later ambition to invest in real estate”.

Fredy realises early on that he “could have a better life if I earned money”. His father lets him manage an old cigarette vending machine, and that’s how he earns his own pocket



Alfred Meili at nine years old, 1956 (top). His mother Rosemarie in the discount ski shop in Lucerne, 1971.

money. At 15, Alfred Meili begins buying second-hand bikes from a local bicycle dealer and reselling them through the classifieds. At 18, the school pupil opens a shop where he sells discontinued lines of well-known ski brands. He calls the business “Skicount”. It does well, very well. On Saturdays there are often people queuing in front of the outlet.

Alfred Meili puts the profit from the ski business into his first property. He freshens up the wooden benches in the stairwell of the four-apartment building with red paint himself, and his school friend and later Mobimo Board member, Kurt Bättig, helps him to lay floor coverings made of Chinese pig bristle.

Meili studies economics in St. Gallen, law in Zurich, earns his doctorate and works successfully as a commercial lawyer. But at 50 he is looking for a change. “I started under the illusion that the job of a real estate agent was much easier than a lawyer’s, so you don’t need to work as hard,” Meili said once. But in fact his passion for properties still has a hold on him, even during his time as a lawyer. He reads in the paper where building work is currently under way. In his free time, he drives from building site to building site, asks questions. Learns by listening.

Then, in October 1997, when the real estate crisis is slowly coming to a close but prices are still low, Meili, together with Lucerne private banker Karl Reichmuth, founds Mobimo, “mobile Immobilien” (German for “mobile real estate”).

Reichmuth, the son of a master cheese-maker from the Canton of Schwyz, had got his private bank off the ground one year earlier. “I noticed that several of our larger clients had invested far too little in the real estate category when constructing their portfolios,” he says. That is about to change.

Meili and Reichmuth know each other professionally; both were involved in the development of retailer Pick Pay. They get on well. “I said to Fredy, ‘You may be a good law-



The founders of Mobimo: Alfred Meili (left) and Karl Reichmuth.

**“DO GOOD,
EARN MONEY,
ENJOY LIFE.”**

yer, but you are an even better real estate buyer.’ He really had a very special gift for recognising the potential of a property,” the banker recounts. Without each other, they could not have made Mobimo work. “Yes, we were united by a common purpose. But most of all we were friends.”

For Reichmuth, it’s quite clear: the business has to be a limited company; a property fund is out of the question for him. The investor’s investments need to remain liquid, which is why he intends to float Mobimo on the stock exchange in the near future. Reichmuth got his way with “the obstinacy of the Central Swiss,” he says. Mobimo starts off with share capital of CHF 36 million, provided by Reichmuth’s clients. This is the strategy: 70% investment properties that yield secure returns, 30% development projects in the residential property sector, where there is real money to be made.

The founding of Mobimo was “brave”, says Georg Horka, one of the first employees of the young company. “Hardly anyone wanted to invest in property at that time. In Seefeld in Zurich, houses in a good location were for sale at a price that you couldn’t even get half an apartment for now. And no one dared to buy them.”

Other brave turns are taken by the new company, which was incorporated into Mobimo Holding in 1999. While others are still hesitating, the company opts for geothermal probe heating, the Minergie standard and energy-saving façade solutions. Art on buildings is a passion from the beginning. And, of course, architecture. Competitions are held to ensure the quality of the projects – the aim is to create buildings that are aesthetically pleasing. Or as Alfred Meili put it, “not to keep blighting the landscape with hideous vanilla slices.”

And that brings us to point number one in the Meili credo: Do good. For that, you need to

be successful. “The profits also give us the opportunity to be socially responsible and considerate, be it to our employees or tenants or third parties. You can’t act like a capitalist from 8 to 5, and only think about social issues in the evenings,” he says.

The early days are wild. In true start-up fashion, the company dares to do things differently. Routes for decision-making are short, the tasks are many and varied. And in the midst of it all Alfred Meili, Chair of the Board, CEO and shareholder in one. “Sometimes, he came into the office and said to us that he had just bought two plots of land,” says Horka. Meili could “negotiate like the devil”, according to journalist Karl Lüond. “If he is shown the door, he comes back in through the window, or through the chimney if need be.”

The entire Board of Directors meets once a month and discusses ideas and projects. And the debate can get heated. “It was anything but a boardroom full of nodding heads,” recalls Urs Ledermann, who was elected to the Board of Directors in 2001. Meili and Reichmuth could “argue tremendously”. “That friction created energy.”

Mobimo grows. From three to 20, to 40 employees. First, it makes a name for itself in real estate circles and then, with the purchase of the former Sulzer office tower on Escher-Wyss-Platz, in the public sphere. “A name is made”, the *Handelszeitung* writes in March 2001.

**“WE WERE
UNITED BY A
COMMON PURPOSE.
BUT MOST OF
ALL WE WERE
FRIENDS.”**



The end of the founding era: Karl Reichmuth retires at the Mobimo general meeting in 2009. On the podium (from left to right): Members of the Board of Directors Wilhelm Hansen, Brian Fischer, Peter Schaub, Paul Schnetzer, Karl Reichmuth, Georges Theiler, CFO Manuel Iten, Chair of the Board of Directors Urs Ledermann and CEO Christoph Caviezel.

On Thursday, 23 June 2005, the day finally dawns that Mobimo founder Karl Reichmuth had planned from the beginning: the public offering. And it shows great promise. The issue is oversubscribed sixfold. On the first day of trading, the share closes at CHF 187.50, nine per cent over the issue price. “For stock exchange newcomer Mobimo, it is primarily the high direct returns that are drawing the conservative investors out of the woodwork. In some cases, the real estate shares investors currently hold are being sold in order to get fully on board with Mobimo,” is the analysis by *Cash*. Time to celebrate: the party follows three weeks later with 100 guests. The dress code, the invitation says, is “Kravatte” (German for tie).

The real estate portfolio grows. By the end of 2006, it is already worth more than one billion Swiss francs. The buildings have names like “Frohe Aussicht” (pleasant view), “West-Art”, Novavida,” “Hexagon”. But Mobimo keeps on emphasising that the aim is to be better, not bigger.

The company is well positioned, records hefty profits, and the strategy stands. And as

the months pass, Alfred Meili decides, “The business doesn’t need me any more.” On 8 May 2008, the man who writes in his autobiography, “there is nothing more lasting than land” hands over his mandate as Chairman of the Board of Directors of Mobimo Holding and is elected Honorary Chairman.

One year later the founding era finally comes to an end: Karl Reichmuth resigns from the Mobimo Board of Directors. When asked today how it feels that some “no-name from Lucerne”, as one article put it, which was founded by two friends, has now become the fourth-largest real estate company in Switzerland, he answers with a Chinese proverb: “If the root stands firm, the branches grow.” Reichmuth reveals: “I think part of the secret to Mobimo’s success is that it is run like a family business.”

A true elective affinity.



Protests, a handshake and
a tremendous bang.
A – very incomplete –
insight into special moments
at Mobimo.

HIGHS AND LOWS

“THE TOWER
BUILDERS”,
ABOUT MOBIMO,
2010



March 2013: The Sprecherhof building in Aarau is demolished.

BANG!

“If it goes wrong, I’ll be the laughing stock of the nation,” said demolition expert Walter Weber in the spring of 2013. And the first high-rise demolition in Switzerland really did cause quite a stir. Thousands of curious bystanders were looking on when the 45-metre-tall Sprecherhof in Aarau hit the ground. The operation on behalf of Mobimo took 75 kg of explosives, 1 500 detonators and three months of painstaking preparation – and was over in five seconds. What remained was an enormous mound of rubble that needed to be disposed of before the development of the Aeschbach-quartier could proceed. Ten years later, Weber says of the demolition: “It’s still talked about in the business today.”



Demolition expert Walter Weber at the media briefing before the demolition.

“NOUS ÊTRE SOCIÉTÉ TRÈS SÉRIEUSE”

On 23 June 2005, the time had come: Mobimo shares were traded on the stock exchange for the first time. The public offering was preceded by a roadshow that took Chairman of the Board Alfred Meili and CEO Paul Schnetzer to see asset managers in Frankfurt, Lucerne, Lausanne and Geneva. “I had a lot of fun,” Meili recalls. “The only one who was stressed was Paul Schnetzer.” Schnetzer’s French skills, Meili says, were what you would call modest. Because of that, at the presentation in French-speaking Switzerland, Schnetzer said in broken French, “Oui, oui, nous être société très sérieuse.” But this didn’t detract from the success: instead of CHF 100 million, underwriting pledges came in to the tune of over CHF 600 million.



June 2005: Board of Directors member Hermann Gerber (left) and Chairman of the Board Alfred Meili at the media information session for Mobimo’s public offering.



April 2010: Construction work on Mobimo Tower.

40 METRES ARE NOT ENOUGH

“The tower is standing. It’s a landmark already,” said architecture critic Benedikt Loderer on 11 August 2011 in the *Tages-Anzeiger*. It was the inauguration day for the 81-metre-tall Mobimo Tower in Zurich West. By that point, the tower had already survived an initiative by the Swiss Democrats to restrict high-rises in Zurich to a maximum of 40 metres and thereby stop the “skyscraper boom”. Roger Diener, architect of Mobimo Tower, stated in April 2009 that he didn’t understand the objection. “High-quality high-rises are an asset.”

RED ON THE OUTSIDE

The façade of the Mobimo business location in Küsnacht in the canton of Zurich came very close to being blue. “We talked him out of it,” recalls Vinzenz Manser. In 2005, the existing premises in Zollikon had become too small for the growing company, and project manager Manser planned the new build with his boss Alfred Meili. Who liked colour. After blue had failed (“Fades over time”, said Manser), there was another favourite. Meili managed to get this one through with guile. At the final board meeting to decide the colour, he managed to get Mobimo co-founder Karl Reichmuth to choose a red tone, says Meili. Which allowed him to joke from then on: “Look, Karl Reichmuth is only conservative in Lucerne. On the outside, he’s a red.”



September 2006: Mobimo’s business location in Küsnacht in the canton of Zurich is ready for occupation.

WHERE THERE IS NO SMOKE

Do you see a cigarette? No? Then you’re seeing right. Mobimo-Hochhaus on Escher-Wyss-Platz in Zurich is a first in many respects: the Minergie energy standard, the company name on the façade. But it is also the first non-smoking high-rise in Switzerland. Way back in 2001, nine years before the Federal Act on Protection against Passive Smoking came into force, the building with its 600 workspaces was declared a smoke-free zone. Mobimo initiated the policy, and tenant Bluewin supported it. It also provided savings on operating costs: because there was no cigarette smoke to be removed, a smaller ventilation system could be installed, which used less power.



