

Dear readers,

With this issue, we are continuing the name of our editorial work: ECKEL INSPIRED is the media platform of Eckel Presse & PR GmbH, and 'Exclusivity with Vision' is the name of the ECKEL INSPIRED magazine. Under this shared banner, we produce in-depth profiles, interviews, podcasts and digital features on projects and personalities whose ideas extend beyond the immediate context.

The starting point for our editorial work remains the world of property. From there, we broaden our perspective to encompass architecture, art, entrepreneurship, culture and the finer things in life, for exceptional places rarely arise from a single discipline. More often than not, creative, economic and personal decisions come together to form a story that only becomes comprehensible once one understands its origins. That is why the same question recurs time and again in the conversations and features in this issue: why does a person embark on a particular project, what drives them, and what purpose is their idea intended to fulfil?

Our cover feature subject, Asteris Kutulas, embodies this in a special way. His professional journey has taken him through literature, music, film and major international productions. Drawing on these experiences, he developed the Flexodrom, a transformable building system that can be planned for different uses, modified and later reused in a different location. The project's artistic origins intersect with very practical questions facing the property sector: how can buildings respond more quickly to new requirements, how can building components be maintained across multiple phases of use, and how does a technical system give rise to a space that people enjoy entering and using?

The wealth of positive feedback from the property sector reinforces our commitment to this editorial approach. Particularly appreciated is the combination of expert analysis with a personal connection to the people who make decisions, develop projects and take responsibility for their implementation over the long term.

I hope you find this a stimulating read and gain new insights into projects whose true value often becomes apparent where their concept, their impact and the personal motivations of the people behind them come together.

Your Editor-in-Chief and Publisher
Thomas Brunke



Thomas Brunke

Photo: Ronny Pabst / Eckel PR GmbH

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Gender note:

The terms used to refer to people in this magazine are mostly in the masculine form, but include all genders.

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Photo: Guido Karp

Spaces in motion

4–21

The cover story on Asteris Kutulas and a new approach to architecture.



Photo: Peter Becker

Asteris Kutulas – The Dramaturg of the Moving Space



He produced concerts and major events in Europe, Asia, the Middle East and the United States, worked with Mikis Theodorakis for four decades, and developed his own form of spatial storytelling drawing on film, music, literature and architecture.

TEXT – Thomas Brunke

PHOTOS: – Copyright details shown in the image

The Acropolis during the Millennium celebrations.

Photo: Mihalīs Patsouras



O

n the night of 1 January 2000, the Acropolis towers over a dark Athens. Then the music of Mikis Theodorakis begins. Light bathes the Parthenon, tracing its columns and transforming the way the entire hill is perceived. For a moment, the ancient structure appears to detach itself from the city and move through the night.

Almost 1,800 kilometres further north, a second production begins at the same time. Mike Oldfield is performing at Berlin's Victory Column. Light, music and pyrotechnic displays fill the Tiergarten. Both events form part of the major European millennium celebrations.

The man involved in both projects is Asteris Kutulas. In Berlin, he is in charge of event management and production. In Athens, he is producing the Millennium event for the Greek Ministry of Culture and assisting lighting director Gert Hof with the artistic realisation of the show, which is being broadcast worldwide.

Kutulas had spent months negotiating with the Greek

government. Staging the Acropolis required technical expertise, political coordination and respect for one of Europe's most significant monuments. Kutulas recalls a remark made by Gert Hof a few weeks before the event: 'In this place, one must practise humility.'

The images from that night already contain much of what Kutulas would later develop into his own artistic method. A building becomes part of a narrative. The city forms the space. Music organises time. The audience sees a familiar structure in a new light.

Years later, such experiences gave rise to the concept of 'Liquid Staging', which in turn led to the 'Flexodrom': a spatial infrastructure that Kutulas now envisages as a building system for a wide variety of purposes. Culture was the starting point. Potential applications now include sports halls, event venues, commercial premises and, in future, temporary educational buildings, workplaces and residential buildings.

This development leads from the Acropolis to a question that almost every growing city is grappling with today: how can buildings be erected more quickly, adapted to changing uses and later reused in a different location?

A life spanning languages and countries

Asteris Kutulas was born in 1960 in Oradea, Romania, the son of Greek emigrants. In 1968, his family moved to the GDR. He attended the Kreuzschule in Dresden and subsequently studied German language and literature and the history of philosophy in Leipzig. Languages and cultural translation were thus part of his life from an early age.

Even whilst still a student, he worked as a translator, adapter, editor and author. He translated works by significant Greek writers into German, including Giorgos Seferis, Odysseas Elytis, Jannis Ritsos and Konstantinos Kavafis. To date, more than 40 books in which he has been involved have been published.

This work shaped his way of interpreting images and organising connections. Translation demands decisions: sound, meaning and cultural background must be reassembled in another language. Thus Kutulas learnt early on that every medium has its own order: literature organises thoughts into sentences; music unfolds over time; film works with close-ups and montage; architecture directs movement and perception through floor plans, height, materials and light.

Since the 1980s, Kutulas has lived in a world steeped in literature, music, art, film, politics, history and philosophy. He has never left this world; he has merely switched media on several occasions.

Kutulas is an author, translator, journalist, filmmaker, dramaturg, director, music producer, event producer and conceptual artist. Each of these activities stems from the same interest: how can a complex idea take on a form that reaches people?

Photo: Guido Karp

**Four decades with Mikis Theodorakis**

In 1980, Kutulas began his collaboration with Mikis Theodorakis. This developed into a professional and personal relationship that lasted until the composer's death in 2021.

Kutulas organised concerts for Theodorakis all over the world, produced more than 30 albums and accompanied him with his camera for decades. Their travels took them across Europe, to Israel, Russia, South Africa, Canada, Chile, Australia and Turkey. Around 600 hours of footage were later edited into the film 'Dance Fight Love Die – On the Road with Mikis', which premiered at the Hof International Film Festival in 2017.

To Theodorakis, Kutulas was a composer, a political thinker, a conversation partner and a teacher. His works combined symphonic music, folk music, poetry, theatre, ballet, film and political experience. Anyone working with this music had to understand large-scale forms whilst at the same time taking the impact of a single melody seriously.

Kutulas witnessed how Theodorakis could fill spaces with musical motifs and reach people across linguistic boundaries. This experience is reflected in 'Liquid Staging': there, the soundtrack forms the temporal structure of the entire work and holds together several films and plots unfolding simultaneously within a shared rhythm.

Theodorakis also developed a working method that combines intellectual preparation with practical implementation. For Kutulas, an idea only gains its full power once it takes on a perceptible form.

Photo: AstiMusicAchilleasGatsopoulos



Cities as a stage

From 1999 onwards, Kutulas worked as producer and manager for the director and lighting designer Gert Hof. Together they staged major events across several continents, including in Berlin, Athens, Beijing, Moscow, Malta, Oman, Atlantic City, Gallipoli and Jerusalem.

In Budapest, the Chain Bridge and the Parliament Building became part of a production marking the millennium of Hungary's existence. In Ferropolis, Gert Hof's lighting design combined the music of Mikis Theodorakis with the huge open-cast mining machines to create an image blending industrial history and landscape. Further projects were realised for the European Union in Malta and Vilnius, at the Israel Festival in Jerusalem, as well as for Hugo Boss in Berlin and Aida in Hamburg.

Gert Hof created images using light, music, fire, architecture and landscape. Kutulas translated these images into a producible sequence. He had to know which structure could support a particular motif, how long set-up and rehearsals would take, which authorities were involved, and what costs a decision would entail. His work encompassed production design, technical aspects, financing, permits, logistics and the coordina-

tion of international partners.

Kutulas describes Hof's works as 'paintings in time and space'. Their shared aim was very straightforward: to amaze people. In his memoirs, Kutulas speaks of the joy in children's eyes – and in those of adults too. For a moment, they were to view a familiar place with fresh eyes.

Those years sharpened his understanding of the relationship between space, operations and the audience. A spectacular image emerged from thousands of precisely coordinated steps.

Photo: Ralph Larmann

Photo: Ralph Larmann



What binds a large audience together

Kutulas gained further experience with Apassionata: from 2011 to 2014 as Executive Producer, and subsequently for several years as dramaturg for the international horse show.

Apassionata was aimed at an audience with very different expectations. Children saw animals, movement and colours. Adults focused on the music, set design and storyline. Horses, riders, dancers, lighting, costumes and projections all had to come together within a single evening's programme.

Kutulas worked on the chronological sequence, the emotional transitions and the connections between individual scenes. The experience showed him that artistic ambition and economically successful operation can be developed hand in hand within a single production.

This connection shapes his work today. Kutulas conceives a production from the audience's perspective whilst also being fully aware of the requirements regarding budget, tour planning, safety and reliable operations. The Flexodrom follows the same logic: a building must connect with people and serve its users. At the same time, it must be financially viable, capable of obtaining the necessary approvals and capable of being operated reliably over the long term.



Photo: Sabine Wenzel

The camera from 1989

In 1989, Kutulas bought a camera. It changed the way he perceived performances, journeys and encounters. The view through the lens selects a specific frame. Montage relates images to one another, condenses time, shows processes in parallel and reorders memories. Through film, Kutulas found his way to conceptual art and ultimately to polydimensional vision: a form of perception in which multiple perspectives coexist simultaneously.

Traditional cinema presents the viewer with a specific frame. The classical stage, too, directs the audience's attention towards a central event. Kutulas sought to open up this structure spatially. The viewer should be able to decide for themselves which image, which body or which action to follow. From the editing process in the cutting room emerged the idea of a montage that takes place in the audience's mind.

Liquid Staging: The film becomes spatial

In a manifesto from 2016, Kutulas describes Liquid Staging as the 'spatialisation of film'. In this process, the film leaves its traditional projection screen. Images appear on multiple walls, on bodies, fabrics, transparent surfaces and architectural elements. Music, light, film, dance and live action share the same space. The audience finds itself within this unfolding event. This does not result in a random collection of images. The director determines the duration, rhythm, soundtrack and the relationship between the individual elements. The audience is granted freedom within a prepared dramaturgical system.

This principle mirrors a present-day reality in which people deal with parallel streams of information on a daily basis: multiple windows on a screen, news, images, music and conversations all happening simultaneously. Liquid Staging transposes this experience into a physical space. The audience remains engaged because they are constantly making decisions.

Four films and a fifth in the mind

With ELECTRA 21 and MEDEA 21, Kutulas developed two prototypes of polydimensional viewing. In ELECTRA 21, four independent films run simultaneously on four screens. All are based on the same musical recording by Mikis Theodorakis and are precisely synchronised to the shared soundtrack. The audience is positioned between the projection screens. Each viewer chooses their own line of sight.

No one can take in all four films in their entirety at the same time. Every shift in gaze creates a personal montage. Thus, from the four films distributed throughout the space, a fifth film emerges – one that is re-edited in the mind of each individual viewer.

ELECTRA 21 premiered in 2021 at the Hof International Film Festival. There, Kutulas received the Hans Vogt Film Prize, which honours filmmakers for innovation, meticulousness and their distinctive approach to film music. Festival director Thorsten Schaumann described the installation as a glimpse into the cinema format of tomorrow, as 'Cinema 2.0'.

Metropolis: A World on Multiple Levels

The METROPOLIS project expands on this principle to create a grand spatial narrative. Fritz Lang's 1927 film depicts a city whose social order is also organised spatially: above are power, gardens and privileged residents, whilst deep underground people labour at the machines.

Kutulas takes up this vertical order. In his concept, the upper world, the underworld and the catacombs become levels where performances take place simultaneously. Film, live performance, dance, music, light and architecture intertwine. Berlin provides a contextual reference point for this: film history, industrial spaces, electronic music and the experience of a city that has had to reinvent itself time and again.

A conventional stage is hardly sufficient for such a performance. It requires several stages distributed throughout the space, projection screens, technical levels and



Photo: GRAFT & Asteris Kutulas

rooms for parallel actions. The Flexodrom arose from this requirement.

Kutulas regards it as the architectural embodiment of an artistic theory developed over decades. Liquid Staging organises the view and the emotion within the space. The Flexodrom creates the infrastructure that makes this organisation possible.

From art project to building system

The Flexodrom arose from an artistic necessity. Its core – a modular, adaptable and reusable infrastructure – can, however, be applied to many other building projects and configured and expanded in different ways depending on the location and intended use.

Kutulas developed the name, the brand, the platform concept, the strategic positioning and the creative and curatorial architecture of the system. The technical and structural development was carried out by Alexander Strizhak and the team at JSA Stage Company.

Universally applicable systems from Layher serve as the structural basis.

The project was first presented at Layher in 2019. The partners then worked on the basic drawings, construction, logistics and design. Following a hiatus during the pandemic and as a result of the war against Ukraine, development resumed in 2023.

The components are drawn from an industrially proven system. They can be transported, assembled, supplemented and reused. The difference from the conventional understanding of prefabricated construction lies in the level of repetition: it is the load-bearing and structural foundations that are repeated. The floor plan, height, façade, interior fit-out, technical equipment and service life are redefined for each project.

A Flexodrom therefore does not have to look the same in every location. A sports hall requires different spans and surfaces to a commercial building. A town hall needs a stage, foyer, toilet facilities, cloakrooms and a

high-performance technical infrastructure. The common basis facilitates planning, manufacture, transport, assembly and subsequent alterations.

Why cities need new building models

Many towns and local authorities are currently operating under considerable time pressure. Schools, sports halls and administrative buildings are being refurbished. Clubs are looking for premises. Housing is needed more quickly than conventional projects can provide it. At the same time, local authority budgets are limited, and the duration of a need is often difficult to predict. A temporary school may be needed for four years. A plot of land may be available for eight years before a permanent development is built.

Conventional construction projects are slow to respond to such timeframes. Years often pass between the identification of a need, securing funding, planning, obtaining planning permission and completion. The Flexodrom tackles this time-related problem. A pre-fabricated modular construction system can shorten planning and assembly processes. Reusable components and familiar construction principles simplify costing and logistics. This allows buildings to be erected more closely in line with actual needs.

The sports hall that can move on

A growing community urgently needs an additional sports hall. Schools, clubs and recreational sports have to share the few available slots. A permanent new build-

ing is planned, but will not be completed for several years.

For this transitional period, a Flexodrom could be configured as a sports hall, with the required playing surface dimensions, ceiling heights and safety clearances, plus changing rooms, equipment rooms, stands, technical facilities and accessible entrances.

Once the permanent hall is complete, the building could be relocated or converted for a new purpose. Parts of the structure would remain in circulation. The investment would thus be tied to the system rather than to a single plot of land.

Spaces for business and new ways of working

Companies often change their space requirements faster than buildings can be planned. Production orders run for limited periods. Start-ups need more space at short notice following a round of funding. Craft businesses look for halls whilst a business park is being developed.

A flexible building system can accommodate offices, workshops, laboratories, showrooms, retail spaces or light manufacturing areas for such situations. Floor-to-ceiling heights, access, technical loads, delivery points and façades can be designed according to the intended use. Should requirements change, the building can be extended, reduced in size or converted.

This approach opens up an additional opportunity for project developers. A plot of land can be put

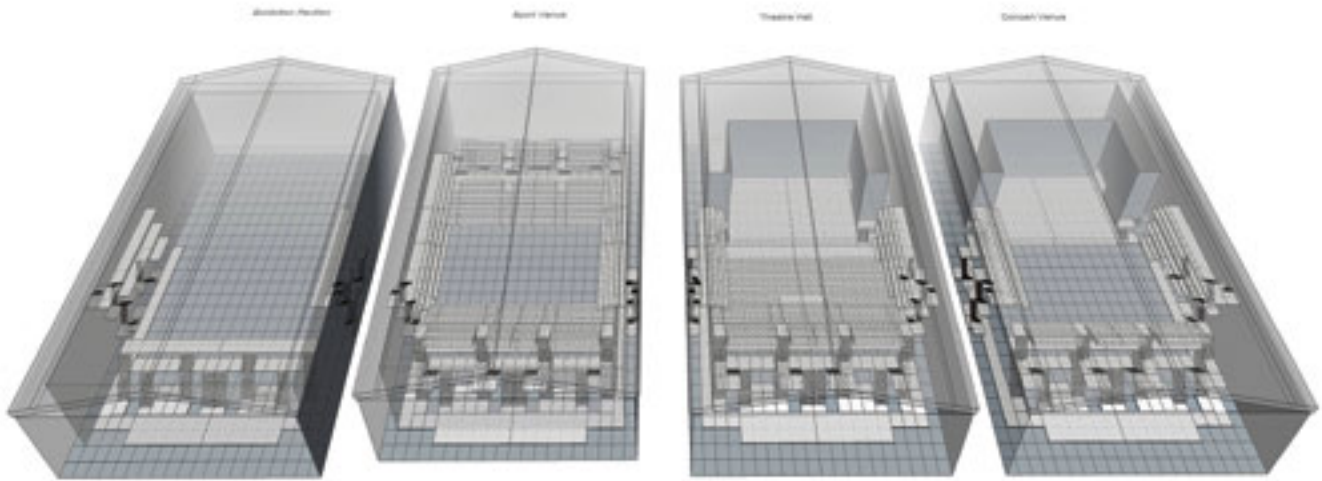


Photo: Alexander Strizhak/JSA



Photo: Alexander Strizhak/JSA

to economic and public use even during a lengthy planning phase. Retail, cultural venues, catering and events could form a mixed-use site for several years. The location is given an address before permanent development begins. However, such interim uses require urban planning: access routes, open spaces, delivery points, noise protection and the neighbourhood must be taken into account from the outset.

Costs arise throughout the entire life cycle

With a flexible building, it is hardly enough to look solely at the initial construction cost. What matters is the entire lifecycle of use. A building component used across multiple sites spreads its manufacturing costs across different projects. A structure that can be extended or reduced in size can be operated more closely in line with actual space requirements. A building that is reused after the end of its initial use retains part of its economic value.

Standardised components simplify tendering, procurement, maintenance and replacement. The specific cost-effectiveness depends on the site, use, fit-out, lease term, planning permissions and the number of times the building is reused. A modular building becomes cost-effective when its life cycle is factored into the

planning at an early stage.

This represents a key difference from traditional temporary use. In such cases, substantial funds are often invested in an existing building, even though it will be demolished or completely rebuilt shortly afterwards. With the Flexodrom, a large part of the structure can be moved from the site and put to use elsewhere.

Temporary quality

In the public consciousness, temporary buildings are often associated with tents, containers or simple makeshift solutions. The Flexodrom pursues an architectural vision that goes beyond this.

The exterior appearance can be tailored to the location. Facades made of timber, metal, glass, textile elements or reusable panels are all possible. Green spaces, terraces, canopies and public ground-floor areas can

integrate the building into its surroundings.

Inside, ceiling height, acoustics, materials and orientation determine the quality of the space. The structure remains a means to an end: people experience the space, the façade and its function first and foremost.

This is where Kutulas' background in dramaturgy comes into its own. He views a space from the perspective of its users. Where does a person arrive? What do they see first? How does the space change as they move through it? How do sound and light affect the experience? These questions apply just as much to a theatre as they do to a sports hall, an office or a concert hall.

