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How do you actually build a people's theater?

As simple as necessary, so as not to cause any fear about entering in the audience, and as chic as possible, because theater is not only about staging on stage. This is the answer of the architectural firm Lederer, Ragnarsdóttir, Oei (Stuttgart) and the construction company Reisch (Bad Saulgau). More on this in their book *Münchner Volkstheater* and in the following excerpt:

Visitors are guided to it from afar. A tall tower shows them the way, with the word VOLKSTHEATER written in white on a red background. This is reminiscent of the pictorial architectural language of modernism, especially in cinemas, of motifs that are echoed in the Titianipalast or in today's Schaubühne, also in Berlin, whose architecture was designed by the great Erich Mendelsohn. And his undogmatic modernism has much to do with the work of Arno Lederer, Jórunn Ragnarsdóttir and Mark Oei.

From Tumblingerstraße, visitors emerge under a wide archway into the theater's open courtyard. The entrance to the theater, which swings out, is sensitively and fluidly divided into a front and a rear area. Layer by layer,

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visitors thus advance further and further. From the public street space to the protected public square in front of the theater entrance. From there, they pass into an even more private beer garden with the adjoining guest room, or through the doors designed with round glass and comfortable handles into the theater foyer. An enormous round window in the theater façade facing the courtyard

offers a tantalizing glimpse into the building. Inside and out, they intertwine. Such inviting sequences of rooms have consequences. For there can be no doubt that they themselves already offer stages, for public as well as theatrical life.

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Architecture itself tells stories by revealing history. Old and new stories. In this place, they condense into a narrative of their own. The old story is found at the back of the Zenetti houses, in the place where the cattle sheds once adjoined. Now the traces of plaster and paint can be seen there, of brick lintels, blocked openings. Rings are fixed in the wall and sawed-off concrete pipes can be seen, touch-ups, new ventilation outlets and concreted surfaces.

It all adds up to a work of its own, as abstract as it is concrete. It does not reveal precisely what once was here. But it hints at what might have been here. A wall that invites you to search for traces, that inspires and at the same time creates its own aesthetic. This is how the Munich Volkstheater has created perhaps the most perfect non-perfect wall imaginable, which in its opulence of traces seems almost Bavarian-baroque.

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But the new story is told by the theater itself. However, it does not tell it by becoming intoxicated with itself, but by picking up the threads that the site offers it and weaving them into the new building. In the theater courtyard, for example, it is a swinging interplay of open and closed wall surfaces and window formats that evokes cascades of architectural memories. Lederer himself cites Swedish architect Sigurd Lewerentz as a model for his artistic approach, along with Alvar Aalto and Le Corbusier. And indeed, the organically moving proximity to Lewerentz's buildings is palpable, to Stockholm's St. Markus' Church, for example, naturally through the material of the brick, but also thanks to the cylindrical and rounded forms.

An architecture that is moving and evocative.

In Munich, this creates an architecture that is moving and evocative. Unpretentiously, LRO takes up Zenetti's red brick and strictly continues it over the entrance arch along Tumblinger Straße with a closed wall. The pale ashlar sections of the old building are translated into the white surface of the wide frieze above, as well as into the sculptural concrete elements for the drainage, for example, and at the edge of the roof. Finally, the theater's delivery area picks up on the 1950s architecture of the surrounding halls with its projecting fine concrete roof and the rhythmization of the brick wall through the exposed concrete columns that taper downward at an angle. This is as serious as it is playful, as natural as it is extraordinary. Look here, architecture can do this!

Text: Jürgen Tietz



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Jürgen Tietz

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LRO Lederer, Ragnarsdóttir, Oei Architekten was founded in 1979 and currently employs around 50 people. Arno Lederer, born 1947, Prof., studied architecture in Stuttgart from 1970 to 1976. Worked in the architectural offices of Ernst Gisel and Berger Hauser Oed. 1979 independent architect, office partners: 1985 Jórunn Ragnarsdóttir, 1990 Marc Oei. Professor of Construction and Design at the Stuttgart University of Applied Sciences, of Building Construction and Design at the University of Karlsruhe and Head of Institute for Public Building and Design at the University of Stuttgart.

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