

07

Hoyer Schindele Hirschmüller Architektur

Text: Cordula Vielhauer Photos: Torsten Seidel

Profile

CASE STUDY HOUSE 3
Auguststrasse, Berlin-Mitte



URBANE PARASITEN

They met in Braunschweig, from where they went to London, Barcelona and L.A., before finally setting up a studio in Berlin: For years all they ever designed was buildings in former East Berlin, but Hoyer Schindele Hirschmüller nevertheless have always had an international thrust.

Ever since the 1990s the in the Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg districts of Berlin, with their old buildings and derelict sites, have represented something of a field of experimentation for young architects. Not the illustrious settings all around Gendarmenmarkt and Friedrichstrasse, but suburbs such as Scheunenviertel and Rosenthaler, quarters around Arkonaplatz, Teutoburgerplatz, Zionskirchplatz, Kollwitzplatz and Helmholtzplatz.

At night on any weekday, to the sound of gentle beats and the taste of Tannenzäpfle beer in a different temporary bar in the factories, cellars and outbuildings here, you had the feeling that you were living in the most exciting place on earth. By day the dilapidated houses were taken possession of. However, as opposed to previous generations, instead of getting bogged down in nerve-wracking discussions with the owners, the buildings were simply bought up. It was irrelevant whether a group of inhabitants clubbed together or got Daddy to pay ("a great investment!" – how true), in next to no time buildings where the owners had done a lot of the refurbishment work themselves began to stand out against their dilapidated surroundings like a symbol of a golden future for real estate, such that even more cautious builders dared to venture into quarters such as these.

In the narrow gaps between buildings, with which no investor had any intention of getting his fingers burnt with, young architectural studios created their first works. In the process they often tried their hand as building and project developers: Deadline with their "slender/bender" in Hessische Strasse, abcarius + burns with their minimalist apartments in Joachimstrasse, zanderroth/nägeli with their "Aquarium" on Helmholtzplatz, and Jörg Ebers and Daniel Buchheit with a "single-family dwelling" in Auguststrasse.



CASE STUDY HOUSE 5
Choriner Strasse

The duo of Florian Hoyer and Harald Schindele has been particularly active – and since 2002 they have worked with Markus Hirschmüller as their partner. Strolling through the districts mentioned previously, several of their projects catch the eye: Residential buildings with patchwork facades made of wood and stucco and, occup-



CASE STUDY HOUSE 7
Auguststrasse, Berlin-Mitte

ying a former gap, a new building that only begins on the second floor and is firmly attached to its neighbor.

Case study houses, roofs and gaps is how they refer to their projects, which, in their innovative power, are certainly based on Californian predecessors, while at the same time reflecting the context of their environment. For some ten years now the trio has been involved almost exclusively with doing up existing buildings. They have developed a few small but elegant residential structures, which, on the outside, respond to the old buildings all around, but on the inside reveal a wealth of spatial surprises. In all cases they emerged through dialog between two parties: the surroundings and the user. So HSH also see themselves as project developers, always on the lookout for building plots, which may well be deemed unsuitable for development, because that is what they are not – but rather, for example, emergency access. Projects they nowadays showcase at the Venice Biennale.

None of the three partners was ever employed in another studio; directly after graduating they founded their own studio in Berlin and did what most graduates only dream of: completing an entire building, from performance phase 1 to 9. There was also a bit of luck involved, because the advance trust came from the immediate family, though they very quickly established their own client base, with which as



