



# All buildings have their own personality

Kister scheithauer gross architekten renovate old buildings and build new ones in a sustainable way

TEXT: JESSICA POMMER | PHOTOS: KSG ARCHITEKTEN

For the architects of kister scheithauer gross buildings should either write history or radiate their history. All new buildings are constructed in a way that gives them a unique character and reflects their function. Old buildings are considered as valuable

remnants of past times and are treated with diligence when they are renovated so that their character is preserved.

Over 20 years ago, in the year 1992, the young architects Johannes Kister and Reinhard Scheithauer founded their architectural office Kister Scheithauer & partner in Cologne. Five years later Susanne Gross joined the duo and they formed the trio kister scheithauer gross architekten und stadtplaner (ksg). Nowadays, over 50 professional architects and interior designers at two premises – Cologne and Leipzig – work daily on the concept of kister scheithauer gross: to put into practice an in-depth dialogue between the location and the function of a building.

One example for the realization of ksg's architectural concept is the construction of a research laboratory for the German Aerospace Centre (DLR) in Bremen: the façade consists of anthracite-coloured ceramic tiles that resemble the shell of a space shuttle and reflects the highly complex interior of advanced and sterile research labs that are annexed to the already existing building of the DLR by a bridge.

Another important characteristic of ksg's work is sustainability. By transforming old buildings into present-day living space architectural history is saved for present and future generations and resources are used in an ecology-friendly manner. "In order to renovate an old building successfully we have to operate like a doctor: we have to get



Prof. Johannes Kister & Prof. Susanne Gross  
Photo: Wilfried Dechau

to know every detail of our patient and elaborate an anamnesis. We don't try to give a young face to an 80 year-old building. We try to preserve the substance and keep the edifice's dignity and character," says Johannes Kister. By using the old substance energy is saved as a lot of the material doesn't have to be destroyed, newly purchased and transported anymore.

One signature renovation project was the refurbishment of the granary situated along Cologne's old Rheinauhafen harbour front. Comprising several houses with pointed roofs it has affectionately been called "Siebengebirge" by locals, alluding to the regional mountain massif consisting of seven mountains. As after the War the Rheinauhafen turned into wasteland, the Siebengebirge granary also lost face. The renovation of the complex steel-framed building originally built in 1908 by Hans Verbeek seemed impossible to do. A particular challenge was to consider the vast building depth and low storey height with regards to natural lighting. In order to secure the building's heritage the ksg architects renounced integrating atriums. Instead, they created open plan layouts and glass loggias. Over 130 flats were built with attractive commercial areas on the ground floor within a revitalised harbour area.

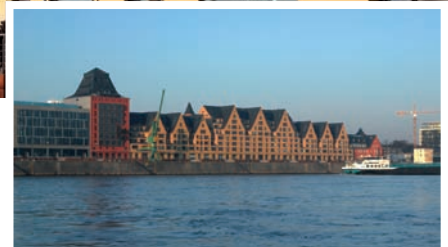
When ksg dedicate their time to building new buildings they try to ensure sustainability by using high-quality materials, integrating natural light, generous proportions and sufficient ventilation. Furthermore, they aim to design timeless, beautiful frames.

Within 20 years ksg architects have garnered numerous nominations and awards for their work. Recently, they won first prize for the realization of a sewage system edifice in Cologne or in 2012 first prize for the design of the engineering faculty's campus of the Cologne University of Applied Sciences in a town planning competition. One cornerstone project for which ksg received first prize was the construction of a new synagogue in the Southern German town of Ulm. The old synagogue had been destroyed by the Nazis in 1938, so building a new synagogue was a specific, delicate chal-



lenge. The new Weinhof synagogue has a detached position which integrates it into this highly sensitive location. It has no structural border. It is a place of peace as all the city's distractions are blocked off via the enclosed playground.

Is there any building which stimulates the imagination of the experienced ksg architects? For Johannes Kister, who also gives lectures at the design school Bauhaus Dessau, it is the inconspicuous distribution centre of the now-defunct German retail company Quelle in Nuremberg. Kister regards it as the "biggest built Gesamtkunstwerk of modernity". "Its outer appearance reflects its past function and is a representative type of the Bauhaus movement," summarizes Kister. On behalf of an investor Kister has now developed a masterplan for the renovation of this monument of the post-war Wirtschaftswunder. He wants to transform the unit into an assembly of community, sports and living facilities.



[www.ksg-architekten.info](http://www.ksg-architekten.info)

Opposite, main image:  
DLR Bremen. Photo: Yohan Zerdoun

This page, top:  
Siebengebirge Cologne. Photo: Christoph Seelbach

Above:  
Synagoge Ulm. Photo: Yohan Zerdoun

Below:  
Quelle Nuremberg. © KSG

