

Falk Jaeger

# Temple of Abstraction

Fumihiko Maki and the  
Museum Reinhard Ernst



# The idea, the architect, the city

The idea of building a museum was the result of many thoughts that had been going through my head since the year 2008. Evidently my initial love of abstract art morphed gradually into a passion – and I became a collector. Alongside acquiring artworks, I also set about defining the focal points of my collection. And throughout I upheld the decision I had originally taken to only acquire artworks that I liked.

Europe (and in particular France and Germany), the USA, and Japan became the geographical regions in the collection. I attach special importance to artworks that were produced in the post-war period, meaning after 1945. Other features of the collection derived from my preference for using the collection to visualize the groups of artists that arose back then and personal links. I felt it important to consider not only the well-known and celebrated protagonists, but also unknown or forgotten artists who clearly were in no way inferior to the “Greats” – with reference to Europe, Japan, and the USA. The collection not only focuses on areas in line with my own interests but also offers an overview of abstract post-war art through to non-figurative contemporary art today.

As my 60th birthday approached, I started contemplating what should happen with the collection after my death. I got in touch with museums with the idea of bequeathing it, under the proviso that always at least ten to fifteen of the works in the collection would be presented at once.

After the initial discussions, I realized that this was hardly something museums could handle, given their limited hanging and storage space. In the final instance, they would probably only select individual key works, and my idea would then vanish along with the other works in a storeroom. I hadn't spent years collecting for that to happen.

I slowly came round to thinking of building my own storeroom in order to keep the artworks under ideal conditions. Back then, I was not imagining building my own museum.

In December 2009 – when it transpired that I would be able to shoulder the financing for the building – I entered into talks with the City of Limburg on building a museum for abstract art. Limburg was my first choice, as I had established both my companies there and was supported by the city authorities in doing so. To my great regret, as early as September 2010 the project proved to be unfeasible. Fumihiko Maki, who was already my preferred architect, had already prepared models and designs for the project, and we had invested a lot of time and money.

I had got to know Maki back in the 1990s in Japan through our mutual friends Mitsumasa Ito and the renowned sculptor Yoshi Iida. From the outset, we were on the same wavelength, and this evolved into a friendship over the years. We repeatedly met up when he visited Germany or I was in Japan, and Maki showed me the buildings he had designed, including many museums in Japan and the USA. I showed him the Rheingau and my collection, and he greeted both enthusiastically. He loves abstract art.

When the City of Limburg turned the idea down, it hit Maki less than it did me. I now know that he champions building a museum in the heart of a city. He encouraged me to approach the executives of the City of Wiesbaden, where we have lived since 2000.

Fumihiko Maki was not only a truly gifted architect (as his list of awards certainly shows), but also a special person. When I asked him in April 2011 whether, after the disastrous flooding in Japan, he could help our foundation do something for the people there, he agreed on the spot. Without him, we would not have managed to build our “House of Hope” in Japan, let alone hand it over to the City of Natori within the space of a year.

Maki was an architect without a star's pretensions, which were utterly alien to him. His buildings feel plain and simple but are actually planned and realized down to the smallest details – for the purpose for which they are intended. It was always clear to me: If I were ever to build a museum, then only with him! That was not just because of the museums he had designed and I had viewed, but primarily because of his style of perfect clean lines, somehow reminiscent of the Bauhaus, not to mention his convincing way of comporting himself and his pleasant staff – I had the pleasure of meeting quite a few of them very early on in the process.

Maki's practice is home to both young and experienced architects who all have one thing in common: excellent training and one of the best teachers one could imagine. This also applies to Michel van Ackere, a US architect who has lived in Japan for over 25 years now. We will return to him in the further course of this book, as he was Fumihiko Maki's right hand in the planning and realization of our museum. By “realization”, I mean all the planning ideas and details, from the door handles or the color concepts through to the designs for the counters and furniture.

The realization drawings and construction management lay in the highly able hands of renowned Frankfurt architects schneider+schumacher, whom we had selected together with Maki.

Times had changed in Wiesbaden. The plot at Wilhelmstrasse 1, where the “Victoria Hotel” had stood until it was destroyed by bombing during the war, subsequently became a car park. In 2012, the City of Wiesbaden resolved to build a municipal museum there. What I consider the unprofessional approach of those involved sadly led to a real dilemma. The CDU-SPD coalition in the city council stopped the project at the end of 2014, “owing to a lack of local support for it”. In the end, the city received only about a third of the original site or less than 6,000 square meters back from its contractual partner, to whom they had sold the land for the new museum.

That seemed to have been that. Only for the majority on the city council to resolve to erect a hotel at Wilhelmstrasse 1 – flying in the face of the original idea of siting a public building there.