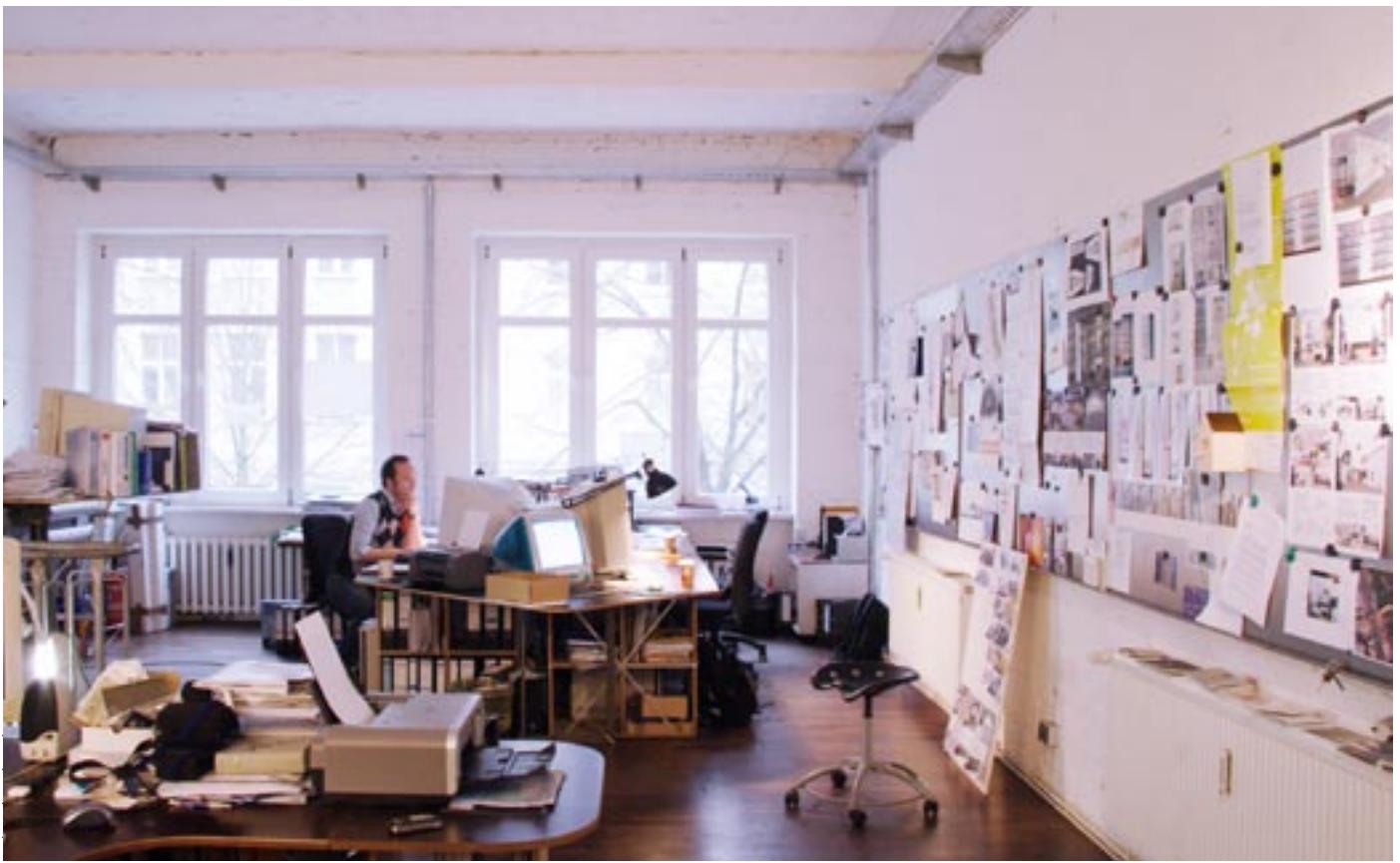
E-WERK
New stairwell tower meets building
fabric.

"building groups" they realized further projects in the east of the city. Nowadays they also design buildings in West Berlin, throughout Germany and even abroad.

And when it came to converting the legendary Berlin techno temple "E-Werk", a block power station redesigned in the 1920s by the Bewag public utility's architect Hans Heinrich Müller, into a functional office building, on the back of their organic innovations HSH ultimately won the day over "the one and only Müller connoisseur" Paul Kahlfeld. And imagine their surprise when the famous Berlin Chamber of Architects, which is not exactly renowned for its promotion of the up-and-coming generation, chose the E-Werk as the venue for its jubilee celebration. But perhaps they have something to catch up with what the DJ Sven Fäth calls "Feierei", getting down and having a good time.