Sustainability through reuse

The Flexodrom is based on reversible construction. Components should be able to be dismantled, transported, inspected and reused. A building is thus understood as a temporary assembly of components whose lifespan extends far beyond its initial location.

This approach reduces material consumption, avoids waste and extends the service life of high-quality components. Sustainability arises from the system as a whole: from the choice of materials, transport, energy supply, service life and reparability.

Cities could develop their own building pools for this purpose: a local authority owns certain basic components and deploys them in turn for schools, sport, events or commercial use. In this way, a single building could become part of the local infrastructure.

What 'market-ready' means in this context

Kutulas and his partners now regard the Flexodrom as a fully conceptualised system that is ready for the market. In 2025, JSA used the Flexodrom approach to design a two-storey hospitality building for up to 1,000 guests at the Eurovision Song Contest in Basel, including the load-bearing structure, structural engineering, heating, ventilation, air conditioning and event infrastructure. In the end, the contract went to another provider; nevertheless, the planning demonstrated how the system can be developed for a specific tender.

For a building system of this kind, 'market readiness' means that the idea can be developed into a concrete project. Each site still requires its own specific planning. Structural engineering, building regulations, fire safety, sound insulation, energy, operations and planning permissions are all determined by the specific use of the building.

The most extensive experience lies in cultural and event venues. Sport, commercial use, and – in future – education and residential use expand the system and require specialised partners. The Flexodrom provides the structural and logistical foundation; the final architecture emerges from the location, the brief and the users.

An artist thinks like a project developer

Kutulas' path to the Flexodrom seems unusual at first glance. He comes from the worlds of literature, music, film and large-scale productions. He is not a classically trained architect and does not present himself as such.

His experience lies elsewhere. For decades, he created spaces for highly complex tasks, co-ordinated artists, technicians, authorities, financiers and international partners, and worked with historic buildings, stadiums, public spaces and temporary structures. He learnt the implications that an artistic decision has for technology, costs and processes.

This combination of dramaturgy and production shapes the Flexodrom. Its artistic origins imbue the system with a question that is easily lost in function-oriented construction: How does a person experience this space? The entrepreneurial perspective adds a second question: How can this space be built, operated, altered and reused?

A building as an ongoing process

Our conception of architecture is closely linked to permanence. A building is erected in a specific location and remains there. The Flexodrom proposes a more fluid relationship between building, site and time.

A building can be designed for one location and later leave it. A sports hall can expand, a commercial building can be given additional storeys, and an

events hall can later be converted into workspaces or educational facilities. The building becomes an ongoing process with multiple phases of use and, potentially, multiple addresses.

For cities, this opens up a new dimension of planning. Permanent buildings remain necessary and shape a city's character across generations. At the same time, there is a growing need for spaces that can respond more quickly to change: climate adaptation, demographic trends, new ways of working and waves of regeneration create challenges whose duration is difficult to predict in advance. Flexible buildings can accommodate such transitions and buy the city time.

Bridging the many paths

At first glance, Asteris Kutulas's career appears to be a succession of very different activities. On closer inspection, however, his development follows a clear trajectory.

Literature taught him to organise meanings. Music introduced him to the architecture of time. The camera added perspective and montage. Gert Hof showed him how a city can become the medium for a production. Apassionata sharpened his eye for dramaturgy, audience engagement and economic viability.



ELECTRA 21 translated montage into the physical space. METROPOLIS called for an architecture capable of accommodating multiple levels simultaneously. The Flexodrom is the architectural outcome of these experiences.

Its value may now extend far beyond the original cultural concept. Cities and local authorities need buildings that are available more quickly, can be planned economically and retain their value even after their initial use. Kutulas brings to this discussion a perspective honed through the practical experience of large-scale international productions. He understands spaces as living systems: they accommodate people, processes, images and memories. They are allowed to change when their purpose changes.

A space for the next purpose

Perhaps the idea of the Flexodrome really did begin on that night on the Acropolis. Back then, a structure that had stood in the same place for centuries was given an unexpected sense of movement through light and music. The columns remained in place. Perception changed. Today, Asteris Kutulas is taking this movement a step further. A building can alter its appearance, change its use and, ultimately, even leave its location. The supporting structure remains in place. The next location gives it a new purpose.

For an artist, this is a spatial narrative. For a city, it can be a practical solution. To bring this solution to market, Kutulas founded Flexodrom GmbH in July 2026.

Photo: Ralph Larmann



Photo: Sabine Wenzel





Photo: © asisi

Architecture, culture and the future

22–81

*Places, ideas and projects that demonstrate how
design shapes society and the future.*



Photo: Arch Hascher Jeele Architects, Berlin

Wolfgang Priedemann: The man who builds shells – and is now devising an ark

He has worked on façades for high-rise buildings, hotels, museums, hospitals and iconic international landmarks. Today, Wolfgang Priedemann is grappling with a bigger question: how can we protect people, cities and living spaces, before the crisis turns into a catastrophe? His 'Noah's Ark' mission could become a visible symbol of this – in Berlin, in Germany and perhaps far beyond.

TEXT – Thomas Brunke

PHOTOS: – Copyright details shown in the image



Photo: Reiner Freese

There are people who talk about the future simply because it sounds good. And there are people who have spent their whole lives working on specific aspects of that future. Wolfgang Priedemann belongs to the second group. He is not a man of grand claims. He comes from the world of engineering, of planning, of the reality of major construction projects. He knows that an idea only counts once it becomes a reality, once it withstands wind, sun, heat, cold, costs, deadlines and responsibility. Priedemann is a mechanical engineer. In 1993, he founded the company priedemann in Berlin, which specialises in holistic façade planning and development. Later, he served as managing director of priedemann fassadenberatung and the Facade-Lab Centre of Excellence for Research and Development in Großbeeren near Berlin. Today, he acts as a manager, consultant and source of ideas.

Anyone who wants to understand his work must not mistake the façade for mere decoration. For Priedemann, the building envelope is never just a surface. It is the boundary between inside and outside. Between people and the climate. Between city noise and concentration. Between heat and comfort. The façade is protection, technology, expression and responsibility all at once.

From building component to philosophy

This philosophy runs through the projects on which Priedemann and his team have worked. In Berlin, the KPMG HQ at the Köbis-Dreieck exemplifies this. The office building was completed in 2005. The façade incorporates a modular curtain wall system, integrated maintenance access routes, external sun protection, controlled vertical glass louvers, parallel-opening windows and an atrium skylight. That sounds technical. In fact, it boils down to a precise question: how do you create a workplace that admits light, controls heat, takes energy efficiency into account and yet still demonstrates architectural integrity?

In Potsdam, the Hans Otto Theatre reveals a different side. Gottfried Böhm's building is not an anonymous functional structure, but a cultural venue with a striking form. The polygonal steel façade with point-fixed glazing is part of this effect. Here, technology must remain unobtrusive. It must not overwhelm the architecture; it must enable it.

At the Charité high-rise ward block in Berlin, the challenge takes on an even more human dimension. A hospital is not a prestige project. It is a place where people wait, hope, work, recover or say their goodbyes. The façade of the high-rise ward block and the new building had to cope with a very large scale: around 25,000 square metres of façade area, approximately



Photo: Kollhoff

80,000 square metres of gross floor area, and a high-rise building standing around 85 metres tall. The project was completed at the end of 2016. The task was not merely a technical refurbishment; it was also a contribution to a functioning healthcare facility.

In Hamburg, the Grandhotel The Fontenay is a project that demonstrates just how closely luxury and precision are intertwined. The hotel did not want to be just any hotel. It wanted to be among the very best. To achieve this, the building envelope had to do more than just look impressive. The amorphous form, curved ceramic façade elements, delicate glass details and the building's understated elegance demonstrate that exclusivity does not come from ostentation. It comes from precision.

Photo: Arch HOK International Ltd



International benchmark

On an international scale, the benchmark is even higher. The Al-Tijaria Tower in Kuwait City stands at around 219 metres tall. Its twisted façade and vast façade area epitomise those construction projects where architecture and engineering expertise become inseparable. A form of this kind cannot be built on good intentions alone. It requires calculation, a systematic approach, mock-ups, an understanding of materials and the ability to turn an idea into a structurally sound component. The Central Bank of Kuwait presents an even greater challenge. A high-rise building of representational, security-related and technical significance. This is not merely a matter of aesthetics and climate control. It is about security, functionality and the dignity of a national institution. In a project of this kind, a façade must not only be beautiful; it must be reliable.

In Dubai, the ICD Brookfield Place demonstrates the combination of global scale and sustainability standards. The mixed-use building, designed by Foster + Partners, represents a new generation of international skyscrapers: complex geometries, high technical requirements, a sophisticated mix of uses, large façade areas and, at the same time, a commitment to using resources more consciously. Modern high-rises are not becoming simpler. They are becoming more complex. And that is precisely why they need people who can make sense of that complexity.

Even smaller projects have a lot to say. The State Archaeological Collection in Munich is working on a refurbished façade made of weather-resistant structural steel. Here, the focus is on heritage, memory, material and respect. Not every project has to be taller, bigger or louder. Sometimes the real art lies in giving an existing place a new lease of life.

The bigger question

Given this background, Priedemann's new focus does not feel like a break with the past. It feels more like a continuation. Only the scale has changed. Previously, the focus was on the envelopes of individual buildings. Today, the question is how societies prepare for what has long been evident: heat, water, extreme weather, resource scarcity, social insecurity and technological upheavals.

Flame Towers, Baku



Photo: Arch Mäklér Frankfurt

Waldorf Astoria Berlin Hotel

To this end, Priedemann has formulated the Noah's Ark mission. The idea is simple enough to be understood immediately – and grand enough to bring together many people, institutions and companies. The Ark stands for protection, a new beginning, selection, responsibility and hope. But Priedemann does not conceive of it as a religious backdrop, nor as a nostalgic tale. He envisages it as an accessible, visible, public space. As a stage for solutions. As an invitation to the worlds of science, small and medium-sized enterprises, architecture, politics, schools, culture, foundations and business.

The key idea lies in the connection between symbol and substance. The Ark must not be a mere decorative object. It must explain what protects people today: clean water, resilient cities, new materials, the circular economy, energy, education, medical care,

“It used to be all about the building's envelope for me. Today, it's about what kind of envelope our future needs.”

smart infrastructure and social stability. It must show that transformation need not remain abstract. It can be entered, seen, experienced and discussed.

Why Berlin?

Berlin, in particular, could be the right place to start. This city knows what it means to experience upheaval. It knows what reconstruction entails. It knows ideologies, failure, new beginnings and international attention. An Ark in front of the Brandenburg Gate, by the Reichstag, in a hangar or on Tempelhof Field would not be just another event image. It would pose a question to the city's community: do we merely want to di-

scuss the future, or do we want to make it visible?

Berlin has the power to create such images. The Air Lift had its images. The fall of the Wall had its images. Major social movements need places, symbols and moments. The Noah's Ark mission could become such a symbol – not as a monument to fear, but as a public space for responsibility.

Berlin need not remain alone in this. The Ark could be conceived as a national or European initiative. A travelling Ark that stops at special locations, highlighting a different theme at each: water in Hamburg; heat and the urban climate in Berlin; Mobility in Munich. Industry and transformation in the Ruhr region.



Photo: W. Priedemann

The financial centre and responsibility in Frankfurt. Agriculture, soil and new materials in Brandenburg. Coastal and flood protection in the north. This would not result in an abstract sustainability programme, but rather a series of concrete images, discussions and decisions.

A possible prologue to the EXPO idea

The link to a potential EXPO prospect for Berlin and Brandenburg is also obvious. A world exhibition thrives not only on pavilions, exhibition spaces and visitor numbers. It thrives on a narrative. On a question that is bigger than the location itself. If Berlin and Brandenburg are considering an international stage for the future, the Noah's Ark mission could serve as a visible prologue: a powerful, accessible image that shows what this is actually all about.

It is not about inventing yet another event. It is about bringing a social issue to the fore: how do we protect people at a time when climate, technology, urban development and social stability need to be rethought?

Priedemann's advantage is that he does not come from the purely symbolic world. He has worked on real buildings. He knows clients, architects, engineers, manufacturers, materials, processes and limitations. Perhaps that is precisely why the Ark must not come across as a PR stunt. It must be built, experienced, entered and understood. It must be robust enough to withstand wind and weather. And open enough to children, politicians, entrepreneurs, scientists and people who would otherwise have little understanding of the word 'transformation'.



Photo: Patrick Tourneboeuf *

A temple to modern art: the Bourse de Commerce in Paris

For the past five years, the diverse Parisian museum scene has been enriched by a spectacular new exhibition venue: the Bourse de Commerce, which has been reconstructed and redesigned by the Japanese master architect Tadao Ando, has been enriched by a spectacular new exhibition venue. A visit to this former grain trading centre, which now houses the Pinault Collection, is a unique experience in its own right, if only for the architecture.

TEXT – Martina Vetter

PHOTOS – Bourse de Commerce — Pinault Collection © Tadao Ando Architect & Associates, Niney et Marca Architectes, Agence Pierre-Antoine Gatier *

It certainly takes some courage: within the historic rotunda of the Bourse de Commerce, crowned by a dome, the exceptional architect and Pritzker Prize winner Tadao Ando had a nine-metre-high hollow concrete cylinder with a diameter of 29 metres installed. The magic emanating from this ‘circle within a circle’ is breathtaking and enchanting from the very first moment. Rather than confining the viewer, the new structure within the historic monument broadens their per-

spective whilst simultaneously creating an exhibition space that invites visitors to wander and linger. One moves with reverence through the smoothly polished, almost velvety-looking exposed concrete cylinder, in which Ando has created not only a fascinating exhibition space, but a space that enters into dialogue both with the art on display and with the history of the site, which originally served as a grain market and later as a trading centre for other goods (see next page).

The historic architecture, with its spectacular, almost 40-metre-high dome and the gigantic panoramic painting above the rotunda, can be experienced from a new perspective thanks to the bold

placement of the walk-through cylinder. At a height of nine metres, Ando created a wraparound gallery. You can reach it via a staircase that winds its way round the outside of the cylinder, or from the second exhibition floor in the historic ring-shaped building, which is also accessible by lift. Through an opening in the old walls, a walkway leads to the gallery on top of the concrete cylinder. Viewed from this lofty height, the perspective on the space below and the respective exhibits changes once again. At the same time, the interplay of light and shadow within the almost spider’s-web-like structure of the glass dome is mesmerising. Depending on the time of day, the angle of the sun or the

evening lighting, the space changes – and with it, one’s own perception of the surroundings. It is as though the interplay of architecture and light opens our eyes to the bigger picture, whilst at the same time making us feel that we are all just a tiny part of the vast universe.

“My architecture should move people with its beauty and inspire them with its boldness”, says the veteran architect Tadao Ando. Following the Palazzo Grassi and the Punta della Dogana – both venerable buildings in Venice – Ando has, with the Bourse de Commerce, created a third exhibition venue for the art patron François Pinault to house his extensive collection of modern art. The commercial building, covering more than 10,000 square metres in the centre of Paris, is the largest museum in the Collection Pinault to date. The building, which had stood empty for some time, belongs to the City of Paris, which has granted a 50-year lease to Pinault – an

art lover originally from Brittany who made his fortune through a business empire in the fashion and luxury sectors.

In return, Pinault undertook to have the building restored in accordance with heritage conservation standards and to open it to the public as a museum. Alongside Tadao Ando’s office, NeM agency/ Niney et Marca Architects, Paris, formed part of the project team, which included restorers, conservationists, designers and numerous other experts. With great effort and attention to detail, they have breathed new life into the Bourse de Commerce and transformed it into a museum that meets the necessary requirements for showcasing all forms of modern art. Particularly inside the austere designed concrete cylinder, each new exhibition gives rise to astonishing installations. At times the floor is entirely mirrored; at others, a shallow, circular water basin filled with singing

bowls takes up the space; or mist spreads out and creeps slowly from the floor up towards the dome.

The museum is a place that invites visitors to discover art in ways as diverse and novel as the architecture and history of this site. The double spiral staircase, which has been preserved to this day, serves as a reminder of the building’s origins as a grain market. The structure was originally designed to ensure that workers laden with heavy sacks of flour or grain did not get in each other’s way. They therefore went up on one side and down on the other – this was strictly regulated. As a visitor to the museum, you have complete freedom of choice and, at the same time, enjoy another astonishing spatial experience.

Photo: Vladimir Partalo *



The history of the Bourse de Commerce

The origins of the domed building go back a long way. Originally opened in 1767 as the Halle au blés, the ring-shaped building – with a circumference of 122 metres – comprised a large, open-air courtyard. Through the open archways on the ground floor, customers and traders streamed in from all sides to buy and sell grain for bread, which was the most important staple food at the time. The grain market was built not only as a trading centre but also to store grain in granaries beneath the roof.

The first building was erected between 1763 and 1766 on the site of the former residence of Catherine de' Medici, the widow of Henry II of France. Fires – which also destroyed the original wooden dome above the courtyard – and growing demands for hygienic grain storage meant that the trading exchange underwent repeated structural alterations.

However, as a trading centre in the heart of the city, the Bourse de Commerce lost its significance after a good 100 years. In 1873, the hall was closed and, two years later, handed over to the Chamber of Commerce. In 1888–89, Henri Blondel carried out extensive reno-

vations, during which the ring-shaped building was given its spectacular dome of iron and glass. At the 1889 World's Fair in Paris, the Bourse de Commerce – with its dome, which still stands today, and a new, monumental panoramic painting beneath the rotunda – was one of the most admired attractions, alongside the Eiffel Tower.

When the traditional market district of Les Halles, situated in the immediate vicinity of the Bourse de Commerce, was demolished in the early 1970s, protests prevented the rotunda from suffering the same fate. The Chamber of Commerce continued to use the already severely neglected building until 1989. After that, the building stood empty. The building was set to experience a renaissance when, in 2016, the City of Paris offered the monument – which had since been listed as a historic monument – to the renowned art collector and billionaire François Pinault for a period of 50 years as a venue for his collection of modern art. In May 2021, the first exhibition took place at the Bourse de Commerce – Collection Pinault.



The play of shadows cast by the steel profiles framing the glass of the dome structure.

Photo: Marc Domage*



Photo: Florent Michel *



Pictures of the current exhibition by the Japanese artist Fujiko Nakaya, born in 1933, in the rotunda of the Bourse de Commerce. The mist sculpture is entitled Cloud #07156 and engages in a dialogue with Tadao Ando's architecture.

Photo: Nicolas Brasseur *

The Central Library looks almost like a sculpture, with its curved, wood-clad canopy that extends right down to the ground.