This was fiercely opposed by both political executives and by members of the population, something that culminated in the then Lord Mayor convening a first citizens' participation process.





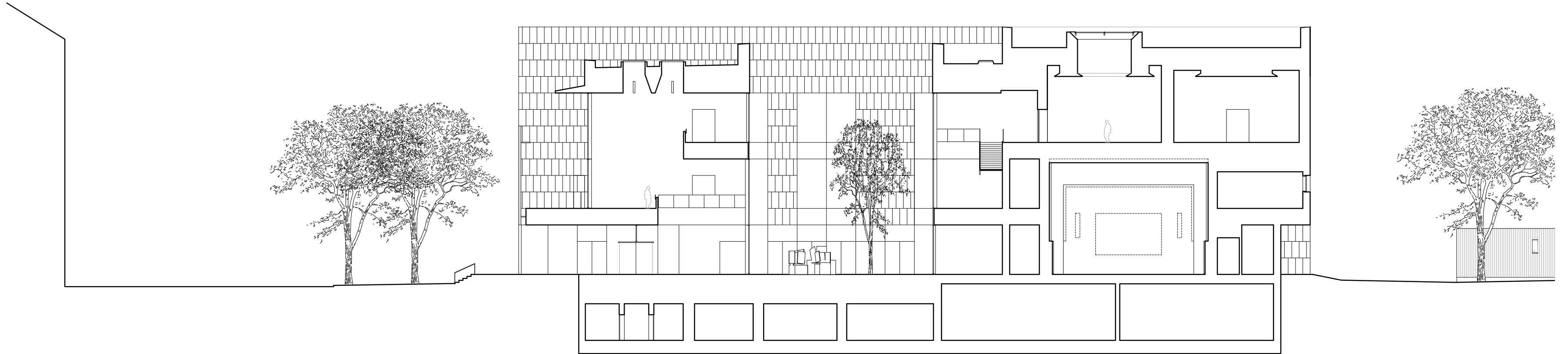
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# Do you love abstract art?

## Questions to Fumihiko Maki



### *Do you love abstract art?*

Generally speaking, yes – but of course, it depends on the artist and the particular painting. The development of abstract art occurred right alongside my own career, so I have followed its trajectory and am familiar with many of the artists in Mr. Ernst's collection.

*What are the correlations between abstract art and architecture? How do you see the relationship between abstract art and expressionist, modern, or postmodern architecture? Where do you see the most equivalents?*

I haven't really thought too much about these correlations. Architecture has to serve so many functions – for the visitor, for the client, for the city – whereas art is more free; it can be experienced or not experienced, depending almost entirely on the individual will. You do not have to go

into the building to see the paintings if you don't want to, but the building itself will still exist in the city and affect your life. So art and architecture are very different things, and difficult to correlate for me.

*In your opinion, how important is the architecture of an art museum with regard to the exhibits? Should it withdraw as much as possible ("white cube" principle)? Or should it develop an autonomous formal intrinsic value?*