June 2001: Mobimo-Hochhaus is officially opened.



June 2018: The *Mobimo* picks up speed.



May 2014: Speed ace Fränzi Aufdenblatten and skipper Christian Wahl at the christening of the *Mobimo*.

SPELLBOUND

In May 2014, ski racer Fränzi Aufdenblatten christened the *Mobimo*, skipper Christian Wahl's boat. More than one bottle of champagne was emptied to mark the occasion. "One for each hull and a few sips for the lake, that's the tradition," Wahl explained. The boat's speedy godmother obviously brought good luck – or simply reinforced existing skills: Wahl, dubbed the "Wizard of Lake Geneva", won the Bol d'Or, the world's biggest inland regatta, with *Mobimo* in 2018.

GETTING WET

Going all-in for the district: in 2017, Marc Pointet, then Head of Mobimo for French-speaking Switzerland, even climbed into the water to promote the redesigned esplanade in the heart of Lausanne's Quartier du Flon. "We want to become the place to be," he said. The fountain, designed by artist Vincent Kohler, had previously met with both enthusiasm and criticism. The *24 heures* newspaper reported that an architecture critic called it "the height of bad taste", and said that the "tiny jet of water" verged on "obscenity". Pointet countered calmly: "We don't want artworks that don't stand out." An amplifier is also part of the bronze sculpture; it symbolises the importance music has had in the district from the start.



October 2017: Marc Pointet in the fountain of the redesigned esplanade in Flon.



2014: The occupied Labitzke site in the Altstetten quarter of Zurich.

THE COLOURFUL FORTRESS

In 2013, when Mobimo was presenting plans for the development of the Labitzke site in the Volkshaus in Zurich, occupiers disrupted the media conference. Wearing paper bags over their heads, they announced their resistance. "It would be a pity if they delayed our work," responded Peter Grossenbacher, member of the Mobimo Executive Board. He may have already surmised how much more challenging the coming months would become. The 10'000-square-metre Labitzke site in Altstetten with the Autonomer Beauty Salon was the site of one of the largest squats in Zurich for around three years. During the eviction in August 2014, police removed a group of activists one by one from the Labitzke tower. "The colourful fortress has fallen," wrote the *NZZ*.

AN IMPORTANT ROLE

Sometimes buildings play more than a supporting part in films.

Example, anyone? Here are a few: the motel in *Psycho*, the McAllister house in *Home Alone*, or Tara in *Gone with the Wind*.

So it followed almost naturally that Mobimo would support the Zurich Film Festival. The sponsorship started in 2013 and is still going today. But even with all the glamour there are still stand-outs. The highlights of the highlights, so to speak. For example, in 2017 when tennis star Roger Federer was a guest at the opening night presented by Mobimo, and all the other celebrities on the green carpet turned into fans themselves. The film – as befit the guest – was *Borg/McEnroe* by Danish director Janus Metz. “Tennis used to be rock’n’roll. I would have liked to be part of that generation,” Federer declared.



September 2017: Roger Federer at the Mobimo opening night of the film festival in Zurich.

SHAKE ON IT

“He walked once around the whole district, without saying a word. Then, when he came back to the Place de l’Europe, he shook my hand and said, ‘We’ll do it.’” That’s how Paul Rambert remembers the decision of then Mobimo Chairman Urs Ledermann on the merger between Mobimo and LO Holding Lausanne-Ouchy. The two companies merged at the end of 2009. For Mobimo, this was the long-awaited move into French-speaking Switzerland; the Romandy portion of the portfolio increased from 1% to 28% in a single stroke. Paul Rambert played a crucial role in the development of the showcase Quartier du Flon in Lausanne, and sat on Mobimo’s Board of Directors until 2015. Lausanne-Ouchy S.A had re-planned and built the Quartier du Flon, a former industrial district in the heart of the city, which was threatening to fall into disrepair.



November 2009: Paul Rambert was head of LO Holding when it merged with Mobimo.



**“MOBIMO IS
GOING STRONG”,
ON MOBIMO 2016**

MILESTONES

What better way to describe
Mobimo's history
than with its work?
Three projects, three cities,
three landmarks.

Go West!

To build a tower, you need a flexible mindset.
Especially in Zurich West,
where city life can be quite turbulent.

Überall hends bautet, Tower um Tower, um Tower, um Tower” (“They’ve built everywhere, tower after tower after tower”) a voice sings in Zurich dialect to a melodic reggae beat. “Und ich wür so gern no chli bliibe doch kein Stei bliibt meh de glich” (“And I’d love to stay a while, but not one stone has stayed the same”). This farewell to Zurich West was written by musician Dodo in 2018. Ruefully, he laments the evolution of the former industrial district, which is changing and no longer offers him a home. “Und vilicht erchänni di irgendwann nūme” (“And perhaps some day I won’t even know you”).

Opinions about Zurich West, the area between Gleisfeld and Limmat that’s 2’000 metres long and 700 metres wide, are sharply divided. While the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reports enthusiastically that “the sedate banking stronghold is suddenly displaying an exciting metropolitan face,” the *NZZ* feels that the district is “extremely staid and dead”. It’s a fact that no other district in Zurich is so controversial, so hard to understand, so ambivalent.

But its history also shows that in Zurich West, renaissance is more than just the name of a hotel. So it would seem logical, almost fated, that one of Mobimo’s most ambitious projects was carried out in this part of the city – heralding if not a rebirth, then certainly a new epoch for the real estate company.

“Any Märklin fan would love the view,” says Stefan Buchs, and points from a panoramic window on the 15th floor. Below him are tracks with trains running, as tiny as a model railway landscape. The cheerful Buchs, who hails from Baden Württemberg in Germany, is the General Manager of the 5-star hotel Renaissance Zurich Tower. He has also lived in Dubai, London and Prague. No, not all the guests who stay in one of the 300 rooms immediately understand the charm of Zurich

West, he says. “It doesn’t have much in common with the Switzerland shown in picture books.” But he personally loves the fact that it’s “proper city” here.

The tower that General Manager Buchs loves working in is 81 metres tall, with a bar and fine dining restaurant on the ground floor and 53 privately owned apartments on the nine floors above the hotel. It was designed by Basel architecture firm Diener & Diener for Mobimo.

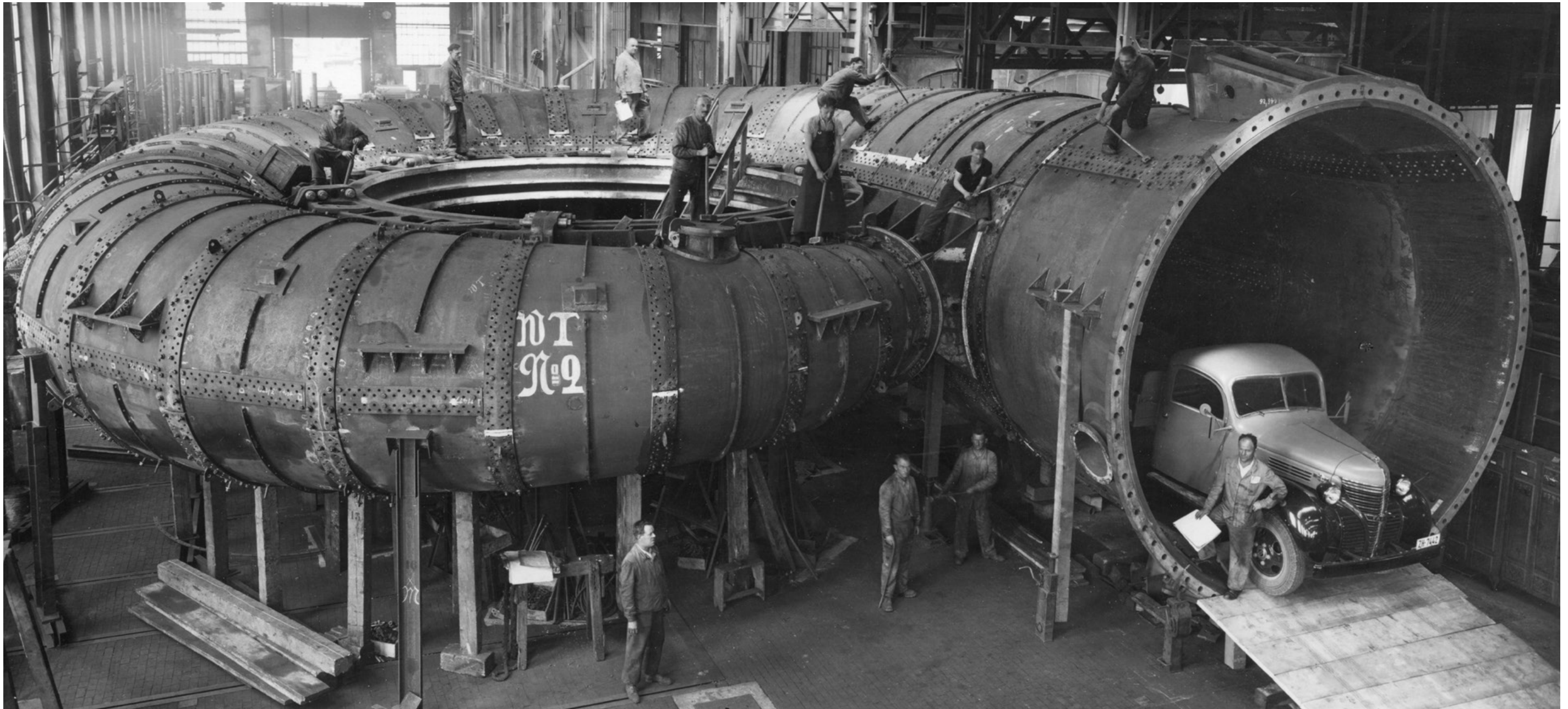
The proposal was described by *Finanz & Wirtschaft* in August 2008 as “the most ambitious project in the company’s barely ten-year history”. In its annual report for the same year, Mobimo wrote that with a total investment of approximately CHF 250 million, including CHF 37 million for the site, Mobimo Tower was the biggest project to date.

