

Reference case

muto' GmbH | Karlsruhe | June 2021

HOW A PIECE OF CHEMNITZ ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY CONTINUES TO UNFOLD.

Three became one: Chemnitz University of Technology's new central library was officially opened in October 2020. The Free State of Saxony has invested an impressive 53 million euros in this unique prestige project, which has now replaced three old locations scattered around the university city and brought them together in a lavishly restored historic building, the Alte Aktienspinnerei. More than 1.2 million books and journals as well as over 700 workstations for students and researchers have found a new home here.

It was a long road to get there. At the end of January 2013, a panel of experts chaired by Professor Paul Kahlfeldt decided on the various submissions for the competition, which was ultimately won by the bidding consortium of Dresden-based Lungwitz Architekten together with Heine Mildner Architekten and Berlin architect Thomas Rabe. Decisive factors in this decision included the urban gesture, the symmetrical frame buildings, the preservation of the visual axis to St. Peter's Church and the balanced proportions of the extension buildings, which are strongly oriented towards the scale and symmetry of the immediately adjacent existing architecture. The winning project embodies a contemporary response to established historical structures and at the same time meets the high demands of functionality and aesthetics of the present.



Source: Press office TU Chemnitz, Jakob Müller

The former building, built in the style of the 1850s by architect Friedrich Theodor Roschig, was once the largest spinning mill in Saxony and housed 60,000 spindles. The name "Alte Aktienspinnerei" (Old Stock Spinning Mill) goes back to the specially founded stock corporation that made the realization of an industrial building of this size possible in the first place: a five-storey central building with a crowned roof structure in combination with elongated four-storey side wings with a simple pitched roof and formally framed by characteristic corner towers. After suffering severe damage during the Second World War, the severely decimated complex was used as a temporary home for the destroyed opera house, a department store, puppet theater, office building, gallery and even once as a municipal library. The building has stood empty since 2004 and has been owned by the Free State of Saxony since 2011. However, the new building project, which was to create a usable area of more than 12,000 square meters, was not without its hurdles. With the utmost sensitivity, especially in relation to the ensemble context of the surroundings, the most important components were preserved, restored with great attention to detail and supplemented with partial gutting and new extensions to accommodate the new use as a modern university library.

"The opportunity to realize a central university library in the city centre of Chemnitz as a building project that is extraordinary in terms of its dimensions, its significance for the city, the history of the location and the requirements for its future use is a motivation and strong driving force for every architect.

Keeping our ambitious goals and considerations and the resulting design from the architectural competition in focus throughout the long period of subsequent planning and especially the construction period and reconciling them with the day-to-day constraints, small and large problems, was probably the biggest challenge of the project," reports

Thorsten Mildner, HEINE MILDNER ARCHITEKTEN, one of the planning architects of the Alte Aktienspinnerei Chemnitz consortium.

The important future role of the building complex called for special care and a skillful use of selected stylistic elements. While the historical appearance was largely preserved on the outside in the form of faithfully reproduced windows and restored plaster structures on the façade, an elegant bridge was built between historicism and modernity on the inside. On the one hand, the cast-iron supporting structure - one of the most significant features of 19th century industrial architecture - was uncovered again and now spans the spacious halls and rooms with its brick cap vaults, which benefit enormously from the charm of the delicate iron supports. At the same time, an inviting, inspiring working atmosphere has been created, which extends generously and multi-faceted across the building.



Source: Press office TU Chemnitz, Jakob Müller

What is particularly exciting, however, is a decisive change in the choice of materials: while the Alte Aktienspinnerei was built exclusively from stone and iron out of caution with regard to fire hazards and wood was deliberately avoided as a building material, it has finally been allowed to move in with the new library. The Karlsruhe-based company muto', a renowned expert in all wood-related matters and a competent partner for planning details, was in charge of implementing the trendy wooden surfaces. Right from the start of the renovation work in 2015, muto' acted in an advisory capacity for the architects. Implementation options were worked out together in advance, logs were selected and reserved on site in Karlsruhe, realistic reference samples and meaningful tender texts were created and, last but not least, the project was supported throughout the entire execution period.

The architects ultimately chose European rift oak, which muto' produced into high-quality veneer surfaces for the entire interior. The elegant wooden surfaces for all the doors, wall cladding and furniture were produced by muto' as a composite fixed mass with a planked look, a technique that gives the individual elements an elegant solid wood character. In order to ensure a consistent, homogeneous look for all the oak wood surfaces, they were delivered across all trades - a logistical challenge that more than paid off with the result of a total of 8,000 square meters of high-quality oak veneer.

"Understanding the library as a meeting place that invites users to linger was always a central concern of the planning. In addition to the necessary structural and spatial components, the choice of materials and surfaces and their interplay are of great importance," emphasizes architect Thomas Rabe, who was involved in the planning, adding:

"A few key materials were carefully selected and used in a targeted manner in the various areas. Wood was increasingly used in zones with reduced mobility, a comfortable working environment and a high quality of stay."



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The whirring of the spindles, which has been silent since 1914, has now given way to the turning of book pages and quiet typing on the keyboards. What has remained the same, however, is the fascination of those light-flooded rooms, which have now been given a new lease of life with the new Central Library of Chemnitz University of Technology, which is soon to open as a unique 24/7 library. Wood plays a key role in the connection: On the one hand, because with its homely charm and visual warmth, it lends a certain softness to the theory-heavy seriousness of a library; on the other, with its timelessness as a living material and stylistic device, it links the individual stages of the building's history, even if it was not always present. The Alte Aktienspinnerei thus becomes a place of encounter: of centuries and of people.

Info box:

Client: State of Saxony, Saxon Real Estate and Construction Management
Architects: Arbeitsgemeinschaft Alte Aktienspinnerei Chemnitz (Arge AAC): Siegmund Lungwitz, Lydia Heine, Thorsten Mildner (Dresden) and Thomas Rabe (Berlin)
Project management: ARGE Unit 4 GmbH & Co. KG + FC. Projektsteuerung GmbH, Stuttgart
Architecture: ARGE Aktienspinnerei Chemnitz Lungwitz Dresden, Heine Mildner Dresden, Raven Berlin
Structural design: Mathes Beratende Ingenieure GmbH, Chemnitz
Technical equipment: INNIUS GTD GmbH, Dresden / TEAMPLAN Ingenieure GmbH, Leipzig
Fire protection: ARGE Aktienspinnerei
Construction period: 2015 - 2020
Usable space: around 12,300 square meters

muto' GmbH is a subsidiary of Schorn & Groh GmbH, one of the leading companies in the veneer industry worldwide. Muto' manufactures high-quality wood surfaces for the contract sector and supports architects and designers from the wood selection and tendering phase through to the production of the designed wood surface. Over 150 types of wood - including domestic, modified and exotic veneers - are offered in a wide variety of formats and finishes across all trades.

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