Residential development, Halle-Neustadt

Stefan Forster's conversion of a post-war block of flats into single family homes is a pattern book for urban renewal in the former East Germany.

GERMANY — TEXT: CHRISTIAN RIEMEYER, PHOTOGRAPHY: JAN LUEBKE

For some years now, Frankfurt-based Stefan Forster Architects have been attracting attention with a series of residential projects that recall a time when architects — but also city authorities and society at large — took their brief seriously. One need only look to the 1950s or the period of reconstruction after World War II: when huge housing programs put new buildings back over people's heads, it was done with an eye on space and comfort.

As a result, Forster is applying a new, rigorous approach to his projects — one that is a deliberate attempt to change the world, and this change is apparent in numerous projects he has realized in the former East Germany. Ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, he has implemented projects ranging from urban and suburban development to the renovation of old buildings. In the town of Ende, Forster transformed a former apartment block into a single-family home with an emphasis on sustainability and energy efficiency.

In Halle-Neustadt, Forster's most recent project is the conversion of a former East German office building into a residential complex. The building was constructed in the early 1970s as an ideal social housing unit. According to plans drawn up by Richard Paul Acka, who had worked with Walter Gropius at the Bauhaus in Dessau, it was a model for modern living. But the dream has not become reality. In the 1990s, the building was converted into a series of apartments, each with its own entrance and bathroom.

Forster's intervention is a response to this situation. He has transformed the block into a series of individual apartments, each with a unique design and layout. The result is a building that is both a work of art and a functional home. The project showcases the potential for urban renewal in former East Germany, and it serves as a pattern book for other architects and developers.