The area around Turbinenstrasse 20 had already had a somewhat chequered past. The first time that the street, then still on the outer limits of the city, made its way into the headlines was on 10 April 1906. “Last Monday, at around two in the afternoon, a conflagration started in the industrial district, just behind the large engineering works of Escher, Wyß & Co. In front of a stable attached to the two-storey Pfingstweid residence, at Turbinenstrasse 20, was a pile of straw, probably put there to dry. Two small boys were playing there with matches, lighting a ‘little fire’. To their delight, the straw suddenly went up in

**“THEY’VE BUILT
EVERYWHERE,
TOWER AFTER
TOWER
AFTER TOWER.”**



MOBIMO TOWER
AND "AM PFINGST-
WEIDPARK"
COMPLEX, 2019



The Escher Wyss engineering plant also produced gigantic turbines in Zurich's industrial district. Shown here: assembly of a volute casing, 1939.

flames," reported local newspaper *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*.

Eight cows and all residents of the building were rescued unharmed. "A great crowd of spectators gathered around the burnt-out building all afternoon, of which now only the bare walls are standing."

A few months later the *Zürcherische Freitagszeitung* commented: "In this district, still in its infancy," it seems that the "worthy councillor" must have left the naming of the

streets to the Board of Directors of neighbouring company Escher Wyss. Because, the paper said, the biggest attraction that Turbinenstrasse has to offer is "two muck wagons".

The management of engineering firm Escher Wyss had indeed decided in 1889 to build a new manufacturing plant in Hard. Turbines, ships, paper machines, steam locomotives: all were built in the enormous factory buildings. Other business were already in the neighbourhood or followed suit: the firm of

Steinfels, for example, that made soap out of old fat, brewery Actienbrauerei Zürich and Maag Zahnräder AG.

Now there was industry in the industrial district.

But the rise was followed by the fall. With the structural changes in the economy at the start of the 1980s, companies moved away or closed their doors for good. Three-quarters of the jobs in industry disappeared. The production sites deteriorated and gradually became

neglected wasteland. The district suffered. Where 2 248 men, women and children had lived in the district in 1930, the figure was down to 1 513 by 1990.

Eventually, the government recognised the problem – and also the potential that the development of the industrial brownfield land offered. No, the city wasn't built yet. Here was an opportunity for a bold step, for "Zurich's belated, but all the more brash, attempt at frenetic city living," commented FAZ.

In 1996, the city council seized the initiative and convened the Stadtforum: Social Democrat mayor Josef Estermann set about finding workable compromises between the city and landowners, and between sustainability and profitability, for the vacant industrial site.

A new start followed, and so did change. Puls 5 opened its doors, followed by the Prime Tower on the Maag site and the restored arches of the railway viaduct. And amongst them the clubs, restaurants and workshops that sprang up through temporary use. A Zurich-West scene of dreamers, nuts, students, lawyers, artists and bankers had emerged. Soon it was known as the district to be in.

And this was where Mobimo wanted to build its tower. It wasn't the first project in the district. Mobimo-Hochhaus, an office building constructed to Minergie low energy standards, has stood in the vicinity of Escher-Wyss-Platz since 2001.

Works on Turbinenstrasse began in May 2009. Not without detractors. The Young Socialists criticised the "overpriced luxury apartments no one needs".

In 2010, when half the Mobimo Tower had been built, project manager Marc Pointet declared in business magazine *Bilanz*, "We're not selling a high-rise at all, we're selling something much more attractive: views and life in a five-star hotel, encased in Roman travertine." There was an aspiration for vertical neighbourhoods, Pointet said, where people don't just live, but can also take care of many other things.

**"WE ARE
NOT
SELLING A
HIGH-RISE AT
ALL."**

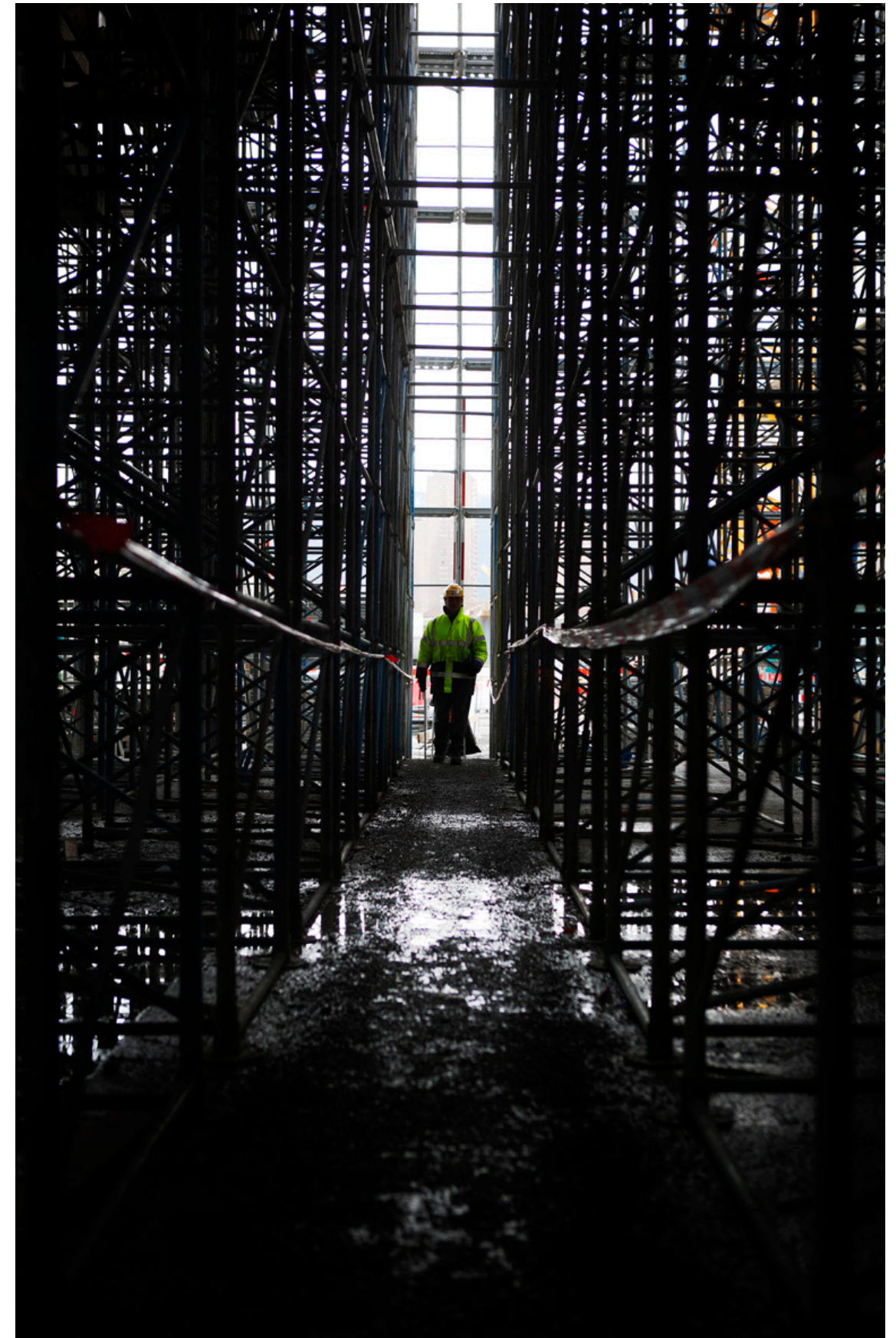
Mobimo had already had to rethink one aspect, however. Although they had secured a tenant with a 25-year lease in the form of the Renaissance hotel chain, the planned privately owned high-end apartments proved hard to sell. The response was to make the living spaces smaller – and the prices. The penthouse on the 24th floor, for example, designed with 1 180 square metres of floor space, now became four apartments.

When criticism of the striking high-rise and the development of the district in general didn't abate, Marc Pointet countered in the *Magazin* of the *Tagess-Anzeiger*: "I don't understand the concerns that the tower could be a symbol of the gap between rich and poor, and that a few millionaires are living here totally separated from the local residents of Kreis 5," he said in July 2011, a few weeks before the building opened. "Our clients are successful entrepreneurs or top managers – ordinary people."

Nevertheless, a feng shui consultant was brought in for the tower. "You feel this positive, weighty energy in the tower," said project manager Pointet.

Pleasing as the energy was, the luxury apartment experience also signified a change of course for Mobimo. "We will not continue in this sector," said Christoph Caviezel, who had taken over the position of CEO in 2008, at the presentation of the financial results in 2012. In future, Mobimo would concentrate on the middle segment. Condominiums in that price range still sold like hotcakes, Caviezel said.

"Du häsch kei Platz meh für mich" ("You don't have room for me any more"), Dodo sings in his song about Zurich West. "Ich akzeptiers. (I accept that.) Drum nimi Abschied vo dir. (So I'll say goodbye to you.) Obwohl i di lieb. (Although I love you.)"



81 metres tall: Mobimo Tower rises, March 2010.

LIGHTS ON:
THE ZÜRICH WEST
SKYLINE, 2013



Nothing is ever finished

Once it was a river bed, then a goods yard and the most notorious mile in French-speaking Switzerland: the Quartier du Flon in Lausanne.

When Paul Rambert talks about the Quartier du Flon, these are the phrases he uses: “C’est un quartier pas comme les autres” – There’s no other district like it. And: “Rien n’est jamais terminé!” – Nothing is ever finished. Architect Rambert dedicated a chapter of his career to the vision of Flon, and the 79-year-old has played a major part in what the district in the centre of Lausanne is today: a meeting place for residents, a must-see for tourists, a successful mix of shopping, working, studying, living, culture, sport and leisure. Flon is what many urban areas in Switzerland would like to achieve with their development plans.

Flon is part and parcel of Lausanne’s identity. It is a district with its own public WLAN named after it. A district with an award-winning underground car park and very good connections to public transport. A district whose residents and business owners still refer to themselves as “les gens du Flon” – the Flon people. And last but not least, the district is also a stroke of luck for Mobimo in French-speaking Switzerland.

The Flon is actually the river that flows through this part of Lausanne. In the 19th century, the “Compagnie du chemin de fer de Lausanne à Ouchy”, Lausanne-Ouchy or LO for short, built the metro line from Ouchy to the city centre, filling in the river bed of the Flon. The Grand-Pont on the south-eastern boundary of the district, of which only the uppermost arches are visible today, bears witness to this. The rest of the bridge is stuck “up to its knees in the new terrain”, as the magazine *Hochparterre* phrased it. Today, the Flon is channelled underground in a heritage-listed tunnel under the Flon plateau.

