



WORLD WIDE WEAVE

Masterpiece of contemporary religious architecture

A golden veil for the new synagogue in Munich

Modern architecture – according to Munich's Lord Mayor Christian Ude – has a hard time in the white and blue metropolis. This scepticism also applies to the new main synagogue in the heart of Munich's historic district. The inauguration of the Jewish Community Center at St. Jakobplatz, right next to the Town Hall and the Church of Our Lady, is the highly symbolic result of twenty long years of incessant agitation and promotion by the President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Charlotte Knobloch. The Jewish community's move from the outskirts of Munich to its new, and at the same time old location in the middle of town is the crowning moment of her life's work. 68 years after the Pogrom Night, the new main synagogue features again prominently in the Munich skyline, just as its predecessor once did. In memory of the orthodox synagogue destroyed by the Nazis back in 1938, the new synagogue bears the same Hebrew name: *Ohel Jakob* ("Jacob's Tent").

Dialog with the vicinity and with other cultures

The winning tender for the City of Munich's architectural design contest in 2001 came from the Saarbrücken architects Wandel Höfer Lorch + Hirsch. With their award-winning construction of the synagogue in Dresden, this team had a first-class reference. In Munich, a Jewish Center has been created on the exposed site, left unused since the post-war period, that unites all the facilities previously scattered throughout the city. In addition to the synagogue, the complex also includes a hall with rabbinate, a kindergarten, a full-time primary school, a youth and culture center, administration offices, official reception, event rooms as well as a kosher



restaurant. A Jewish museum as a place for public encounter with Jewish history, art and culture serves as a structural link between the community center and the synagogue. The desire to document the renaissance of public Jewish life in Munich called for skillful integration of the building complex into the neighborhood and great sensitivity to religious requirements. The immediate vicinity to the Angerkloster meant that this dialog with the surrounding architecture also had to be a dialog with other cultures.

The real eye catcher of this spectacular complex of three interrelated buildings is the new main synagogue. Its expressive architecture is characterized by two stacked cubes: a massive, temple-like rock base with a filigree glass construction on top clad in a bronze-colored translucent woven metallic veil. This interplay of stability and fragility, permanent and transitory, is a convincing constructional metaphor for the Jewish leitmotifs of temple and tent. The eight meter high windowless base, clad in slabs of travertine, radiates a sense of defiance and authority. It symbolizes the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem and gives this place of worship the appearance of a protective, seemingly age-old sanctuary – a solid basis for an undisturbed religious service.

Interplay of extremes

From the core of this archaic rock base rises a twelve meter high glass cube bathed in light with triangles formed into Stars of David shimmering through its textile-like metallic mantle. The tent-like grace of this radiant crown, visible from afar, evokes the memory of Moses in the desert. Its skin of spiral metal mesh makes the tent glow mystically in the sun by day and mysteriously by night. While the exterior of this monumental piece of religious architecture draws its sculptural and sensual strength from the



interplay of extremes, the unadorned interior has an unbelievable intensity. In line with orthodox tradition, the rows of seats for men and women are separated: about 300 seats for the men; on stands to the right and left about 200 seats for the women. A subterranean passage connects the community center and the synagogue and commemorates the Munich victims of the holocaust.

Light as a signal of hope

33 meters long and 22 meters wide, the interior is considerably smaller than most Christian churches, but its simple design with Lebanese cedar paneling makes it seem very spacious. The east side, where the splendid, golden Tora shrine stands flanked by seven-arm candelabras, is paved in travertine stone. The skin of bronze netting around the glass dome breaks up the sunlight falling on it and bathes the interior of the synagogue in a warm light. The sensitive interplay of light and shadow gives the room a unique atmosphere. At the entrance, the first letters of the Ten Commandments have been mounted as ten golden Hebrew characters. When the worshippers' eyes wander over the wood paneling up into the translucent tent roof of the glass dome, they experience the architectural symbolism of the optimistic path from darkness into light.

Outer skin of bronze spirals

The conspicuous golden outer skin of the glass dome was made to specifications using the spiral mesh type Escale of the Dueren-based metal weaver GKD – Gebr. Kufferath AG. Made of bronze, the spirals of the mesh were widened to create the optical impression of an equilateral triangle. An impression reinforced by the similarly triangular construction of the glass façade behind the mesh. The overlapping of the elements creates an abstract Star of David. The decision to use the material bronze was



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influenced not only by the aesthetic beauty of the material but also by its functional advantages. The copper-tin alloy's high tin content of between 7.5 and 8.5 percent makes for a gold-like color. As time passes, the bronze will oxidize and lend the building a unique patina of its own. Furthermore, the long service-life, non-flammability, easy maintenance and recyclability of the woven metal mesh make this material a technically and economically attractive solution.