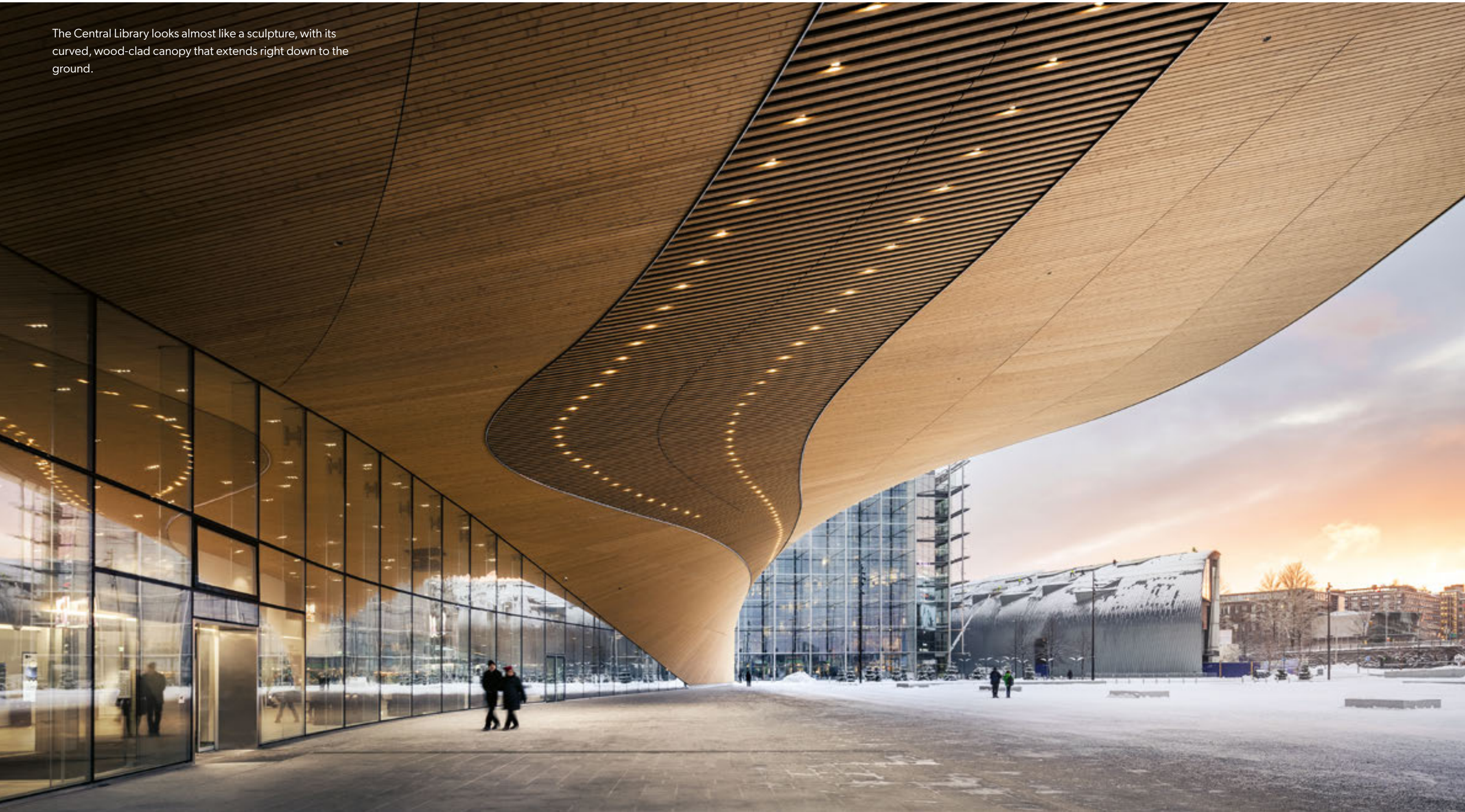


Photo: Kuvatoimisto Kuvio Oy; Martin Sommerschild

An ode to Helsinki's Oodi Central Library

An architectural landmark, a crowd-puller, tourist attraction – the Oodi Central Library is all of these things. It is regarded as one of the most modern and versatile libraries in the world and attracts visitors with a range of services that goes far beyond simply lending books and other media. The Helsinki-based architectural firm ALA gave the usage concept – developed through a participatory process – its extraordinary form and created a library building with iconic character in the heart of the Finnish capital.

TEXT – Martina Vetter

PHOTOS – Credit as shown in the image

As if it had spilled over from the nearby Töölö Bay, the long structure of the Oodi Central Library stretches across Kansalaistori Square, Helsinki's Citizens' Square. With its undulating roof and sweeping wooden and glass façade, whose shape is reminiscent of ocean waves, the building stands out from the structures in the immediate vicinity. Alvar Aalto's famous Finlandia Hall, the Musiikkitalo concert and events hall, the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art and the Parliament building directly opposite Oodi all appear, by comparison, rather 'rigid and stiff', according to Samuli William Woolston of ALA Architects.

Kansalaistori Square is a popular meeting place for both Helsinki residents and tourists, and is always bustling. The library's spacious forecourt is also a hive of activity. It is a sunny, pleasantly warm day in August, perfect for enjoying the outdoors. A group of young people are practising a dance routine beneath the cantilevered 'city balcony' on the upper floor of the library, which spans part of the forecourt.

The entrance below, leading to the generously glazed foyer, is effectively set back into the curve of the build-

ing, creating the impression that one is diving into the structure as if into a wave. Despite the lovely weather, the foyer is teeming with people of all ages. Just behind the glass façade are two rows of chess tables. Amidst the hustle and bustle, the players appear deeply concentrated, pondering their next move. Other visitors stand in front of large information boards, reading up on what the 17,500-square-metre building has to offer and where the rooms or areas for the various activities are located.

The possibilities are simply overwhelming. On the ground floor, there is a cinema and an events hall, a café and a space for temporary exhibitions. On the middle floor, behind the bulbous curve of the wooden façade, the so-called 'Maker Space' beckons with craft and electronics labs, 3D printers and sewing machines, film editing suites, and photo and sound studios. Musical instruments and tablets can also be borrowed from the Oodi Library if required.

As well as the Maker Space, the middle level offers further options for passing the time away from home. On the stepped seating areas, you can chill out whilst gaming with friends, or study or work in peace and quiet, either alone or in pairs, in the quiet zones. Rooms for meetings or workshops are also available. All private use is free of charge; at most, there may be a charge for materials. Consequently, the facilities are well used, and some rooms are already fully booked weeks in advance.

On average, 7,000 people visit the Oodi Library every day. It is open all day until 8 pm or 9 pm, and also at weekends. This makes it easier for families to enjoy the facilities together. Being able to try things out and learn new skills without having to buy expensive equipment, or simply spending time together whilst discovering new things, reflects the spirit of this special library, which was conceived by active citizens as a place for inquisitive, creative people and aims to promote exchange and togetherness:

"Everyone has the right to be in the library. Hanging around is allowed – indeed, it's encouraged. Racism and discrimination have no place in this library. Oodi is our shared living room."

These lines, translated in essence, are displayed on a plaque on the first floor of the library. Since its opening just under eight years ago, Oodi has been an

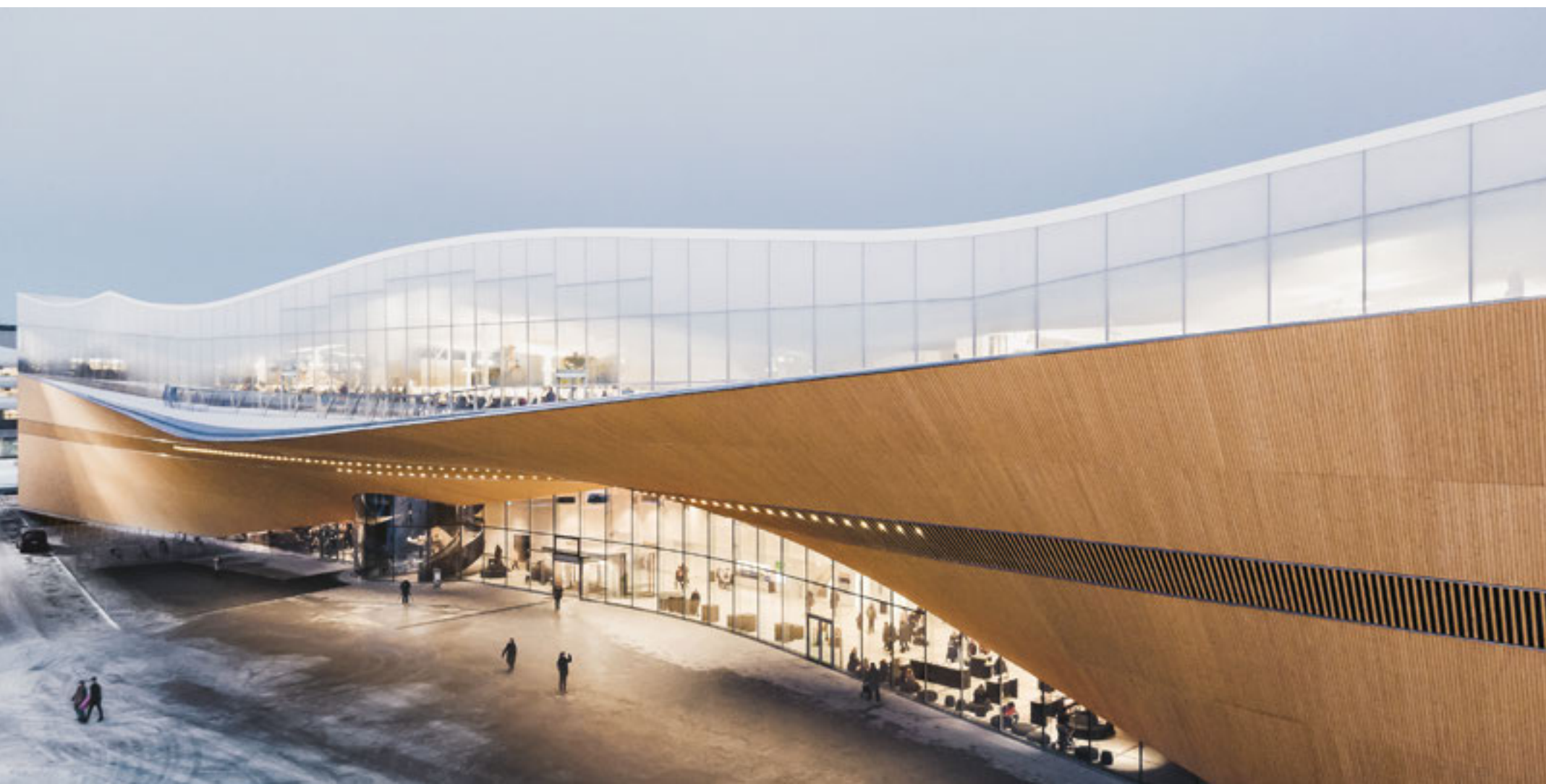


Photo: Kuvatoimisto Kuvio Oy; Martin Sommerschild

outstanding example of how a library can be far more than just an archive for books.

Naturally, the Finns – who are considered to be avid readers – did not want to do without books in their new central library. Quite the contrary: the approximately 100,000 volumes housed in Oodi’s reference library are literally raised up to the heavens. The architects have created an imaginative reading landscape on the upper floor, which is glazed on all sides. The undulating roof and varying floor levels create vantage points and quiet corners, whilst still allowing the entire space to feel spacious. The undulating ceiling structure helps to dampen loud noises. The planners cleverly situated the children’s reading area in a lower-lying section of the room, framed by wooden shelves in a semi-circular arrangement. There, children can laugh and chat without disturbing those who wish to read in peace. *“It was important to us to create a gentle and pleasant atmosphere”*, explains Woodston.

As well as bookshelves and variously designed areas that invite visitors to browse, the architects have integrated a café into this ‘book paradise’. When the weather is fine, the highlight is the city balcony, which offers a magnificent view over Kansalaistori Square and beyond – a wonderful place to watch the clouds drift by.

The architecture of the Oodi Library celebrates a building that allows people of all backgrounds and social classes to acquire new knowledge and skills in a variety of ways, whilst at the same time strengthening a sense of community and a fundamental understanding of democracy. The name Oodi (Ode) – in ancient times a hymn of praise in verse form and today a poem of praise – could therefore hardly have been chosen more aptly.

Photo: Maarit Hohteri / City of Helsinki



Photo: Kuvatoimisto Kuvio Oy



Browsing with a view of Parliament:
Inside the upper floor, the different
levels create distinct areas that invite
visitors to read.



Photo: Suvi-Tuuli Kankaanpää / City of Helsinki



Photo: Suvi-Tuuli Kankaanpää / City of Helsinki



The palace reinventing itself.

Severin Pimperl on the Showpalast Munich,
from the Pferdetheater to a stage for the whole city

TEXT – Lena Rolle

PHOTOS: – Showpalast Munich

Photo: Ronny Pabst / Eckel PR GmbH



Facade of the Showpalast

To the south of the Allianz Arena, a wooden façade sweeps across the site in gentle waves. Behind it lies the Showpalast München, a newly built theatre that was originally intended as a permanent venue for a horse show but is now so much more. Severin Pimperl has been involved with the venue for over ten years, from the construction phase right up to the present day. A conversation about vision, change and the art of turning detours into something positive.

Severin Pimperl describes himself as an entertainment and theme park enthusiast who has been passionate about this industry since childhood. Positions at Stage Entertainment in Hamburg and at Merlin Entertainments – the operator of Sea Life, The Dungeon and Legoland – took him through the world of major attractions before he was drawn back to his home city of Munich. There, Apassionata – until then known for its horse shows touring Europe – was planning a permanent theatre. “*I want Munich, and they want to go there*”, is how Pimperl sums up the decision. He has been involved for over ten years.

From touring to a permanent venue

The idea came about whilst on the road. At the edge of the large halls, the horses were being shod or washed, and time and again, guests would stop, watch and ask questions. “*There’s a huge amount of interest*”, recalls Pimperl, thinking back to the moment when the idea took shape to anchor the experience in a permanent venue, rather than travelling across the country with dozens of lorries and constantly setting up and dismantling the show. Munich provided the stage. The site south of the Allianz Arena had become available since the Deutsches Theater no longer needed its temporary venue there. Added to this were the international airport, the purchasing power and an audience that is happy to treat itself to entertainment. “*Munich is financially strong and has a large, broad middle class that is also happy to treat itself to entertainment*”, says Pimperl. Construction began in June 2016.

Rustic on the outside, high-tech on the inside

The architecture follows a horse theme. Plenty of wood, plenty of natural materials, a wave-like, curved façade, within the structure of which leaping horses are hidden. Inside, the picture changes. The Showpalast is a high-tech theatre with around 1,700 seats, steeply rising tiers and comfortable cinema-style seating, which brings its guests very close to the action. At its heart is one of Europe’s largest permanently installed LED screens, which transforms the auditorium in a matter of seconds into a meadow landscape, a cityscape or a fantasy world. “This allows me to whisk the guests away instantly,” says Pimperl. He believes a horse show appeals to more senses than any other stage production, right down to the smells and a sense of closeness that one would otherwise only experience at the circus. The audience is predominantly female and family-oriented. The best moment, he says, is when a father who was initially unenthusiastic says at the end, ‘That was brilliant.’ *And that really does happen very, very often.*’

From a horse palace to a stage for business

Things turned out quite differently from what was planned. The horse adventure park originally envisaged could not be sustained in that form in the long term, for economic reasons and because of the pandemic. Pimperl no longer dwells on this.

“Sometimes, necessity gives rise to truly wonderful things.”

Today, the Showpalast is an event venue that hosts almost anything, from business dinners for 500 guests to concerts, festivals and horse shows. Around 80 per cent of its use is now accounted for by corporate events, many of them from the automotive sector – both international and, increasingly, from the Asian market – as well as the solar, construction and pharmaceutical industries. The major advantage remains the stage, complete with its LED wall. Brands drive their vehicles onto the stage and present their products against a backdrop that can be customised as required. The large corporations, says Pimperl with visible pride, now come regularly and want to return.

One moment has stayed with him in particular.

When another venue wasn’t ready in time, 1,500 deaf young people celebrated at the Showpalast. “These are very visually oriented people,” he explains. Lighting, colours and the LED wall created the atmosphere, whilst the bass – which the guests could feel vibrating through their bodies – did the rest. *“It gives me goosebumps just thinking about it. It was a wonderful event; I’ll never forget it.”*

Hong Kong and an investor from Beijing

Internationally, the company is looking in two directions. For the first time, the horse show is travelling to Asia, with a two-week guest performance in Hong Kong, for which the production is being adapted in terms of language and content. *“Horses aren’t that well known there”*, says Pimperl, which makes the performance all the more appealing. At the same time, there is a Chinese investor behind the scenes who has helped shape the Munich project and provided financial backing, even through the Covid-19 pandemic. He responds to the circulating reservations about Chinese investors with a level-headed approach. *“The investor has really helped us and seen us through”*, he says. They are in close con-

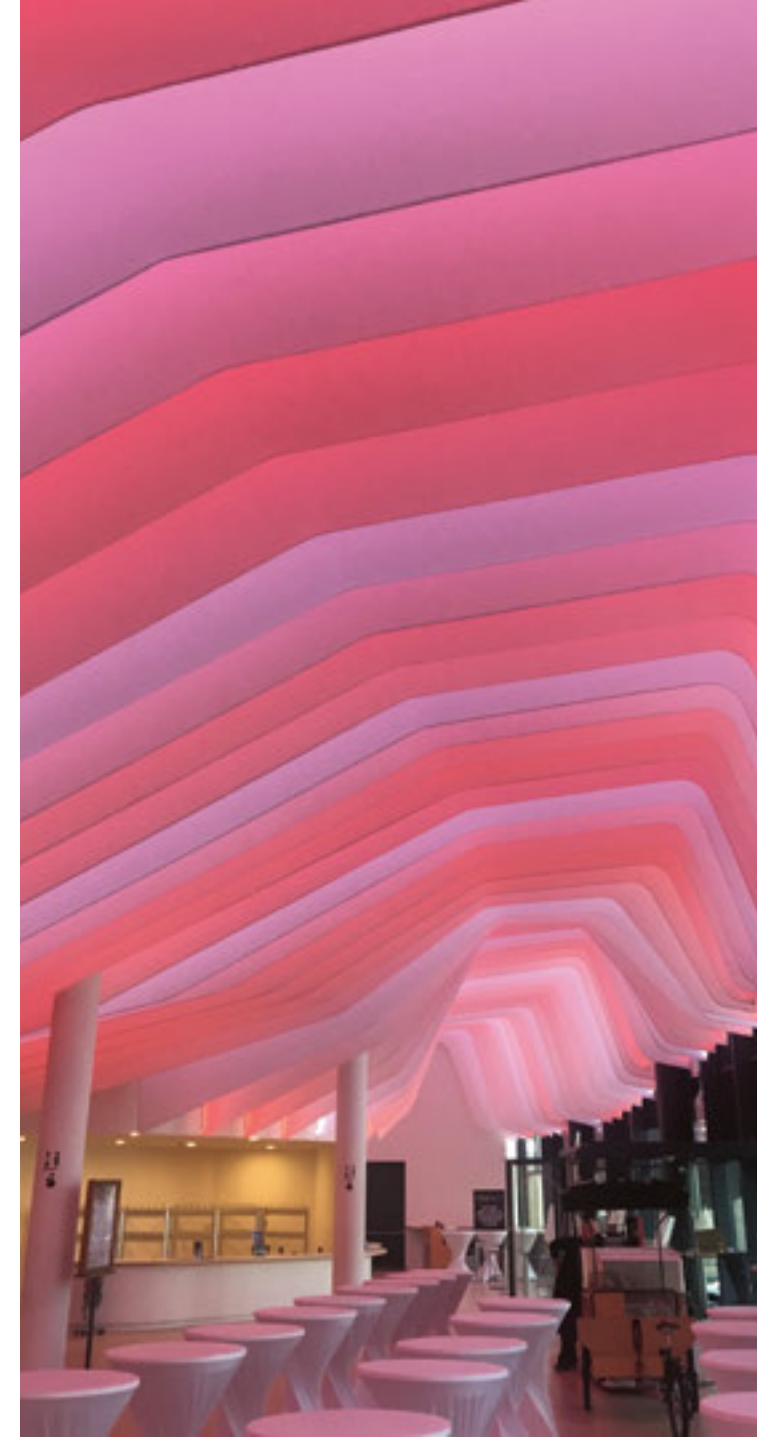


Use of the Show Palace by industrial partners





Interior views



tact, but he is not being told what to do.

