

02/23/2015 dpa news (1)

Accolades from Apple CEO for Swabian SME firm seele
By Christoph Dernbach, dpa

Swabian facade and glass specialist seele is a typical "hidden champion" in the German economy. Hardly anyone knows what spectacular projects the company has been involved in. Apple CEO Tim Cook has praised the Germans' work in the highest terms.

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Gersthofen (dpa) – Swabian facade and glass specialist seele doesn't even have a Wikipedia entry yet, and on the way out to the Gersthofen industrial park north of Augsburg our taxi driver has to ask directions. Few people in the area are familiar with the company in this small town north of Augsburg, which has played a key role in several stunning architecture projects. These include the 185-meter twin towers of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, the National Stadium in Beijing and the distinctive cube design of the Apple store on New York's Fifth Avenue.

seele wasn't allowed to talk about its big customer Apple for a long time. But that has changed since Apple CEO Tim Cook visited the factory of seele subsidiary sedak, after which seele – the hitherto largely unknown "hidden champion" of glass construction technology – has moved more into the spotlight. The Fifth Avenue store in New York was one of Apple's most special outlets worldwide, Cook said. Without seele Apple would not have been able to build it the way it is.

Speaking to sedak employees on Monday, assembled before a glass segment 14 meters long and 3.20 meters high, Cook declared: "You're the best in the world!" This huge facade pane is the Swabians' last delivery for the futuristic Apple Campus 2, home of the new Apple headquarters in Cupertino, California.

seele subsidiary sedak, formed in 2007 as an independent glass manufacturer, produced over 800 of these panes. The canopy panes come from Gersthofen as well. And the actual facade including metal structure was made in Swabia too. Specialist firm Josef Gartner GmbH – located in Gundelfingen about 50 kilometers away from Gersthofen as the crow flies – integrates and installs the seele panes in the Campus facade.

Company founder Gerhard Seele (age 59) is pleased at how cooperating with Apple has led to such a solid partnership despite the geographic distance the two enterprises and their difference in size. Nelli Diller, managing director of seele GmbH, has noted how Apple architects and designers have clear ideas of what they want and a high standards bordering on perfection. "We encourage each other and are always pushing to sound out the boundaries of the feasible, so we can try new ideas."

In Gersthofen Tim Cook talked about how his predecessor Steve Jobs spent the last years of his life developing the Campus 2 concept and put much of his energy into it. "We were looking for someone, not just in the USA, but worldwide, who could implement Steve's ideas, and this is where we ended up – because no one else can do it as well as you."

seele had to look beyond its own horizons in the conventional glass industry to get the job done for Apple. Thus in October 2012 a 220-ton, 17-meter autoclave was unloaded off a flat-bed trailer in Gersthofen. An autoclave is a sealable, gas-tight pressure vessel used principally in the aerospace industry, but seele wanted to use the autoclave like a giant oven to process glass.

Since founding of the company in 1984 seele has steadily grown, landing contracts for airport projects like Hong Kong's Cep Lap Kok, Munich Terminal 2, Berlin (BER) and the ICE train station at Cologne/Bonn airport along with other projects including Seattle Central Library and the collaboration with Apple. The mid-sized enterprise currently has a workforce of roughly 1,000 employees and annual sales of around 200 million euros. After completion of the panes for Apple Campus 2 the next milestone up ahead is already known: the "iconic skin SCF" system, developed to make manufacturing of individually designed facades with optimum insulation values much easier than has ever been possible before.

02/23/2015 dpa news (2)

Apple invests 1.7 billion euros in two European data centers

By Christoph Dernbach, dpa

China is Apple's biggest growth market. Though Europe is by no means being ignored. Apple CEO Tim Cook has announced the company will be investing over a billion in European data centers, and praised a Swabian glass supplier as the "best in the world".

Gersthofen/Cork (dpa) – Apple intends to offer cloud services to European customers from two new data centers located in Europe. During a visit to Germany Apple CEO Tim Cook announced the corporation would be investing 1.7 billion euros to build and operate the two facilities in Denmark and Ireland.

On Monday morning Cook visited Apple supplier seele, whose subsidiary sedak supplies the facade panes for the new Apple headquarters in Cupertino. The actual facade with sedak glass panes was delivered by Swabian steel and glass specialist Josef Gartner from Gundelfingen.

seele was involved in the designing of the first Apple stores back in 2001, and has supplied glass stairs and facades for seventy stores around the world. "Without seele, our stores throughout the world and our Apple Campus 2 could not have been designed as we had envisaged them," Cook told a dpa reporter. "The quality and size (of the panes) are beyond anything ever realized in the world," he commented, adding that seele is the best glass processing firm in the world. "Nothing leaves the factory that isn't perfect."

Cook emphasized that outstanding engineering and precision work are what draws Apple to partner with German providers. "Our level of interest in what German firms are doing is evident," said Apple's CEO, "Last year we spent some two billion euros with numerous German suppliers including seele."

The first two European data centers will not be in Germany but rather Denmark and Ireland. The primary factor in deciding on location was supposedly the ability to supply the facilities with 100% green energy. The two new data centers in Ireland's County Galway and the Central Jutland region of Denmark are to be run entirely on renewable energy, according to Cook. Apple cloud services including iTunes, Mac Stores and the iMessage, map and Siri voice control services are to be operated from the facilities for customers throughout Europe.

“This major investment represents Apple’s largest project ever in Europe,” stated Apple CEO Cook, adding that this would lead to the creation of hundreds of jobs while introducing advanced green building concepts in those regions. The two new facilities slated for startup in 2017 will have less environmental impact than any Apple data center ever operated.

Currently 18,300 people are employed by Apple in 19 European countries and over 2,000 new jobs were created in 2014, according to the corporation. “Last year Apple spent more than 7.8 billion euros with European providers and suppliers involved in making Apple products and supporting our global business operations,” commented Cook.