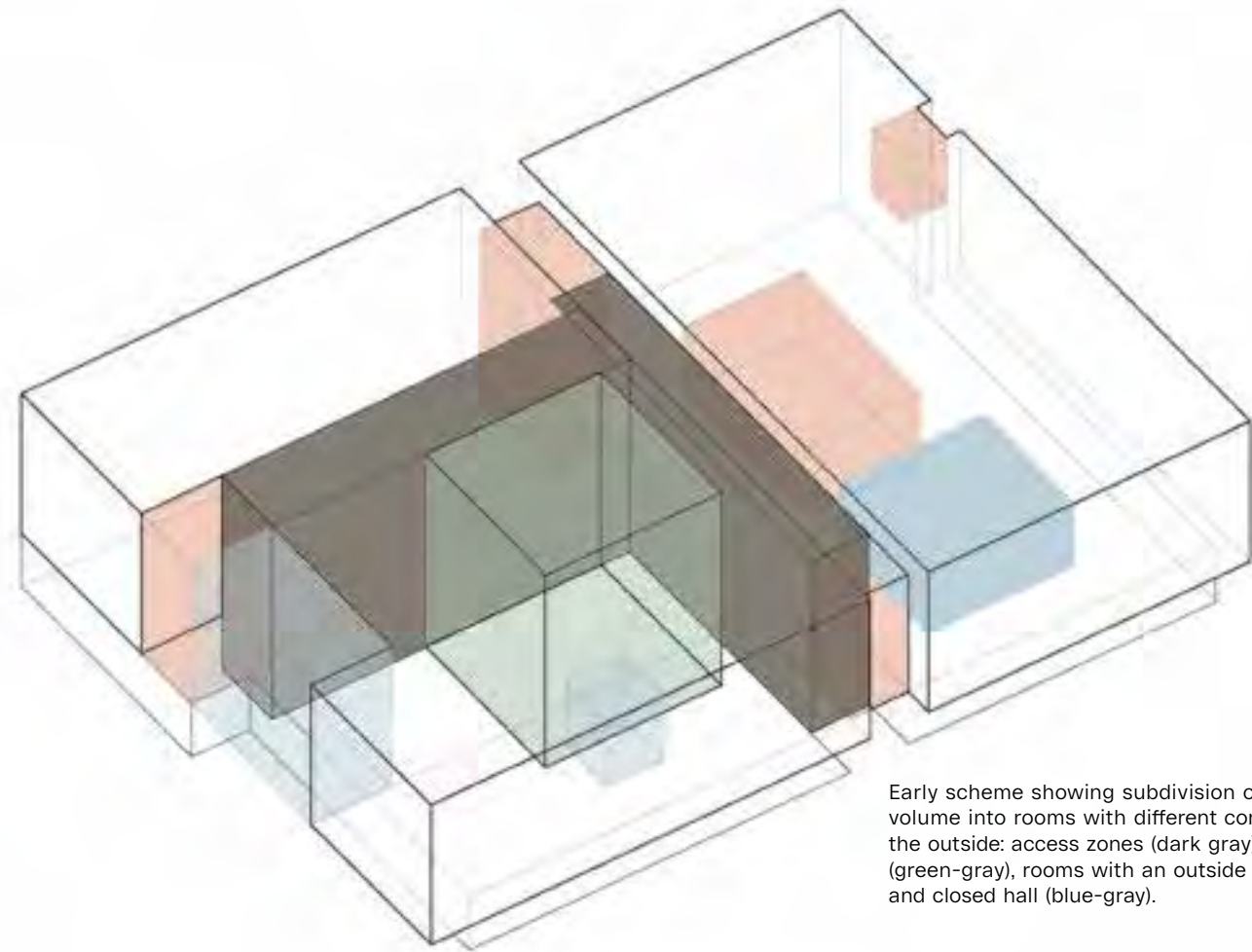
In developing this museum, it was my intention to create a "world of art", albeit within a limited site and building. It was important that the visitor experience be enjoyable above all else – this was clear from my conversations with Mr. Ernst. Whatever intrinsic formal values developed are intended

to serve this purpose, rather than existing for their own sake. And the containers for art are, as far as possible, open white spaces where the art itself takes center stage.

In many cases, we have designed museums where we weren't very familiar with the exhibition content. In Wiesbaden, we knew the collection well from the start, but it is still evolving. Because of that, we thought the galleries should not be too specific. The collection is larger than the museum, so paintings will be rotating in and out of galleries, and the curatorial input is not yet available. So, overall, an abstract, white-cube approach seemed the most appropriate.

*What role does natural light play throughout the museum and especially in the exhibition spaces?*

We are always enthusiastic to have natural light throughout museums and even in exhibition spaces. This is always tempered by the opinion of the curators, and the need for stricter and stricter regulation of light and temperature to protect the art. The balance struck here is to make the public spaces very open to a sheltered central courtyard, and then introduce "borrowed" light to exhibition spaces via openings to the public spaces (rather than openings directly to the outside). This allows some indirect natural light to enter galleries and creates diagonal views through and across the museum, which Reinhard wanted. A few north-facing openings directly to the exterior were also allowed.



Early scheme showing subdivision of the building volume into rooms with different connections to the outside: access zones (dark gray), open atrium (green-gray), rooms with an outside connection (red), and closed hall (blue-gray).

While two of the special exhibition rooms include skylights, most of the gallery ceilings are sealed. Natural light is introduced horizontally and is intended to brighten the spaces rather than the art. The art relies mostly on LED lighting for proper display.

*Forced tour or matrix – which organization of the exhibition area do you prefer?*

My preference is for a matrix. However, it is good if this matrix has enough clarity so that visitors can create their own route – one that ensures all exhibits are seen. That was our intention in Wiesbaden.

*How do you react to the arrangement of the structures in the environment around the building?*

As the site is located at the edge of the city center (with its larger institutions) and a more residential area (with individual

villa-type homes), the museum massing tries to reflect both scales. It starts as a single large volume that preserves the streetlines along Rheinstrasse and Wilhelmstrasse. This volume is then internally articulated to reflect the purpose and respond to the surrounding buildings that are smaller in scale.