On the plateau, at the end of the 19th century, LO operated a goods yard with tracks and warehouses. When the LO group ceased railway operations in the 1980s and sold the Metro to the Lausanne public transport operators, Lausanne’s subculture moved into Flon:



**A DISTRICT THAT'S
LIKE NO OTHER:
LE FLON**



Where once there were railway tracks, people now shop or stroll: Les Mercier with Voie-du-Chariot, 2008.



A district that's alive round the clock: the picture series "Le Flon la Nuit" shows the night life in the Quartier du Flon, 2009.



small businesses, creatives, party venues. Lausanne rappers Sens Unik had their recording studio here in the 1990s. In a portrait of Sens Unik by radio and television station RTS, a young Carlos Leal can be seen on the roof of a building in Flon; hidden references to the district were included on the album cover of *Chromatique* from 1994. Les gens du Flon lived in the attics of the warehouses, and the legendary club MAD opened its doors in the district in 1985. Newspaper *NZZ* described MAD as "a bit crazy, a bit underground, a bit edgy". Flon was said to be the "Soho of Lausanne".

But Flon is also a big car park and a place where projects are destined to fail. Among the numerous conversion ideas that were never realised is one by the two giants of Swiss architecture, Mario Botta and Vincent Mangeat. And Flon became a no-go area where prostitution and the drug scene took root. "It wasn't quite as bad, but similar to Letten in Zurich," Paul Rambert recalls. The bad reputation of the district reached a tragic peak in autumn 2000, when 27-year-old drug-addicted prostitute Plume was the victim of a brutal crime. A man raped her and beat her almost to death in a warehouse in Flon.

In 1998, Paul Rambert took over the management of LO, the former railway company that was now a real estate business – and hence the task of doing something with the Flon site. The architect,

"A BIT CRAZY, A BIT UNDERGROUND, A BIT EDGY."

who had also worked for real estate companies in the US and Algeria, first wanted to find out why this piece of land in the heart of Lausanne "had remained at rock bottom for so many years", as he put it. The battle lines between LO, the municipal authority and les gens du Flon were entrenched. Rambert brought two advisers on board: French urban planner Charles Lambert and communications specialist Edgar Fasel, formerly a personal colleague of Swiss Federal councillor Kurt Furgler. They imagined what they would see if they flew over the neighbourhood in a helicopter in 20 years' time. "We wanted to discover the district from a different angle," Rambert says. He swapped his suit for jeans, walked his dog through the district and talked to people. There "wasn't much happening", except between one and four in the morning.

Rambert and his team at LO had a vision: for Flon to be alive around the clock. "This district that's like no other needs people living there, working, consuming, enjoying themselves." The Flon vision was born.

The vision demanded of proprietor LO the willingness to risk a major investment. Shareholders waived their dividends for several years. Rambert had to convince les gens du Flon that the intention was not to take everything away from them, and at the same time make it clear that LO Holding owned the 55'000-square-metre site. The communications offensive by Edgar Fasel, ("informer, communiquer... encore et toujours") also helped to bring the Flon vision a step closer; in 1999 the Lausanne municipal council approved the development plan. The latter divided the site into three strategic areas: a commercial transit zone at the Grand-Pont in the east, a meeting zone in the centre and a destination zone at the western end with office and administration buildings and the Migros Club

School. New buildings by various well-known architectural firms took their place next to heritage-listed historic buildings such as the warehouse, in which the MAD club had been located since 1988. Squares, shopping areas, pedestrian zones, restaurants, apartments, artworks materialised. Two hotels subsequently joined the mix. There was a place for long-established favourites such as the Maniak boutique and relief organisation Terre des Hommes, along with Migros, French entertainment giant Fnac and a bank. Underground, a car park stretched almost the whole length, sharing a bed with the river.

At times, discussions with les gens du Flon pushed level-headed architect Rambert to his limits. He could live with the fact that the barriers that LO had erected to tame the haphazardly parked cars were regularly taken down and demolished. But what he didn't understand was why t-shirts were suddenly circulating with the slogan "Guantana-Flon", and that les gens du Flon were claiming that they were being locked up and kept under surveillance. Constantly being in the media took its toll on him.

But at the same time, there were the first signs of success. For example, the car park became the most popular in the city – there weren't any parking spaces reserved just for women, but there also weren't any dark corners and obscure flights of stairs, or columns that blocked visibility or got in the way when parking. In 2003, the car park received an award from the European Parking Association for this design.

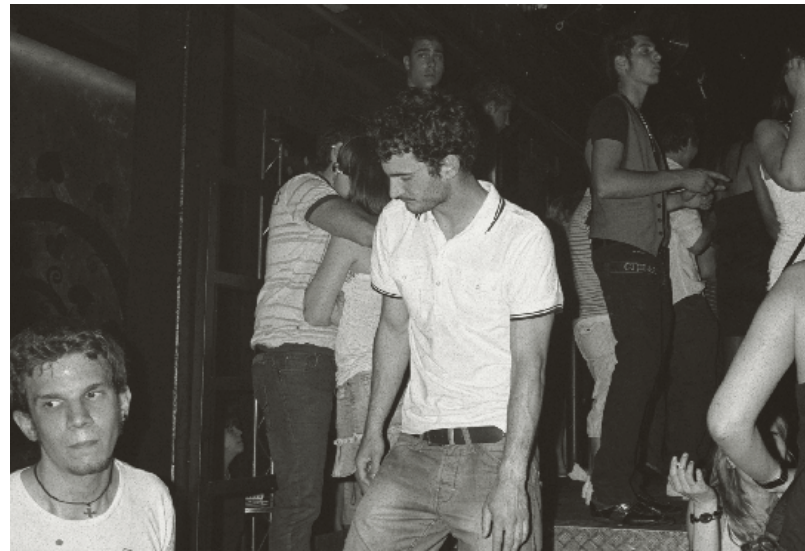
In 2009 – when the first stage was complete – Mobimo came calling as an interested party from German-speaking Switzerland. The real estate company wanted to realise its long-held desire to enter the market in the French-speaking part of Switzerland with a merger. LO Holding, meanwhile, was in need of fresh money for the second stage of the Flon vision. At the end of the year, the merger of the two companies was a fait accompli. Mobimo acquired a holding in LO, exchanged shares and assumed debts totalling CHF 150 million. Paul Rambert relinquished operational management of LO Holding and sat on the Mobimo Board of Directors until 2015.

In 2024, the Flon vision – just like Mobimo – turns 25. The Flon vision lives on. And naturally the district like no other is still not finished. Paul Rambert notes this when he walks through "his" district, drinks a coffee or an aperitif and inspects the outdoor furniture for the restaurants, the new lighting, the newly created squares and the shops that have now moved in here. Today, a childcare centre uses the terrace that was built as an open-air theatre, Postfinance is opening a branch soon and the latest electric vehicles are on display behind striking glass façades. At the same time, notes NZZ, Flon is "going back to trams again", around 60 years after the tracks were removed. A stop and tracks for the new line between Lausanne and Renens are to be completed by 2026. And there are rumblings underneath the Place de l'Europe, too: the third Metro line, M3, is coming.

In 2009 Paul Rambert said, "When I walk through the Flon district now, I see the future." That still holds true in 2024.

**"WHEN I WALK
THROUGH
FLON NOW,
I SEE
THE FUTURE."**

Live, work, consume, enjoy yourself:
Paul Rambert's vision for Flon.
Picture series: Le Flon la Nuit, 2009.





STREET STYLE:
FLON ATTRACTS
EVERYONE –
LOCALS AND
VISITORS ALIKE.

Shade and seating areas in
the district: L'Arbre et ses
racines, 2007.



Boulevard: studios,
boutiques and galleries in
„Les Garages“, 2022.



Paul Rambert: “We wanted to discover the district from a
different angle.”



Flon, the social
hotspot: the MAD club
and Cinema Pathé
cinema complex.

THREE BUILDINGS,
ONE COMPLEX:
LES PÉPINIÈRES,
2014.





The right mix

The newest district in Aarau has been created on the site where Fritz Aeschbach once manufactured kneading machines.

The story of a premiere.

It was a revolution behind closed doors. In 1904, Reinach native Friedrich “Fritz” Aeschbach invented a kneading machine to make bakers’ work easier. But they didn’t want it. Or rather, they did want it. They just didn’t want anyone to know about the mechanical assistance. After all, the belief prevailed in many bakeries that customers expected bread to be baked from hand-kneaded dough.

So Aeschbach had to deliver his turquoise “Artofex”, concealed from curious eyes, to those customers who, while they wanted to share in technical progress, weren’t yet ready to say so in public. The machines were often delivered “under cover of darkness”, his grandson Robert Aeschbach told radio station SRF 1.

But despite the hide and seek, the Artofex began its triumphant march through baking businesses until it finally became respectable. In December 1908, the *Tägliche Anzeiger für Thun und das Berner Oberland* wrote, “One horsepower is sufficient to process a hundred-weight of flour.”

Success brought growth; in 1910 Fritz Aeschbach had a production plant built for his machines in Torfeld, Aarau: the Aeschbach-halle, a brick building with a low-pitch roof and iron pillars placed in a grid formation. Subsidiaries in Milan, Paris and New York ensured that the skilled machine technician’s appliances, now protected by multiple patents, also became an export hit. *Baker’s Digest*, for example, a trade magazine from the US, praised the “best dough machine in the world,” and the Shah of Persia acquired a machine manufactured in Aarau to mix school chalk.

In its heyday, the Maschinenfabrik und Eis-engiesserei F. Aeschbach employed as many as

300 men and women; at times it was the largest employer in Aarau. By the time the works closed in 1988, over 50’000 Artofex machines had been sold all around the world.

Thomas Reck and Arton Tishuki stand in front of the Aeschbachhalle with a machine that is very different, but no doubt just as effective. The long building opens onto a large square, flanked by blocks of houses to the left and right. Reck leans against the door of the ride-on cleaning machine and says, “This is the heart and soul of the district.” The two men know every nook and cranny of the 55’000-square-metre district near the Aarau railway station, every manhole, the curb of every pavement. They are part of the three-person caretaking team who look after building maintenance for Mobimo. “It’s a great job,” says Reck.

And just as the revitalised factory building is the heart of the district, the Aeschbach-quartier has a special place in Mobimo’s history. It is the first district the real estate company has developed from the ground up.

