

## Restoration Project: ADGB Trade Union School, Bernau near Berlin, Germany

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### The ADGB Trade Union School (1930-1933)

The school in Bernau near Berlin is a building of the German Labour movement of the Weimar Republic, financed by the ADGB, General German Trade Union Federation, the umbrella organisation of 4,5 million union members. Educational work was an important factor in the strategy of the ADGB for a strong workers' representation in the young German democracy. Towards the end of the 1920s the ADGB intended to build 2 colleges in Germany for the unionist's training. Only the college in Bernau near Berlin was completed in the years 1928-1930, built 25 miles from Berlin in the State Forest of Bernau amidst a delightful pine forest with a lake. The object of the Bernau institution was to enable the unionists to enjoy further education in such subjects as trade union studies, management, economics or labour law. During the training with a residence of one month the students also had lessons in physical training in natural environment.<sup>1</sup>

The Trade Union School in Bernau was built by the Swiss architects Hannes Meyer, successor of Walter Gropius at the Bauhaus in Dessau and director in the years 1928-1930, and Hans Wittwer (1894-1952), head of the section "Architecture" at the Bauhaus Dessau in the years 1927-1929. The Bernau School maybe is a less known monument from the Bauhaus era, but the most important building designed by the Bauhaus outside of Dessau.<sup>2</sup> Unlike to the Bauhaus building in Dessau, the houses of the Bauhaus masters or the settlement Dessau-Törten, which were designed in the private office of Walter Gropius, the Bernau college was a project of the architecture class, established in 1928 by Hannes Meyer. The Trade Unions College gave the Bauhaus Dessau with its new architecture class and the associated facilities the chance to create a demonstration object, to show the productivity of the design school and to emerge credits.

The completed school building was the result of an architecture competition in 1928 in which six well-known German architects were invited to take part, for example Erich Mendelsohn and Max Taut. The prize and the assignment

to build the school was awarded to Hannes Meyer and Hans Wittwer because they designed a modern school building with a decentralized structure based on a well-conceived pedagogical concept.<sup>3</sup>

### The building concept by Meyer and Wittwer

The structure of the college and its buildings intend to reproduce socio-educational functions, based on a concept bound to the ideal of living and working in a community: learning as a social act and not only as an act of knowledge transfer. This concept is reflected in the architecture and the design of the college. With the decentralized configuration of the college in domains for learning (school building with seminars, classrooms, reading room and gymnasium), for living (separate houses for students and teaching staff) and for community (main wing with common rooms like auditorium, refectory, kitchen), students' sphere is compiled clearly. The blocks are laid out along the main line of the gently undulating land, connected by a glass corridor going from the main wing near the approaching road to the school building at the end point of the property. The landscape is utterly unspoiled, with the exception of a sports complex. The beautiful outlook from common rooms and living rooms is a document for the architects' intentions to forge close

3. Bundesschule des Allgemeinen Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes in Bernau, "Bau-Wettbewerbe" 1928, No. 33, pp. 1-7, 9-32.

1. Air view, 1930. Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf / Luftbildbestand



1. Die erste Bundesschule entsteht, "Gewerkschafts-Zeitung" (38)1928, No. 19, pp. 294-296; Die Bundesschule – Rede des Vorsitzenden des ADGB Peter Graßmann zur Eröffnung der Bundesschule in Bernau, "Gewerkschafts-Zeitung" (40)1930 No. 19, pp. 289-290, 290-292; Arthur Hessler, Die Bundesschule des ADGB, „Das freie Wort - Sozialdemokratisches Diskussionsorgan“ (2)1930, No. 18, pp. 1-5.

2. Lena Meyer-Berger (ed.), Hannes Meyer, Bauen und Gesellschaft. Schriften, Briefe, Projekte, Dresden 1980; Hannes Meyer 1889-1954 – Architekt Urbanist Lehrer, Berlin: Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, Deutsches Architekturmuseum Frankfurt/Main, ETH Zürich, 1989; Klaus-Jürgen Winkler, Der Architekt Hannes Meyer – Anschauungen und Werk, Berlin 1989; Hans-Jakob Wittwer, Hans Wittwer (1894-1952), Zürich: Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, Institut für Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur, 1985.