*You design bigger complexes mostly as a composition of cubes with changing directions and angles. Why did you return to the orthogonal arrangement of the cubes in Wiesbaden?*

Because the site of the building is limited, and its context largely orthogonal, it made sense to work within this orthogonal vocabulary as well. Also, as the art collection itself is graphically energetic, we thought it better if the building recedes somewhat, remaining more neutral and formally restrained.

*Is your design in the “International Style”, or is there something “Japanese” about your creation for Wiesbaden?*

My design is neither purposefully international nor Japanese. Like any building, it is the result of many complex factors. Perhaps it is better for visitors themselves to judge whether it has Japanese influence or not. Certainly, the central courtyard garden is inspired by some traditional materials and ideas, but in other ways the connection is not intentional – though it could perhaps be interpreted that way.

*You are not considered to be an architect with a recognizable individual style, but rather you take a new formal approach to every single project. That means a client cannot just order “a Maki” from you, which would have a brand character. Is the individual “handwriting” of the architect not as important as that of the poet or composer?*

Every client, context, and development is different, so it seems natural to me that – if one takes these demands seriously – different buildings in different locations and satisfying different needs would not look alike, even if they are by the same architect. At the same time, there are certainly themes that permeate my work, though perhaps they’re not evident at first glance. I work to avoid iconic, overly personal, and highly expressive architecture, choosing instead to focus my energy on developing rich and humane spaces that inspire visitors. I hope that this spatial richness transcends trends and icons and gives my buildings a broader cultural meaning. This is far more important to me than the development of an architectural “brand.”



Final distribution of the public areas on the three main floors. Access and ancillary spaces (gray), exhibition areas (brown).





# Timeline

2016		Proposal for construction of a museum presented to the City of Wiesbaden
2016	07/14	Public participation procedure for use of the site
2017	03/17	Resolution of acceptance by the city council
2017	12/22	Leasehold agreement with the City of Wiesbaden for 99 years Planning contract awarded to the architect Fumihiko Maki
2018		Building permit
2019	08/30	Laying of the foundation stone
2021		Completion of the shell construction Installation of the artwork <i>Pair</i> by Tony Cragg
2022		Start of interior fit-out Installation of the artworks <i>Buscando la luz III</i> by Eduardo Chillida <i>Kraken-Migof</i> by Bernard Schultze
2023		Installation of the artworks <i>Ein Glas Wasser, bitte</i> by Katharina Grosse <i>Vertical Highway</i> by Bettina Pousttchi <i>Wandering Thoughts</i> by MadC
2024	06/23	Opening





