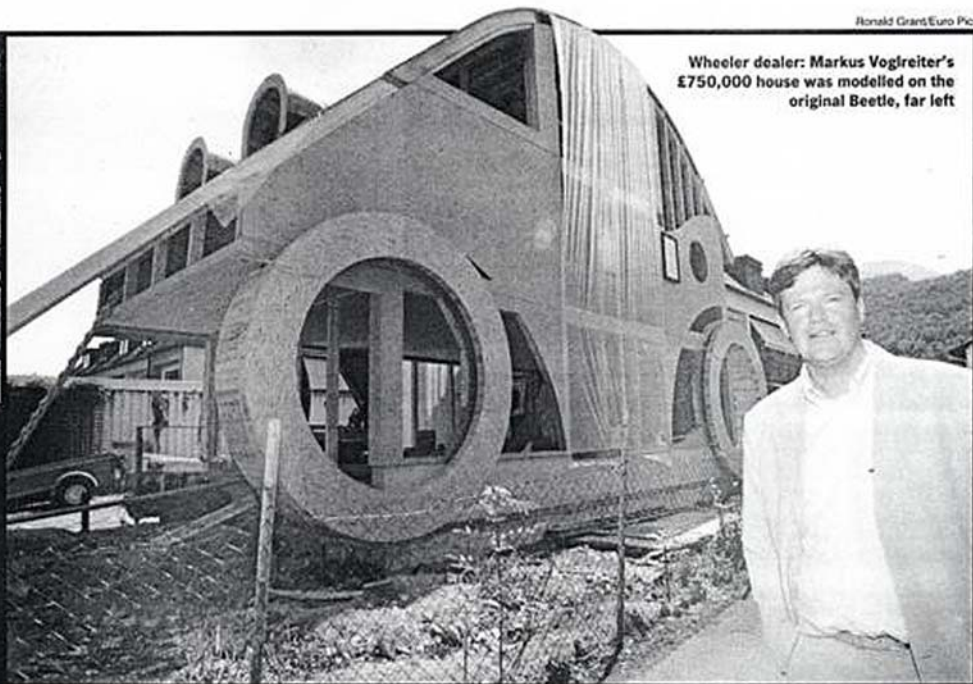


Building on Beetlemania



Wheeler dealer: Markus Voglreiter's £750,000 house was modelled on the original Beetle, far left

An Austrian keen on living in his car has created the ultimate VW tribute house near Salzburg, reports **Clare Chapman**

The last factory to make the classic VW Beetle, in Puebla, Mexico, may be closing this month, but an Austrian builder has created his own memorial to one of the world's best-loved cars. Markus Voglreiter, a 36-year-old master builder from Salzburg, has spent £750,000 building a house that is a model of the original Beetle.

His unique home — superimposed on the structure of an existing property — will be completed and ready for occupation in October, 18 months after Voglreiter conceived the idea, after a meeting with planning authorities.

"I wanted to build a normal corner house in a respectable area in the

mountains surrounding Salzburg. But I was told the gradient was too steep for the kind of house I wanted to erect. As I sat mulling over what to do next, I joked with a friend that if we couldn't build houses to live in, then maybe we should all live in our cars, as I had been practically living in mine at the time. Then the idea hit me: I would build a solid house in the shape of a car."

So a new site was chosen as well as a new design, and Voglreiter will live in the house with his wife Ursula and their two children. Voglreiter, who has three cars and has just ordered a fourth, a Beetle Cabrio convertible, the newer model, clearly believes this car is king.

The three-storey structure now emerging is not a convertible but is based on the original Beetle, which was first produced by Ferdinand Porsche in 1935. Voglreiter's home is constructed entirely out of pine, except for its cement foundations, and has a number of features representing those of a car.

"The building's most noticeable features are the large wheels," says Voglreiter. "We specifically scaled up these proportions so that they would act as barriers to the prying eyes of neighbours, who would otherwise be able to see in through the ground-floor windows. The small, round bathroom window is also an important feature, as it represents the car's fuel cap."

Two bedrooms on the second level have canopied windows which act as headlights, casting light from the lamps indoors over the landscape when the night closes in.

The property's upper level has a terraced area reached through long balcony doors, and a large windscreen-like sheet of glass can be opened or closed to keep out the elements. During the summer months, the house's "exhaust" doubles up as a barbecue area.

Voglreiter claims that the 900sq ft house will comfortably fit a family of four and could even be split into two or three separate units, each with their own kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and access to the entrance door.

Even before its completion, the house in the Gnigl area of Salzburg has attracted bus-loads of tourists, though Voglreiter met the disapproval of some neighbours as the structure was taking shape.

"The proportions of the house do not exceed planning limits," says Voglreiter. "It doesn't block any of the neighbours' homes either, so

there was no real reason why it couldn't be built."

For the moment, the Beetle house remains the only one of its kind, but Voglreiter does not discount building more such properties, even though he has no immediate plans to do so.

"If anybody wanted a similar house we would be willing to build one," he says. "In fact, we have already received inquiries into the Beetle house from a lady from London."

Matt Christy, of the London Assembly and Mayor of London's planning decisions office, says: "The house would be theoretically possible in the UK, but approval would be needed from your local borough council." And as Clive Robinson, a planning officer for the London borough of Barnet, points out: "A house that looks like a car would probably face opposition from local residents."