Interview



HOYER SCHINDELE HIRSCHMÜLLER ARCHITEKTUR

As far as architects go, they are makers and shakers: Hoyer Schindele Hirschmüller is a studio that has been designing buildings from the word go. And yet they also see themselves as researchers: Because for HSH each project is a "case study", in which something that is established is given new contours. We asked them about it and received answers based on practical experience in the studio: How they land contracts and get hold of developers, how they define their task as architects, which networks they use and not least of all the question: Where does the best energy flow?

The new building in Auguststrasse in Berlin represented your first "architectural calling card. With its sculptural facade made of wood and plaster, it certainly caused a sensation. At the time the Berlin design bylaws were extremely strict, there was a dispute raging about the façade on Pariser Platz, and people were asking: is that actually legal?

Harald Schindele:

The project was based on market research. At the time there were few new buildings in Scheunenviertel. We wanted to find out just what type of apartment was missing. We noticed that for example the only maisonette apartments were those that included the attic. Our building in Auguststrasse functions in a similar way to the Gameboy game Tetris, which at the time had an influence on us. The maisonette apartments with their L-shapes and double Hs are stacked in a similar way to in Tetris. The façade once again reflects inner life, but also responds to the old building context: We stucco-related privileges, laws, which, though they stem from 1780, were still valid in the late 1990s. These allowed us to model the façade in such a sculptural way, use both the inside and the outside – variations so to speak of classic oriel and loggia themes.



Isometry concept for
Auguststrasse



Harald Schindele

How does one of your projects evolve? For his residential project in Berlin the architect Wolfram Popp first of all looked for buyers and then an investor. What is your approach?

Florian Hoyer

In principle there are two scenarios: On the one hand you have an investor who wants to build something. Then at an early stage a group of purchasers comes along that is prepared to be involved with the project. And that's where the conflict arises: Even before there are any purchasers, the investor or builder decides on quality, in order to "entice" clients. Once all the purchasers have been got together all he sees is the maximization of his profit. Naturally enough his profit margin is to be found somewhere in the Delta between what he receives and what he has to spend. And then he tries to keep the latter as low as possible, which marks the beginning of our work to convince him to let us take of the quality.

Harald Schindele

As architects we are in a much stronger position with regard to the builder or investor if the future occupants get involved themselves. In such a situation he is unable to regiment us so much. After all our purchasers want quality – which is something we welcome.

Fortunately we now have our own client base: People come to us whether we have any projects on the go at the moment. We then include them in a list. When there are between five and ten of them we approach the builder or investor and ask whether he would be interested in building something with us. That's the second scenario.



Residential building in Grunewald

So you act as project developers. Does that mean you also look for the plot of land?

Markus Hirschmüller

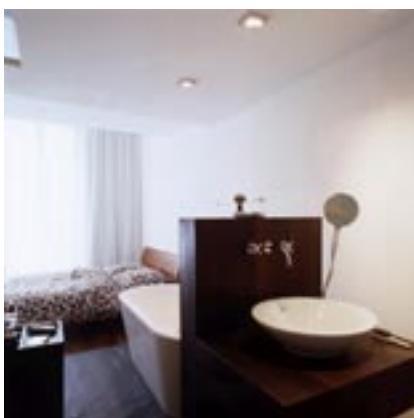
Exactly, that's a major point. Our clients are fixated on a very specific area of Berlin, namely the Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg districts. Though we now have projects in other areas of the city, (for one or two years now we have gradually been moving westward) our work, with the case study houses as well, is at home in this highly concentrated city. Plots of land measuring 600 to 1,500 square meters, with which we have been working to date, are a good model: The buildings are appropriately sized to be able to communicate quality directly. As of a certain size selling all the apartments in advance no longer works. That is when you end up including in the building process compromise units that are scarcely defined, and that is always a shame.



**The man from the building site:
Markus Hirschmüller**



Floating Grounds: Concept studies



**Sleeping and bathing facilities in
Auguststrasse**

In Berlin there is no way round having to deal with old buildings. Do you consider that to be more of a restriction or inspiration?

Florian Hoyer

For us it involves a tremendous attraction. As an architect you have a split attitude to the fact that most people want to live in an old building. As far as we are concerned the challenger is to combine old and new buildings.

