

Bauhaus Dessau

Press release

The Bauhaus Museum
Dessau opens

Interview with architect
Roberto González
(addenda architects)

Press contact

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The Bauhaus Museum Dessau is being built by addenda architects, a young architect's office from Barcelona. At the end of 2015, the design was selected as the winner from 831 submissions in an open international competition. Architect Roberto González talks about the basic concept of the museum and new paths that he and his colleagues have taken for the Bauhaus Museum Dessau.

What is the design concept for the Bauhaus Museum Dessau?

Roberto González: Our basic concept for the museum was to create a large, flexible space so that exhibitions and workshops can take place without feeling restricted in any way by the architecture. We obviously had to integrate this idea with the requirements for the museum: It had to provide an area of 1,500 square metres for the collection, protect the exhibits from direct sunlight and offer ideal climatic conditions.

This is how we came up with the idea for the *Black Box*, a closed concrete cube that floats above the ground. At almost 100 metres in length and 18 metres in width, the *Black Box* is supported by two staircases, which are 50 metres apart. It doesn't have any supporting columns.

So the *Black Box* hovers five metres above visitors' heads. It is always there, always present – like the legacy of the historic Bauhaus. To utilise and experience the building, visitors don't necessarily have to go through the exhibition of historical objects. On the ground floor, the *Open Stage* offers space for contemporary artistic perspectives. It's a look into the future – and this future is open, flexible and welcoming to everyone.

Of course we couldn't just leave the space below the *Black Box* open. We are in Northern Europe where it rains a lot and gets very cold. So we built a kind of winter coat made of glass. This glass facade protects the building. But it also created additional space for exhibitions, events and offices on the ground floor.

The location for the building is quite special. How does the museum manage to fit into Dessau's municipal park?

González: I visited Dessau for the first time in 2005. I saw the beautiful Bauhaus Building and the Masters' Houses. At the time, I thought, 'That's Dessau'. In the competition phase for the museum we compiled everything we actually knew about Dessau's centre. It was not much. That's when we realised that the location of the museum is important. People come to see the Bauhaus Building on one side of the railroad tracks. What's on the other side gets overlooked so easily. So that's what was on our mind on our second visit to Dessau. We looked at the city through new eyes and asked ourselves: What would spark the visitors' interest?

We walked through all of the streets that lead to the park to understand what visitors see on their way to the museum. There are two important main axes: When you're coming from the direction of the station, you don't see much of the building. It's different if you're standing in the Ratsgasse. Here, you're walking directly toward the museum and you realise that this is the Bauhaus Museum Dessau. The building attains a certain presence. The same thing happens from the side of the park.

The Bauhaus Museum Dessau functions as both a border and a connection between the city and the park. The building's two sides are identical. But,

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depending on the lighting conditions, the environment is reflected to varying degrees. On the side that faces the city, the relationship with the city is strengthened as the facades of the opposite buildings are reflected. On the park side, the relationship with nature is reinforced by the reflection of trees.

The moment when you enter the building is magical. Suddenly you are in the middle of it. There are no limitations. Everything seems open, transparent and fluid.

The museum has a fifth facade: the roof, a green roof.

González: The Bauhaus Museum Dessau is located in Dessau's municipal park. We wanted to protect and preserve the park. That's why we put a little piece of the park on the roof. Apart from the symbolic motivation there is also a practical reason for doing this: rainwater can be used to water the plants and plants help to isolate the building.

How much Bauhaus is in the architecture of the Bauhaus Museum Dessau?

González: Actually, nothing about the new building was intended as a direct quotation from the outset. But as architects from Barcelona, we have always had a close relationship with Mies van der Rohe. There is a strong connection to the Pavilion in Barcelona. Of course, not every architect in Barcelona loves the Pavilion but we are definitely a team of Mies fans.

When we saw the programme for the competition, we realised that it was a challenge. But not in the sense of Mies van der Rohe's "less is more". Our maxim was "more with less".

Our building is about proportion, positioning and space. It's not so much about using the highest quality materials. But the Bauhaus Museum Dessau shows that given the right combination of materials, space, colours, etc. you can achieve an outstanding result with limited resources. That's very Bauhaus. If you look at the Bauhaus buildings, you see that the members of the Bauhaus already tried to get the maximum benefit from a minimal investment.