The roof and façade of the glass lantern are clad in a total of 1,300 m² of Escale mesh. For this first large-scale application of the bronze variant of the successful mesh type, 16 façade elements with the dimensions 11 m x 4.40 m and 6.60 m and 70 roof elements with the format 2.20 m x 2.20 m were connected to make 14 m long elements. The façade elements were attached at the top to the steel substructure using inserted bronze flat profiles; in the middle they were screwed to a bronze pipe construction; and at the bottom they were stretched tight to the substructure via fork terminals and tendon pipes.

The glittering skin of *Ohel Jakob*, of *Jacob's Tent* is a highly conspicuous ambassador of assurance, the building as a whole a masterpiece of contemporary religious architecture.

GKD – WORLD WIDE WEAVE

As a privately owned technical weaver, GKD - Gebr. Kufferath AG is the world market leader in metal, synthetic and spiral mesh solutions. Four independent business divisions bundle their expertise under one roof: Industrial Mesh (woven metal mesh and filter solutions), Process Belts (belts made of mesh and spirals), Architectural meshes (façades, safety and interior design made of metal fabrics) and Mediamesh[®] (Transparent



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media façades). With its headquarter in Germany and five other facilities in the US, South Africa, China, India and Chile – as well as its branches in France, Spain, Dubai and worldwide representatives, GKD is close to markets anywhere in the world.

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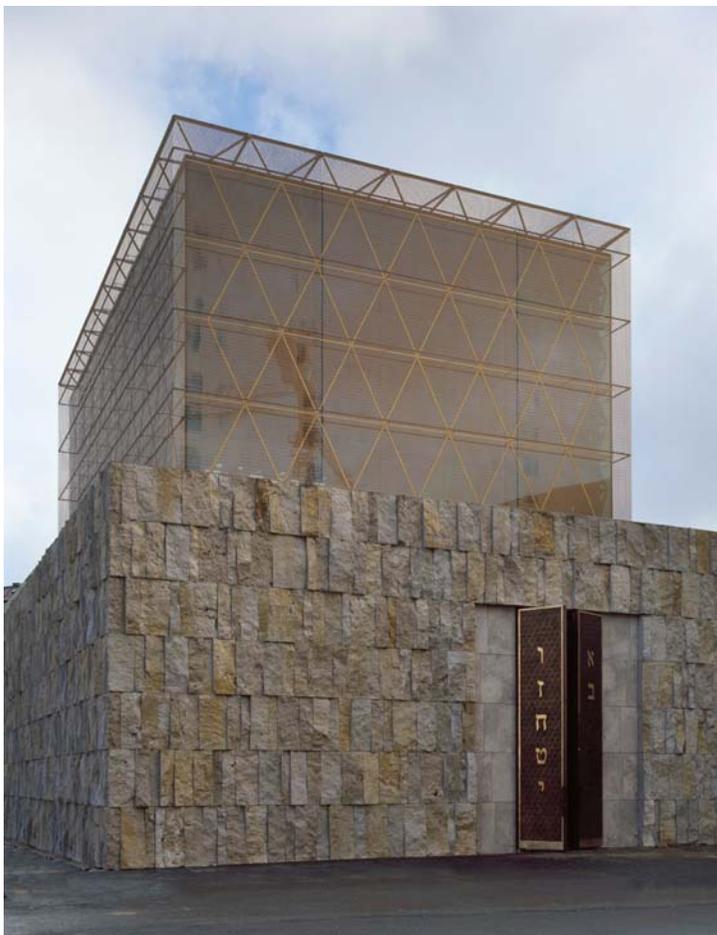
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Picture 1: Two stacked cubes of glass with textile-like metallic cladding and of concrete symbolize a filigree tent standing on a monumental temple base.



Picture 2: The Escal bronze mesh clads the glass upper cube in a golden veil.



Picture 3: As well as the steel construction, the spiral mesh also forms an infinite number of abstract Stars of David.

Picture 1 © GKD/Roland Halbe

Picture 2-3 © GKD

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