2. Refectory with annex building of the 1970s, 1998. BRENNE Gesellschaft von Architekten mbH, Berlin



3. Refectory with the reconstructed wintergarden, 2007. BRENNE Gesellschaft von Architekten mbH, Berlin

links between buildings and landscape.<sup>4</sup>

The college was built to accommodate 120 students. Meyer's concept was affected by Pestalozzi's theory of the small circle from which larger communities would emerge. The students' houses are the most significant buildings to explain this concept, motivated by pedagogical reasons. The 120 students are organized in 12 cells each of 10 members. Two students' room together and five of these groups of two form a cell (community of the floor) whose members live together separate from the others. The organisation in communities is supported by the use of colours, with a different coating for the students' houses. The blue, red, green, yellow and grey house give orientation for the students, a signage by colours. Even floor-to-floor the basic colour changes from light to dark. Outside of the student's houses the activities of daily living are organized by the whole community. Students eat together in the dining room or study together in the lecture room. Finally, all cells could be assembled together with teaching staff in the big auditorium hall, the dining room or stadium.<sup>5</sup>

The design of the buildings and the rooms follow purely functional thoughts. All buildings (except the school building with classrooms) have flat roofs, and have been carried out in yellow brick. Furthermore, the design of the façades is characterised by the materials: steel (steel windows), glass (prism glasses for windows, inside walls and ceilings) and concrete for the building construction, a frame construction by reinforced concrete, visible outside and inside. Meyers

4. Adolf Behne, Bundesschule in Bernau bei Berlin, "Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung" (51)1931, No. 14, pp. 213-222; Hannes Meyer, Die Bundesschule des ADGB in Bernau bei Berlin, [reprinted in:] Hannes Meyer, Bauen und Gesellschaft. Schriften, Briefe, Projekte, Dresden 1980, pp. 63-67.

5. Hannes Meyer, Erläuterungen zum Schulprojekt. Grundsätze der Gestaltung, "Bauhaus. Zeitschrift für Gestaltung" (2)1928, No. 2/3, pp. 14-16.

4. Houses for the students with the glass corridor before restoration, 1998. BRENNE Gesellschaft von Architekten mbH, Berlin



intention was to create honest architecture, based on the dynamism and the options of the used materials and their characteristics. It is the combination of construction, masonry with yellow bricks, steel windows, glass prisms for walls and ceilings creating the architecture.

The use of modern construction systems and building materials was a central favour in Meyer's philosophy of architecture. Meyer used the potentials of new constructions and materials to full capacity, as well for the design of the buildings. Meyer's view to comprehend architecture as an economical and technical process, to "organise life", always was affected to create reasonable, persuasive and economically justifiable answers relating to construction, technique and the design of a building. In Meyer's entry to the competition the students' houses should be erected with an ultra-modern skeleton frame structure with slight ceilings by system "Feifel".<sup>6</sup> This modular technique, similar to a construction kit, was not accepted by the building owner ADGB. Meyer and Wittwer had to fall back on a construction system for walls and ceilings (reinforced concrete) in combination with conventional masonry linings; a construction, which in 1930 had already be proved and tested for years.

#### Conversions and extensions (till 1990)

The Trade Union college of ADGB had only existed 3 years when the Nazis banned the trade unions and confiscated the building in 1933 for own purposes. During the Nazi period the site became a school for high-ranking SS officers. It's astonishing that the school complex was untroubled by conversions or extensions during that time. The only change: a baffle paint, applied to the façades.<sup>7</sup>

6. Ibidem.

7. Das Schicksal der ADGB-Bundesschule im Dritten Reich, Bernau: Verein Baudenkmal Bundesschule Bernau e.V., No. 6, 2007.

5. Houses for the students with the glass corridor, after restoration, 2007. BRENNE Gesellschaft von Architekten mbH, Berlin





6. Glass corridor before restoration, 1998. BRENNE Gesellschaft von Architekten mbH, Berlin



7. Glass corridor after restoration, 2007. BRENNE Gesellschaft von Architekten mbH, Berlin

After the war the East German Trade Union Federation (FDGB) used the school. The new owner extended the site, which was given the status of a Trade Union Academy. In the early 1950s the first plannings with additional buildings, compiled by architect Georg Waterstradt, let the school of the 1920s untouched. Waterstradt added buildings of almost the same size which stood in parallel to the existing school of 1930. In 1952 the politics changed in the GDR, closer to Soviet directives, as well as the official position about urban development and architecture. The official enacted architecture defamed Bauhaus architecture, too.

