



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 WELZBACHER, PHOTOGRAPHY: JEAN LUC VALENTIN

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 this brief seriously. One is reminded of the 1920s or the period of reconstruction after World War II when huge housing programmes put roofs back over people's heads, accommodation with optimized life cycles and floor plans. Today, things are very different: how people live has long since become a private matter again. In 2006 the

German state stopped providing funds for 'social housing', many housing associations have been privatized, and there has also been a demographic change, with fewer people occupying more space per capita.

As a result, Forster is applying his new serious approach to a changed world — and this change is apparent in numerous projects he has realized in the former East Germany. Over a period of years, he supervised the removal of excess buildings from the industrial satellite town of Leinefelde in Thuringia. And he showed what, with planning skills and creativity, can be

got out of old buildings. He transformed bleak concrete apartment blocks into single-family homes, remodelled floor plans and outlines, turned uniformity into individuality, gloominess into a riot of colour. For this mind-expanding work and for teasing positive qualities out of previously unpopular architecture, he has received recognition and awards.

Stefan Forster's most recently completed project is also in eastern Germany, in Halle-Neustadt, founded in the early 1960s as an ideal socialist town and built according to plans drawn up by Richard Paulick (who had

worked with Walter Gropius at the Bauhaus in Dessau). It was the dream of a modernist city become reality. But this dream has now come to an end. In response to a shrinking population, Halle-Neustadt is being reduced to a core area and the buildings considered worth preserving are being optimized and brought into line with the latest standards (see also A10 #31, page 60). And Stefan Forster is precisely the right architect for this job.

The building on Oleanderweg was once an elongated, five-storey block made of pre-fabricated concrete slabs, of the kind built all over East Germany since the introduction of this building method in the early 1960s. Forster simply broke the monolith open, turning a formerly closed volume into an architectural sculpture by removing segments of the upper floors — thereby also creating large roof terraces. On the side facing the street, he gave the building a new plinth, adding volume and a →

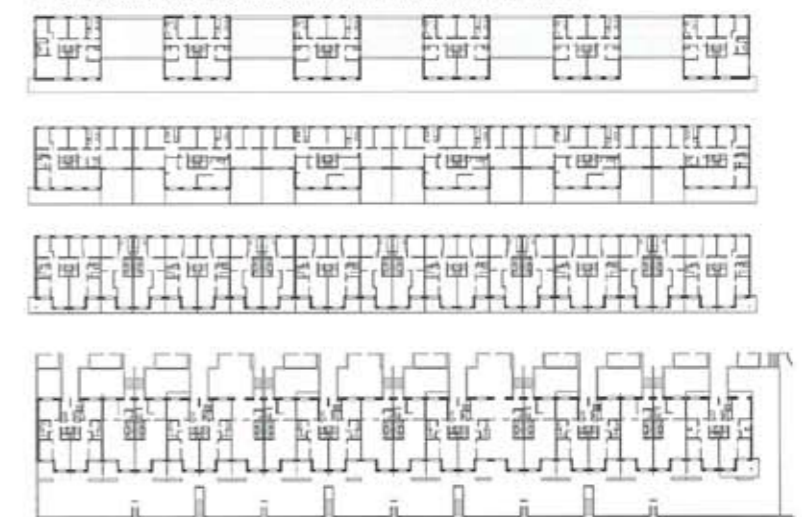
(Residential development, Halle-Neustadt)

glass, brick, wood, paint, plaster, plants): a pattern book for urban renewal that could be used in very similar ways in many other places the world over. In this project, communication with the local population played a major role.

The 2003 competition, organized by the GWG housing association, called for a transparent procedure. This gentle process of transformation, which also explains the comparatively long construction period, was above all necessary to minimize any possible culture shock — and such shock will inevitably be felt by many people in the course of the total restructuring of Halle-Neustadt, a process that has only just begun. ←

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT, 2003–2010
 Architect: Stefan Forster Architects
 Client: GWG Gesellschaft für Wohn- und Gewerbeimmobilien Halle-Neustadt mbH, Halle (Saale)
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↓ From bottom to top: ground floor, first floor, third floor and fourth floor



↓ Street side with new plinth



← Garden side with deep balconies and roof terraces