

THE MAGAZINE FOR LEADING CONSTRUCTION EXECUTIVES

US **Builders** Review

A rich history complemented
by innovation

Groke / SOMMER USA Inc.



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While the company is new to the United States market, Groke / SOMMER USA Inc. (Groke) is having no issue making its mark. Groke manufacturers customized modern doors for high-end residential and light commercial applications in both new and retrofit construction, many of which exceed Energy Star 6.0 requirements. Initially a European-based company, Uwe Sommer and Gerd Schaaf founded the United States-based operation in North Carolina in 2007.

Despite its fresh start, Groke has over 100 years of experience in metal work and is no stranger to its niche. The company was originally established as a locksmith in April 1898 by George Groke. The Grand Ducal Court, as well as the Badische Staatstheater, were soon recognized as two of Groke's masterpieces. Furthermore, Groke built the iron fences for the castle garden of the Karlsruhe residence for the Count of Baden.

By 1934 Groke was established and in its second generation of family ownership; Otto Groke, George's son, was proudly continuing his father's legacy. Employing 30 people at the time, the traditional work in the locksmith trade remained Groke's niche throughout the war. Otto's wife, Elisabeth, took on the leadership role after her husband's death in 1947. The post-war years followed, and business was steadily growing, transforming from a craft business to become a company of steel and metal construction.

In the mid-50s, Groke was among the pioneers of aluminum component manufacturing. At this time, the company began to specialize in using aluminum frames for windows and doors. Groke was at the forefront of innovative fenestration products, and aluminum has provided the basis for Groke products ever since.

The company's deep roots pressed on; marking its 100-year anniversary in 1998. However, the

company did not rest on its laurels. Groke, under Groke Doors GmbH, became part of The SOMMER Company in 2004 as an independent; management was transferred to Gerd Schaaf.

The SOMMER Company, a leading European manufacturer of garage door openers and home automation technologies, boasts over 25 years of developing innovative and durable products with a constantly growing distribution network. With the partnership underway, a complete range of aluminum entrance doors, in conjunction with the door and gate operators and wireless technology for home automation, became available.

The company's rich heritage of quality and craftsmanship, combined with the latest technology,



creates a truly innovative and unique entryway for any home or building. Due to a substantial increase in sales and evident customer satisfaction, Groke now employs approximately 100 people.

Entering a new market with confidence

After decades of developing new products and sustained success in Europe and other international markets, Groke entered the United States in 2012.

“It’s neat, because our history goes back so far,” says Allen Nelson, product manager for Groke’s U.S. operation. “Right now, we are just figuring out how Groke fits in this market.”

Nelson explains that in the United States market, there is not much that compares to Groke. “In the U.S. we offer a very special, unique product,” he elaborates. “There are very few competitors.”

Perhaps this is because the European market has such stringent criteria for building performance. Germany’s standard building code is more stringent, in numerous ways, than LEED certification. According to Nelson, there are more European cities and towns moving to adopt Passive House as the standard building code.

Nonetheless, quality and efficiency are paying off for Groke. “We are filling a unique need; a niche market for modern, energy-efficient doors,” Nelson continues. “In Europe, Groke is pretty standard – it is still one of the nicer doors – but we are offering

another option altogether in the states. So here, we are much better equipped.”

It is evident that Groke is well-received in the states, as well. “People appreciate energy performance, but they also appreciate the look and security Groke offers,” Nelson details. Groke works with customers across the country, providing modern, energy-efficient, durable and secure doors. While Groke’s doors are often modern from an aesthetic standpoint, there is not a project the team won’t tackle.

With a variety of 80 designs to choose from, every client can find a door to fit any aesthetic and practical need, and Groke will even build truly custom one-off doors based on an architect or designer’s sketch. Furthermore, Groke’s doors are engineered from the get-go around a multi-point locking system, ensuring security is a top priority, as well.

In its home state of North Carolina, the Groke team provided a door for a historic single-family home in Charlotte. “Local jobs are fun,” Nelson says. “You get to be involved; go to the jobsite. This was different, too, because it was an older home.”

Nelson goes on to explain that the homeowners had been in the home for 10 years and the most-used door needed to be replaced. “They originally replaced the door with a nice fiberglass door,” he explains. “It was warped and there was tremendous air leakage. When the client contacted me, she never wanted to replace the door again.”



Luckily for this homeowner, Groke was able to deliver a variety of value points: energy-efficiency, security and appearance. “She needed an energy-efficient door that would last – Groke doors will,” Nelson says proudly. “Depending on the end-user, of all the criteria, any one thing can be the most important; however, everyone appreciates the other attributes, too.”

A California-based contractor encountered Groke doors and was immediately hooked. “While he was too far along in his current project, he could not pass it up,” Nelson says. “He bought a door for his home, instead, and the response was amazing.”

When checking in on how he was enjoying his new Groke door, the satisfied customer responded: “The door is amazing in a number of ways. Love the bank locking sound when it closes. The finish is gorgeous. Everyone who has seen it has to step back and just take it in. Most people don’t understand the nuances of a regular door so they would not begin to understand how to appreciate a door constructed in this nature.”

No matter the size, spec or location, Groke is able to deliver.

Like-minded passion

Groke is also reaping the benefits of other industry leaders, as the company attended its second Greenbuild International Conference and Expo

(Greenbuild) in New Orleans in 2014. “We love Greenbuild,” Nelson says. “Everyone there is passionate about taking things further than the average builder. We all care a little more about the product and the greater good.”