In 2001, Mobimo began to gain a foothold in Aarau with the purchase of a plot of land, and five years later the company bought another plot in the area known as Torfeld Süd. There were big plans afoot. The development of some “random collage” should not be allowed here, then CEO Christoph Caviezel said in a media appearance in late summer 2009. Instead it should become a “new city district”, one that would embrace all aspects such as housing, working and living. Planned construction volume: around CHF 270 million. The real estate company had settled on the

**“THIS IS
THE HEART AND
SOUL
OF THE
DISTRICT.”**

development and conversion of whole sites as a business area some time before; it was to become one of their core competencies. The prerequisites: staying power and the diplomatic abilities of a corps of shrewd ambassadors. Only when neighbours, authorities and the government accept and adopt the proposal can a major project succeed.

In fact, just how much potential was lying dormant in deserted industrial sites had already been calculated in 2004 by not one, but three federal agencies in a publication entitled “Switzerland going to waste – development opportunities in the heart of metropolitan areas”. “Many examples show that, with expertise and the necessary will, it is possible to successfully convert industrial sites,” the report found. “Despite this, many millions of square metres remain unused or barely used. It is not just a question of valuable land lying empty, but the fact that every year several hundred million francs in value creation are lost to the owners, and tax revenues to the municipalities.”

Development mainly failed due to lack of interest from investors, the study's author's found.

It was different in Aarau.

The laying of the foundation stone for the “city in the city”, as the *SRF Regionaljournal* reported, took place in 2015. The planning application, a Mobimo magazine, the sales prospectus for the apartments and the masterplan for the district were ceremonially buried in a box with a padlock.

The masterplan had been devised by Kees Christiaanse, Professor of Urban Planning at ETH Zurich and owner of architectural practice KCAP. In his research work, the Dutchman focused on what gave a district life, making him a leading expert globally when it came to the revitalisation of decommissioned harbour or factory sites. “We try to get a feeling for the unique characteristics of a site. Then we establish a system of public paths and squares

“AN URBAN PLANNER NEEDS A THICK SKIN.”

that are always connected to the neighbourhood,” he explained. He added that he was used to criticism in all phases. “An urban planner needs a thick skin.”

A park, a childcare centre in the old Villa Oehler, a high-rise, offices, apartments to buy and rent, terraced houses, shops – the plan for the Aeschbachquartier provided for all of these. It was to be developed in stages, with various phases of expansion and partners. For example, the high-rise project on Buchserstrasse was built by Mobimo and sold, complete with the building site, to GastroSocial, the pension fund for the hospitality industry. The vision: a district with hardly any cars, a feel-good place, diverse, with gold-standard sustainability.

And in the middle of it all: the Aeschbachhalle. The factory building had lain empty for decades. Graffiti artists had gone wild on its walls, illegal parties were held in the basement. He “swallowed hard” when he saw the inside of the heritage-listed building for the first time, Christoph Caviezel told the *Aargauer Zeitung*.

This decrepit relic of past times, this industrial ruin – of all things – was intended to constitute the centrepiece of the future neighbourhood. In September 2016, Mobimo laid the foundation for new life in the factory building: it was restored, renovated and expanded. Then, on 4 April 2019, the official opening took place.



Artion Tishuki (left)
and Tomas Reck from
Mobimo FM Service
in front of the newly
revitalised
Aeschbachhalle.



View of the Aeschbachquartier with Oehlerpark, the Aeschbachhalle and the GastroSocial high-rise, 2019.



Pioneers: Kaya and Marco Puma have been running Veloservice Aarau in the Aeschbachquartier since 2016.



The Aeschbachhalle: where Fritz Aeschbach once built dough machines, the neighbourhood now meets up.

“A DISTRICT WITH A PROUD PAST, GROUNDED IN TODAY’S AARAU.”

One day before, Daniel Ducrey had taken over the operational management of Mobimo. “Everyone involved was present on the opening evening: for example Kris Martin, the artist who had created the artwork for the district residents’ association, representatives of the industrialist Oehler and Aeschbach families, members of Aarau government agencies and residents,” he recounted. “For me, this celebration is a symbol of what we have created: a district with a proud past, grounded in today’s Aarau. Now, residents and visitors will add new chapters to its story.”

One person adding new chapters is Marco Puma. Together with his wife Kaya, he has been running a bicycle shop in the Aeschbachquartier since back in 2016. It was “a big step”, says the man in the flat cap as he walks through the rows of city bikes arranged for sale. He works hard to foster solidarity in the district, made sure that a bakery offered its goods or organised a meet-up with a beer after work. “Even when I first came to the district, I noticed the positive energy,” says Susanne Koch, owner of Haarmonie Coiffure & Make-Up. “It’s cosmopolitan, there’s room for lots of different types of people.”

She has lost some neighbours, though – other small traders who lamented the lack of foot traffic and moved out again or gave up their business completely. The Aeschbachhalle has also had a change of tenants; these days it plays the role of a meeting place, where concerts are held, children play and a restaurant and bar welcome guests.

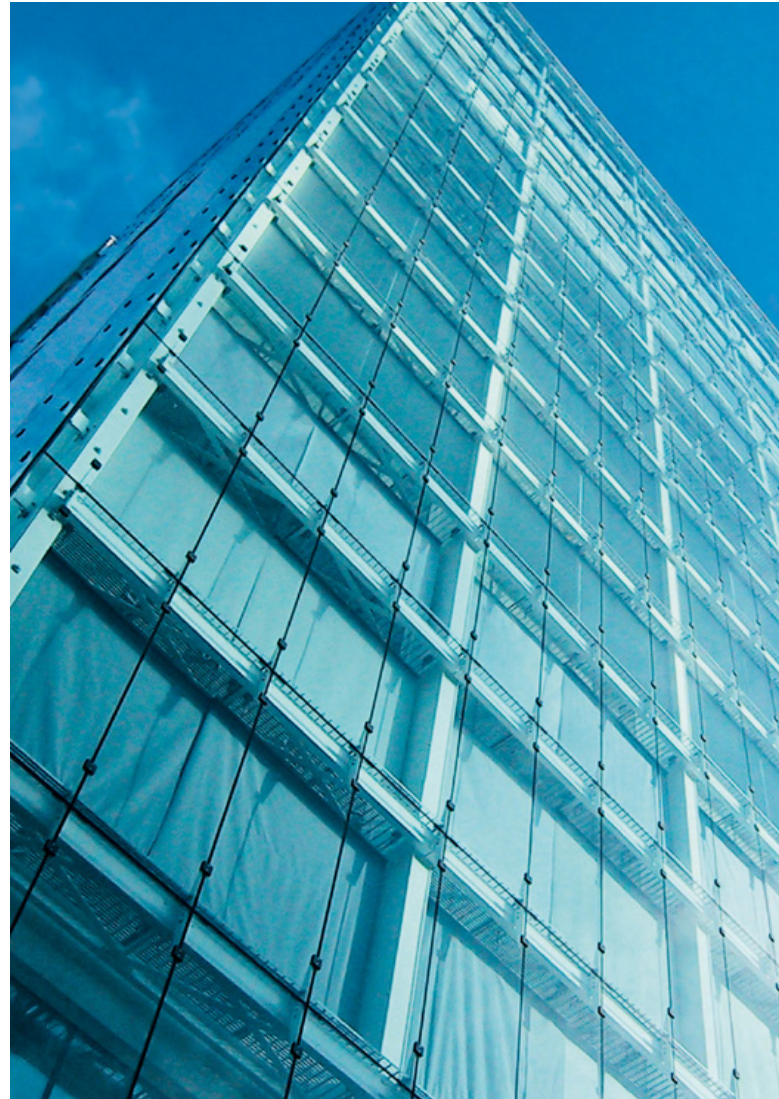
“In theory,” says Vinzenz Manser, Head of Realisation and Member of the Executive Board at Mobimo, “it takes at least five years before a district works.” In practice, he adds, it’s actually ten. Or even more. “Niederdorf wasn’t opened overnight either,” Manser says, referring to the emblematic old neighbourhood in Zurich. Sometimes, he says, he would like to just sit on a bench for a week in a district and see what’s happening. Get a feel for life there. Manser, 57, has been working at Mobimo for 22 years – almost his whole professional life. He says the firm has kept on evolving, providing fresh impetus, and “that’s probably why I’ve stayed for so long”.

But now and then, change does take patience. Right now, the diggers are starting up again in the Aeschbachquartier. The last stage of the transformation is beginning. A timber residential building – Mobimo’s first – will be built, along with the seven-storey Hallenhaus, built on the walls of the historic Halle 5. The “next big thing” read the enthusiastic headline in the *Aargauer Zeitung*, and Mayor Hanspeter Hilfiker referred to a “flagship site”.

Susanne Koch stands in front of her shop and looks at her neighbourhood. “I can see the progress, that everything is coming together. And that’s great.”

And four more

Now for the encore:
another quartet of projects that
shaped the Mobimo story.



LIGHTHOUSE The refurbishment took two years. Then, in January 2001, the nondescript Sulzer office block was transformed into Mobimo-Hochhaus. The building on Escher-Wyss-Platz in Zurich was raised by three storeys, thoroughly optimised for environmental performance and “Mobimo” signage was installed. It wasn’t simply because the glass façade has lit up blue at night since then that Urs Ledermann, the future chairman of Mobimo’s Board of Directors, dubbed the Minergie building a “lighthouse of modern Zurich”.



SHOWPIECE BUILDING It was a coup for the young company: in summer 2000, Mobimo bought the Apollo building on Stauffacherstrasse in Zurich from UBS. The price was not something that was talked about. But newspaper *NZZ* reported that “Mobimo AG, which has now come by this pearl, is one of the younger but boldly advancing companies in the real estate market.” The Apollo building was built in 1991 by architect Theo Hotz for the Swiss Bank Corporation. The building numbers “among the showpiece buildings in contemporary Zurich architecture,” according to *NZZ*. Mobimo sold the commercial building in 2017.



CITY OF THE FUTURE In 2007, it was still an urban planner’s vision of a wasteland in Lucerne South; then, over the next few years, Mattenhof in Kriens began to take shape. The new district was one of the first to be developed by Mobimo from the ground up – to the considerable pride of Lucerne native Georges Theiler, who held the position of Chairman of the real estate company’s Board of Directors from 2013. In 2019, the year of Theiler’s departure, the district was officially opened. “A new order is coming to the Lucerne metropolitan area”, wrote *NZZ* and asked the question: “Is this the beginning of the Central Swiss city of the future?”

Three special editions of the *Biel Bienne* newspaper were dedicated to the Agglolac proposal.