In that sense your case study house in Choriner Strasse was particularly successful...

Harald Schindèle

We see it more as "urban commentary"...

Just how did you arrive at the term case study houses, gaps and roofs? What role does Californian Modernism play for you? Are they role models for you?

Harald Schindèle

Actually they are three different themes, all of which are to do with living. As far as Californian architecture is concerned Richard Neutra, who redefined the transition from interior to exterior, is extremely important to me. For us too the topic of "outside -inside" plays an enormous role, particularly in the case of loft extensions, which frequently represent a completely new, totally free level in the urban landscape. This is where we begin using patios, in other words outside areas that are cut into the interior. Paths are positioned around them so that in summer there is a larger living area available.

Florian Hoyer

We use the term case study literally. We really do go to the site and ask: What is possible here? This results not so much in repetition as variation.

Markus Hirschmüller

Whereby it's the typological aspect that is the deciding point. The gap, the building that is 16 to 20 meters wide, the maisonette, the view to the courtyard, to the garden, to the road – assuming you have these elements and a roof, ideally with a panoramic view – then you have all the ingredients for a typology you can experiment with. So in each project certain parameters are defined that make up a "field of experimentation" and other factors accepted as being pre-defined.

Are there any other spatial types you vary – after all "maisonette apartment" is extremely general?

Markus Hirschmüller

We propose spatial catenations that at first sight seem to be unusual: One such example would be the option of the bathroom opening onto the bedroom, which is a plus point for both rooms: The bedroom becomes bigger, and from the bath in it there is a view of the greenery in the interior courtyard. In this way a relationship emerges between sleeping, bathing, and body culture.

A sort of private spa zone?



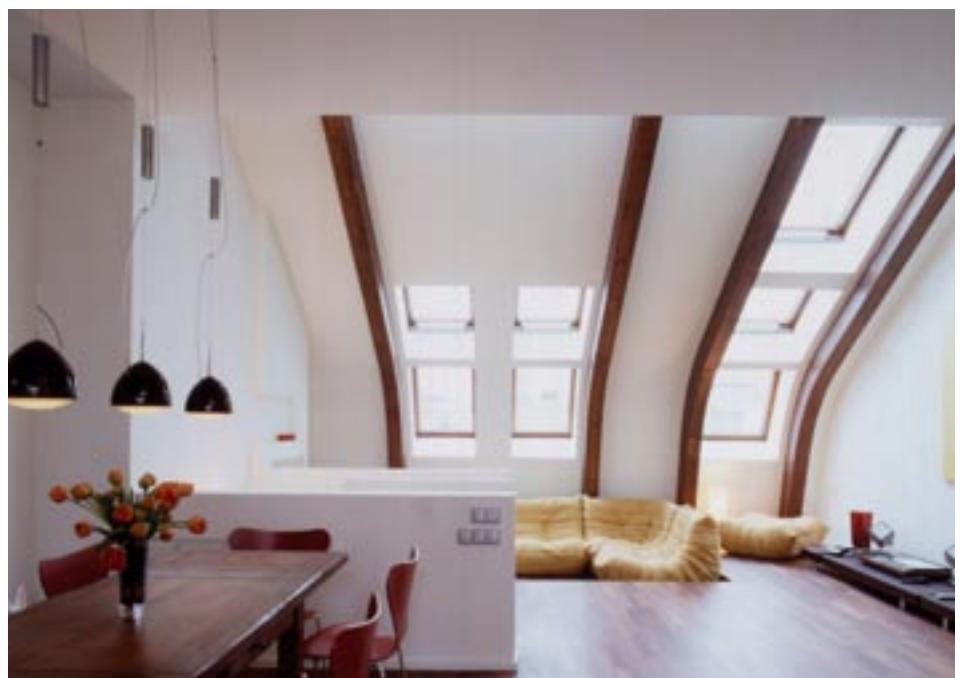
High spaces in Auguststrasse

Markus Hirschmüller

Exactly. Another is the high spaces we try to configure beside the facade. If you have spaces that are six meters high, like in Auguststrasse, you can work with lower heights in other areas. This creates spatial excitement. So what we are trying to do is play with that, give some spaces more potential and others less. This is also a theme of classic Modernism. We see the severe restrictions as a result of building laws, economic restraints and the limitations a gap like this sets, as a challenge to develop that bit "more" from the space available. By means of horizontal and vertical displacement.