A rollercoaster ride with a future

Pimperl describes the past ten years as a rollercoaster ride. Construction delays, a show concept changed at short notice, and the temporary closure during the pandemic. During this time, the Showpalast even hosted meetings of the Munich City Council because there was enough space there. Nevertheless, the trend is upwards. The current lease and tenancy agreement with the city runs until March 2028, and negotiations are under way for an extension until 2035. *“If it were up to me, we’d stay there for the rest of our lives,”* says Pimperl with a laugh. There are plenty of plans for the future: a 1,200-square-metre indoor riding arena, which has seen little use to date, for additional concerts; open spaces for long-term partners; and a collaboration with the neighbouring Allianz Arena. Should Munich bid to host the Olympic Games, the site could also play a role. *“Horses do have something to do with the Olympics, after all.”*

In the end, Pimperl sums up the story in a single sentence: *“Sometimes things turn out differently than you think.”* The planned ‘horse palace’ has become a stage that he envisages as being designed by Munich residents for Munich residents, open to the city’s leisure activities as well as to the business community he is bringing to Munich. And he hopes that this will remain the case well beyond 2035.

The art of making time accessible

TEXT – Thomas Brunke

PHOTOS – Credit as shown in the image

Photo: Tom Schulze © asisi



His panoramas transport people to cities of the past, to the depths of the Atlantic and into the vastness of Antarctica. Yadegar Asisi has brought a historical medium into the present day and developed it into an art form that reaches millions of people. At the heart of his work lies the question of how we perceive the world and how museums of the future can inspire younger generations to see.

A grey sky hangs low over Antarctica. The ice shimmers in shades of blue, green and off-white. Light streams through a gap in the clouds and sweeps across the surface. People stand on the visitor tower, some with binoculars in hand. Others sit below on large cushions. They speak softly or remain silent. The venue is located in Leipzig, in a former gasometer. The Sea has been created using paint, photography, drawing and digital imagery. The cold remains a figment of the imagination. The vastness feels physical. Anyone who enters the space becomes part of a landscape that stretches out all around them.

Yadegar Asisi enjoys observing such moments. He sees how visitors lift their heads, search for a spot, change their position and suddenly pause for a long time. In his experience, children hardly ever run through his panoramas. They look. They find a figure, a whale, a ruin or a bright streak on the horizon. Then their own journey through the image begins.

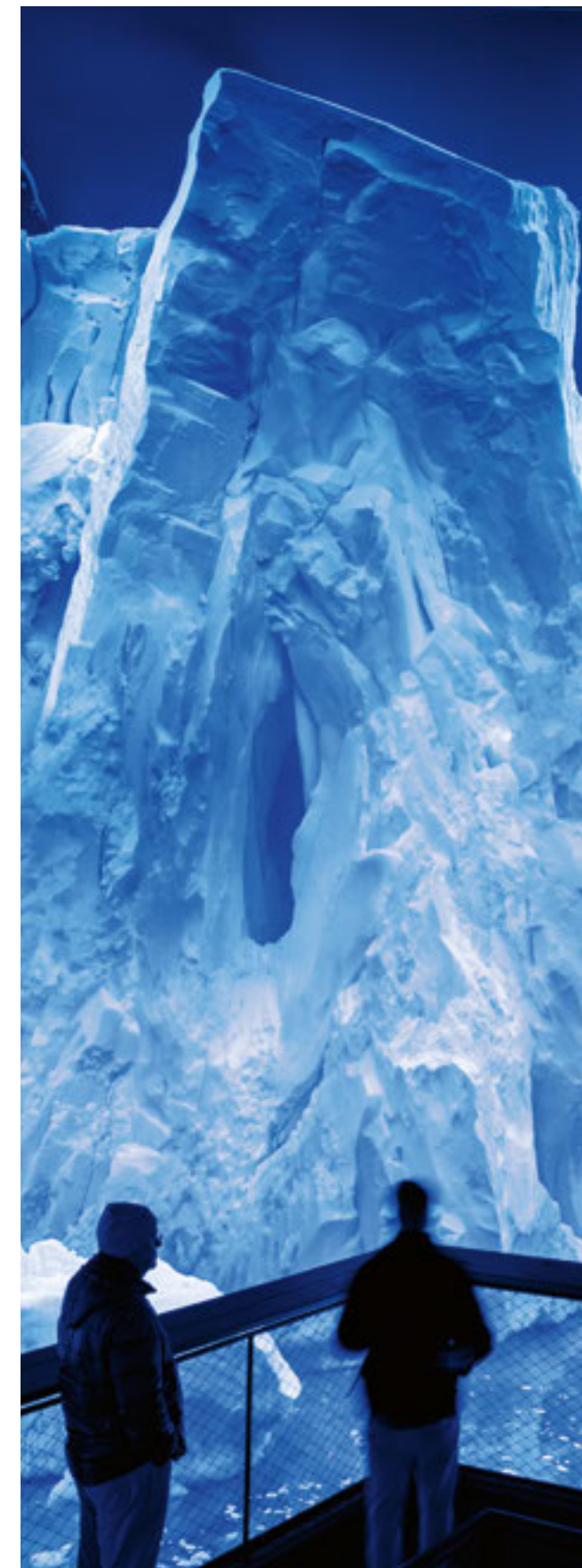
“Everyone is the director of their own vision. No one else sets the pace.”

This sentence encapsulates the core idea behind his life’s work. The panorama leads into a space and affords the viewer freedom. The gaze can glide far across a city. It can linger on a tiny detail. It can return. Every visit takes on its own duration, its own direction and its own story.

Photos: Tom Schulze © asisi



ANTARCTICA, 360° panorama by Yadegar Asisi at the Panometer in Leipzig, view of the panorama from the visitor platform



An interview by Thomas Brunke with
Yadegar Asisi.



Photo: Ronny Pabst / Eckel PR GmbH



Photo: © asisi

An idea must survive the night

For Asisi, a finished plan rarely marks the beginning of a work. A thought emerges. Whilst eating. On the street. In the morning. At first, it remains vague. Asisi carries it around with him and waits.

'If the thought survives the next night, then it is at least worth giving it another thought.' Some ideas disappear. Others return. Then the first sketches and texts emerge. The thought is examined, discarded, reworked. If it endures for months, the actual work begins.

Asisi categorises his themes into four broad fields: history, current affairs, nature and perception. These areas run through his work. They provide him with direction whilst leaving many paths open. A panorama can lead to an ancient city, to the wreck of the Titanic, to the ruins of Dresden or to the icy expanse of the Southern Ocean.

'We all have the ideas. The problem is putting them into practice.' The process takes years. Asisi travels, sketches, takes photographs and reads. He speaks to scientists, historians, architects and people who know a place from personal experience. In the studio, thousands of individual images, models and perspective studies coalesce into a shared world. Light and sound are added. Every figure needs a place. Every line must look convincing from the correct height.

The effort involved is immense. The risk is also immense. A panorama takes shape in dimensions that can only be grasped to a limited extent at a desk. Its full impact is revealed as soon as the printed fabric panels are hung in a rotunda and the visitor stands in the centre. Throughout this process, Asisi sticks to one question that guides his decisions.

'It's always the question: why is he doing this? For me, that's the only guiding principle.' The 'why' determines the choice of subject, the time period of a historical scene, the perspective and the use of music. The Northern Lights are given a purpose. A clap of thunder is given a purpose. The transition into night is given a purpose. The effect follows the concept behind the work.

The boy before the Old Masters

The story of this gaze begins early. Asisi is six or seven years old when he stands before the works of the Old Masters in the Dresden Picture Gallery. Rubens and Rembrandt draw him into their pictorial spaces. The memory remains vivid to this day. For the child, art is an experience that opens up everyday life for a moment.

Yadegar Asisi was born in Vienna in 1955 and grew up in Halle and Leipzig. He studied architecture at Dresden University of Technology and subsequently painting at the Berlin University of the Arts, now known as the University of the Arts. There he completed his studies as a master student of Klaus Fußmann. Later, he taught himself. Architecture gave him scale, structure and space. Painting gave him light, colour, atmosphere and freedom. Drawing brought both worlds together.

Anyone who draws must take their time. A line demands attention. Proportions and distances become visible. The draughtsman learns that an object appears different depending on one's vantage point. For Asisi, this craft became a school of perception.

In 1993, he was commissioned to design an exhibition on the 19th-century panorama at the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn. It was there that he grasped the possibilities of this ancient medium. Painting, architecture, the stage and staging could all come together in a single room.

At the time, a curator described the panorama as the 'dinosaur of 19th-century mass entertainment'. That phrase stayed with him. Asisi saw in this supposedly outdated medium a form that could fit very precisely into a present-day world of fast-moving images.

"I believe that the panorama belongs in the present day."

His reasoning lies in the stillness. The image remains stationary. The viewer moves. They determine the speed. It is in this reversal that the panorama's special power lies.



Photo: © asisi

Yadegar Asisi in his studio,
Sketch: ANTARCTICA



Photo: © asisi

Yadegar Asisi – Life and Work

Born: in Vienna in 1955
Grew up: in Halle and Leipzig
Education: Studied architecture at Dresden University of Technology, followed by painting at the Berlin University of the Arts, where he was a master student under Klaus Fußmann
Teaching: including Free Drawing and Architecture
Key moment: 1993: exploration of the historical panorama at the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn
First monumental panoramic painting: 'EVEREST' at the Panometer in Leipzig, opened in 2003
Thematic areas: History, current affairs, nature and perception
Audience: Around twelve million visits in two decades, according to MDR citing Asisi, as of April 2026; current figures of more than 15 million will be confirmed before going to press, based on a standard reference date

Photo: © asisi



Twenty motorbikes in front of the Gasometer

In the spring of 2003, Asisi faces his first major challenge. EVEREST, a monumental circular painting of the world's highest mountain, hangs in Leipzig's Gasometer. The new exhibition venue bears a name coined by Asisi himself: Panometer, a combination of 'panorama' and 'gasometer'.

There were doubts amongst those around him. Production costs money. The public was largely unfamiliar with this format. Even 30,000 visitors seemed to some to be a considerable target. Asisi knew that such a figure would hardly be economically viable.

In the first few days, he often stands by the entrance. He waits and watches. Then he hears engines. Around twenty motorbikes pull up. Men and women in black leather get off and walk towards the entrance. Asisi asks what they're up to. They want to see the exhibition. It looks interesting to them, they say.

The scene stays with him. These visitors have come out of their own curiosity. They need no prior knowledge and no invitation from the art world. They enter the room and begin to look around. The panorama reaches people who are often hardly drawn to traditional exhibitions.

EVEREST is a success. Hundreds of thousands of people visit. The gamble turns into a life's work. Further panoramas follow in Leipzig, Dresden, Berlin, Wittenberg, Pforzheim and at international venues. Asisi develops his own art form, combining wide reach with personal experience.

An image without a predetermined cut

In the cinema, the camera directs the viewer's gaze. The cut determines which scene follows. The panorama spreads its stories across 360 degrees. People stand in front of, beside and behind the visitor all at once. An event may be visible on the horizon, whilst a small slice of everyday life unfolds nearby.

The visitor tower offers multiple vantage points. From above, the world appears as a whole. Below, some lines of perspective dissolve. A single step alters the composition of the image. Seeing becomes a

physical experience.

Asisi speaks of an emotional movement. The large-scale image itself remains still. Light, sound and one's own position alter perception. The composer Eric Babak has been collaborating on his projects for many years. Music, wind, voices, thunder and other sounds shape the atmosphere. Asisi sets the lighting changes himself. For the night-time, he uses techniques that create the effect of moonlight and spatial depth.

Every technical possibility is explored. Scents proved too crude for complex natural environments. A forest possesses many shifting scents. A single scent would diminish the experience. For Asisi, sight and hearing can be linked more precisely.

This slowness reminds him of the sea. People sit on the shore and watch the waves roll in. The movement

repeats itself. The horizon remains. A sense of tranquillity arises from this seemingly simple experience. Asisi is confident that people will continue to need this tranquillity.

“In the Panorama, there really is a sense of calm, a slowness, which I hardly ever experience in other areas anymore.”

The silence at the bottom of the Atlantic

In TITANIC, Asisi is interested in an idea that extends far beyond the well-known shipwreck. He reflects on modernity, on technological progress and on an era's confidence in its own capabilities. At the beginning of the 20th century, steel, bridges, skyscrapers and large ships embodied a new power of humankind.

The exhibition leading up to the panorama takes visitors into this world of new beginnings. Then the circular space opens up. The wreck lies at the bottom of the Atlantic. The disaster is over. Darkness surrounds the two parts of the ship. Artfully arranged lighting reveals the depths.

Visitors already carry the story of the Titanic within them. Books, photographs and films have etched it into the collective memory. Asisi does not need to show the collision with the iceberg. The wreck contains the entire narrative.

‘People never rush through the panorama. Not even the children. They stop, and suddenly they begin to see.’ The stillness creates a sense of tension. The gaze wanders over



GREAT BARRIER REEF, view of a panoramic section with a viewing platform in Rouen (2017)

Photo: Thomas Boivin © asisi

metal, sediment and darkness. The imagination fills in what the image leaves out. A famous disaster becomes a question about humanity and its relationship with progress.

When the grandchildren looked at their grandparents

The conversation reaches its most emotionally powerful moment when Asisi talks about DRESDEN 1945. For the panorama, he chooses a moment shortly after the final bombing raid. People are emerging from their cellars. Their city lies in ruins before them. Houses, streets and familiar paths have lost their shape within a matter of hours.

There are hardly any photographs of this very moment. Many images were taken later, when the streets had already been cleared and the city's structure was once again becoming more clearly visible. Asisi and his team had to piece together sources, understand the gaps and construct a credible artistic world.

Then the visitors arrived. Older people entered the room together with their children and grandchildren. Some had experienced the bombing themselves as children. They had carried their memories with them for decades, often unable to find the words to con-

vey the full force of what they had been through.

"The grandchildren looked at their grandparents, and suddenly they understood what they had been through." In this exchange of glances between the generations, the panorama takes on a role that goes far beyond a historical reconstruction. An experience becomes visible. A younger person recognises which images have continued to shape an older person's life.

Asisi is interested in the aftermath of the battle. In his panorama of the Battle of the Nations, he depicts Napoleon in retreat. The wounded, the dead and an exhausted city dominate the scene. The war is revealed through its consequences. Visitors are invited to ask what people have done to one another and why violence repeatedly appears to be the solution.

'War solves nothing' This sentence is concise. Its significance is far-reaching. War leaves behind destruction, hatred, anger and memories that persist across generations. Asisi's historical panoramas give such consequences a place. They forge a connection between knowledge and emotion.

Photo: Tom Schulze © asisi

DRESDEN 1945, view from a viewing platform of a panoramic section of Dresden (2015)



Photo: Thomas Boivin © asisi

The word 'responsibility'

The attitude behind these works is linked to Asisi's life story. His father died in Iran for his political convictions. Yadegar Asisi grew up without him. Two older brothers provided him with support. His father remained present in his life as a figure of inspiration and a hero.

For him, responsibility means taking personal ownership of the decision regarding a work. Discus-

sions take place in the studio. Colleagues voice their doubts and make suggestions. Asisi listens carefully. In the end, he makes the decision. This freedom has a

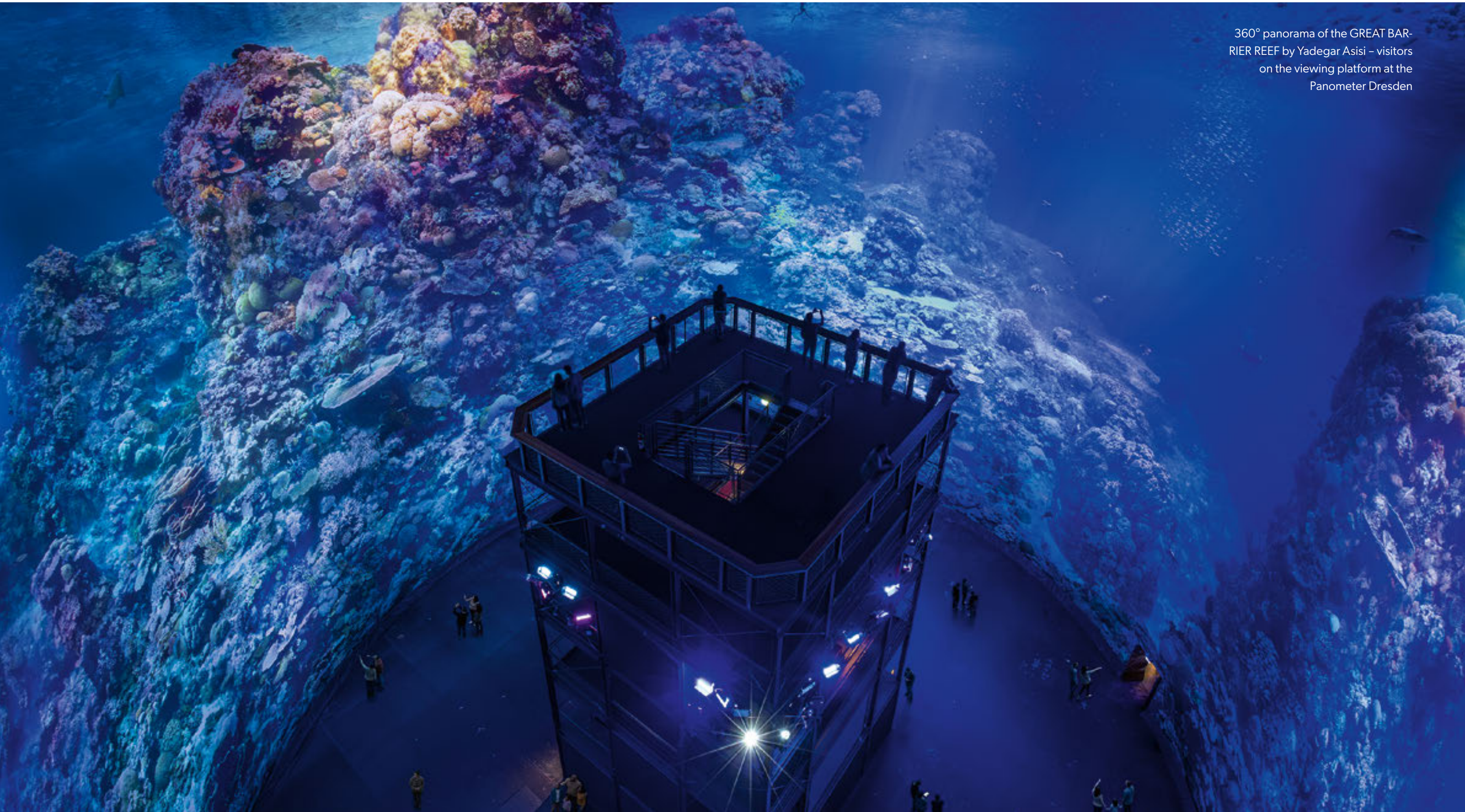
"This word 'responsibility' is something that stays with me."

financial aspect, because every panorama requires income to make the next one possible. Determining the direction of the content remains his responsibility.