SADLY NOT TO BE The great unfinished: The Agglolac district was to be built right on the shores of Lake Biel, in the bay of the lake and on the former grounds of the national exhibition Expo.02. The cities of Biel and Nidau worked with Mobimo on project planning for more than a decade.

For a considerable time, things looked promising for the new district, which was to include living space for around 1’700 residents, a waterfront park and a marina. Not one, but three special editions of the newspaper *Biel Bienne* were dedicated to the new district. Powerful voices came out in support. “Agglolac will bring a great deal of innovation, pioneering spirit and vigour into the region,” Nidau’s Mayor Sandra Hess declared in December 2017. “It is a great opportunity to turn unproductive land in a unique location on the lake into an attractive living environment for all,” was the view of Erich Fehr, Mayor of Biel. Former Bern Social Democrat Director of Economic Affairs Andreas Rickenbacher enthused: “The project fits perfectly into the residential area, it’s near public transport and will set new energy standards.” But while some were very enthusiastic, others were sceptical in equal measure. Three associations opposed Agglolac, sensing “gigan-

“FINALLY,
A PROJECT
WITH
BREADTH
OF VISION.”



tism”, surmising that the apartments would be “only for the rich”, and summarily dubbing the planned district “Mobimo Monster”. Numerous events, opportunities for community involvement and adjustments to the design were undertaken over many years in an attempt to win residents’ support for the new district on the lake. An interactive digital twin was even developed to convert the critics, but with limited success. And the longer the process was drawn out, the more difficult the political environment became. Finally, a representative poll in mid-March 2021 showed that around 60% of those entitled to vote in Biel, and almost 70% in Nidau, were opposed to the project. Three days later both City Councils rejected the project, even though well-known Biel native and urban traveller Benedikt Loderer (Greens) had made a last impassioned plea for Agglolac. It would “finally [create] a project with breadth of vision,” he said, “a piece of city, a neighbourhood,” and not a Switzerland covered in low-density little boxes. In March 2024, the project company cemented the end of Agglolac with its cancellation agreement.

The future of cities rests
not just on concrete, steel and wood.
Mobimo uses art to make
public spaces more liveable.
But What is beautiful?
Happily, that's open to debate!

ART ON BUILD INGS



NOT VITAL: "THE NO PROBLEM SCULPTURE",
CONCRETE, ZURICH, MOBIMO TOWER, 2011

**ANNELIES ŠTRBA: “O.T”,
PRINT ON WEATHERPROOF SLIDING PANELS,
ZURICH, LETZIHOF, 2016**



**YVES NETZHAMMER: “THE LANGUAGE PLAYS TIME OR
SCRUMPTIOUS WAS THE APPLE JUICE”,
ALUMINIUM, AFFOLTERN AM ALBIS, OVA SITE, 2014**



A “meteorite falling on Zurich” was how Graubünden artist Not Vital described his sculpture when unveiling it to the public in 2011. The total length of the edges of the shotcrete cube was exactly 81 metres, precisely the height of the building whose exterior Not Vital’s work was designed not just to enhance but to embody – Mobimo Tower in Zurich West.

Not Vital named the cube “The No Problem Sculpture” as a reminder that in Niger, where he had an 81-metre-deep well dug as part of the project, many of the problems that occupied people in Switzerland were not problems at all. Or, as Not Vital himself explained, if he hadn’t won the art project competition held by the client, it wouldn’t have been a problem.

And the sculpture very much lived up to its name. The approval process and erection both went without a hitch. Then came 2021. And with it a postulate by municipal councillors Stefan Urech (SVP) and Urs Helfenstein (SP). The two of them just didn’t like the artwork. They thought it was too big. Too ugly. They would have liked trees and benches instead. In short, the politicians demanded that Zurich City Council ask Mobimo to remove the sculpture from its own private land.

While the incident demonstrates how apt Not Vital’s thinking was when naming his work, it shows something else, too: art in public spaces causes a stir. The angel by Niki de St. Phalle in Zurich’s main railway station was dubbed “an oversized Sennentuntschi” (alpine demon) by critics in 1997. And the Meret-Oppenheim fountain in Bern, “a ventilation stack”. In 2018, Jutta Langhoff, then a Mobimo project manager, explained in *NZZ am Sonntag* that it didn’t worry her when people argued about art on buildings. “On the contrary, it should be something to muse on beyond the everyday.”

Mobimo has supported art since its beginnings. “Some integrated art, where possible, doesn’t make a great difference to costs,” said founder Alfred Meili, and it brings happiness. The development process was later professionalised, and since 2013 involvement has been focused on the programme “Mobimo & Arts”. Now selected artists are invited to participate in an ideas competition at an early stage of the building project; an independent jury selects the winning project. “Art is not simply glued onto a finished building – it is integrated into the overall project,” *NZZ am Sonntag* wrote. And when it comes to the artworks, there are no limits: reliefs, light works and sculptures, plus façade designs and fountains. “Art always means moving outside your comfort zone,” says curator Friederike Schmid. She has advised Mobimo & Art as an art expert for many years.

The initiative brings art to the people who enter and leave the Mobimo buildings, or simply walk past them; it creates a strong symbolic connection and a sense of identity. It’s not about decoration or improving architecture. “We don’t want to just build with concrete – we want to create harmonious and liveable environs.” Geneva artist Christian Gonzenbach explains it like this: “The location of sculptures has a big influence on their function. In a museum they are there to be observed; in the heart of a residential development they are part of life.”

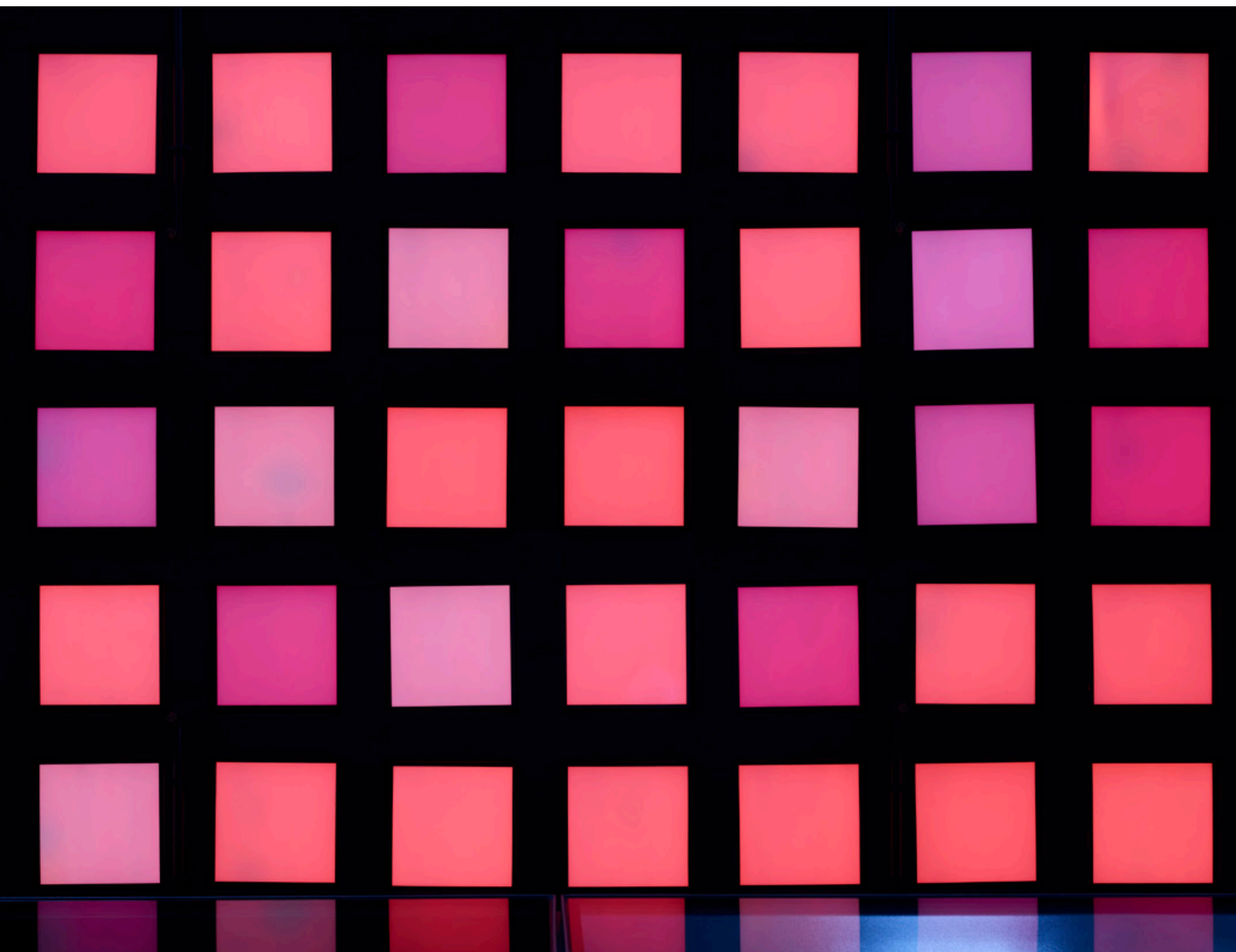
**“ART ALWAYS
MEANS GETTING
OUT OF YOUR
COMFORT ZONE.”**



**ANNINA THOMANN: “THE STRONG ONES”,
ALUMINIUM, ZURICH, MANEGG, 2023**

ATELIER SCHLAEPFER-CAPT: "RIVIÈRE SUSPENDUE",
ALUMINIUM/ACRYLIC GLASS/STAINLESS STEEL,
LAUSANNE, QUARTIER DU FLON, 2020





**SOPHIE BOUVIER AUSLÄNDER: “UPSIDE DOWN”,
RGB PROGRAMMED LED LIGHTS
LAUSANNE, QUARTIER DE LA RASUDE, 2013**



**CHRISTIAN GONZENBACH: “CURRY AND PAPRIKA”,
CONCRETE, REGENSDORF, SONNENHOF, 2015**



NIKOLA ZARIC: "CÔTÉ COUR — ANEHOM LISANT
VOLTAIRE ET FEMLIÈVRE", POLYCHROME CONCRETE,
LAUSANNE, PETIT MONT-RIOND, 2015

VINCENT KOHLER: "UNPLUGGED",
BRONZE, LAUSANNE,
QUARTIER DU FLON, 2017





**BIODIVERSITY
OUTSIDE MOBIMO'S
BUSINESS LOCATION,
2024**

LASTING

Mobimo and sustainability:
what a so-called gelatine glaze,
buildings with no chimneys
and butterflies have in common.