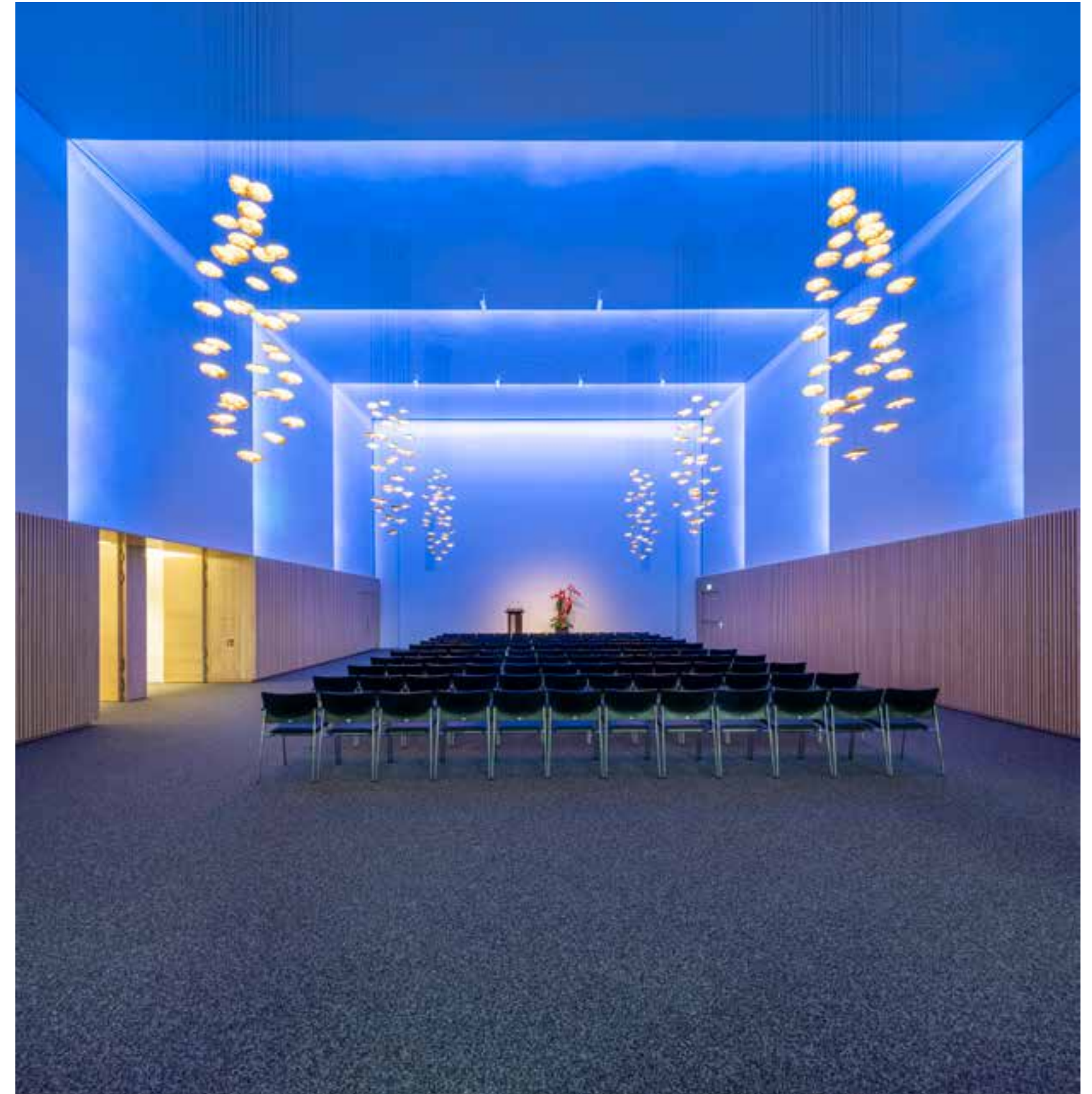