"I don't pander to the audience." The statement sounds resolute and explains part of his success. Asisi

chooses themes that preoccupy him. Some attract particularly large audiences. Others remain more challenging.

What matters to him is whether a work arises from an inner necessity. This consistency builds trust. The audience senses that the images have emerged from a personal struggle.



360° panorama of the GREAT BARRIER REEF by Yadegar Asisi – visitors on the viewing platform at the Panometer Dresden

Photo: © asisi

Colours in Grey

For ANTARKTIS, Asisi travelled to the polar region twice. He saw icebergs, glaciers, water, animals and a sky capable of rapidly altering his mood. Drawing on photographs, sketches and memories, he developed a condensed landscape.

He opted early on for grey weather. Beneath a closed blanket of clouds, the colours of the ice emerge. Blue merges into green. Grey surfaces take on depth. Individual patches of light provide highlights. The absence of a constant, postcard-perfect light renders the landscape tranquil and authentic.

‘The way the colours play out in the ice is sensational.’ The panorama does not depict a single vantage point. It brings together experiences from various locations and moments. Asisi creates a world in which a visitor can feel as though they are standing within this landscape themselves.

In January 2026, ANTARKTIS celebrated its world premiere at the Panometer in Leipzig. The circular painting is 32 metres high and focuses the viewer’s gaze on the continent’s coastal landscape. Penguins, whales and seals appear in a setting whose vastness makes humans seem small.

For Asisi, this sense of smallness holds a productive power. It can inspire humility. People recognise their place within a greater natural order. Beauty opens the way. The sense of vulnerability lingers.



Yadegar Asisi in Antarctica

Photo: © asisi

How will a generation that has learnt to scroll come to see the world?

From Antarctica, the conversation turns to a question that increasingly preoccupies Asisi: how is the way young people see the world changing? Digital information is available at breakneck speed. Images follow one after another. Moving images are part of everyday life. A topic can be accessed in a matter of seconds and explored in many different directions.

Asisi approaches this development with respect. He suspects that young people connect information more quickly and develop different ways of understanding. At the same time, he recalls his time as a university lecturer. Many students had little experience of exhibitions.

‘I was amazed that young people had no experience of exhibitions.’ Visiting an exhibition is a cultural skill. People learn to interpret a space. They decide which texts to read, how long to spend looking at an object, and what connections to make between different things. This experience is forged through repeated encounters.

Asisi is convinced that the museum of the future needs a new form of education. Originals retain their aura. Digital offerings can prepare visitors, provide deeper insight and reveal connections. The physical space must offer value that goes beyond the availability of an image on a screen.

‘I am also thinking about the museum of the future.’ His panoramas offer one

possible answer. Children set their own pace. They adjust the height and observe how lines of perspective change. They combine geometry, art, history and physical experience. The visit becomes an active learning process.

The great challenge lies in linking knowledge and perception. A date remains abstract until it is linked to a place, a person and a story. A natural landscape remains distant until its scale can be physically experienced. Asisi’s art works precisely on this connection.

ANTARCTICA, 360° panorama by Yadegar Asisi at the Panometer Leipzig, view from the visitor tower

Photo: Tom Schulze © asisi



An artist for millions and for every individual

Thanks to his life's work, Yadegar Asisi ranks among the most important contemporary artists in the German-speaking world. He has revitalised a historical art form, given it international appeal and reached an audience that extends far beyond the traditional art world. More than two decades after EVEREST, his panoramas are among the greatest public successes in contemporary art. They are exhibited in several cities. PERGAMON attracted around 1.5 million visitors in 2011 and 2012 as part of a joint exhibition with the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Asisi's works have also been shown in France and in a video installation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

His latest major historical project takes him to Lake Constance. In Constance, Asisi is exhibiting KONZIL VON KONSTANZ, a monumental circular painting depicting the Council of Constance from 1414 to 1418, one of the greatest ecclesiastical assemblies of the Middle Ages. The work was created for a specially erected cylindrical structure, some fifty metres high, near the Schänzlebrücke, designed by the Berlin-based architectural firm Sauerbruch Hutton. Following on from ROM 312 and LUTHER 1517, Asisi thus continues his exploration of religious history and brings the late Middle Ages to life as a period that visitors can experience first-hand.

The cultural significance of his work is already evident in the composition of the audience. Families, school groups, art connoisseurs and people with little museum experience all find themselves in the same space. Everyone brings their own memories, knowledge and questions with them. Everyone discovers a different image.

Asisi has transformed the 19th-century historical panorama into a contemporary medium. He combines analogue scale with digital imagery. He combines scholarly research with artistic freedom. He connects an audience of millions with a highly personal way of seeing. His life's work also lies in the fact that these spaces operate outside familiar categories. They are works of art, exhibitions, public spaces and learning environments. Their impact begins with a sense of wonder and can lead to memories, knowledge and a sense of responsibility.



Photo: © asisi

360° panorama of the GREAT BARRIER REEF by Yadegar Asisi – a bird's-eye view – visitors on the viewing platform at the Panometer in Dresden.

In the end, the view remains

Back in Leipzig, the grey sky still hangs over the ice. The light has moved on. A group is slowly making its way down from the visitor tower. Below, a child sits looking at a small figure in the panorama. An adult stands a few metres away, gazing at the horizon. Both are part of the same picture. Both see something of their own.

Perhaps this is the most precise description of Yadegar Asisi's art. He creates a vast space and allows people to move freely within it. He gives form to history, nature and memory. Then, as the narrator, he steps back and places his trust in the visitor's perception. For a moment, the world slows down. A detail takes on significance. A question lingers. And the act of seeing begins anew.

Photo: © asisi



Photo: © asisi



Photo: © asisi

Panorama of CAROLA'S GARDEN
with visitors from Vogelschau



Photo: Tom Schulze © asisi

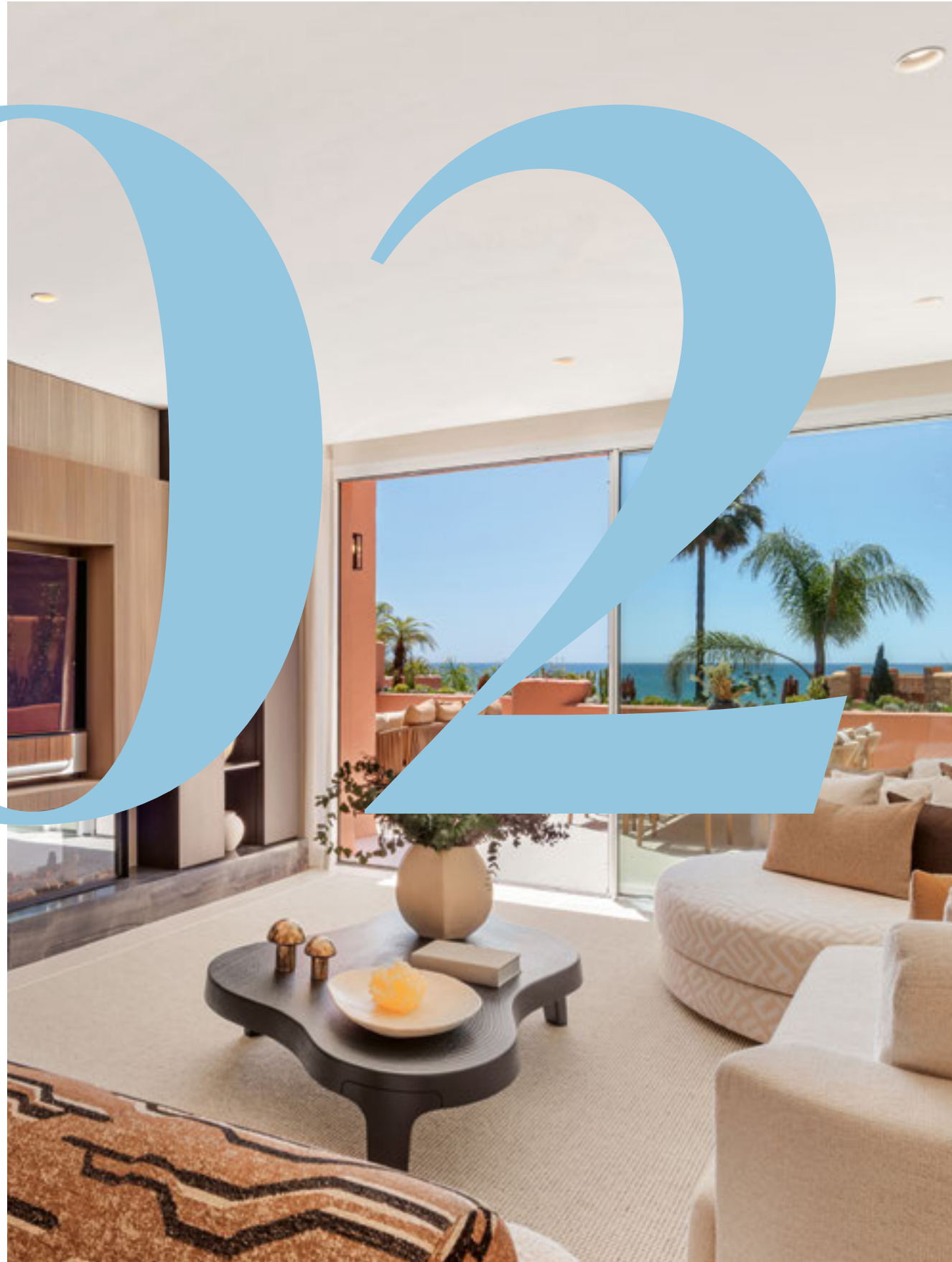


Photo: Frank Steffel

Property and urban development

82–105

New approaches to housing, work and urban development from an entrepreneurial perspective.



Photo: ELBEFLUT, Thomas Hampel

A multi-storey car park is to become a pilot project for a new residential neighbourhood

Living right in the heart of Hamburg city centre, with short to work, for shopping, to see doctors, schools or nurseries, restaurants, cafés or theatres. Even for high earners in major cities like Hamburg, this has now often become an unattainable dream. To make this dream a reality, a group of people came together in 2019 on the initiative of the association 'Altstadt für alle e. V.', developed ideas for communal, affordable housing in Hamburg city centre, and founded a co-operative. Their first project: transforming a dilapidated municipal car park from the 1960s into a diverse, sustainable neighbourhood for living, work and live.

TEXT – Martina Vetter

PHOTOS: – Copyright details shown in the image



Photo: ELBEFLUT, Thomas Hampel

It's hardly a pretty sight. The grey concrete skeleton of the former multi-storey car park on Neue Gröninger Straße seems more off-putting than inviting, and doesn't fit in at all with the surrounding area, with its historic trading houses and the attractive brick buildings of the Speicherstadt, which stretches out just on the other side of the Zollkanal. It's still worth taking a second look, though, because where cars used to be parked, a forward-looking neighbourhood is currently taking shape – one that could serve as a model for the redevelopment of disused inner-city spaces.

But first things first: the site at Neue Gröninger Straße 12 belongs to the City of Hamburg, which also operated the multi-storey car park – built in 1963 – until a few years ago, but then decided to put the ageing property out to tender for leasehold. The contract was awarded to the Gröninger Hof eG co-operative, founded specifically for the project, whose concept for a new urban block – comprising flats, offices, cultural, commercial and communal spaces – proved convincing. The fact that the co-operative wanted to retain as much of the existing building as possible and supplement it with timber construction, whilst also contributing to the revitalisation of Hamburg's city centre, bolstered the political decision-makers in their decision to award the contract. "It was a bold move by the city to lease the site to a newly founded co-operative," says Björge Köhler, a board member of Gröninger Hof eG. Without this opportunity, the co-operative's project would have had little chance of success, as purchasing a plot in such a prominent location would have been far too costly. "Our example shows how smart land policy can bring about positive change in a city."

The cooperative had reached the first milestone on the path to its ambitious goal. The transfer of the plot – which the Gröninger Hof eG cooperative can use for 75 years with an option to extend – took place in 2025, whilst the handover had already occurred five years earlier. This allowed preliminary planning for the project to begin. With great enthusiasm, the ever-growing number of co-operative members moved on to the next stage, and an architectural competition for the project was launched in 2021. The Hamburg-based firm Duplex emerged as the winner.

The design by the architectural team led by project manager Caroline Nachtigall-Marten elegantly sol-

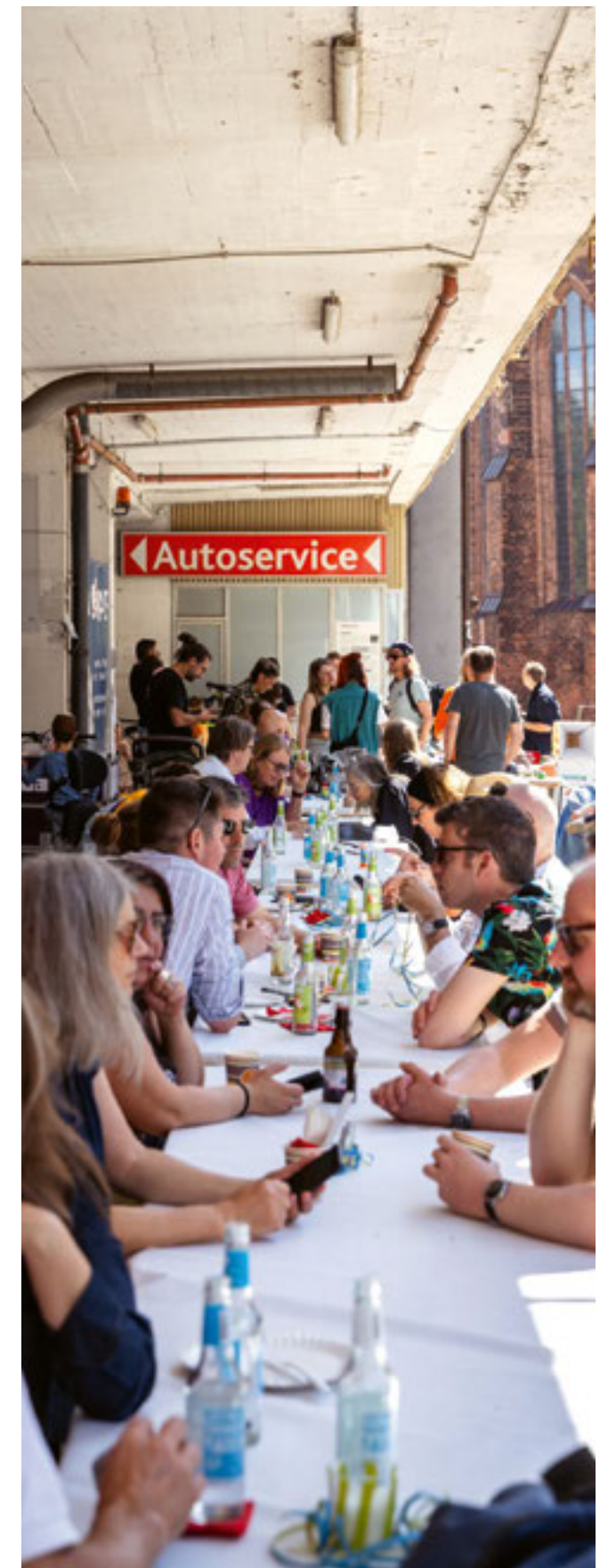


Photo: Tobias Eineder

ves the problem posed by the car park's depth, which is completely unsuitable for residential purposes. The 37-metre-deep structure will feature a spacious inner courtyard with pergolas. To achieve this, the inner core of the car park – which is surrounded on three sides by neighbouring buildings – is to be demolished, thereby bringing light into the dark interior of the split-level structure. The split-level construction typical of some multi-storey car parks – where staggered levels allow for shorter ramps rather than steep access roads – was to be retained. The planned 90 flats and all other spaces were to be industrially prefabricated using a timber modular construction method and integrated into the reinforced concrete structure.

However, a reality check then literally threw the plans into disarray. Upon closer inspection of the building fabric, it became apparent that road salt previously used on the roads to combat ice and snow – which had been carried into the car park by cars – had caused chlorides to penetrate the intermediate floors, which were not particularly robust to begin with. The salt, in turn, had caused the steel embedded in the concrete to corrode, which had been installed to stabilise the building. The result: following the remediation of the contaminants, the dilapidated structure must be demolished down to the foundation slab.

At least the solidly constructed floor slab and the nearly 300 concrete pillars beneath it, which extend 15 metres into the ground, can be retained. The fact that, in this water-rich environment, there is no need for costly re-foundation – combined with the sustainable timber construction method – means that the CO₂ savings for the future Gröninger Hof will always exceed 40 per cent compared with a conventionally built new development.

The need to redesign the plans due to damage to the building's structure, coupled with a sharp rise in construction costs, made financing the project a challenge. However, despite a cost increase from the initially estimated 28 million euros to 40 million euros, the co-operative members have managed to secure the project's funding. In addition to the €4 million in equity capital raised so far by all co-operative members, funding from the housing support programme of the Hamburg Investment and Development Bank (IFB) is a key component in financing the new neighbourhood, whose



The Gröninger Hof co-operative project is creating a new living space offering a wide range of opportunities right in the heart of the city.

Photo: Gröninger Hof eG and Jonas Bloch

flats are 100 per cent subsidised and will cost between €7 and €17 per square metre, depending on the subsidy level. Supplemented by further funding for new-build incentives – such as for the green roof, the use of sustainable insulation materials or timber construction – and with the help of construction loans, the necessary funds for the project were secured and the co-operative was finally able to get the project off the ground.