Praise sounds different. When the refurbishment of Mobimo-Hochhaus was completed in January 2001, the *NZZ* reported that the “refurbishment measures have turned a previously attractive industrial structure into an unattractive building,” and that “the second glass façade resembled “a gelatine glaze, a mask”.

This was a blow for the young Mobimo, given that it had announced it was building “Switzerland’s most modern high-rise” on Zurich’s Escher-Wyss-Platz, with low energy consumption and non-smoking offices. He probably “put [the criticism] out of his mind,” says Georg Horka, project manager at the time, today. “Or perhaps I never even read it?”

Someone else at the time immediately wrote an eloquent reply. “Something that polarises and provokes strong opinions can’t be completely without quality”, head of Mobimo Alfred Meili said. “The core concept behind this project was to turn what currently exists into a building for the future. And in that process, form follows function.” He went on to say that along with architectural quality, Mobimo promoted construction methods that were consistently environmentally friendly, also for commercial reasons. It was important here “to realise that the environmental questions of the 21st century cannot be answered with the design vocabulary of the 19th century.”

So, there it stood – the first low-energy and non-smoking high-rise in Switzerland. And it immediately aroused controversy, although the much-maligned façade was a genuine pioneering feat for the environment.

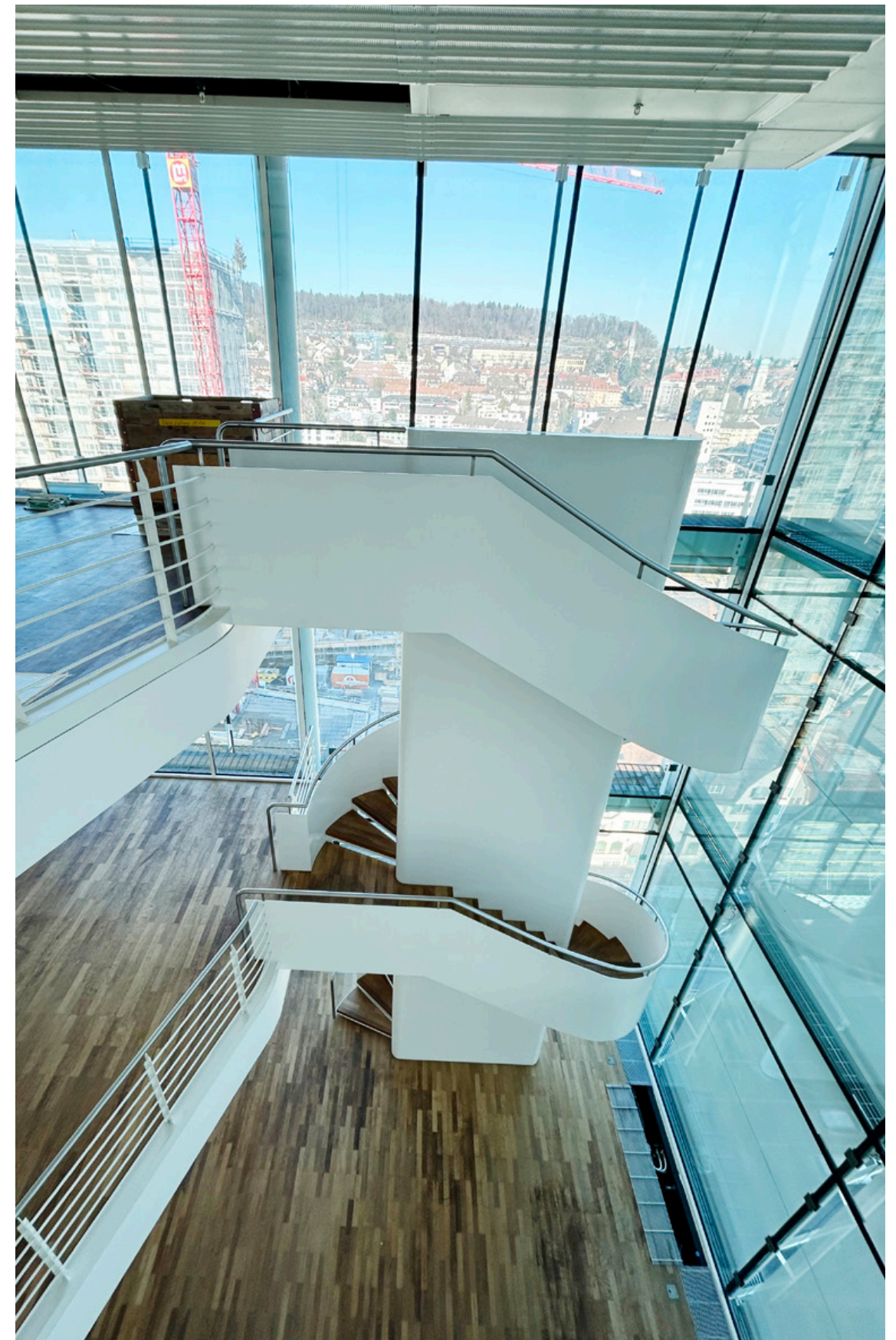
The former Sulzer administration building, built in 1972 and by then somewhat past its prime, had been for sale for some time in 1999, when one day Georg Horka’s phone rang. “Is this something you might be interested in?”, the caller wanted to know. Indeed, Horka decided. Because “I believed in the district,” he says. Even though its defining characteristic was a vast industrial wasteland. But there were also artists, underground clubs and the city’s statement of intent to create “a good new district”. “That made us sit up and take notice, it signalled a new start,” Horka says.

The native of Graubünden, in charge of architecture and project management at the young Mobimo, now had to persuade the Board of Directors of his vision. Three presentations were needed to win over the Board. They travelled to the area near Escher-Wyss-Platz in two cars and looked around. It was clear to them that the high-rise is going to be quite something. But different to how some envisaged.

Georg Horka doesn’t like it when people refer to him as the father of sustainability at Mobimo. “That would be praising me too much,” he says. “It was teamwork.” Nevertheless, it was he who drove progress with his ideas when many people still thought that taking resources into account was only something for dyed-in-the-wool Greens voters and head-in-the-clouds environmental dreamers.

Together with architects Rolf Läubli and Heinz Zimmermann, Horka got down to business on the high-rise. The height of the building was increased by three floors to 15, and was given a “second skin” in the form of a glass façade that functioned as an air col-

**“SOMETHING
THAT
POLARISES
CANNOT
BE WITHOUT
QUALITY.”**



Pioneering environmental feat: Mobimo-Hochhaus was the first Minergie high-rise in Switzerland in 2001.



FENG SHUI In 2013, Andreas Hämmerli, Head of Development at Mobimo, described in *NZZ am Sonntag* how he imagines future-proof properties. Energy efficiency is already part of standards today, he said. But it's not enough for true sustainability. "People should feel good in buildings," according to Hämmerli. That is why Mobimo also opted for feng shui, a theory of harmony from China, in its new buildings and refurbishments. Bern native Roland Frutig (in the photo above) was called in as the expert for major projects. "If introduced at the right stage," Frutig says, "feng shui can reveal essential connections. For example, it can answer the question of how to connect a new district harmoniously to an existing one."

**"AT FIRST,
BUILDINGS
WITHOUT
CHIMNEYS
WERE
DERIDED."**

lector. This enabled the energy required for heating, ventilation and air-conditioning to be reduced by around 70%, as stated at the time. The remainder required came in the form of waste heat from the nearby household waste incinerator on Josefstrasse.

The project was far ahead of the sector's standards for its time in other respects, too. Mobimo dispensed with oil and gas heating wherever possible. Instead, the company opted for geothermal probes and heat pumps. Moreover, well-being, which is today part of the social components of the ESG guidelines, was important. With the involvement of colour consultants, art on buildings and later also feng shui experts, the aim was to build in such a way that the residents were happy to be at home or working in Mobimo buildings. "Sustainability is a mindset," Georg Horka says.

One that not everyone understood. "At first, 'buildings without chimneys' were even derided," former Mobimo CEO Christoph Caviezel recalled. His predecessor Paul Schnetzer also wrote in the *Handelszeitung* in 2007 that "Energy efficiency is still barely talked about in residential construction. That has to change, because improving the environment on a global level starts locally." Due to climate change, "the rules that currently apply in energy and building engineering have to be critically re-examined. After all, what is at stake for us all is the future of our planet."

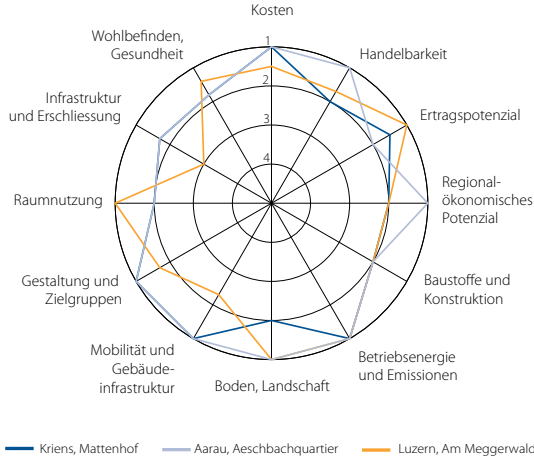
Mobimo systematically pursued its chosen path. An integrated sustainability section appeared in the 2011 annual report for the first time. "Properties have a long life, and hence the decisions made in the initial stages influence the environment and society for a particularly long time," the report states. And a year later: "Mobimo wants to create the foundation for modern, healthy, responsible and environmentally compatible housing, working and living."

The ongoing efforts were translating into numbers, the report found: the analysis of all existing Mobimo investment properties showed that properties built in 2008 and earlier consumed a total of over 232 kilowatt hours per square metre per year. The new buildings in the portfolio, in contrast, only required 83 kilowatt hours per square metre per year. Animal residents also felt the benefits of the sustainability efforts. On the roof of the Pfingstweid project in Zurich, for example, the real estate company provided special earth formations as homes for lizards in 2013.