Harald Schindele

It's all about improving the quality of life. It's our aim to be able to say, in a city: I open the door and I'm in an apartment that is paradise. I can relax, can recharge my batteries. Even if I have two or three children. And if I only want children later, the apartment has to be able to cope with them as well. It has to be extendable, be in a position to be completely turned upside down. There is interdependency between future occupants and our spatial ideas. To put it the other way round: If somebody wants us to do a conventional footprint for them, in other words with a central hall and two rooms to the right and left, we turn it down.



Paradisiacal conditions
- still in Auguststrasse

Which project gave you your breakthrough or at least made you realize you wanted to carry on in this way?

Florian Hoyer

All of them.

Harald Schindele

We're not a studio that goes in for competitions. With competitions I can well imagine that you win a major one and that's the starting point, from when on everything changes. On some occasions we did look on enviously, but it's just not our way of working, and we can't get in on them anyway. To be perfectly honest it would mean us having to invest a lot of effort in a competition department and we think that is too much trouble.



Florian Hoyer is happy only to have to go in for half a competition a year

Florian Hoyer

We're in the fortunate position of having enough to do. And to say during the construction process "right, let's go in for a competition – but you can't go in for just one – so let's go in for ten, is just not on as far as we're concerned. Over the past ten years we went in for perhaps five competitions, i.e., a half every year.

Harald Schindèle

We do think that it provides a good opportunity for studying. But you also need time to develop and learn the "language".

And in Berlin there are no longer any competitions for residential buildings. These days, competitions, which are anyway restricted, are for totally different types of building: Museums, schools, administration buildings...

Markus Hirschmüller

We always restrict ourselves to apartments. The E-Werk, for example, was a project that opened up new a totally different horizon for us. But what it has in common with all our other projects was our intense dealings with the city and the close attention we paid to the listed building. Whether we're talking about a monument or the building fabric or the size of the buildings on either side of a gap, or indeed an old building itself plays no role whatever for us. In Sophienstrasse we are currently working on a listed building. On Teutoburger Platz we did a roof extension in a listed ensemble of buildings. In the E-Werk we paid very close attention to old building fabric.

Harald Schindèle

What we also do – unconsciously and consciously - is "detective work". We look for elements we can take, can use, which recharge us and which we in turn recharge by discovering them. In that respect the E-Werk was a brilliant playground.

There are almost mystical stories going round about the E-Werk construction process ...



Detective work in the E-Werk:

Graphic artist Anne Krieger's graduation thesis was devoted to the converted industrial building.



A statue of the patron saint of the building trade mysteriously survived all the conversion work at the E-Werk.

Florian Hoyer

... which we really don't want to go into in any depth here, ...or do we??

(At this point the tape recorder is switched off and Florian Hoyer tells the legend of a small St. Christopher sculpture that wondrously survived the construction process in a Rachel Whiteread-like restroom under a staircase in the E-Werk, and today graces the front wall of the studio. The architects only give more precise information if personally asked to do so.)

Harald Schindele

Markus will also be giving a lecture on energy at the beginning of December. All about energies: How can we use them? We even once had a building that was blessed.

Florian Hoyer

Now that really was something, yes indeed. The one in Choriner Strasse. To begin with just about everything that could possibly go wrong did so. Although he was German, the developer had spent several years living in Russia. And he had good connections with the Russian-orthodox church. And at some point he got so fed up with the building site that he got hold of a Russian-orthodox priest and had the entire house blessed. The following day the construction firm announced it was bankrupt, was out of the contract, the whole thing ground to a halt – and from then everything went like clockwork.

Markus Hirschmüller

Just imagine it: Someone actually turned up with a thurible and blessed all the walls...