Demolition work on the multi-storey car park is currently underway and is expected to be completed in September this year. The new building can then be erected almost in the blink of an eye, and as early as summer 2028, a diverse community of around 170 people will be able to move into the Gröninger Hof. Membership of the co-operative is a prerequisite for moving into the building. The exception is the cluster flats at Gröninger Hof, for which several social housing organisations have subscribed to cooperative shares. These flats, where up to five rooms, each with its own bathroom, are combined into a single unit (cluster) with a large kitchen-diner, are intended for apprentices or students, who do not need to subscribe to cooperative shares themselves.

However, by no means will every one of the now approximately 600 cooperative members move into one of the flats at the Gröninger Hof. Some members support the project by purchasing shares because they like the concept; others because they would like to move into a future project run by the cooperative. Birgit Bender, former managing director of a traditional property company and a voluntary member of the co-operative's supervisory board, also intends – like Björge Köhler – to move into the Gröninger Hof at a later date. This dedicated professional would rather grow old in a vibrant community than remain alone in a detached house once her children have left home.

The spirit of community plays a central role at the Gröninger Hof. “When it comes to the future of cities, you often see high-tech versions of smart buildings. Our vision of the future is a green city with reduced traffic, where everything is within walking or cycling distance, where older people can get about easily because the distances aren't great, where children can play safely, and where people know one another and support one another. We have a vision of community and social coexistence, and we are building a home



This is what the façade facing the street is expected to look like after the renovation.

Photo: Gröninger Hof eG and Jonas Bloch

based on this vision,” says Köhler, a member of the co-operative’s board, with a twinkle in his eye.

In so-called ‘echo rooms’, the team at Duplex Architekten worked with the co-operative members through a participatory process to explore what is important to them for a good sense of community and to develop appropriate spatial concepts. Alongside a variety of flat types – ranging from one-room to five-room flats, some conventional, others designed as maisonettes or cluster flats – the planning focuses above all on communal and hybrid spaces.

Hybrid spaces are rooms that can be used in a variety of ways. The covered entrance area, where the entrance to the car park used to be, is, for example, designed so that events can take place there. The staircase leading up to the first split-level floor, designed as a seating staircase, serves as a grandstand. On the ground floor, facing the street, a café and commercial premises open to the public are planned to bring the neighbourhood to life. A cultural workshop will be provided for courses, workshops or events, continuing a tradition that began even before the car park conversion in the premises of a former car repair workshop.

The units on the first floor also form part of the hybrid spaces. Commercial spaces are planned there, which can be used as studios or offices. In addition, there will be twelve guest flats that can be rented by cultural institutions in the district to accommodate artists and cultural practitioners visiting the city for a project.

At the same time, visitors to the main residents can be accommodated in the guest flats if required. This is because the living spaces in the units have compact floor plans and are smaller than required by the guidelines for subsidised housing in the City of Hamburg. The future residents agreed to forgo 8 per cent of the living space permitted under their respective subsidy tier in favour of spacious communal areas. The IFB development bank agreed to this experiment, and the scheme enjoys the status of a pilot project serving as a model amongst key political decision-makers: “The Gröninger Hof is an asset to the city centre and its development,” says Finance Senator Andreas Dressel (SPD) with conviction.

The future members of the residential community are rewarded in many ways for their willingness to make do with less space individually. Together, they have access to a workshop, a room for washing and drying laundry, a cold store where fresh vegetables can be stored or small freezers are kept, and a children’s playroom where they can run about to their heart’s content. The highlight, however, is the roof garden on the two stepped storeys. Whilst the roof on the rear block of the building is designed as a fully landscaped green roof, the roof area of the front building features a spacious communal area with a kitchen. This is where birthdays or other celebrations can be held, or where residents can cook together. The space, with its fantastic panoramic views over the city, is also complemented by a fitness area and a quiet zone where residents can retreat to work or relax when things get a bit too hectic at home.

So, by foregoing more living space for themselves, everyone who will soon be moving into the Gröninger Hof will benefit in the long run – or, as Björge Köhler puts it: “The idea of sharing enables a luxury that one cannot afford on one’s own.”

Photo: Gröninger Hof eG and Jonas Bloch





Between foxes and the Costa del Sol's

Frank Steffel on Berlin, bureaucracy, elite sport and his successful Spanish model

TEXT – Thomas Brunke

PHOTOS – Frank Steffel

Mr Steffel, you have been an entrepreneur and investor for decades. What personally drives you to keep developing new projects?

Anyone with an entrepreneurial mindset carries it through to every area of their life. Politically, I spent a good three decades in the Berlin House of Representatives and the German Bundestag, but at heart I have been an entrepreneur for 37 years. I have always been drawn to independence and the desire to create something new. A company that no longer develops dynamically would eventually bore me. I started out at the age of 23 with just one employee, built the company up to 700 staff, and sold it in 2015. Since then, I've been doing completely new things: in Berlin, in Spain, in Dubai, in Kuala Lumpur. This variety is great fun. As an entrepreneur, I believe you're finished if nothing new is ever created.

Is there such a thing as retirement for you?

I can't imagine that at all. Perhaps at some point you might wish for more downtime, more moments when you can step back. But I simply enjoy it, and I'm not driven by anything material. Of course, the accounts have to add up; otherwise, it's no fun. At heart, what appeals to me is constantly developing something new, finding a good strategy and then implementing it successfully.

Berlin, bureaucracy and the Foxes

Berlin has always been a central point of reference for you. What makes the city special to you, especially now that you also have an outsider's perspective?

Berlin remains young at heart. Compared to other major cities, it's relatively small, yet enormously dynamic, and it has an incredible historical appeal. You can experience vast swathes of European history – particularly that of the last century – here within just a few kilometres. In business terms, however, the city could achieve much more if we didn't just talk about bureaucracy but actually cut it down.

You mention bureaucracy. Is that the biggest obstacle for entrepreneurs?

Whether it's tax issues, employment law or high non-wage labour costs – I consider bureaucracy to be the biggest disaster in Germany, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises. The endless bureaucratic minutiae that businesses have to deal with from morning till night paralyses them, and in the end, it's the boss who bears the responsibility. This is also the consequence of a society in which entrepreneurs are met with envy rather than respect. That is why people feel the need to regulate everything. As soon as petrol prices rise by a few cents, the state is automatically called upon; if a cheaply booked flight is cancelled, the state is expected to pay for the return journey. We have developed a culture of entitlement that is out of touch with reality. Take the apprenticeship levy: some companies can no longer find any qualified young people at all, and are now expected to pay a penalty on top of



Photo: Ronny Pabst / Eckel PR GmbH

that. That is madness.

Where do you see a way out?

In my many years in Parliament, I have rarely seen a law actually repealed. If we don't want a revolution, there is only one solution as far as I'm concerned: laws must be made time-limited. That forces Parliament to spend at least a second thinking about whether a regulation from 1975, 1983 or 1996 is really still necessary in 2026. Germans are, by nature, very conscientious; as citizens, they ask for rules. If an apple falls into their neighbour's garden, they want to know what the law says about it. This perfectionism is a strength, but we tend to regulate everything, and politics ultimately reflects this society. We need to be more willing to leave things open.

Let's turn to the Füchse. You've been president since 2005. What does this role mean to you?

I've been doing this for over 20 years – as president of the club and as the majority shareholder in professional handball. It's a two-part role. I was brought in because the Reinickendorfer Füchse, the most important club in my home district of Reinickendorf, were in dire financial straits. They said: 'Give it a go for a year.' Those twelve months have turned into over 20 years. In grassroots sport, we've grown the club from 1,800 to 6,000 members, across 30 sports, with 30 permanent staff and 500 coaches. And not in Frohnau or Hermsdorf, but in the more challenging southern part of Reinickendorf, which, sociologically speaking, is actually closer to Wedding.

And what about handball?

When I arrived, the handball team had just lost their licence for the second division; we were in the third division. Then I was lucky enough to meet Bob Hanning, who has been our managing director for handball for many years. We agreed: if you want to be successful in Berlin, you can only do so on the international stage. The city doesn't need another second-division side or a mediocre Bundesliga team, but rather top-class international sport. Last season, we became German champions for the very first time; we've won every title from the Super Globe to the Super Cup and the DHB Cup, we're playing in the Final Four in Cologne and we want to get back to the Champions League final. And we've been breaking even every year for the past 20 years – that's not the norm in sport.

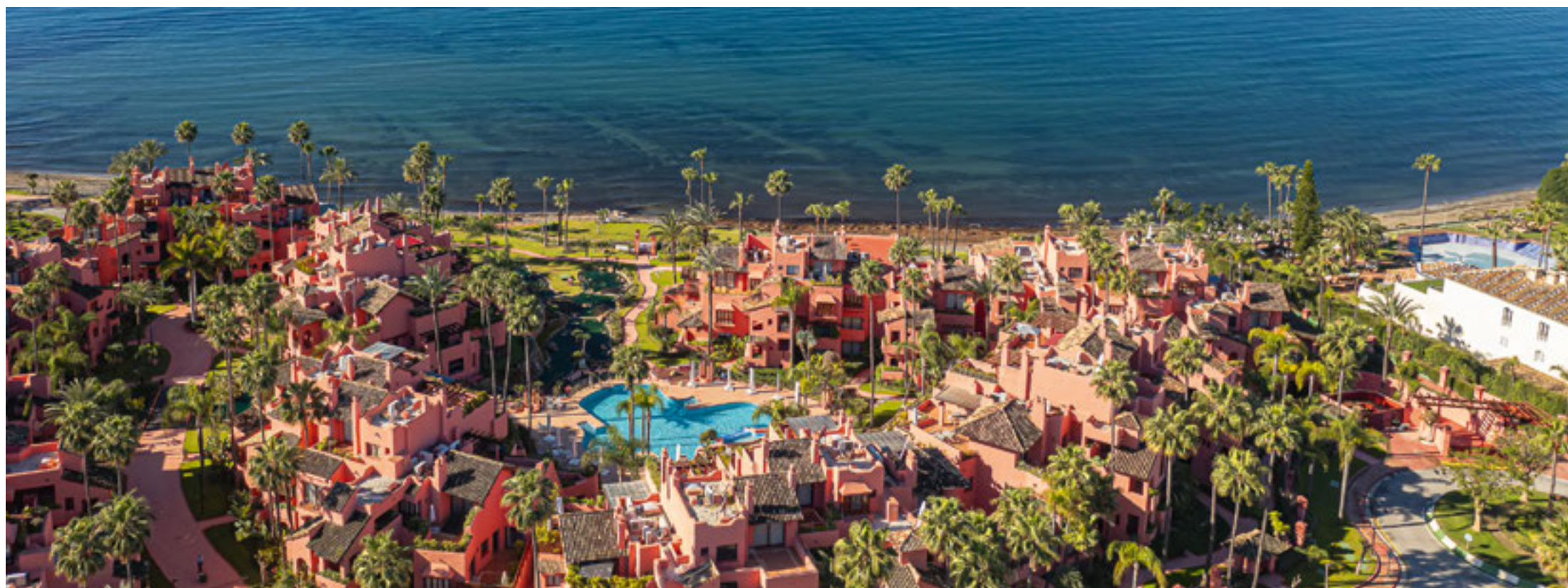
With 30 sports on offer, which ones define the club the most?

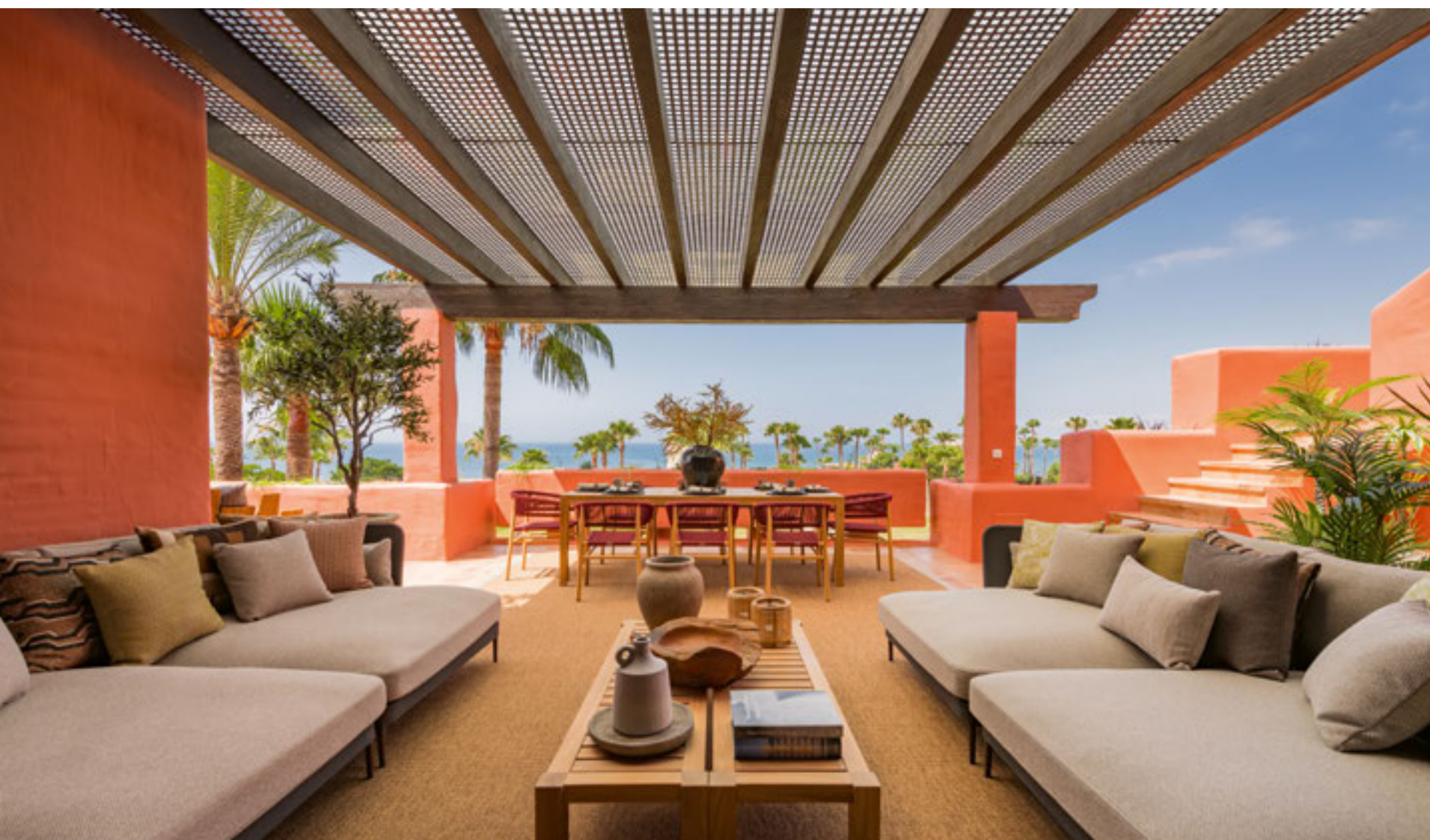
Outwardly, of course, it's handball. Traditionally, we've had a large football section with 700 members; Thomas Häßler and Jérôme Boateng came through our ranks. We're also strong in rehabilitation, family and health-focused sport, as well as in volleyball, basketball, bowling, boxing, hockey and tennis; we've established a padel section, rugby is currently being set up, and we also have a swimming section. We offer classes for the very youngest – in our 'Windelflitzer' class, the youngest children take their first steps with their fathers on Sundays – and many groups for older people. In doing so, we do one thing differently from everyone else: with us, anyone who wants to take part must become a member. We don't offer courses where you pay five euros and then leave. Older people, in particular, should feel a sense of commitment. This is achieved through a minimum membership and the prospect of really doing sport on a regular basis. That's part of our success.

Spain: Luxury in a prime location

As well as your work in Germany, you're increasingly investing internationally, particularly in Spain. How did that come about?

I've had a personal connection with Andalusia, specifically the Málaga area, for decades. And I've always been surprised that new-builds are mostly constructed in poor locations behind the second row of beachfront properties, whilst the properties right by the sea are in poor condition. After I sold my group of companies, which specialised in interior design, I said to myself: it must surely be possible to turn the prime locations and the oldest, 20- or 30-year-old flats into something really stylish and completely new. We're talking exclusively about flats there, not villas. Today, we transform flats in prime seaside locations into absolute luxury properties and sell them for between two and five million euros to a top-tier international clientele. Fully furnished and ready to move into – people practically just need to turn up with their suitcase and move in. People who spend a lot of money don't want any hassle.





That sounds like a very exclusive concept. How fierce is the competition?

We're the undisputed market leader, and we've built this up very effectively from a strategic perspective. This year, we're likely to generate over 60 million euros in turnover there. We operate exclusively with equity capital, which makes us extremely independent. And we really do deliver a top-quality product: from high-end wine climate cabinets to the finest bathrooms and kitchens, right through to a sound system throughout the entire flat. We place a strong emphasis on 'Made in Germany' – Bang & Olufsen, for example, or Burmester Audio, with whom we're establishing a partnership. Particularly in southern Europe, where standards are often different to those in the north, 'Made in Germany' continues to enjoy an excellent reputation. Customers notice that.

Is this luxury market on the Costa del Sol a short-term fad or a long-term trend?

The Andalusian government and the mayors of the towns have realised that they cannot sustainably progress with low-cost mass tourism. They have consistently developed what is, in terms of weather, already the best region in Europe to a higher standard. Málaga Airport has been massively expanded and now handles twice as many passengers as Berlin. Over the past few decades, around 100 golf courses have been built, alongside top-class restaurants, high-quality shopping facilities and a rich cultural scene, shaped in part by the Arab, Moorish and Christian heritage. There is now a 170-kilometre coastal walking trail stretching from Gibraltar to the Sierra Nevada. There is a deliberate drive to elevate the segment: if a four-star hotel wishes to renovate, it often only receives planning permission if it upgrades to five stars whilst reducing the number of rooms – in order to curb mass tourism. This approach has been very successful.

Who are your customers?

Unlike in other places, for example, around 150 nationalities are represented in the greater Málaga area – and these aren't temporary workers in the hospitality sector, which the Spanish largely run themselves, but rather affluent people who spend part of their lives there. Working from home has been a huge driving force. We've sold to many CEOs and board members of DAX-listed companies who spend months of the

year living in our apartments and run their businesses from there. On top of that, there are many start-up entrepreneurs. The clientele is therefore very young: it's no longer the 70-year-olds who are buying, but successful people aged between 30 and 50. In our case, the majority are owner-occupiers – in other words, people who buy for themselves and their families. The game-changer is that people no longer use the flat for two 14-day periods, but for four months a year. It is no longer a holiday flat, but a second home where they live. I myself have been commuting for years and now practically live in Spain.

Just how international is your clientele, specifically?

Very. We've seen a significant increase in buyers from North and South America and Canada. Eastern Europe – Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania and Bulgaria – has grown considerably. The Benelux countries and Scandinavia have always been strong markets. Russia has seen a decline, as did the UK initially following Brexit, though it is picking up again. And we're seeing an increasing number of buyers from Asia, such as China – many affluent people who can well imagine owning a beautiful flat in Europe. But of course we also have many German clients.