In the case of the ADGB-college a complete deformation of the entrance situation took place. A second storey was built onto the old entrance section and eliminated the original architecture by Meyer and Wittwer. Later on the original structure was disfigured by large annexes to the sections of the ADGB School that contained common rooms. A heating station was constructed adjoining the lecture hall and over time the original balance between the building and landscape has been severely compromised by infilling of new buildings and overgrowth of vegetation.<sup>8</sup>

#### The renovation project

After closing the FDGB Trade Union Academy in 1990, the college complex was unused for many years. It remained vacant for over a decade, threatened by vandalism. In 2001 the province Brandenburg, owner of the college complex, and the Handwerkskammer Berlin (Chamber of Crafts of Berlin) concluded a contract to reuse the former ADGB School as a boarding school.

The challenge was to visualize the covert architectural qualities of the Meyer-Wittwer building, which meant to set

8. The post-war reconstruction, extension and modifications are documented in: Die Bundesschule des ADGB in Bernau bei Berlin 1930-1993, Hannes Meyer und Hans Wittwer, "Arbeitshefte des Brandenburgischen Landesamtes für Denkmalpflege", No. 1, Potsdam 1993.

8. School building before restoration, 1998. BRENNE Gesellschaft von Architekten mbH, Berlin



free the building from the worst deformations of the postwar period. On the other hand the project was determined by the refurbishment and the conversion to a modern boarding school. Previously a building masterplan was compiled and measures for the preservation and the rebuilding were captured. This catalogue took into account the demolition of non-monument-relevant extensions of the postwar era as well as the exposition, conservation and restoration of the architecture from the Bauhaus period as well as parts of the building from the GDR era, worth to conserve.<sup>9</sup>

One basic idea of the restoration was to reactivate the structure of the 1930 building with its rooms, their special functions and correlations to each other. Some examples: the semicircular glass winter garden had been replaced with a second refectory in the 1970s. This extension, a masonry structure, was not only unsatisfactory for aesthetical reasons, but also in a bad structural condition. The glass corridor had been shortened by additional rooms, so that the connection between the entrance hall and the school building was cut abruptly. Also the school building with the gymnasium was modified structurally and aesthetically. The open area below the stairs and balcony had been walled off with plastered masonry, concealing the graceful asymmetry of the building. Working from the original plans it was possible to remove all these extensions and conversions from the 1970s and 1980s.

It also was essential to integrate architecture from the East German era into the today's school project. This concerns first and foremost the entrance situation of the school building, which was rebuilt completely in the 1950s as

9. The main assumptions of the master plan are published in: Winfried Brenne, Denkmalpflegerischer Rahmenplan ADGB Schule in Bernau [in:] Umgang mit Bauten der klassischen Moderne, Kolloquium am Bauhaus Dessau 1999, Dessau: Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau, 1999, pp. 20-25; Roland Schneider, Substanzfetischismus oder Rekonstruktionslust – Praxisalltag in der brandenburgischen Denkmalpflege, "Brandenburgische Denkmalpflege" (15) 2006, No. 1, pp. 52-63.

9. School-building after restoration, 2007. BRENNE Gesellschaft von Architekten mbH, Berlin





10. Refectory before restoration, 1998. BRENNE Gesellschaft von Architekten mbH, Berlin



11. Refectory after restoration, 2007. BRENNE Gesellschaft von Architekten mbH, Berlin

described above. First of all, it was impossible to reconstruct the former situation, because of the total loss of the original structure of the building. A second reason was – in the case of the entrance situation – the good quality of this post war building elements, referring to the building substance and the design. And last but not least it was an important fact in the renovation project to save the architecture of the 1950s, respectively to document the recent history of the school during the GDR period.

The entrance situation, including the foyer and the entrance hall, required a different approach. It was here that original substance from the 1950s clashes with original substance from the 1920s. For this special situation a solution was found, which combines elements from both periods with additions from today. Today the entrance area provides three time layers of the metamorphosis of the building, which documents the different use and construction phases of the monument very descriptively. The glass brick wall in the entrance hall is a reproduction, which became necessary to bring back the spatial impression of the hall, in correlation with the glass corridor and the refectory next to the hall. The glass bricks, identical to the original ones, were made in Portugal.

Many of the original elements had survived and were still intact, just covered by elements attached in the last 40 years, such as the original reinforced concrete construction and its glass brick ceiling in the refectory. The concrete construction was completely enclosed and the glass block ceiling was concealed by a suspended ceiling. These were re-exposed and conserved. Together with the reconstructed steel windows, which had been replaced by wooden windows, the refectory now has returned to its original design that beautifully has integrated the interior and exterior spaces surrounding this common room. Another example is the glass corridor. The original steel construction had survived, but the transparent character got lost, obscured by a wooden parapet. Today, after the restoration the glass corridor shows its original design: a light-filled corridor with bright red colour of the steel framing.