Harald Schindele

There was a similar incident in Auguststrasse, though on a different level. We opened up the plot of land because it was nine months until we could start building work. We set up a local café, invited artists to the dilapidated outbuilding in the rear courtyard; the kids spent nine months there developing their spray skills. And when the building was ready it was spared of graffiti for three years – for Berlin an eternity. I think they realized you can adopt a different approach to building sites, and they respected that. The developers too. The fact that you don't just put up a fence, but communicate. And we refer to that as charging or energy flows.

Markus Hirschmüller

Perhaps it sounds a touch esoteric. But the fact that we are here in Berlin has got something to do with it. We told ourselves we were going to be part of the mood after the Wall came down and the sense of new departure.

Harald Schindele

Berlin continues to be dominated by a generation that is ten years older than we are. So we were faced with the question of unique characteristics. Auguststrasse was the initial booster for that.

Building apartments for people that want to live in a city but are looking for qualities associated with houses?

Harald Schindele

We are slowly beginning to get away from this niche form of architecture. It's now going to be important for us to handle bigger projects.



"Urban commentary" or niche architecture? The house for "Dr. Spatz" fits exactly in the gap between two pre-cast Berlin buildings.

Markus Hirschmüller

We are also beginning to venture out of Berlin. To begin with we are "moving" from East to West Berlin, which is important...



After almost ten years spent working exclusively in the eastern half of Berlin HSH have "crossed over": A residential building in Grunewald.

Harald Schindèle

We are working on projects in Irsee, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, as well as in London and Riga .This involves commercial buildings as well, for example alterations to a supermarket.

Florian Hoyer

In Riga, we are building 1,000 square meters of residential accommodation, and for us that is a quantum leap forward.

Markus Hirschmüller

What is interesting is that outside Germany as well there is a lot of interest in Berlin. In other words we are not only involved in international projects, our Berlin clients are also often foreigners. 60 % of my dealings with developers are now conducted in English, and in Florian's case in Spanish.

Harald Schindèle

And in mine the Hessian dialect.

Florian Hoyer

But not yet in Russian. Over the past nine months we have certainly noticed that things are moving again in Berlin, that we are gaining ground again, that money is coming into the city. But as I said, there are only foreign investors, who are building for their own purposes, as well as for other occupants.

How important are computers in your work? Do you use them as design tools or just for implementation? Do you build models at all?

Markus Hirschmüller

At college we were almost the last intake to still work on an analog basis. When I moved to Los Angeles things were already totally different there. Even then computers were already an important topic. In L.A. there was almost a sort of MTV-architecture.



For some foreign clients Harald Schindèle is practicing his mother tongue again: A residential and studio building in Irsee.

Enormous numbers of images with a high degree of perfection were produced extremely quickly. The questioning before you make a stroke (which you then laboriously have to rub out again) is missing. For me, being able to do both is a quality.



Residential and studio building in Irsee

Harald Schindele

I can't design something using a computer alone. I always have to print everything out, reconstruct it, and exploit it to the full. I'm far too easily seduced by beautiful images, I still don't totally believe in them. Computers are just one element for use in portraying something. But precisely for simulating things like the course of the sun they're unbeatable.

Markus Hirschmüller

We still build models, in fact more and more. We have also started looking at more minor situations in model form again. It goes without saying that we also have the facility to create visualizations in the office. We have always done everything: 3D on the computer and as a model. And we use computers as a machine for images and as a network device.

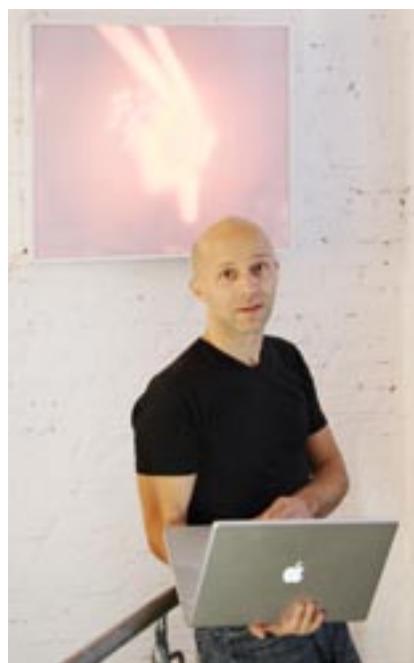
What do you think of the classic networks for architects? After all you're in the Association of German Architects (BDA)...