What role do architecture and design play in your concept?

We completely gut the properties and transform the old into something entirely new. Our design is consistently focused on people: what do they expect from their home? Many flats built 20 or 30 years ago – and, to be honest, many built today as well – are architecturally thoughtless. A hundred identical flats are built without a thought for the person who will eventually move in. We create a genuine product. Take this example: the English tend to want the washing machine in the kitchen if in doubt, the Spanish always do, whilst the Germans would never have it there – they'd much rather have it in the bathroom. We solve this by ensuring that each of our flats has a laundry room with a Miele washing machine and tumble dryer. We build an open-plan 'American kitchen' with a sea view, and behind it a 'dirty kitchen' where the family or a member of staff can leave the dirty washing-up. Every kitchen has two dishwashers, so there are never any dirty dishes lying about. And we now only use induction hobs, where you can't even see the hob itself – this creates much more worktop space. There are lots of little details that



we're constantly working on.

You also make an unusual promise to your buyers.

We sell with a sort of lifetime guarantee. If someone has a problem – even if it's just that the system breaks down on a Saturday and they can't watch the Manchester City v Manchester United match – we'll be there within an hour. With us, the answer is basically always 'yes'. If someone says after the purchase that they'd like a red floor, we say: 'Give us 14 days.' In principle, we don't charge for this, as long as it isn't excessive – that goes without saying. The interesting lesson is that, in the end, people don't actually want to change much. They ask lots of questions, but usually things stay as they were intended from the start. That builds trust. Of the nearly 100 flats we've sold over the past ten years, every buyer would advise their best friend: 'Buy from Phoenix.' Some are even shareholders in our company today – for me, that's the greatest proof of trust there is. My co-shareholders say: 'Frank, you're our most successful start-up.'





Four locations, one strategy

What is the overall structure of your portfolio?

The Family Office is essentially divided into four parts. In Germany, we are purely portfolio holders, mainly owning blocks of flats in the Berlin suburbs, which we manage ourselves – in a very medium-sized business style and for the benefit of the tenants. Due to rising interest rates and prices that are still relatively high, we are not currently expanding there, but are instead developing our existing portfolio. In Spain, the model described above is in operation. In Dubai, I’m purely an off-plan buyer; the market there is quiet at the moment due to the conflict, but it’s not dead. And in Kuala Lumpur, I buy holiday properties, which are mainly rented by people from Singapore for short stays. The key thing is always this: you need a clear strategy, then the capital, then the right location. The worst thing is spreading yourself too thin. Not being convinced by the strategy and investing anyway makes no sense.

To conclude, a personal perspective: you say that retirement is not a concept for you. What will drive you in the future?

Constantly developing new things. I took over the Fuchse when handball and grassroots sport were at rock bottom; we’ve turned it into something magnificent. I’ve built up all my companies myself. That’s exactly what appeals to me. I live by two pieces of wisdom: ‘Success is no accident’ and ‘Hard work beats talent’. I tell young people that too. Even those who aren’t exceptionally talented can achieve a great deal professionally through hard work, dedication and commitment. This brings us full circle to handball: our World Handball Player of the Year, Mathias Gidsel, is the first to arrive at training and the last to leave, and he inspires the younger players. That’s why the team is successful. That’s exactly what I find so brilliant about entrepreneurship: that you can develop people and build something with them, especially with young people. And yes – the saying ‘money isn’t important’ may be true; it isn’t the most important thing. But quality of life and the ability to provide for one’s own family do depend on money. We should feel free to tell young people that. The rest is down to hard work, and fortunately, many do just that.

A lovely closing remark. Mr Steffel, thank you very much for the interview.

You’re very welcome – and thank you very much for your time.





Photo: Catocin Creek Distilling Company

Enjoyment and craftsmanship

106–143

Where origin and meticulous craftsmanship determine the quality of exceptional products.



Photo: Catocin Creek Distilling Company

From Veteranenstraße to Virginia

TEXT – Lena Rolle

PHOTOS: – Catoctin Creek Distilling Company



Photo: Butcher Photography

At the Beavis Bar in Berlin-Mitte, it is the origin, production and the guest's personal taste determine which bottle is served. Being a household name counts for little there. Jon Cooper, a software developer, host and analytical taster, knows many of the independent producers personally. His recommendations offer an insight into a new generation of American distilleries and an old tradition that was painstakingly rebuilt after Prohibition.

Anyone entering the Beavis Bar on Veteranenstraße is first met by a wall of bottles. The illuminated shelves reach so high that ladders are a standard feature of the décor. In this small space near the Volkspark am Weinberg, there are well over a thousand spirits from independent distilleries, organised like the holdings of a library. Every bottle has its place, and for many of the spirits, Jon Cooper knows the people who made them. Hospitality takes time here. Cooper listens, asks about memories and preferences, and then seeks out a whisky that might suit this guest and this evening.

He opened the bar in the summer of 2018 together with Rik Lusing, conceiving it from the outset as a venue for artisanal spirits. Small distilleries, regional ingredients, unusual production methods and a traceable provenance define the selection. What began as around 500 bottles has grown into one of the most extensive collections of its kind in Berlin. The owners themselves refer to it as a 'craft tasting bar', whilst visitors and writers have called the venue a 'liquid library'.

For Cooper, this library is also a personal archive. He hails from Arizona, studied on the east coast of the United States and began his career as a software developer. He gained access to computers whilst still a teenager, at a time when these machines still filled entire rooms. Later, he worked in New York, Silicon Valley and several European countries; an early assignment took him to Milan. Europe became the centre of his life. Cooper took Italian citizenship and lived in Italy, France, Spain, Sweden and Germany, amongst other places.

Before moving to Berlin, Cooper and Lusing ran a bed and breakfast in the Norman town of Étretat. What they learnt there continues to shape the Beavis Bar to this day. Guests want to feel welcome, to discover something new and to understand what lies before them. The pair set up a small bar in the guesthouse and developed tasting sequences. Conversations about flavours regularly turned into discussions about origins, landscapes and personal memories. In 2016, they moved to Berlin; two years later, the Beavis Bar opened.



Catoction Creek Distilling Company



Photo: Butcher Photography

Between programme code and flavour

Cooper’s perspective on whisky still bears the marks of his work with software. A programmer breaks down a complex problem into structures, examines relationships and seeks a solution that holds up even when individual conditions change. Cooper takes a similar approach during a tasting. He perceives flavours, categorises them and asks what sensations they trigger in a particular person.

For him, taste remains a personal matter. Technical terms facilitate understanding, but one’s own perception is what really matters. On his blog ‘The Joy of Tasting’, Cooper links whisky with memory, language, music and literature. Together with his team, he has also developed Tasting.ai, an application designed to record personal taste profiles and derive well-founded recommendations from them. It aims to guide people towards whiskies that suit their preferences, whilst also explaining why that particular bottle is being suggested.

For him, both programming and tasting begin with uncertainty. In one case, the question is whether a solution will work. In the other, it remains to be seen which flavours will emerge and which memories they will trigger. As soon as the individual elements come together to form a coherent whole, the joy of discovery sets in.

This is a useful mindset for a journey through American whisky. Cooper regards every bottle as the result of many decisions. Who selected the grain? Where was it grown? How was it distilled, and which casks were used? What economic and personal risks were involved in setting up the distillery? His recommendations often stem from long-standing encounters. They lead to people who have left their professional careers behind to set up a distillery, or who are continuing a regional tradition using modern methods.



Photo: Butcher Photography

A tradition marked by profound ruptures

American whisky lends itself particularly well to such an examination. National Prohibition banned the production, transport and sale of alcoholic beverages from 1920 to 1933. Numerous businesses disappeared, established production structures collapsed, and a significant portion of artisanal knowledge was lost. After the end of Prohibition, a heavily regulated market emerged in which large companies had the better conditions for production and distribution. The resurgence of small distilleries began decades later. They revived regional grain varieties, historic styles and artisanal production methods. Some of the early mo-

dern distilleries emerged in the 1980s, whilst the broader boom began in the 1990s and 2000s. It has since developed into an industry in its own right, one that is currently experiencing economically challenging times. The Craft Spirits Data Project Report counted a total of 2,282 active craft distilleries in the United States in August 2025 – significantly fewer than the previous year. This is the landscape in which Jon Cooper operates. His first recommendation for ECKEL INSPIRED takes us to Purcellville in the state of Virginia.

Catoctin Creek: Two engineers and Virginia rye

There, in 2009, Becky and Scott Harris founded the Catoctin Creek Distilling Company, the first legally operating distillery in Loudoun County since the pre-Prohibition era. Scott Harris had obtained two degrees in computer science from the Georgia Institute of Technology and had spent many years working on telecommunications systems and information technology for government clients. Becky Harris is a chemical engineer who had worked professionally on industrial processes and production systems. The couple decided to apply this expertise to their own distillery.

Cooper has known Scott Harris since the early days of the Beavis Bar. Harris dropped by after it opened, and further encounters followed. For Cooper, the connection is obvious: both come from a background in software development, both are interested in whisky, and both strive to make complex processes understandable.

At Catoctin Creek, Scott Harris is responsible for business management, marketing and industry relations. As founder and master distiller, Becky Harris oversees production, and her training shapes the processes. The distillery uses pot stills and, according to its own account, sources grain and fruit from regional suppliers wherever possible. Becky Harris allows the distillation of a batch to run for around nine hours. This longer process gives her precise control over the cut-offs and the flavours that are to remain in the distillate.

At the heart of the range is Roundstone Rye, a whisky made from 100 per cent rye. It is mashed, fermented, distilled, matured and bottled at the Purcellville site. The standard expression is aged for around two years in new, charred American white oak casks. The distillery sees this as a modern continuation of a rye style that was widespread in Virginia before Prohibition.

Rye has a long history in Virginia. Early settlers used the grain for whisky production, and later George Washington operated a commercial rye distillery on his Mount Vernon estate. Catoctin Creek draws on this heritage and combines it with a contemporary operation. For Cooper, the significance of the distillery lies on several levels. The whisky tells the story of a historic grain and a landscape; the company, of two engineers who have applied their knowledge to a craft product. This personal connection, in turn, provides direct access to the people behind the bottle.

Becky Harris served as president of the American Craft Spirits Association for three years and received a lifetime achievement award from Bourbon Women in 2023. Her work illustrates how scientific training, production expertise and sensory judgements work in tandem. At Catoctin Creek, chemistry is evident in temperature profiles, fermentation, cut-off points and the patient handling of the distillate.

Scott Harris complements this with entrepreneurship, sales and advocacy work on behalf of smaller distilleries. In 2023, Becky and Scott Harris bought back the shares previously held by Constellation Brands Ventures. Since then, the founders have once again been running Catoctin Creek entirely on their own, which demonstrates the importance the company places on independence.



Photo: Butcher Photography

Virginia Distillery: Irish origins, American single malt

Cooper's second recommendation takes us further into the Blue Ridge Mountains to Lovington. Dr George G. Moore founded the Virginia Distillery Company in 2011. He was originally from Ireland and had moved to the United States in the 1970s. After years as an entrepreneur, he combined his Irish heritage with his adopted home of Virginia and developed the idea of producing high-quality single malt there. Today, his son Gareth Moore runs the independent distillery.

The Virginia Distillery Company's flagship product is called 'Courage & Conviction'. The name derives from a phrase George G. Moore often used within his family. The whisky is made from 100 per cent malted barley and is matured for at least five years. To achieve this, the distillery uses ex-bourbon casks, sherry casks and casks that previously held cuvées from European red wine producers. According to the distillery, the bourbon casks account for approximately 50 per cent of the standard blend, whilst the sherry casks and wine casks each account for 25 per cent.

The selection of casks brings together expertise from different regions of whisky and wine production. Former bourbon casks often impart notes of vanilla, caramel and wood, whilst sherry casks can contribute dried fruit, nuts and spices. The wine casks are scraped out on the inside, re-toasted and charred before being filled with whisky. Added to this is Virginia's climate, with warm summers and cool winters, which influences the



Photo: Butcher Photography

exchange between the wood and the distillate.

The Virginia Distillery Company is one of the firms that have campaigned for years for a legally defined category of American Single Malt. Since 19 January 2025, this designation has been officially regulated in the United States. The whisky must consist entirely of malted barley, be produced in a single American distillery, and be mashed, distilled and matured in the United States. It is aged in oak casks with a capacity of no more than 700 litres and is bottled at a minimum of 40 per cent by volume. For the designation 'Straight American Single Malt', a minimum maturation period of two years is also required.

For producers such as Virginia Distillery, this regulation carries significant weight. It provides a common foundation for this emerging category and makes it easier for retailers and consumers to identify its origin. Nevertheless, there remains scope for regional variations. Barley, water, climate, distillation techniques and cask selection differ considerably from Oregon to Texas to Virginia. As a result, American Single Malt is forging its own identity within the international whisky world.

Two paths through Virginia

Catoctin Creek and Virginia Distillery are taking different paths. In Purcellville, the focus is on rye, a grain with a deep-rooted regional history. In Lovington, single malt is crafted from a family history spanning Ireland and Virginia and from a young, now protected category. Both companies combine technical expertise with a conscious choice of location. Both demonstrate how historical experiences can be embraced and further developed in a modern distillery.

Their economic circumstances are also part of the story. Small American distilleries are struggling with falling sales volumes, challenging distribution channels and political trade conflicts. According to the Distilled Spirits Council, exports of American spirits to Canada fell by 85 per cent in the second quarter of 2025 compared with the same period the previous year. Sales restrictions remained in place in several Canadian provinces. For a small business, a key sales market can thus close down within a matter of weeks. Whisky is aged in casks for years; production decisions are made long before the product is sold; and international distribution relationships are built up over many encounters. A political conflict can render all this work worthless in just a few weeks. This affects major brands and small producers differently. Smaller businesses usually have fewer reserves and fewer options for redirecting their products to other markets at short notice.

Becky and Scott Harris

Photo: Butcher Photography

A translator between people and flavours

At the Beavis Bar, these connections are distilled down to a manageable scale. A table, a few glasses, a conversation. Cooper explains why a rye whisky from Virginia tastes different from a bourbon from Kentucky or a single malt from the Blue Ridge Mountains. He tells the story of the people behind each bottle, whilst leaving guests room for their own interpretations.

Behind this lies the conviction that everyone is entitled to take their own taste seriously. A tasting should be a slow process. Smell and taste evoke memories that defy a uniform technical vocabulary. Jon Cooper does not compile a ranking of the best whiskies. He draws connections between Berlin and Virginia, between computer logic and olfactory memory, between an old tradition and a new generation of distillers. Anyone who listens to him comes to understand whisky as the result of many decisions that coalesce in the glass: grain, water, time, wood, climate, capital, entrepreneurship. Added to this are the people who are willing to tell their stories. These connections make Cooper a reliable guide through an America whose whisky landscape is being charted anew.





Robert Weil Winery: A breath of fresh air at Kiedrich's Gräfenberg

TEXT – Robert Weil Winery

PHOTOS – Sandra Fehr / Heroes of Riesling



Photo: Sandra Fehr

With the arrival of the new generation at the renowned VDP Robert Weil Winery in Kiedrich, the historic manor house has undergone a sensitive transformation. Marie-Charlotte Weil, together with her brother Robert, has achieved the feat of carefully modernising the building's architectural heritage whilst weaving in contemporary influences. The estate's roots stretch far back into the 19th century: the striking central section of the complex was built in 1857 by the British nobleman and art patron, Baronet John Sutton, in the English Tudor style, before the estate passed into the ownership of the winemaking family. These cosmopolitan, British origins form the design foundation upon which the latest refurbishment is built. The result: a dynamic dialogue between the eras unfolds in the stately rooms.

The historic breakfast and meeting room is decorated in a delicate lime green. 17th-century Flemish tapestries exude an almost sacred, warm aura. They harmonise perfectly with the organic walnut chairs by Spalli, whose delicate design artfully evokes the structure of grapevines.

The architectural journey continues through the magnificently panelled John Sutton Room. Here, historical heirlooms meet contemporary Italian designer furniture, such as the oval side tables by Molteni&C. In the narrow adjoining room – the former servants'

Photo: Peter Quirin



Photo: Sandra Fehr

Photo: Sandra Fehr



quarters with its historic bull's-eye windows – two iconic, orange-red tweed 'Egg Chairs' make a striking statement. The deep connection to Fritz Hansen is rooted in a long-standing brand partnership and brings Nordic purism to the traditional Rheingau ambience.

The architectural highlight is the opulent dining room. Here, the view opens up through generous windows onto the picturesque garden, whilst floral Art Nouveau ceiling murals exude a sublime energy. The crystal chandelier, dating from the year the building was constructed, crowns the ensemble. The former crimson fabric covering has given way to subtle shades of beige, which harmonise perfectly with the cream-coloured leather upholstery of the Danish designer chairs. It is precisely this symbiosis of respect for history and the courage to embrace modern design that lends the manor house its new, timeless identity.

Artifacts dating back centuries meet contemporary design elements: the Weil family's manor house in Kiedrich is a wonderful example of the sensitive transformation of a historic building.



Photo: Sandra Fehr



The WeinAtelier: Art meets terroir

TEXT – Battenfeld Spanier

PHOTOS – Battenfeld Spanier



How can ‘terroir’ be translated into spatial terms? How can architecture make visible something that only truly reveals itself in the glass? With their new WeinAtelier in Hohen-Sülzen, the VDP estates Battenfeld-Spanier and Kühling-Gillot provide an answer that is as understated as it is compelling. To mark their 20

years of working together, Carolin and H.O. Spanier, in collaboration with interior designer Christine Piecuch of Inconcepte in Mainz, have created a space where architecture, art and wine merge into a single narrative.

Carolin and H.O. Spanier deliberately chose the term ‘Ate-

lier’. It describes a place of design, creation and refinement – and thus implicitly refers to the creative process that shapes art, architecture and, in a certain sense, wine too. With a large-scale work by the artist Daniel Lergon, they set the calm, atmospheric tone of the WeinAtelier: here, art is not a decorative

element, but an integral part of the concept.

However, the true centre-piece consists of two hand-drawn vineyard maps, commissioned specifically for the space. They translate the abstract idea of terroir into a visible, legible image and thus become a curatorial element of the interior design in their own right. The first map depicts the Roter Hang near Nierstein and Nackenheim, with its legendary steep slopes from which Kühling-Gillot’s wines originate. The second is dedicated to the Zellertal and the variety of top vi-

neyards there belonging to Battenfeld-Spanier.

The WeinAtelier in Hohen-Sülzen impressively demonstrates how viticultural identity can be expressed architecturally. Here, origin is experienced in a dimension that is both spatial and gustatory.