A main object of the restoration concept was the securing of original building substance, the restoration and the repair of unique elements, designed with the materials concrete, brick, steel and glass, which are so important for the primary concept of Meyer and Wittwer. The yellow brick façade with the concrete construction were repaired and cleaned without damage to the material. The original copper works at the roof also were in a good condition and fully operative. Just a clean-up was necessary. Inside of the building the pylons and beams of the concrete construction had nipped surfaces. This is an important detail for the interior design, which was lost for years since the rooms were converted in the 1970s or 1980s. Works of conservation and repair were sufficient to gain back the brilliance to the surfaces of the concrete elements.

The windows with fine steel frames are one of the most interesting features of the building, for innovative and technical reasons, special designed for the rooms, to offer a view and a connection with the surrounding countryside. The

steel windows for the refectory and for the external staircase are fascinating technical objects with a precise mechanical hardware, demonstrating the innovative character of the school.

Unfortunately, steel windows were replaced with wooden ones. This applies especially to the windows in the living rooms of the students' houses. But some windows had survived, so it was possible to make reproductions. The original steel windows were repaired, but assembled with double-pane glazing (for thermal quality) with minimal measurements. The application of double-pane glazing included the combination of float and mechanical drawn glass chosen to maintain the historical genuine character. Scarcely visible ventilation slits were placed underneath each window's metal plates to provide fresh air.<sup>10</sup>

The conservation and preservation of the original building substance determined the restoration of the building, as well as a sustainability-oriented building refurbishment. The ADGB school was restored completely in the years 2002-2007. In 2008 the project was awarded with the World Monuments Fund/Knoll Modernism prize, dedicated only to restoration projects concerning buildings of the modern movement.<sup>11</sup>

10. The most recent articles about the project: Thibaut de Ruyter, *Hannes Meyer ou l'architecture retrouvée*, "L'architecture d'aujourd'hui" (76)2006, No. 366, September-October, pp. 106-113; Falk Jaeger, *Glücksfall – Hannes Meyers Gewerkschaftsschule saniert*, "Deutsche BauZeitschrift" (DBZ) (55)2007, no. 3, p. 16; Simone Hain, *Differenz und Wiederholung – Zur Geschichte und Rekonstruktion der ADGB-Gewerkschaftsschule von Hannes Meyer*, "Archplus – Zeitschrift für Architektur und Städtebau" (40)2007, No. 183, pp. 2-5; Roland Schneider, *Die Bundesschule des ADGB im Spannungsfeld zwischen Moderne und Geschichte*, "Moderne trifft Geschichte – das Denkmal in der heutigen Zeit, Arbeitshefte des Brandenburgischen Landesamtes für Denkmalpflege", No. 17, Potsdam 2007, pp. 91-95; Manuel Pestalozzi, *Sachlich schön*, "Architektur & Technik – Schweizer Fachzeitschrift für Architektur, Bauwesen, Industrie und Technik", 2007, No. 8, pp. 10-12; Jan Gympel, *Überraschend gut erhalten – Ehemalige Bundesschule des ADGB, Bernau*, "Metamorphose – Bauen im Bestand" (2)2008, No. 8, pp. 52-54; Ulrich Brinkmann, *Zurück auf Meyer und Wittwer – Sanierung der Bundesschule des ADGB von Hannes Meyer und Hans Wittwer in Bernau: Winfred Brenne Architekten*, "Bauwelt" (99)2008, No. 8, pp. 17-25.

11. World Monuments Fund/Knoll Modernism Prize for Brenne Gesellschaft von Architekten mbH for the restoration of the Trade Union School ADGB (1928-1930), designed by Hannes Meyer and Hans Wittwer, New York 2008.

#### Project data

Year of construction:	1928-29 by Hannes Meyer and Hans Wittwer
TFA / NFA / TV	6715 m <sup>2</sup> / 3398 m <sup>2</sup> / 23875 m <sup>3</sup>
Address of project:	Hannes-Meyer-Campus 1 16 321 Bernau
Restoration period:	2002-2007
Building Cost:	7.8 m Euro / 1.162 Euro m <sup>2</sup> TFA
Client:	Handwerkskammer Berlin (Chamber of Crafts of Berlin)
Architect:	BRENNE Gesellschaft von Architekten mbH Rheinstrasse 45 12 161 Berlin fon: 0049 30 859079-0 fax: 0049 30 8594063 mail: mail@brenne-architekten.de www.brenne-architekten.de