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Minimum Documentation Fiche 2009

International working party for
documentation and conservation

of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the
modern movement

composed by national/regional working party of:

Germany

The Reichsbank extension (1934-1940) / Federal Foreign Office (1996-2000)



depicted item: Federal Foreign Office, front Unterwasserstrasse

source: Ulrich Borgert

date: 2010

	db code
1. Identity of building/group of buildings/urban scheme/landscape/garden	
1.1 current name of building: Federal Foreign Office	3
1.2 variant or former name: Reichsbank extension building	4
1.3 number & name of street: Werderscher Markt 1	5
1.4 Town: Berlin	6
1.5 Province/state: Berlin	7
1.6 zip code: D-10117	8
1.7 Country: Germany	9
1.8 national grid reference:	10

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1.9	classification/typology: ADM / COM	11
1.10	protection status & date: The former Reichsbank, built 1934-1940 by Heinrich Wolff, is listed as an architectural monument. Since 2000 the Federal Foreign Office has its seat here, using the former Reichsbank building, in conjunction with a new building of 1999 (architects: Thomas Müller / Ivan Reimann). The new building is not part of the monument.	12
2	History of building	
2.1	original brief/purpose: new building (extension) for the German central bank, in direct neighbourhood of the older central bank, built 1872-1877 by the architect Friedrich Hitzig (after the constitution of the "Deutsches Reich" in the year 1871), extended 1890 by architect Max Hasak.	13
2.2	dates: commission/completion: The history of the central bank extension building begins with a remarkable competition in February-April 1933, a few days later when the Nazis came to power in January 1933. Because the plannings for the competition started 1932, it was possible to invite 30 of the foremost German architects to take part, including architects representing the modern movement, like Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, Otto Haesler, Richard Döcker, Wilhelm Riphahn. But the new political situation, the influence of the Nazis on the competition proceedings prevented the competition itself and a democratic result. So the competition jury was forced to decide no one of the architects contribution to award with a prize or to nominate for the assignment to build the new central bank. When the competition starts the 30 invited architects couldn't know, that the directorate of the central bank still had made separate plannings for a new extension building since 1930. Heinrich Wolff, head of the central banks building department, had drawn draft plans for a new building before the competition started. When the competition was finished, Hitler himself decided to use Wolffs design (with modifications) for the new "Reichsbank" extension building. Construction period / date: February/April 1933: competition 20.September 1933: Hitlers decision in favour of Wolffs design September 1933 – April 1934: demolition work 5.May 1934: laying of the foundation stone 8.July 1937: topping-out ceremony January 1939: move in of the first departments March 1940: move in of the last departments	14
2.3	Architectural and other designers: Responsible for the planning and the final design of the central bank extension was Heinrich Wolff, head of the central banks building department since 1926. Responsible for the statics of the building was the consortium office "Mensch & Padler" (Gerhard Mensch: structural engineering / Georg Padler: civil engineering)	15

- 2.4 others associated with building: 16
 art for architecture:
 Josef Thorak, sculptor; Ludwig Gies, sculptor; Paul Bronich, sculptor; Ferdinand Paul Krüger, artist blacksmith; Julius Schramm, artist blacksmith; Julius Starcke, metal founder; Fritz Erler, wall pictures (mosaic); Harold Bengen, ceiling pictures; Ferdinand Spiegel, wall pictures; Paul Merlin, sculptor; Wilhelm Repsold, sculptor; Richard Pfeiffer, paintings; Hans Pfeiffer, sculptor; Hans Uhl, glass painting
- 2.5 significant alterations with dates: 17
- War damage:
 From the outside the Reichsbank extension appeared virtually untouched at the end of the war. In fact the stable steel-frame construction with reinforced block ceilings and concrete roofs had proved advantageous. But inside walls and ceilings were completely destroyed and most of the rooms were burned out.
- Berlin Stadtkontor (1945-1949):
 After the war the Soviet occupation authorities founded the Berlin Stadtkontor in the Reichsbank to ensure ongoing execution of basic monetary transactions. Building activity was commensurate with the situation immediately after the war and consisted mainly of essential repair.
- The Ministry of Finance of the German Democratic Republic (1949-1958):
 With the founding of the GDR 1949 the former Reichsbank extension building was used by the Ministry of Finance. In the context of rebuilding with extensive cleaning, repair, restoration and renovation work the building became a completely new internal structure with massive partitions, especially for office spaces. The iconographic programme (sculptures, paintings etc.) from the Nazi period was removed completely (inside and outside). The biggest task was converting the former Tellers' Hall I into a multipurpose function room with a total area of nearly 1.650m², for as a result of the devastation caused by the war there were very few rooms of such size in the city.
- Headquarters of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany / SED (1958-1990):
 1958 the "Politburo" of the SED resolved to make the former Reichsbank building available to be the seat of the Central Committee for the party headquarters. Therefore the building had to be structurally adapted to the needs of the Central Committee (office spaces for 40 departments with more than 2.000 employees, meeting halls for plenary sessions). During 3 major renovation phases (1958-1962, 1966-1968, 1971-1975) the whole building inside was reconfigured with complete interior decoration, so that the listed monument documents not only the former Reichsbank extension building from the Nazi-period, but also the representation of the centre of power of the political leadership in the GDR-state.
- 2.6 current use: 18
 1991 the German Bundestag decided to move to Berlin and 1995 the Federal