Harald Schindele

The BDA is good on the one hand: They send a super Info Letter, you find out what's going on in the city. You receive invitations to new buildings and offices, etc.. On the other, not enough attention is paid to the patronage of young studios. In other words to the fact that now and again someone should stand up for the young studios and against the phalanx that covers everything like a film of oil. In this respect there is nothing being done, which is a great shame. Perhaps you have to do it yourself.

Harald Schindele

Things do still happen at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. It might be on a totally different level, but there was a debate about Schlossplatz that went on for two years.



Exploit the device to the full...



In front of Stefanie Bürkle's "palace wallpaper" in the HSH studio.

At BauNetz we frequently hear about the drives that the various associations organize. For example what about the "architecture export" initiative, which is concerned with German architecture abroad, in China, Russia, and Dubai?

Harald Schindele

If anything the "Partner for Berlin" and "Creative Industries" initiatives were of importance. Over a period of 18 months they proved to be a fantastic organization for us. They took us with them, invited us along, we got around, went to London and Los Angeles. There were interesting events, people communicated. Wowereit, the Lord Mayor of Berlin, pushed it at the time, saying creativity was possible in Berlin. It worked very well. Unfortunately the funding has now been axed, which is a tremendous shame. But it strengthened our international footing. Because having been involved in a project abroad and being a complete unknown are totally different things.

Cordula Vielhauer spoke to HSH.

Cordula Vielhauer writes about architecture and culture for specialist and daily media, and designs furniture. She lives with her family in Berlin.

Projects

CHORINER STRASSE



Foto 1/2:

I was not a gap for building on.

Almost one half of this gap development consists of a gap, while only the other half is occupied by a building. Wasteful? Not if you consider that previously the gap was not even land for building on, but rather served as access to the plot at the rear. And it still leads there. Above it, jammed between two old buildings, three containers were stacked up pretty high, up as far as the roof, and on top of that staggered (in order to comply with building regulations referencing the projecting oriels and recessed facades on the neighboring historic buildings). As such the middle container has a balcony overlooking the road.

OK, we think, a three-storey maisonette, four meters wide? If you take away the staircase it doesn't leave a great deal of space for living in, not to mention constantly having to tackle flights of stairs. Yet the architects thought about that too, which is why they came up with a totally different solution: The "containers" connected to the neighboring old building only house the kitchens and bathrooms, rooms in which, for hygienic reasons alone, you don't really miss the genuine creaky charm of old buildings. The living and bedrooms are for that.

And since the guys at Hoyer Schinidle Hirschmüller are real sticklers when it comes to space, the cross-connection with a view of the apartment in the old building is not enough; they also orchestrate the longitudinal direction of the containers: The kitchens are configured towards the road, and the bathrooms towards the garden. Between these there is a sliding wall, which can be pushed back flush with the projecting wall, such that in visual terms the bathrooms and the view of the garden are included in the kitchen. But fear not: Because the bath is raised by about a meter all the sanitary installations disappear in the floor or behind the projecting wall.

Structurally too this "urban parasite" functions along the "container principle": The boxes themselves form an independent support system and, like a rucksack, were hung on the neighboring old building by means of a steel girder.

E-WERK

To date the conversion and refurbishment of the E-Werk have been the biggest project HSH have completed: Here they were able to make full use of their experience in how to approach listed building and monument fabric. The building has a rich history: From 1924-28 Hans Heinrich Müller converted the former block power station into a transformer station, which after WW II was nothing more than a disused ruin, before being rediscovered by the techno scene in the 1990s. The work to convert it into an office building for an IT company has been completed since 2005, although, referencing its legendary interim use, one hall and the “chill-out lounge” on the roof are available for hire for as an event venue.