There are also some more immediate parallels to the Bauhaus Building. Though they weren't meant as quotes either. The *Black Box* sits on the stairwell like a bridge. The Bauhaus Building has a bridge too. Both buildings have two doors on opposite sides that allow you to enter from one side and exit from the other. For us, these decisions were all about flexibility and function. And Gropius was probably thinking the same thing with the Bauhaus Building. The result is very Bauhaus.

What sorts of innovative approaches did you realise?

González: In Spain architects are used to inventing and trying new things all the time. Norms and requirements are less restrictive than in Germany. Here, we had to find already existing solutions to realise our ideas for the Bauhaus Museum Dessau. Of course this would mean that you're not creating anything new but simply selecting from a catalogue of options. That's why we pushed the standard requirements as far as possible for the Bauhaus Museum Dessau.

The *Black Box*, for instance, is constructed like a bridge. It is bent upward at the ends so that once the scaffolding is gone, its weight, the weight of the

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visitors and of the exhibits will pull it down. In the end, it should ideally form a horizontal line. That's not going to happen immediately but in the course of the next maybe 20 years. Because the *Black Box* is made of concrete and steel, the outcome can't be calculated exactly. There is some wiggle room – which is much larger than is standard. The planning and construction were really challenging. We had to push the standard requirements by a lot. But we found partners, discussed it with them and finally reached a solution that everyone was able and willing to answer for. In doing it this way, we have created something unique. And something that other architects in Germany can fall back on.

Only with the facade did we deliberately rely on the standard requirements. Here, we were playing with the idea of repetition. While the dimensions of the *Black Box* are dictated by the size of the exhibition space, the exterior dimensions of the building were not fixed from the beginning. They have to do with economic factors: money and time. With the resources we were given, we made the building as large as possible.

What new materials did you use?

González: We used some fairly uncommon new systems. This includes the air conditioning of the building. Except for the administrative wing and the event room, there is no floor heating or even air conditioning on the ground floor since that would be neither environmentally friendly nor financially savvy. So there's a lot of air that needs to be air-conditioned and there is a glass facade through which additional heat gets into the building when it's sunny outside.

So we made use of the large floor space by installing a water pipe in it. In winter, the floor can be heated with hot water. In summer, we run cold water through the pipes. Fresh air also flows through the building constantly via the ventilation system. This same air is then cooled from the ground. Here in Germany, this system is relatively new. In the south of Spain, it is known from the traditional Andalusian patios.

The material we used for the curtain is brand new. Although the facade has triple glazing with a printed sunscreen and many layers that protect against heat, we needed another element behind the facade to serve a dual purpose: to confine the ventilation area and offer protection from the sun. Our curtain has an innovative metal coating on one side that reflects 70 to 80 percent of sunlight. We ended up using 3,000 square metres of this curtain material.

During the construction of the Bauhaus Museum Dessau you published a number of Cahiers. What's the idea behind those?

González: During the competition phase, we talked to many colleagues who are not architects. Among them was Moritz Küng, a publisher and curator of art and architecture, who also works with artists. He introduced us to the Leipzig-based photographer Joachim Brohm, who was very interested in photographing the construction process.

However, we thought that a photo book documenting the construction would be too expected. Here, too, we wanted to create something that didn't exist before. Everyone contributed their ideas, we discussed them and that's how the idea for the Cahiers came about.

The ten notebooks guide readers through the process of building the museum and show it from a different, more artistic point of view. There are not

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just photos of the construction site and the architecture. Rather, the photos focus on other aspects of the construction – aspects that we find very exciting and interesting. We also published information that is not typically published, such as technical drawings or unprocessed records. When architects present their work, they usually redraw everything so that it looks nice and simplified. However, technical drawings tend to be complex and packed with information. That's exactly what we wanted to show. For instance, in one of the Cahiers you'll find the plan of the upper floor at a scale of 1:50 on a two-metre long sheet.

addenda architects

Barcelona-based Addenda Architects (Roberto González, Anne Hinz, Cecilia Rodríguez, Arnau Sastre, José Zabala) is the young collaborative architecture practice developing the project for the Bauhaus Museum Dessau. The diverse professional background of its team members is reflected by the variety and straightforwardness in the design field, having especially in mind the specific conditions of the physical and cultural context where they work. Their individuals have been awarded in national public competitions and recognized in several professional and cultural fields. Addenda is in charge for the renovation of the Sagrada Familia Public Facilities urban block (Barcelona, 1st Prize June 2019, in partnership with Flexo Arquitectura).

addendaarchitects.com

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addenda architects: Roberto González, Anne Hinz, José Zabala, Cecilia Rodríguez, Arnau Sastre. © addenda architects, 2019