Government and the government of Land Berlin (Senat) came to the decision to use the former Reichsbank building for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Since the end of renovation in 1999 the the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is based in the Reichsbank building.

2.7 current condition:

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The former Reichsbank extension building has been renovated completely in the years 1995-1999. The Berlin architect Hans Kollhoff, responsible for the necessary renovation of the former Reichsbank extension, devised the idea of a three-layer approach. The construction layers from the thirties and the postwar period would be retained as much as possible but a third layer added in all functionally relevant areas.

3 Description

3.1 general description

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The enormous building (length of 100m at the east side and 150m at the west side) was embedded in a densely built-up quarter. In order to realize the building complex the demolition of houses and streets on the site were necessary, including the old Mint building, constructed 1871 by architect Friedrich August Stüler, at the north end of the site, near Werderscher Markt (Werder Market place). Instead of the Mint building Wolff projected a "Nordbau" (north building), which never was built, with a forecourt with colonnades between northbuilding and the later on realized Reichsbank extension building. The forecourt envisioned as the "Reichsbankplatz" continued to be a fragment for a long time, till 2000, when Müller-Reimann Architects built a new building for the Federal Foreign Office. The partial-realization of Wolffs planning explains the today's situation of the Reichsbank extension building with an indiscernible main entrance at the north side.

The Reichsbank extension building, a five- to seven-storey steel-frame structure, was erected on a non-uniform, bended ground plan. The detailed layout plan shows a four-wing building, inside with a longitudinal main axis and transversal linking sections, dividing the block in 6 courtyards of different sizes. The most important and representative rooms were installed in the ground floor along the longitudinal inner axis, arranged in a north-south direction: main entrance with staircase to the main floor of the building, the "Ehrenhalle" (hall of Honour) with staircases for the vertical transportation, Tellers' Hall I (the imposing nucleus of the building), Tellers' Hall II and finally Tellers' Hall III, which took up the entire width of the building. The interplay of different fittings, fixtures and materials was of great importance for the overall effect and style of the building: the use of natural stone (sandstone, porphyry, marble, travertine) for walls and floors, wood ceilings (ash, walnut, the use of anodized light metal and aluminium (for example for doors, windows, radiator covers, lighting fixtures, handrails),), etched and frosted glass, figurative mosaic pictures.

The street facades are decorated with natural stone (sandstone), hiding the modern steel structure. The facades of the courtyards were clad with ceramic tiles. Except for its sheer size, the building hardly reflected Nazi architectural ideas as embodied

in public buildings later on.