Groke’s booth at Greenbuild 2014 was in the Passive Zone and the company is planning to attend the 10th annual North American Passive House Conference in Chicago in 2015. Nelson goes on to explain his craze with the new line of thinking.

“Who doesn’t want a home that is more energy efficient?” he asks. “One of the biggest things with Passive House is air leakage; Groke doors have multiple levels of continuous air sealing gaskets around the whole perimeter of the door and the multi-point locking also plays a significant part of creating a super tight seal. While exhibiting at Greenbuild we had the chance to speak with quite a few people who had attended the 2014 North American Passive House Conference in San Francisco a few weeks earlier. The topic of doors being one of the weakest links for Passive House projects in North America was discussed at great length in San Francisco. This is a great opportunity for Groke.”

It is evident Nelson takes great pride in what Groke is able to deliver. “A lot of what makes a door energy-efficient is what makes a door secure,” Nelson points out. “A lot of what goes into a high-quality, energy-efficient home cannot be seen on day to day basis, but a door, you can see. Our doors say something else about the home.”

Pressing forward into 2015, Groke is prepared for yet another year of sustained growth. Nelson and his team are looking forward to expansion in the United States and expect sales to continue to be robust.

With a true passion for the industry and innovative products, Groke will continue to build up the United States’ expectations on green building, ensuring the company is an industry leader for years to come. Boasting a rich history, but never settling for yesterday’s best, Groke / SOMMER USA Inc. shows no signs of slowing down. •



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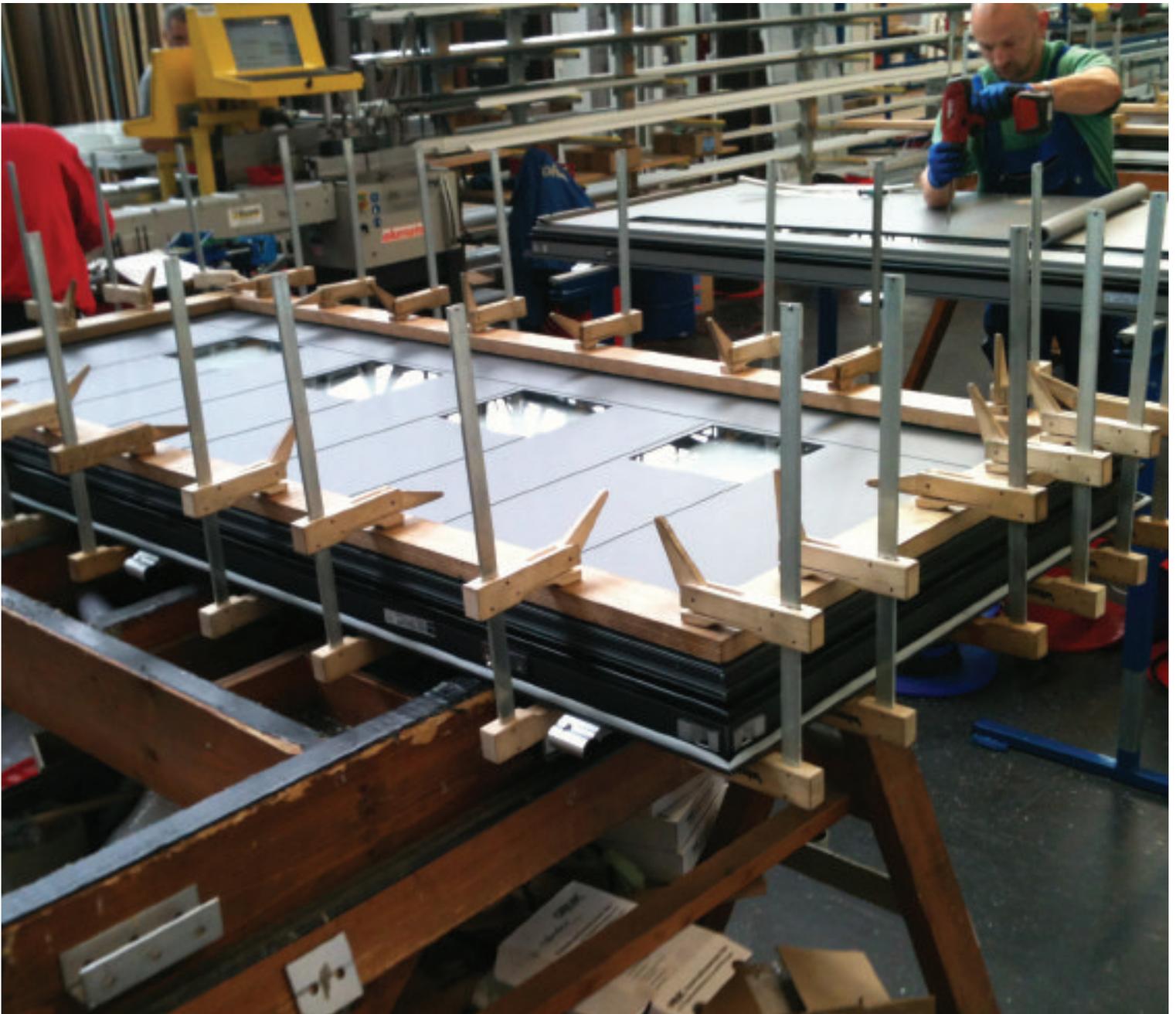
COMPANY AT A GLANCE

ESTABLISHED : 2007

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EMPLOYEES : 8

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