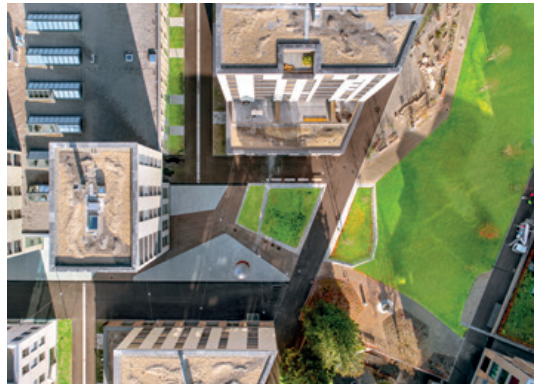
And pioneers keep advancing. An endeavour is currently under way to use artificial intelligence to further reduce the energy and CO₂ emissions of building stock. Another experiment is growing in front of the windows of the Mobimo headquarters in Küsnacht in the canton of Zurich. Instead of lawn, a colourful mixture of indigenous grasses and bushes is springing up; employees helped decide on the biodiverse redesign. If it works, the garden, which is currently in the trial stage, will be rolled out in the surroundings of real estate projects. There are already initial reports of success: "We really are seeing more butterflies," says Vinzenz Manser, Head of Realisation.

And Mobimo-Hochhaus rebuked by the *NZZ*? It has outlasted its critics. Today, the city of Zurich's website says: "The renovation made a beacon out of the high-rise." And: "In the process, an energy-saving and environmentally friendly Minergie build was created."

A PLUS Something special is being created in Köniz in the canton of Bern: an EnergyPlus district. What this signifies is that the buildings in the Feuerfalter development generate more energy over an entire year than they use. Moreover, the district, which Mobimo is co-developing, will be a certified 2000-watt site. The building materials chosen for the 240 apartments, which will be completed by the start of 2027, play an important role here. For example, the hybrid timber façade stores CO₂ over the long term. The municipality of Köniz itself has set the target of becoming climate neutral by 2045.



SUSTAINABILITY NETWORK In 2015, Mobimo developed an internal sustainability rating system. This allowed a clear comparison of the quality of different projects and properties. For investment properties, this enabled the identification of actions required and the implementation of improvement measures. For development properties, the rating served to firm up the sustainability requirements.



GOLD FOR FIRST PLACE The Aeschbachquartier in Aarau is the first district in Switzerland to be awarded the German Sustainable Building Council (DGNB) certification for holistic sustainability. And not with silver, but with gold. The DGNB certification takes into account factors throughout the entire life cycle of the district. Environmental factors are assessed, as are financial, planning and socio-cultural characteristics.

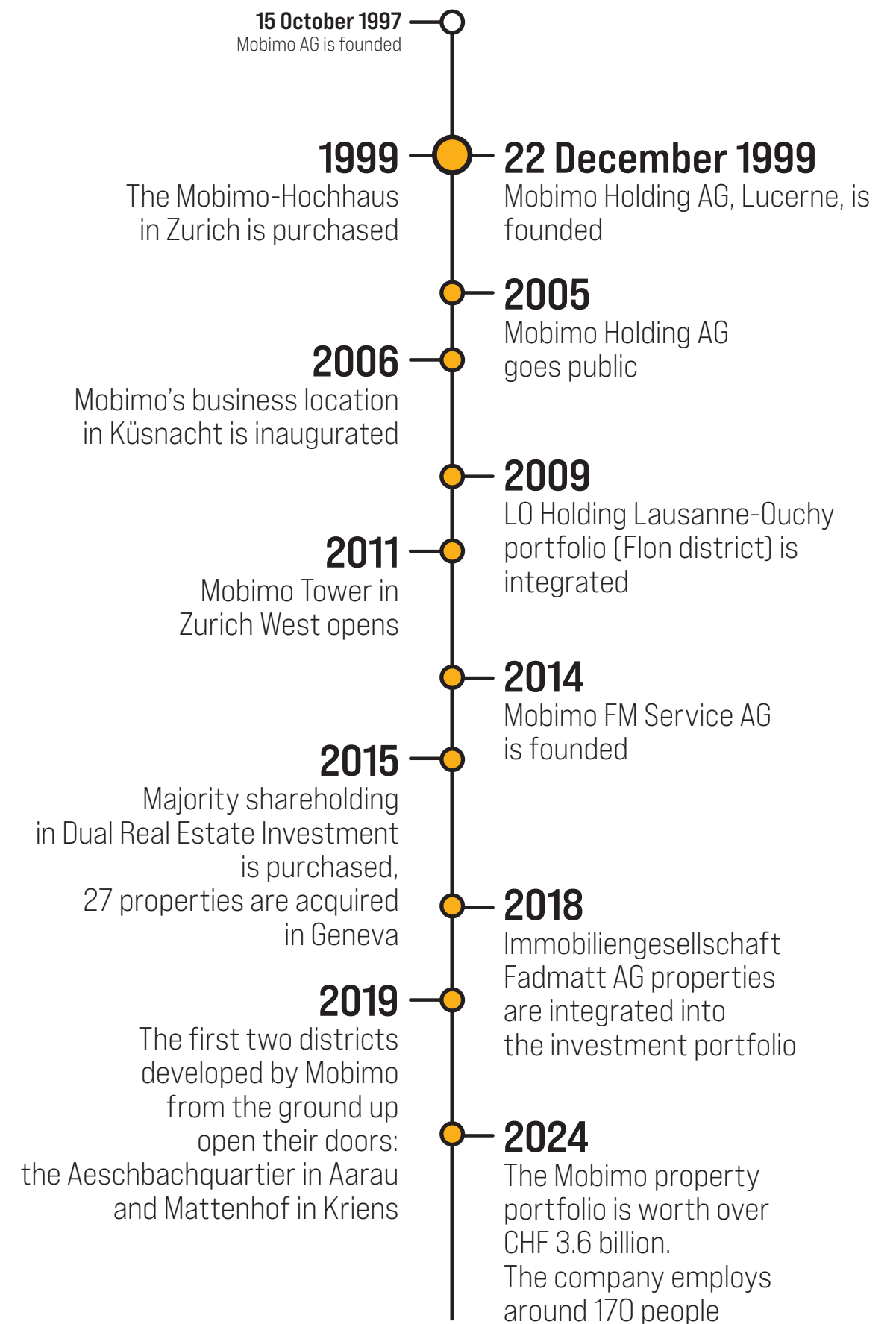


QUITE DIFFERENT In 2014, Mobimo CEO Christoph Caviezel explained how conversions can be part of the sustainability strategy: he reported that two years previously, an office building in Winterthur had been converted into apartments and it had been a “very positive experience”. “That motivated us to evaluate other projects.” Many more followed: for example, Tiergarten in Zurich, where Mobimo installed 59 apartments in an old office and laboratory building in 2023. This saved 60% of grey energy compared with a new build. “Conversion is the supreme discipline,” said Vinzenz Manser, Head of Realisation, to the NZZ.



THE KEY POINTS

Facts, facts, facts!
A speed read: Mobimo at a glance.





"EVEN GENEROUS
REAL ESTATE
COMPANIES MAKE
GOOD PROFITS",
ABOUT MOBIMO,
2021

OUTLOOK

The stories in this book eloquently demonstrate the proud contribution that Mobimo's creative power makes to civil society, whether it be as a creator of living spaces or as a private company listed on the stock exchange. In the current environment, the role of the real estate sector in society as a whole is often vigorously debated by certain circles in public discourse. The anniversary offers us the opportunity to present the relevance of our achievements with pleasure and pride.

Mobimo came onto the scene 25 years ago, and it is here to stay. But what will the next 25 years bring? And how can Mobimo maintain and further expand its excellent reputation as a reliable partner and owner in the future?

As the Greek philosopher Heraclitus said long ago, "The only constant in life is change." Workplaces, forms of housing, consumption, the environment and society have always been subject to change, but the cycles of change are much faster today. We feel the effects of this in our projects, too. Needs are changing, complexity is increasing – in social, regulatory and political contexts. It is vital to anticipate change and at the same time continue to put people first in everything we do.

Climate change and protecting the environment are not just trendy issues any more; sustainability literally requires sustained attention. Mobimo integrated the sustainability aspect into its planning very early on, but has further intensified its focus in recent years. A detailed reduction pathway to carbon neutrality by 2050 now serves as our compass. In addition, we are increasingly having the social and environmental compatibility of our projects and properties assessed and certified by accredited institutions.

Over the years, developing, converting and operating whole sites so that they become vibrant districts with mixed uses has become one of



"Our story continues to be written": CEO Daniel Ducrey (left) with some of Mobimo's employees.

Mobimo's core competencies. Such conversions also have great potential for the future, as the two final expansion stages in the Aeschbachquartier show. And so our story continues to be written.

Mobimo's drive to create innovative, needs-based, high-quality living space continues unabated. Our broad experience, coupled with the aim of leading the field in what we do, will keep us on track for success – be that for our employees, our tenants and buyers or our investors. The Board of Directors, Executive Board and employees act with team spirit and are conscious of their responsibility and intend to write the next chapters in the success story of this young company with enthusiasm, dynamism and deliberation. I look forward to your continued support on our journey.

DANIEL DUCREY, CEO

IMPRINT

We would like to thank everyone who has given their time for this publication and shared their memories with us.

Publisher

Mobimo Holding AG, Rütligasse 1, Lucerne

Project management

Anthony Welbergen, Head of Corporate Communication

Design & editorial

Panda & Pinguin GmbH, Zurich

Texts: Andrea Bleicher, Sabina Sturzenegger

Art direction: Andrea Müller

Photography

Henrik Nielsen: p. 55, 58 / 24-Heures: Florian Cella p. 24

Keystone: Justin Hession p. 14, 19, 37, 90, Walter Bieri p. 16, Sigi Tischer p. 17,

Alessandro della Bella p. 18, Steffen Schmidt p. 21, Ennio Leanza p. 26

Mobimo: Markus Bertschi p. 3, 66 - 80, 87, 95 Loris von Siebenthal p. 22,

Dominique Meienberg p. 41, N. Wenger p. 49,

Daniel Werder p. 56, 87, Roland Tännler p. 84, all others: Mobimo archive

Baugeschichtliches Archiv, City of Zurich: Thomas Hussel p. 25,

Marlon Thomann p. 32 / City Archives Zurich: p. 34 / Aeschbach archive: p. 52

Meili archive: p. 6, 10, 13 / Shutterstock: p. 88

Lithography

Widmer & Fluri GmbH, Zurich

Printing

Multicolor Print AG, Baar

English translation

Supertext AG, Zurich

© 2024. All rights reserved

“CUSTOMER LOYALTY THANKS TO
COLOUR’,
ABOUT MOBIMO, 2018



Annina Thomann: “The strong ones”,
Zurich Manegg, 2023