3.2	Construction Architect Heinrich Wolff designed the extension to the former Reichsbank as a steel skeleton structure with ashlar façades hiding the steel structure. Of special interest is the steel construction for Tellers' Hall I, a hall with no interior supports, approximately 44 metres long, 19 metres wide and 9,5 metres high. Gerhard Mensch from Ingenieurbüro Mensch & Padler, the engineering office responsible for the statics of the building, had developed a massive, one-storey high steel suspension system over the hall. Only this construction allows the generous lighting of the hall, directed via large vertical glass panels on the third floor through skylights and into the hall.	21
3.3	Context A Reichsbank branch building in Dresden, designed 1928-1930 by Heinrich Wolff too, is similar in form to the Reichsbank extension building in Berlin, but less monumental in its occurrence concerning size of the building, architecture and symbolic power.	22
4	Evaluation	
	Technical The building was equipped with many distinctive technical features, for example an decentralized air conditioning system or an underfloor heating system, which at the time was the largest ever built. The three basement floors contained extensive state-of-the-art vaults to store the gold and currency reserves.	
4.1		23
	Social The Reichsbank extension building must be seen in the context of an employment-creation programme, part of the Nazi propaganda machinery. The employment of more than 600 workers to demolish the old buildings and to construct a new building with work space for 5000 people was to be taken as a sign of determination as well as success in fighting unemployment.	
4.2		24
	Cultural & Aesthetic The building, which can be seen as a typical example of conservative modernism, largely follows the sober and functional approach of the 1920s. The smooth, relatively plain façades, the horizontal subdivisions of the windows and above all the steel-framed structure which can be seen in the narrow spaces between windows are all modern features. Modern trends also mark the inside, for example the innovative tellers hall 1 at the centre of a series of representative rooms which had direct natural light from two rows of windows in the ceiling. This was possible thanks to a sophisticated system of steel columns supporting the floors above the tellers hall. The ashlar façade hiding the steel structure, like the row of pillars which stretch over one and a half floors and dominate the main façade, is one of the conservative elements.	
4.3		25
4.4	Historical	26

The great interest of the Nazis in the building can be explained by the fact that it served as a towering symbol in the very centre of the city of the reconstruction which had been given such emphasis in National Socialist propaganda. The outward appearance of the building was thus only of secondary importance.

- 4.5 general assessment 27
The Reichsbank extension building was the first big Nazi representation building in Berlin, important for its propaganda message. Therefore the propaganda effect on the population during the construction period was more important, rather than the architecture of the building or its content determination as a bank building.

5 Documentation

- 5.1 principal references 28
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Auswärtiges Amt – Geschichte und Gegenwart, Deutsche Bauzeitung, vol.134, 2000, No.5, pp.96-109

Wilderotter, Hans, Das Haus am Werderschen Markt – Von der Reichsbank zum Auswärtigen Amt, Jovis Verlag, Berlin 2002, ISBN 3-931321-20-7

5.2 visual material attached

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front facing Kurstrasse, left the main entrance to the building
Source: Ulrich Borgert / date: 2010



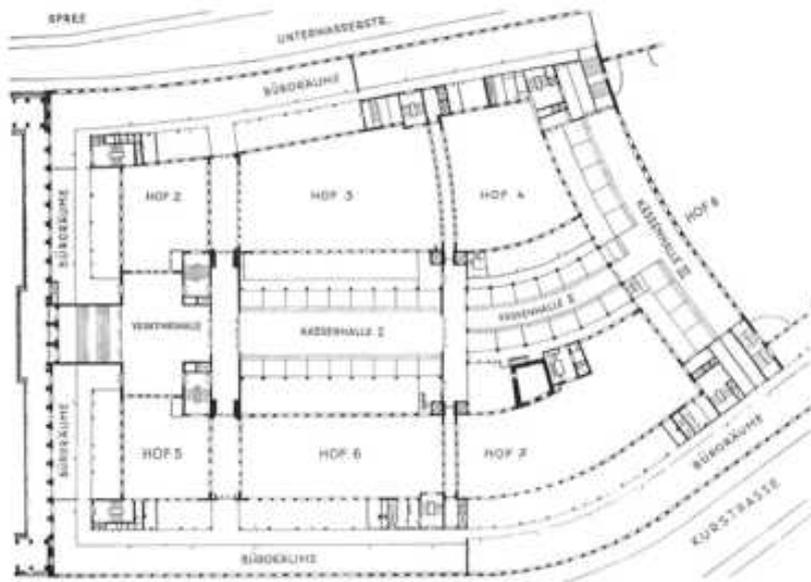
The steel framework facing Kurstrasse,
Source: Berliner Stahl-Hochbauten, Berlin 1936, p.33

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ground plan of the main floor, 1941

source: Wilderotter (Editor), Das Haus am Werderschen Markt, Berlin 2002, p.93



front facing Kurstrasse

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front facing Kurstrasse
Source: Ulrich Borgert / date: 2010

5.3 rapporteur/date:
Ulrich Borgert (uli_borgert@yahoo.de) march 2010

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6. Fiche report examination by ISC/R

name of examining ISC member: Ulrich Borgert

date of examination: März 2010

approval:

Wp/ref. no:

NAI ref. no:

comments:

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