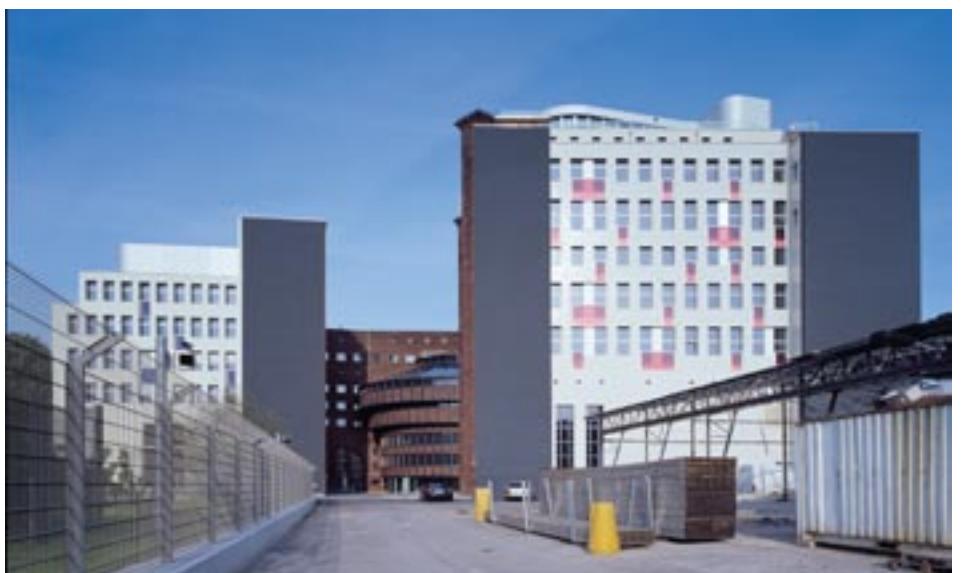


Foto 3:

Dark areas delineate the former fire prevention walls, colored parapets the new lines of vision.

The complex consists of three parts: The transformer stations in the north and south, and a look-out. First of all the architects peeled away the fire prevention walls, which had become superfluous: At the time it was erected it had been surrounded by the winding structure that was the booksellers' quarter, and for this reason had only been to expand inwards and upwards. Towards the courtyard, the façade sported an Expressionist design, and the building towered far above its neighbors. Little of the latter remained after WW II, meaning that HSH were able to generously open out the complex, delineating the newly created lines of vision to the outside world by means of colored parapet elements, while those areas that had been “cut up” were given dark plaster.



Foto 4:

Roof terrace and lounge

Foto 5/6:
In the new sections HSH counter
Müller's concave walls by means of
convex shapes.



Alongside Müller's architecture, which strictly followed a grid, they positioned organically shaped edifices: A new, curved stairwell tower provides access to the northern complex, the free-form chill-out lounge crowns the roof of the southern building, while the service areas hug the amebic footprints. Whereas as much as possible of the patina of the old building fabric on the façade and in the halls was preserved, the smooth skin of the new elements deliberately sets them apart: As such the stairwell tower and lounge are cloaked in matt aluminum, a non-color, which offers an out-of-focus reflection of the surroundings. The office areas on the upper stories on the other hand were totally redesigned and modernized, while preserved objects and quotations here and there reference the former industrial context.

Foto 7:
The look-out. "If somebody says it
looks like before, we take it as a com-
pliment." (H.S.)



RESIDENTIAL BUILDING IN GRUNEWALD

With this residential building in the Berlin district of Grunewald the Wall has also finally come down for Hoyer Schinelle Hirschmüller as well. It is their first project in the west of the city and was completed in summer 2006. The unconstrained style of building in the quarter, with few references in terms of urban planning, made possible a free, almost ideal approach: The design principle comprises four modules, configured on three sides around an interior courtyard. This results in the interior and exterior interweaving on several occasions; large patios complement the adjoining living areas and a rooftop room that has become a tower provides a vertical touch. The bright white and the sculptural division of the space are reminiscent of futuristically tuned Modernism and recall the not too far-removed buildings on which they are based, the villas of the Luckhardt brothers and Erich Mendelsohn...

Foto 8:

Four L-shaped modules group to form a sculptural edifice



Foto 9:

...and create differentiated interiors and exteriors.