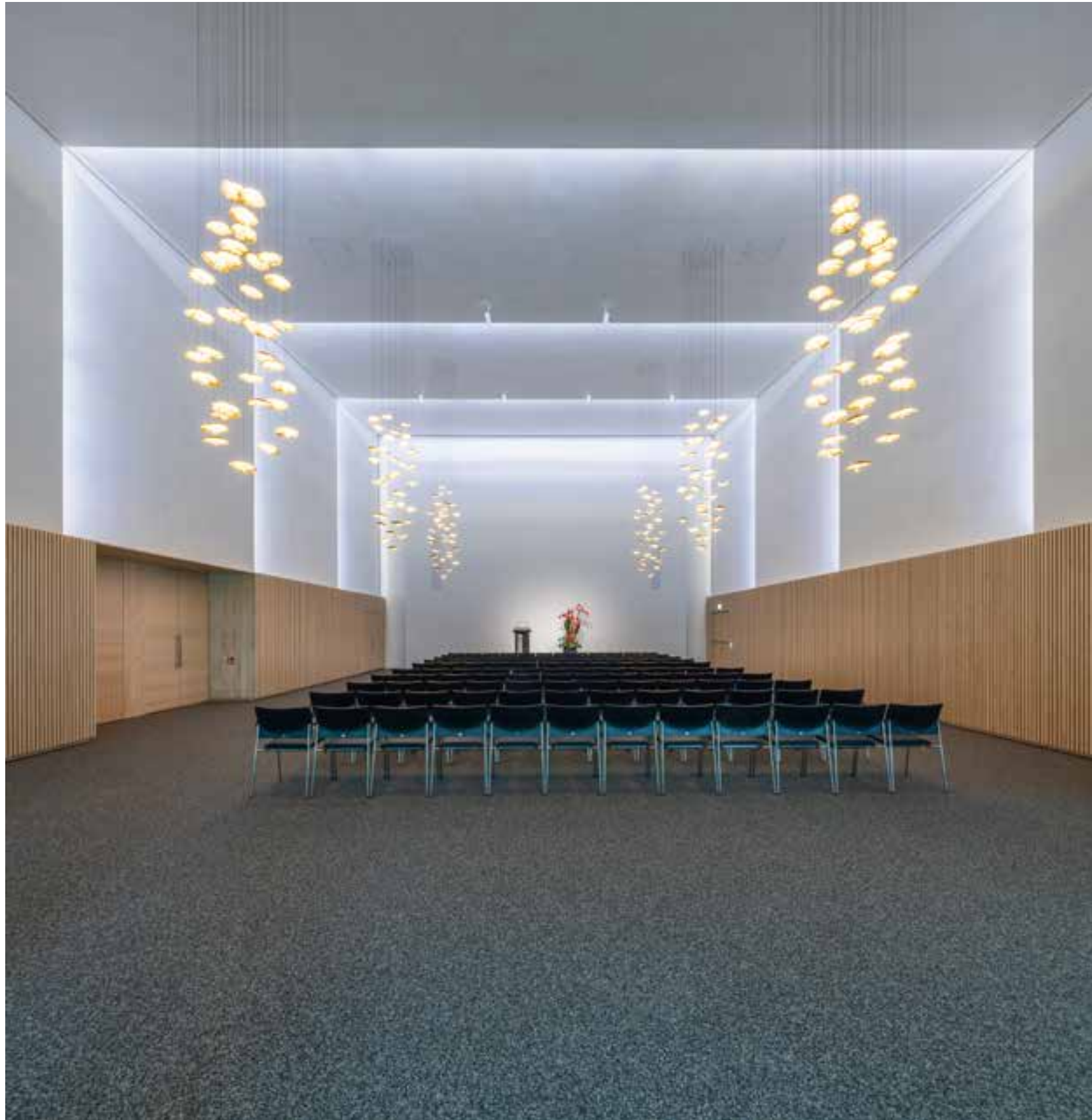










