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# THE NEW OLD

Hamburg studio asdfg Architekten transforms an 1844 miller's house in Berlin into a cool, contemporary family home.

Words Michele Koh Morollo Photos Michael Pfisterer



In the centre of Prenzlauer Berg, a trendy yet tranquil tree-lined neighbourhood in Berlin, sits one of the area's oldest buildings – a 2,700 sq ft house built by in 1844 by a mill owner named Hermann. Sited on a 4,306 sq ft plot, the Müllerhaus (miller's house in German) was later used as a police station, then a workshop, before remaining vacant for many years.

In 2011, German curator and gallery owner Petra and her husband Max Maendler decided that this old Müllerhaus would be perfect as a new family home for them and their three children. Of course, a lot of work would have to be done, so they hired their friend Philipp Loeper who at the time had recently established his own Hamburg-based architectural studio, asdfg Architekten.

The house was in a dilapidated condition, had interiors that were divided into many small rooms, and because it was a heritage building, was constrained by government building regulations.

The refurbishment of Müllerhaus was a tall order for a new studio's first project, but they pulled it off with panache.

“Due to its history and location, we considered the

project a big challenge, but we also saw significant potential for it to become a unique single family house with a small garden in the centre of one of the most popular neighbourhoods in Berlin,” says Loeper.

Because of the building's heritage value, Loeper and his team had to work through much red tape before they could even begin work on the project.

As the oldest building in the Prenzlauer Berg neighbourhood, the authorities insisted that they reconstruct the façade so it would look precisely as it appeared in a 1844 historical drawing. Though Loeper wanted to respect the history of the building and the request of the authorities, he did not think it would be authentic for the house's exterior to be an imitation of a style that was 170 years old. So he modernised the façade while abiding by the building's original form.

“In an architectural drawing, a line can be interpreted in many different ways. For example, it can be expressed as a gap in the wall, a section line or a difference in height. The concept we developed was to argue that the lines in the historical drawing could be read as differences in the height of the plaster-rendered façade using ancient >>

techniques and materials. It took us quite some time and many visualisations and physical models to convince the authorities of our approach,” says Loeper.

The first sketches were done in 2011, but the three-level house was not completed until 2015. Indeed, it was a long process, but the studio and clients’ patience and efforts certainly paid off. The new Müllerhaus is a truly original home with voluminous interiors and an interesting layout.

To open up the interior space, Loeper and his team demolished the existing walls of the small rooms and retained only one massive wall in the middle of the property. Around this sturdy wall they built the staircase, kitchen, and sleeping galleries for the children.

The entrance, dining and living area, library, chimney and media room were incorporated into a single and open flowing space on the ground floor. The kitchen, storage area and toilet were fitted into and around the massive wall in the middle of the house and served as a partition for the other areas. On the first floor are private areas, loft-style bedrooms for the parents and children, and an open concept office. Incorporated onto the first floor are gallery spaces that function as a bath area and sleeping areas for the children. A guest bedroom, sauna, bathroom, fitness room, workshop and storage area were created in the basement level.

The modern, chalk-white staircase, which appears to hover above the ground, is divided into two sections. “The first five steps lead

through the big wall on a small platform, where it is possible to experience the full height of the main room. The second part hangs from an open gallery which spans from one wall to the other, creating the parents’ working and sleeping spaces, which are separated by a huge sliding door,” says Loeper.

**For the staircase and the kitchen interior, asdfg Architekten reused wood from the old beams that supported the former ceilings of the old Müllerhaus, and left the old brick walls of the interior exposed to create a warm, rustic atmosphere that revealed the history of the building.**

Anhydrite screed was used for the flooring, mosaic glass tiles for the bathrooms and recycled wood from the house’s old beams were used for the staircase, kitchen and galleries.

“The design process was carried out in close consultation with our client Petra and Max Maendler who themselves are experts in good design. This resulted in many highly personalised and individually created elements. Not only the cabinets, but everything from the shutters to the washbasins and even the bathtub was custom made for this project,” says Loeper.

Minimalist, Scandi-inspired loose furniture items, accent lights and plenty of white and light wood worked with the extensive brick walls and height of the building to create an somewhat fairytale-like, gallery feel. The result is a wonderful, bright and spacious home that holds the grains of the past within the present. ■

