



t-hoch-n ZIVILTECHNIKER GmbH

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Press-Information
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The Castle Merkenstein Chapel - A Contemplative Space Finds New Expression

The rebuilding of a chapel on a private estate was a new kind of commission for t-hoch-n, one that extended well beyond historic reconstruction. The building, which has undergone the cycle of ruin and reconstruction more than once in its history, was transformed into a model of the allegory of preserving tradition not as ashes but as fire.

(Text: Theresia Hauenfels // Translation: Ada Anastasia Brown Brant)

Sacred Refuge in a Landscape Garden

The setting is the landscape garden surrounding Merkenstein Castle near Bad Vöslau, which was destroyed by the Ottomans in 1683. Merkenstein Castle, designed in English Tudor style by architects Johann Julius Romano and August Schwendenwein during the era of romantic historicism, was built near the ruins in 1843 for Joachim Eduard Graf von Münch-Bellinghausen, who had purchased the manor from Count Dietrichstein. The chapel is situated on the grounds to the southeast of the monumental residence. The exact date of the compact religious building is no longer known, but it is certain that Countess Elizabeth von Dietrichstein had the then-dilapidated chapel rebuilt "for use as a church" in 1820. During her lifetime, the chancel was rebuilt and a wooden bell tower was added to the roof.

Revitalization with a View

When Peter Wiesinger, who runs the Vienna office of t-hoch-n together with Gerhard Binder and Andreas Pichler, acquired the ensemble, not much more than the outer walls were left of the Merkenstein "Marienkapelle", and they were overgrown with vegetation. Encouraged and supported with by the dedication of the grandmothers of both his own family and his in-laws, the architect committed himself to the task, and t-hoch-n began the work of bringing the ruins back to life. Rather than using cement, a historically authentic mixture of lime and sand was employed. The Federal Office of Monuments supported the ambitious project. At the outset, the architecture firm, which is known for its confidently expressive profiles, considered erecting a flat roof above the relics. Ultimately they decided on a modern interpretation of the original roof shape. The choir and nave are differentiated on the exterior by two pitched roofs at differing heights. The intersection of the two volumes is glazed, creating a slot of light from above that brings daylight into the prayer space. The roof was rebuilt with the aid of historic drawings and documents. The paired rafters carrying the roof give a lightweight feel to the wooden structure, which is finished in oiled larch. The ventilated roof assembly was doubly shingled with Vienna-style roofing tiles, clasped with copperwork fastenings.

Open for Art

The Merkenstein "Kränzel-Kapelle", as the locals call it, is an open-door church. Accordingly, no locks were installed, and the oaken front door is equipped only with a door handle. t-hoch-n gave the task of designing it to sculptor Florian Schaumberger. The steel sculpture the artist created is shaped like furled bark. Jesuit priest Dr. Gustav Schörghofer, jury chairman for the Otto Mauer Prize, aptly described it: "The piece of steel forged by Florian Schaumberger doesn't merely depict something that was destroyed; it also creates inner spaces, protective zones. The metal encloses something, much like protective arms that wrap around and conceal something." On entering the chapel, the light invites visitors to let the brightly painted interior take effect on them in the silence. The gap of light of the glazed incision in the wooden ceiling and a narrow lancet window in the sanctuary open up the space capsule to nature, replete with the rustling of leaves.

Complex Interplay of Light

The remaining four windows serve a different function, inevitably recalling the text of Goethe's poem Songs (Gedichte sind gemalte Fensterscheiben): "But let us now inside repair / And greet the holy chapel there! / At once the whole seem clear and bright / Each ornament is bathed in light, / And fraught with meaning to the sight. / God's children! thus your fortune prize, / Be edified, and feast your eyes!" The stained glass window created by Sabine Wiedenhofer for Merkenstein is a harmonic composition of a wide spectrum of colors. The varying depths of the cubic glass prisms refract the light into a special blend of colors. They don't follow any strict pattern of ornamentation, but are a lively image of the building blocks that make up the stations of life for each individual. The artist explains, "I deliberately chose a rectangular prism, because it also symbolizes humility. If we were to unfold it, it would make a cross." The cross at the altar is also by Sabine Wiedenhofer. The glass pieces were fabricated in Murano by the Berengo Studio, which has extensive experience working with contemporary artists. The window frame is made of weather-resistant oak framework. Vertical divisions of the window were consciously avoided.

Lines Formed in Consistency

The cubic shape of the glass blocks is repeated in the purist lamps that form a graphic extension of the linear pattern formed by the spare crossbraces of black steel that take up the load of the tensile forces. The

furnishings also continue the concept of the line transformed into space: the oak benches, fitted with plain backrests, provide seating for 24 people. Travertine was used for the baptismal font designed by t-hoch-n as well as for the flooring. The choice of material was prompted by the steps that were preserved from the original building. Embedded in the floor is a crypt in which the lord of the manor, Adolf Freiherr von Brenner-Felsach was interred in 1883. The cycle of life always begins anew, however: as the first solemn act in the revitalized house of God, Leonard, the youngest inhabitant of Merkenstein, was baptized.

Refreshing Break

The firm of t-hoch-n gave a modern accent to the ensemble with the centrally located pool area. The spacious wooden tanning deck frames the water: the 20 x 4.75 x 1.5 meter pool is surrounded by a natural pond that keeps the water clean using the active oxygen method. A thin strip of stainless steel separates the two bodies of water. The equipment for the pool system was positioned below the wooden deck, hidden from view. Maximizing the topography, the swimming pool was integrated into the site in such a way that it is not seen from the gated entrance to the property. The open-air kitchen and dining area make spending time outdoors more comfortable. The stepped floor, which provides a surface for seating and reclining, is made of travertine. The kitchen itself is finished in Max panels. A shed was built at the rear of the property for equipment needed for tending to the garden. The 10 x 5.5 meter wood-frame structure is entered through a pair of sliding doors and is clad in larch clapboard. Copperplated connectors at the roof and parapet and in the door hardware create a horizontal opening. The cubic wooden building also functions as a workshop.

After all, in the 18th century, the writer Luc de Clapiers, Marquis de Vauvenargues, remarked: "La jouissance est le fruit et la récompense du travail." - "The fruit of labor is the sweetest of all pleasures."

Projektdaten / Technische Daten:

Project: Merkenstein: Chapel & Open Space Design

located: Castle Merkenstein, 2540 Bad Vöslau, Lower Austria

Architecture:

t-hoch-n Ziviltechniker GmbH

Margaretenstraße 28/3, 1040 Wien, Vienna - Austria

Project management: Gerhard Binder

Project participation: Armin Draxl

Start of planning: 01-2013

End of planning: 08-2013

Start of construction: 08-2013

Handing over: 06-2014

Art within architecture:

Windows of the Merkenstein Chapel:

Sabine Wiedenhofer

Represented by:

Gallery Kovacek

Spiegelgasse 12, 1010 Wien

<http://www.wiedenhofer.cc/>

Sculptural door handle:

Florian Schaumberger:

Unterpfinnigsteigmühle, 2094 Eibenstein 20

<http://florian.schaumberger.net/>

Materials / Credits:

Photos of the project: © Rupert Steiner:

<http://www.rupertsteiner.com/project.php?id=4254>

More Materials: [t-hoch-n-Dropbox](#)

Photos: t-hoch-n/Martina Hartl

Plans: t-hoch-n

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