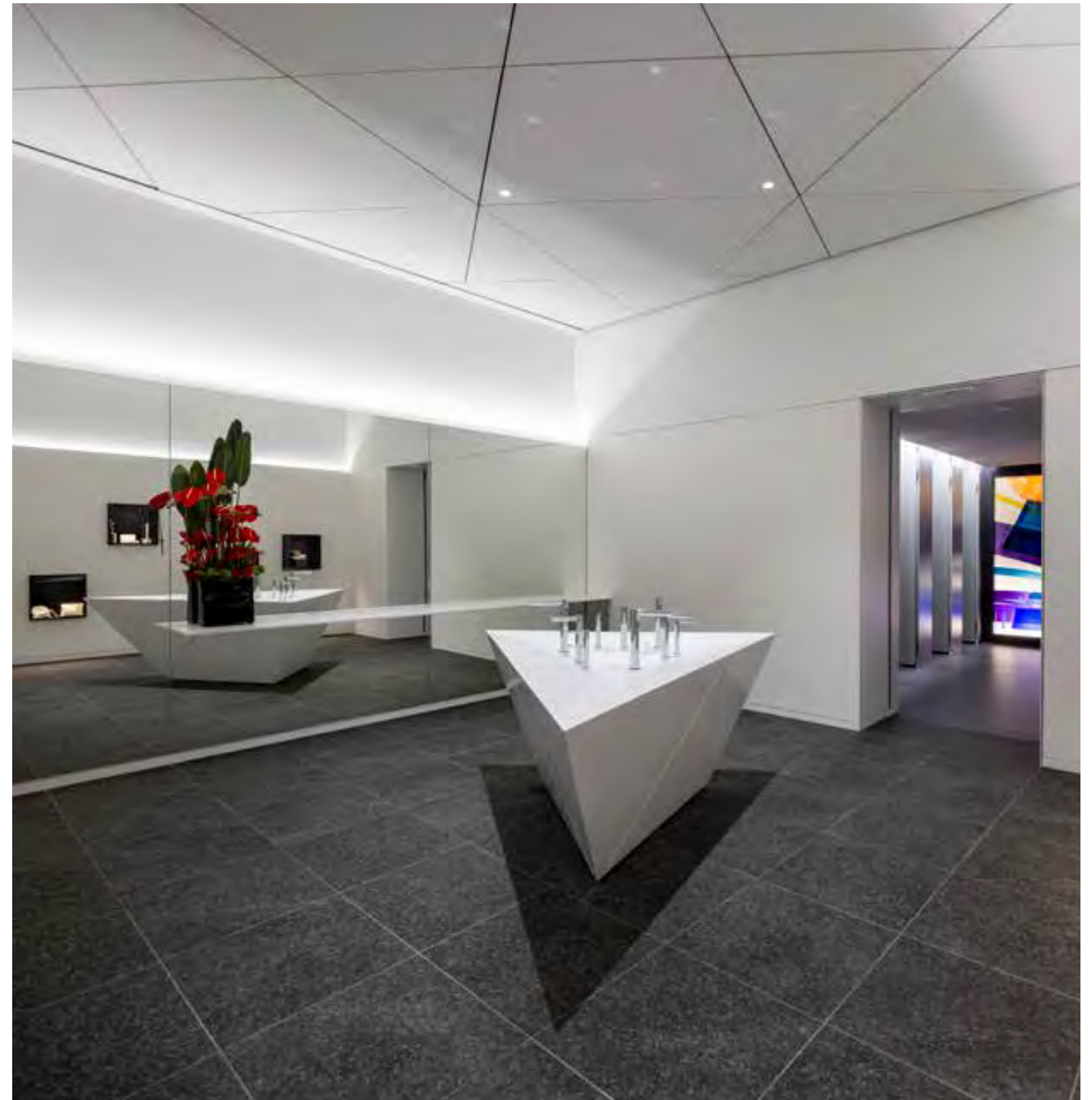
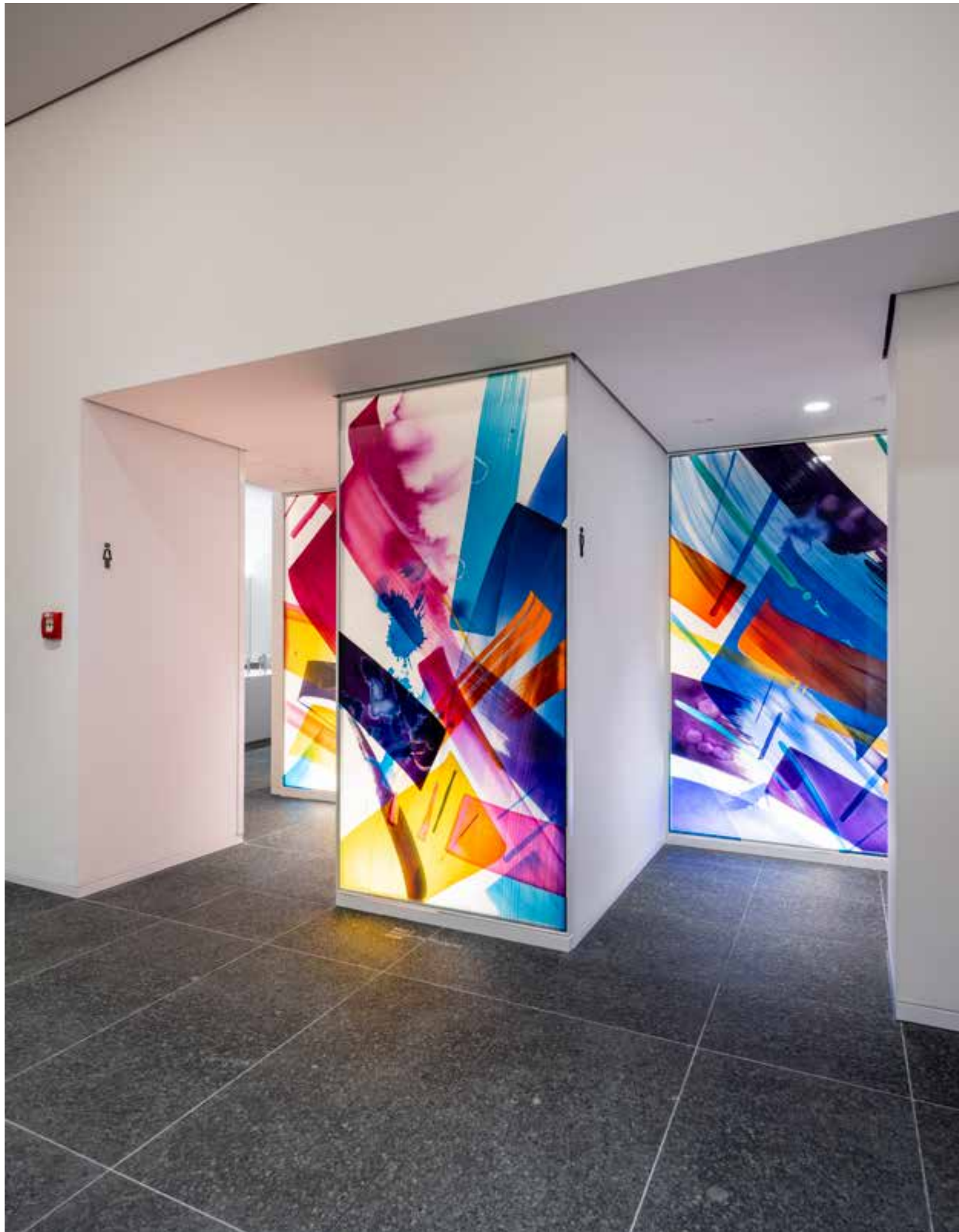


