



The  
Federal Government



# Interior views

The Federal Foreign Office



Atrium



The Old and New Buildings of the Federal Foreign Office provide 62,500 m<sup>2</sup> office space for more than 2,000 employees. In addition, the two buildings house several conference halls, the Political Archive, medical and social services, a canteen, as well as the library.

The nerve centre of the Federal Foreign Office is the Old Building erected in 1934, which served as the Reichsbank from 1934 to 1938. In 1959, the building became the headquarters of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, the ruling party in the GDR. The Central Committee and the Politburo met there. In 1995 it was decided to locate the Federal Foreign Office in this building and to add a new building on Werderscher Markt.

The New Building was designed by the architects Thomas Müller and Ivan Reimann and constructed from 1997 to 1999. The transparent facade of glass and travertine stone invites visitors to enter the Atrium and its Visitor Centre, which is open to the public. All in all, the New Building with its three partially open inner courts constitutes an inspired link between the Old Building and the Spree canal, Schlossplatz and Werderscher Markt.

Reception Courtyard



The architect commissioned to refurbish and alter the Old Building, Hans Kollhoff, faced a threefold task. Firstly, he had to make it evident that Germany's new foreign policy had nothing to do with the policies pursued in this building during the two German dictatorships. On the other hand, however, he could not simply wipe out all traces of the past. What is more, the building had to be redesigned to meet the Federal Foreign Office's spatial and functional requirements.

To this end, Hans Kollhoff developed the three-layer concept. The first layer highlights the modern aspects of the Old Building, which should not be regarded solely as an embodiment of National Socialist architecture. The second layer preserves in an exemplary fashion the building's design during the GDR era. For the third layer, a colour concept was developed in collaboration with the artist Gerhard Merz whose large monochrome surfaces lend the building a modern flair.



# Weltsaal

## At the heart: The Weltsaal

At the heart of the Old Building on the first floor lies the large conference centre, almost 900 m<sup>2</sup> in size. The former Reichbank Tellers' Hall 1 was considerably altered for use by the SED leadership as a congress hall. During this process the luminous ceiling was covered over. When the Federal Foreign Office was refurbished, however, it was uncovered, as was the original wood panelling in the central part of the ceiling.

The entire room can be divided by a 9 metre high and 16 metre wide mobile partition. It was designed by Gerhard Merz as part of the three layer concept. The surface consists of numerous small squares in various colours. This deviation here in the Weltsaal from the monochrome surface principle applied in the rest of the Old Building was intended to highlight the world's cultural diversity.

The lower part of the walls and the doors to the lounges are clad in German cherrywood. The interpreting booths, screened off from the hall, are situated on top. This screen is divided horizontally into three monochrome sections, each of which has a slim aluminium frame. The lower sections consist of black glass, the larger middle sections of a white screen, while the upper sections are mirrors.



Europasaal



These mirrors optically enlarge the luminous ceiling which highlights the unusual modernity of the building's first layer. A modern bearing structure made of steel, on which the three narrower floors above the hall rest, allows daylight into the hall on either side of these floors.

Most of the technology required for conferences is under the floor.

Office with anteroom



Foyer



### The three layers – three eras

The three layers, and thus the building's chequered history under its changing occupants, is evident in various other parts of the Old Building.

The former Reichsbank Tellers' Hall 3 was divided in 1958/59 for the use of the SED leadership: it was converted into a conference hall for the SED Central Committee complete with anteroom, cloakroom and foyer. This partition was preserved when the building was taken over by the Federal Foreign Office. Following refurbishing, the design of the foyer and the conference hall, which is now called the Europasaal, has remained largely unchanged, especially the doors and ash wall panels, the horizontal light fittings and the characteristic ventilation grilles. New seating was provided in the conference room. In the foyer, third-layer elements were added to the second layer: Gerhard Merz contributed a monochrome red wall between the doors to the conference room and Hans Kollhoff designed a chandelier.



# Entrance Hall

The first and third layers meet in the Entrance Hall which is accessed from the main entrance via a lobby with a broad stairway. Key elements of the original design have been preserved in the Entrance Hall. The wall surfacing made of marble from the Lahn region and the frames of the high windows made of anodized light metal originate from the Reichsbank era. Gerhard Merz gave the Entrance Hall a monochrome cobalt blue ceiling which is framed by a very bright strip of neon lights, a stark contrast to the static massiveness of the marble.

In keeping with conservation guidelines, two rooms from the second layer have been fully preserved: the former conference hall of the Politburo of the SED Central Committee on the second floor and the offices of Günther Mittag, the Politburo member responsible for economic issues, on the fourth floor.

## The New Building: Foreign policy as a public task

The Federal Foreign Office's New Building is accessible to visitors via the spacious Atrium at Werderscher Markt. From here it is possible to enter the public and semi-public rooms, the café, the Information and Visitor Centre as well as the library, which with approximately 6,000 m<sup>2</sup> takes up almost one third of the entire surface.

It is to be found on the ground floor, on the eastern side of the building. Daylight comes from above through openings in the rooftop garden between the ground floor and the first floor.

Former meeting room  
of the Politburo of the SED  
Central Committee





This garden has two functions: it constitutes both the library roof and a second courtyard, the library courtyard, which is open to the east. The library contains more than 300,000 volumes. The bookshelves and walls are clad in cherrywood.

The offices of the Central, Cultural and Legal Directorates-General of the Federal Foreign Office are to be found in the non-public area on the second to fifth floors. A standard office is 15 m<sup>2</sup> and 3.3 m high. As the office wings have a double-row construction, that is to say they are divided by a corridor, the offices either look out onto the three surrounding streets – Unterwasserstraße, Kurstraße and Werderscher Markt – or onto the three courtyards which lend the building its characteristic openness.

The third courtyard, the Reception Courtyard, is on the south side before the main facade of the Old Building. Together with the entrance between the Old and New Buildings, it provides a space for receiving visiting Heads of State and diplomats in an appropriate manner.

### **The Old Building: The day-to-day workings of foreign policy**

The office of the Federal Foreign Minister is to be found in the Old Building, the former Reichsbank building. It is on the second floor, above the main entrance, and thus faces the Protocol Courtyard between the Old and New Buildings. Erich Honecker occupied these offices from 1971 to 1989 as SED Secretary-General.

To put it simply, the building is divided up into three. The foyer, Welt-saal as congress centre, the Europasaal and other conference rooms are





# Tunnel of light

situated in the middle block. These conference rooms are the former Reichsbank Tellers' Halls, which are separated by two transverse halls. Leading on from these transverse halls are corridors to the west wing at Kurstraße and to the east wing at Unterwasserstraße.

Most of the offices, which either face onto one of the two streets or one of the green inner courtyards, are situated in these two wings. A standard office is roughly 20 m<sup>2</sup> and on the upper floors 3.20 metres high. The offices of senior members of staff are twice as large or even larger, depending on their rank.



Above each door there is a clear glass window reaching to the ceiling. The entrance area of each office has fitted cupboards and a suspended ceiling. The offices have oak parquet flooring, while doors and cupboards have an American cherrywood veneer.

The Old and New Buildings are linked by a roughly 50 metre long tunnel. The tunnel has wooden-plank flooring, just like a landing stage, while the walls and the ceiling, in line with a concept by the New York glass artist James Carpenter, are clad with bright illuminated panes of glass which optically broaden the narrow tunnel.

Roof terrace



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