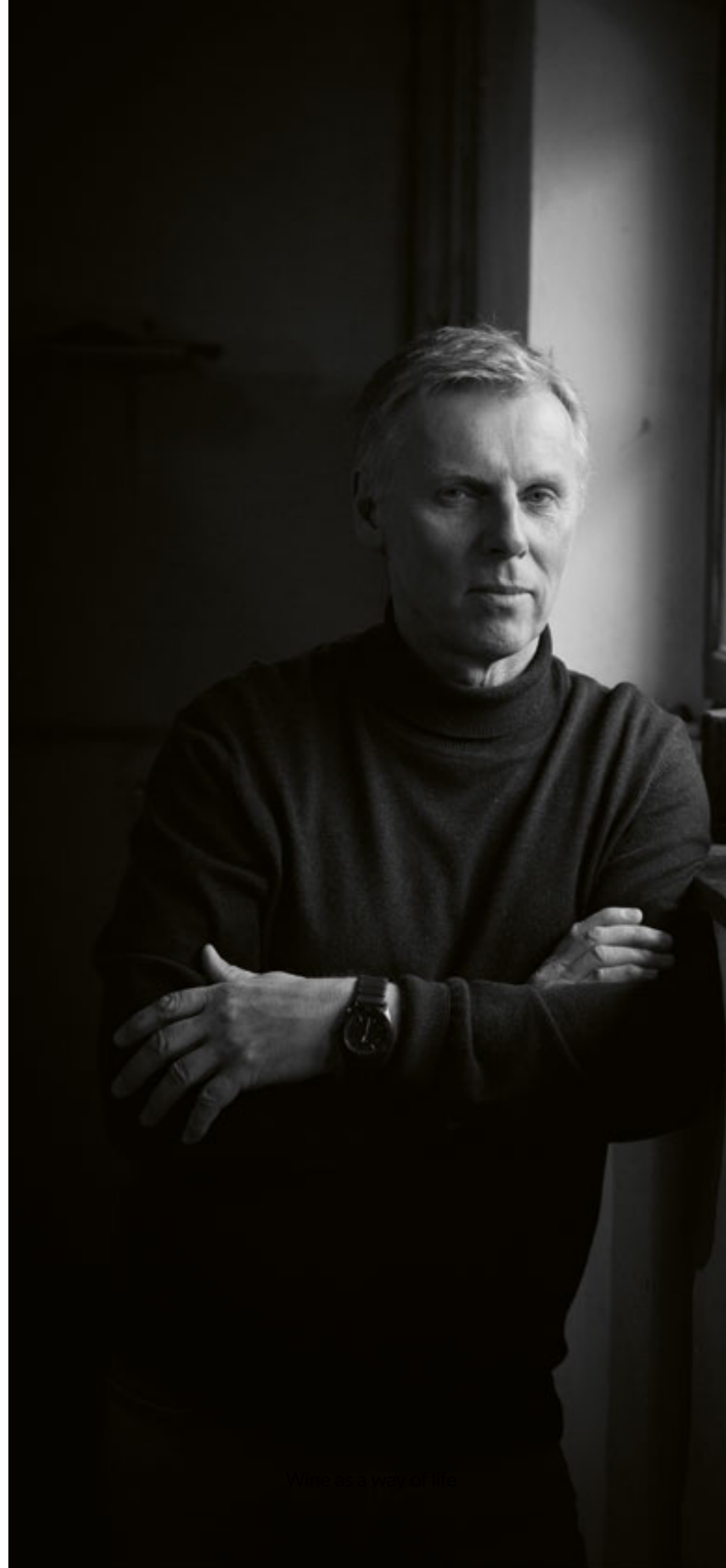


The Architecture of Pleasure: The production of a hand-blown glass

TEXT – Josephinenhütte

PHOTOS – Josephinenhütte

The heat of the furnace, the glow of the glass, the use of archaic tools: all this sets the stage for a spectacle that has scarcely changed for centuries – and yet continues to enchant time and again. At Josephinenhütte, every glass is unique – mouth-blown and hand-shaped. Up to six glassma-



kers work on each individual glass in a well-rehearsed rhythm. It is an almost dance-like sequence of shaping, turning and pulling – a interplay of intuition, precision and experience. Every movement is precise; every breath is part of a greater whole.

Glass designer Kurt Josef Zalto has personally selected every single artist permitted to craft his Josephine glass collection. In a world that rewards speed, this glass reminds us of something else: patience. Dedication. And the quiet power of craftsmanship, which creates wonders with the simplest of means: glasses that provide the perfect stage for the world's finest wines.

The journey begins – a path full of precision

The production process begins with a specially developed raw glass mixture. This unique blend of glass gives the final product its unrivalled lightness, flexibility and brilliance – and with it, remarkable durability. The mixture is melted in the furnace at over 1,400 degrees Celsius. Only when the quality meets the highest standards does glass production begin – otherwise, work is suspended for the day.

Kölbels and Cuppa – perfection in shaping

In a series of skilful steps, the glassmakers transform the glowing raw material into delicate glass. Using a glassmaker's pipe, the tip of which has been pre-heated, the 'Köbel' maker draws some molten glass from the furnace and carefully and precisely shapes it into a small, spherical bubble – the so-called 'Köbel'.

Using the Köbel, the glassblower removes a quantity of glass from the harbour furnace corresponding to the size of the final piece. The great challenge lies in removing exactly the right amount of glass; even 10 grams makes an enormous difference and determines whether the glass will have the desired lightness. The still viscous glass mass is pre-shaped using wooden tools.

Whilst constantly rotating the glass, it is blown into a two-part, specially made mould. However, the hot bowl – or 'Cuppa' – never touches this mould; it hovers thanks to a fine vapour barrier that forms at around

One of the most significant glass designers of our time: Kurt Josef Zalto

1,000 degrees. Only the most experienced glassblowers have mastered the fine art of crafting a Josephine glass to Kurt Josef Zalto’s exacting standards. In particular, the thin-walled delicacy of the glasses and the sophisticated, angular shapes demand the very best from the glass artists.

Stem and base – cast as one

Now the first master craftsman comes into play. He heats the small protrusion located at the base of the glass after it has been blown. Using an archaic-looking tool – a rustic pair of pliers – the stem is pulled out of the bowl and shaped whilst being constantly rotated. The bowl and stem are thus formed in a single piece. It requires a great deal of experience and an excellent eye for proportion on the part of the master to shape the stem straight as an arrow and with precision, without any further aids. The second master now takes over the piece. At the end of the stem, a drop of molten glass is applied purely by eye, from which he crafts the base plate by rotating it using special wooden base cutters. Every movement is carried out with a sure eye and decades of experience.

Cooling & Polishing – Patience Pays Off

After shaping, each glass undergoes a controlled cooling process lasting several hours. Once the cooling phase is complete, the final finishing of the glass begins with the removal of the so-called ‘cap’ from the top of the Cuppa. At this stage, the glass is first very carefully scored at this point in a blasting machine using a diamond tip and, in the next step, precisely blasted off exactly there using a short gas flame heated to at least 1,400 degrees Celsius. Only then does the finishing process begin: the sharp rim is polished using diamond tools – both inside and out. At this stage, the rim is still slightly matt.

Flame polishing – the final shine

Finally, the so-called flame polishing ensures the velvety-smooth rim and the characteristic clarity of the glass. To achieve this, the glass is passed through a flame tunnel, which smooths out even the tiniest imperfections. The masterpiece is complete.

Wooden moulds, flames and archaic tools: every Josephine glass is handcrafted with the utmost precision



The Shape of Taste: The iconic shape of the Josephine glass, with its distinctive bend, brings out the wine’s aromas to perfection







Heitlinger Wine Bar: top-quality Burgundy wines and Kraichgau comfort food

TEXT – Heitlinger Wine Bar

PHOTOS – Heitlinger Wine Bar

Nestled in the Kraichgau region between Heidelberg, Karlsruhe and Heilbronn lies one of southern Germany's most exciting culinary destinations: the Heitlinger Genusswelten in Östringen. Surrounded by rolling hills, vineyards and sweeping views, a destination has developed here over the past few decades that combines viticulture, hospitality, golf and fine dining into a holistic experience conceived with rare consistency. Now, the Jacklin family, who own the establishment, have expanded their gastronomic offering to include a wine bar. The focus is on fine wines, regional produce and

a deliberately uncomplicated concept of indulgence. The eye-catching feature is a walk-in glass wine cellar, specially designed for the bar.

Wine selection

Alongside their own biodynamic wines from the VDP estates Heitlinger and Burg Ravensburg, selected bottles from fellow winemakers are also on offer. "We want to create a place that celebrates wine and makes it accessible," says host and winemaker Patrick Jacklin. "That's why we're deliberately keeping our prices moderate:"

Kraichgau comfort food

Culinary-wise, the wine bar focuses on regional bar food and soul food designed for sharing. Alongside classic bar snacks such as cheese, ham, olives and nuts, a changing selection of dishes is served family-style. The ingredients used are predominantly sourced from the immediate vicinity – including vegetables from Tiefenbach, bread from Odenheim, homemade Kraichgau chips and seasonal specialities such as game from the local forests and lamb from their own shepherds, as well as honey and vegetables from their own vineyards.

Heitlinger Wine Bar

Am Mühlberg 3
76684 Östringen-Tiefenbach

Opening hours:

Tuesday to Thursday: 4.00 pm–11.00 pm

Friday: 4.00 pm–12.00 am

Saturday: 11.00 am–12.00 am

Sunday: 11.00 am–6.00 pm





Five island wines

Whether a South Sea paradise or a penal colony: battered by the sea and the wind, islands often have a turbulent history. They are home to wines that capture the imagination. Set sail with these five recommendations.

TEXT – Ulrich Amling

PHOTOS – Ulrich Amling

The Azores

We regularly hear about this Portuguese archipelago in the Atlantic; the high-pressure system named after it shapes the weather across Europe. The volcano on the island of Pico is Portugal’s highest peak, and walls of lava stones protect the vines from the wind. The oldest vineyards are a World Heritage Site and yield only small harvests. Star oenologist Antonio Macanita crafts vibrant wines from the white Arinto dos Açores grape. His ‘Sur Lies 3 Harvest’ is a cuvée blending the 2018, 2020 and 2021 vintages. Citrus brightness and volcanic spice create a solid, uplifting sensation on the palate.

Arinto dos Açores Sur Lies 3 Harvest, Azores Wine Company, 44 euros, gute-weine.de

Föhr

More wine is drunk on Sylt, but on its sister island Föhr, sheltered within the Wadden Sea, there is more land available – including for vineyards. The Waalem Winery cultivates the largest proportion of Schleswig-Holstein’s vineyard area. Farmer Christian Roeloffs and his son Lenz, who trained as a winemaker, have planted hardy new grape varieties in this mild, invigorating climate. There is now even a 19th-century-inspired manor house standing amidst the vines. The ‘Waalem Kul’ has aromas of gooseberries and strikes a cool, balanced blend of invigorating acidity and delicate sweetness.

2024 Waalem Kul, Waalem Winery, 17.95 euros, waalem.de

Gorgona

Its location in the Tuscan Archipelago off Livorno is idyllic. Yet nobody visits Gorgona – Europe’s last prison island – of their own free will. Only those who have behaved well towards the end of a long prison sentence are sent here. Life on the island is intended to prepare them for their return to society. The prisoners learn to grow vegetables, make cheese or tend a vineyard. The Frescobaldi wine dynasty is a partner in the project. The extremely rare ‘Gorgona Bianco’, made from Vermentino and Ansonica, has a delicate aroma of macchia and freedom – a freedom that comes at a price.

2025 Gorgona Bianco, Marchesi de’ Frescobaldi, 96.40 euros, callmewine.de

Corsica

The third-largest wine-producing island in the Mediterranean is a well-known enigma. Whilst mass-produced wines are a staple on supermarket shelves, the top-quality wines rarely leave their homeland, which is dominated by imposing mountain ranges. The island, buffeted by strong winds, boasts a wealth of diverse soils, climates and grape varieties. Among these is the ancient Sciaccarellu variety, which produces a light, peppery red. Combined with Niellucciu – as Sangiovese is known in Corsica – it forms the basis of this lively, delicately spiced organic rosé.

2025 Clos Reginu Rosé, Domaine Maestracci, 11.40 euros, weinhandlung-bacchus.de

Rangiroa

The nearest continent lies 5,000 kilometres away; one would never expect to find a vineyard in the vast expanses of the South Pacific. And yet there is one on Rangiroa, the largest atoll in French Polynesia. Dominique Auroy had long been searching for a place to realise his dream of producing Tahitian wine. He then planted vines in limestone soil derived from coral, enriched with humus from seaweed. The grapes are transported to the winery by boat. The wine glows golden in the glass, with flavours of grilled pineapple, vanilla pod, tropical sweetness and a hint of salt.

2025 Monamona de Corail, Vin de Tahiti, Domaine Auroy, 34.90 euros, chaivallier.de



Ulrich Amling focuses on the finer things in life – food, drink, music – and the stories behind them.



From left to right:
Arinto dos Açores Sur Lies 3 Harvest, 2024 Waalem Kul, 2025 Gorgona Bianco, 2025 Clos Reginu Rosé, 2025 Monamona de Corail



THE WAY RUNNING
SHOULD FEEL



VELOCITY 4

A media platform for relevant topics,
remarkable personalities and new connections

The magazine “Exclusivity with Vision” is the printed heart of ECKEL INSPIRED. Here, projects, companies and prominent figures are given the space that complex stories require. However, the media platform extends well beyond the magazine. It combines editorial work, strategic communication, video and podcasts, digital distribution, face-to-face encounters and a network that has grown over many years.

ECKEL INSPIRED is aimed at people who make decisions, take responsibility for projects and support developments over the long term. Our topics therefore often arise at the intersection of property, architecture, politics, public administration, culture, technology, entrepreneurship and distinctive lifestyles. The focus is on the question of why a project comes into being, which people drive it forward and what significance it can take on beyond its immediate context.

To this end, the platform creates curated communication and reputation-building formats. Editorial storytelling is combined with visual presentation, strategic distribution and the targeted engagement of relevant audiences. Crucial to this is the context in which a story appears and the framework within which a company or public figure is perceived.

From 1 October 2026: behEInd on YouTube

The behEInd YouTube channel will launch on 1 October 2026. This will provide ECKEL INSPIRED with a further editorial platform on which the magazine’s topics can be explored in greater depth and developed further.

Planned content includes video podcasts, in-depth interviews, project discussions, profiles and feature reports. Figures from the worlds of business, property, politics, architecture, culture and the world of fine living will be given the space to explore contexts, background stories and personal decisions. The format aims to reveal what lies behind a project, an entrepreneurial idea or an extraordinary life journey.

Selected articles from the magazine will be supplemented by interviews, photographs and moving images. At

the same time, the channel will produce standalone stories that can later be developed further in print, online, on social media or at events. A single interview can thus give rise to an in-depth video podcast, an editorial article, a photo feature, a series of short video clips and a corporate profile that can be used over the long term.

To this end, ECKEL INSPIRED is already developing editorial features, podcast productions, visual reports, social media content, executive interviews, as well as event and networking formats. This is complemented by targeted digital distribution to selected audiences.

Editorial, consultancy and network

The platform builds on the experience and network of Eckel Presse & PR GmbH. For more than 14 years, the agency’s team has been supporting property projects, project developments, political processes and complex communication tasks.

This includes the strategic positioning of projects, press and public relations, political communication, stakeholder management and the preparation of sensitive decision-making processes. Eckel supports clients in understanding the various interests at stake, involving relevant stakeholders at an early stage and explaining complex projects in a clear and comprehensible manner to politicians, public authorities, the media and the wider community.

In the property sector in particular, communication often determines whether a project is understood, whether conflicts are identified at an early stage, and whether viable channels of dialogue are established. The agency’s expertise therefore also encompasses crisis communication for property projects and events. In such situations, the focus is on rapid assessment, reliable facts, coordinated statements and communication that takes different stakeholder groups into account.

ECKEL INSPIRED complements this consultancy work with its own editorial platform. This allows topics to be explored in depth through journalistic coverage, then further developed in face-to-face discussi-

Coming to YouTube on 1 October 2026:

behEInd

ons and disseminated across various formats. For companies, this creates a credible environment in which expertise, business experience and specific projects are brought to the fore.

New challenges arising from digitalisation and administrative modernisation

A growing area of consultancy relates to digital applications in the property sector and public administration. This includes communication and marketing strategies for digital twins, digital project and building models, as well as new forms of data-driven visualisation of property and urban development projects.

Digital twins can clearly illustrate plans, usage scenarios and complex spatial relationships. This creates new opportunities for businesses, politicians, public authorities, investors and the general public to understand projects at an early stage and prepare decisions based on a shared information foundation.

In this context, Eckel also supports initiatives aimed at streamlining administrative processes and digital marketing within the property sector. This involves structuring information, translating technical content, engaging relevant decision-makers and developing communication strategies that combine digital tools with tangible benefits.

These topics will also be covered editorially on ECKEL INSPIRED in future. The platform aims to highlight how technology, political processes, planning, communication and economic implementation interact.

How ECKEL INSPIRED operates financially

ECKEL INSPIRED is already operating commercially as an independent media and networking platform. It is funded through various services that are transparently separated from one another.

These include advertisements and premium placements in the magazine, labelled advertorials, editorially developed company profiles, executive podcasts, video productions, social media content and strategic communication packages. In addition, revenue is generated through concept development, production, distribution, events, networking formats and further consultancy assignments.

The formats on offer range from print cover-

age and high-quality advertorials, through fully produced podcast episodes, to multi-month communication and reputation programmes featuring articles, video, social media, distribution and reporting.

Paid content is clearly labelled as an advert or advertorial. Editorial decisions remain separate from this. This distinction is important because credibility forms the foundation of the platform.

ECKEL INSPIRED therefore does not simply sell arbitrary reach. The economic value arises from the combination of editorial content, production, strategic consultancy, targeted distribution and personal access to relevant networks. Content is not merely published, but developed for various media formats and made available for use over an extended period.

In addition to its own channels, ECKEL INSPIRED utilises media and technology partners for premium publisher networks, native distribution, social media campaigns, video and podcast distribution, and target-audience-specific delivery.

A network that extends beyond the property sector

The property sector remains a key focal point of the platform. At the same time, Eckel's network has expanded into other areas over many years. These include politics, culture, architecture, events, technology, media, design, the skilled trades, lifestyle and social initiatives.

This interconnection of different sectors opens up new avenues for dialogue. A property company can be brought together with architects, technology providers, political decision-makers or cultural partners. Business leaders meet media representatives, event organisers and discover new opportunities for collaboration. An editorial discussion can give rise to a strategic partnership, an event format or a new business idea.

Many of these contacts and discussions take place away from the public eye. Discretion is therefore a core principle of the platform. ECKEL INSPIRED forges connections where interests align and where collaboration makes sense both in terms of content and business.

The next step

The magazine, the new YouTube channel, the podcasts, digital reports, events and consultancy formats together form a cohesive media ecosystem. It offers companies and prominent figures the opportunity to explain their topics in depth, reach relevant target audiences and build new relationships.

For readers, this means that the stories in this issue do not end on the last page. They are continued in conversations, films, podcasts and further reports.

ECKEL INSPIRED – A media platform for exclusive lifestyles, relevant projects and people who take responsibility.

Exclusivity with a vision for the future

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