The Maki Forum is an elegant, exquisitely designed meeting room that can be set to a wide variety of room moods using a sophisticated lighting system. Acoustic plaster, wood, and carpeting create a cozy atmosphere.











# Facts and figures

## Building owner

Reinhard & Sonja Ernst Foundation  
Wilhelmstrasse 62  
65183 Wiesbaden  
www.ernst-stiftung.de  
Telephone (0 61 98) 58 54 09–70  
info@ernst-stiftung.de

## Location

Wilhelmstrasse 1  
65185 Wiesbaden

## Coordinates

50.0875 8.246

## Dimensions

46 × 65 × 20 m

## Effective floor area

9,700 m<sup>2</sup>

## Exhibition area

Approx. 2,500 m<sup>2</sup>

## Gross construction costs

Over 80 million euros

# Project participants

## Building owner

Reinhard & Sonja Ernst Foundation,  
Wiesbaden

## Architect

Fumihiko Maki and Associates, Tokyo  
Project management: Michel van Ackere

## General planner, planning and construction supervision

schneider+schumacher Bau  
und Projektmanagement GmbH,  
Frankfurt am Main

## Structural engineers

B+G Ingenieure Bollinger und  
Grohmann GmbH, Frankfurt am Main

## Fire protection consultant

Ralf Höhmann, TÜV Technische  
Überwachung Hessen GmbH, Frankfurt  
am Main, and icr ingenieur consulting  
rücker, Darmstadt

## Shell construction

Arge Karl Gemünden GmbH & Co. KG,  
Ingelheim am Rhein, and Wolff und  
Müller GmbH & Co. KG, Karlsruhe

## Steel and metal construction

Huhle Stahl- und Metallbau GmbH,  
Wiesbaden

## Drywall construction

Lindner SE, Frankfurt am Main

## Metal façade construction

Rupert App GmbH + Co,  
Leutkirch im Allgäu

## Natural stone façades

Hofmann Naturstein GmbH & Co. KG,  
Werbach-Gamburg

## Roof covering

Dachdeckermeister Willy A. Löw AG,  
Bad Homburg

## Open space planning

GTL Michael Triebswetter  
Landschaftsarchitekt GbR, Kassel,  
and Makoto Noborisaka,  
Blue Ocean Design, Tokyo

## Building services planning and supervision

FC-Planung GmbH, Eschborn

## Lighting design

Belzner Holmes und Partner LDE  
Light-Design, PartG mbH, Stuttgart

## Media technology

Sonus GmbH, Ettlingen

## Catering planning

Lohberger Küchen Competence Center  
GmbH, Schalchen (AU)

## Glasswork

DERIX GLASSTUDIOS GmbH & Co. KG,  
Taunusstein-Wehen

## Type design

Fabian Dornecker, La Bolde Vita,  
Leipzig (typeface: mre Grotesk)

## Pictograms, signage

Q Kreativgesellschaft mbH, Wiesbaden

# Authors

## Reinhard Ernst

Born in the Dillhausen district of Mengerskirchen, after high school Ernst completed an apprenticeship at a Hamburg forwarding company to become a forwarding agent. After military service, he moved to a Japanese entertainment electronics company as head of logistics. In 1971, he joined Harmonic Drive Systems, a newly founded corporation in Langen that distributed high-precision drives made in Japan and the USA, and then embarked on an entrepreneurial career in 1981 with his management buyout of the company. Since 2000, high-precision drives have been developed, manufactured, and marketed in Limburg/Lahn. Parallel to this, in 2006 Ernst founded OVALO GmbH, which makes drives for the automotive sector. By the time both firms were sold in 2016, they had a joint payroll of over 500 staff members.

## Prof. Dr.-Ing. (arch.) Falk Jaeger

Jaeger studied architecture and art history in Braunschweig, Stuttgart, and Tübingen before being awarded a doctorate at Hanover University. From 1983 to 1988 he was a research assistant at the TU Berlin Institut für Baugeschichte und Bauaufnahme and went on to lecture at various universities; from 1993 to 2000 he held the Chair of Architecture Theory at TU Dresden. He has been awarded Critics' Prizes by the Federal Chamber of German Architects, the AIV, and the German Cultural Heritage Committee. Jaeger lives in Berlin and since 1976 has also freelanced as an architecture critic for both daily newspapers and the specialist press, for TV and radio, and as a publicist and curator. He has published more than 40 books.





Patron Reinhard Ernst plans a home for his unique collection of abstract art, the City of Wiesbaden provides the site in the heart of the city, and Japanese star architect Fumihiko Maki supplies the plans. The Museum Reinhard Ernst is the final masterpiece by the Pritzker Prize winner and was opened just a few days after his death. The result is an architectural gem, but also a low-threshold space that welcomes the general public and offers an attraction for international art-lovers.

This richly illustrated book presents the “Temple of Abstraction” with all its architectural aspects and portrays it as an example of a contemporary museum.

The author, Prof. Dr. Falk Jaeger, is a building historian, architecture critic, and publicist living in Berlin. He writes for major daily newspapers and specialist media and has published more than 40 books on architecture, urban planning, and monument preservation.