

## Identity and Culture

The Kulturbahnhof, which was opened in October 2020, is a beacon project for Aalen, a town in the state of Baden-Württemberg, Germany. With great sensitivity, a+r Architekten have revived the location's industrial history in the present.



*Aalen's industrial history and the architecture of the twenty-first century are brought together in the new cultural centre Kulturbahnhof Aalen. a+r Architekten have succeeded in integrating the historical building fragments on the "Stadtoval" into contemporary architecture with great sensitivity and — at the request of the town of Aalen — in creating a place with supra-regional appeal.*

The town of Aalen wanted a "beacon for culture and creativity" on the site now known as the *Stadtoval*, which was previously occupied by railroad tracks and later used by a construction steel company. Within the framework of this significant inner-city expansion, the *Kulturbahnhof* plays a central role: the building is not only intended to house the city's diverse cultural institutions and catering facilities, but also to have a major radiant effect throughout the region.

After coming first in the restricted competition in 2015, a+r Architekten implemented the project between 2018 and 2020. The inauguration of the building in the northwest of Aalen's *Stadtoval*, which now accommodates a cinema, a theatre, the music school and high-quality function rooms for cultural events along with premises for catering, was celebrated from October 2-4, 2020.

### Cautious approach to the urban heritage

For the architecture firm, which runs offices in Stuttgart and Tübingen, the building task posed "a challenge to create a harmonious whole from the existing building fragments and new elements."

Following a fire in 2014, all the architects found were a number of historical groups of buildings, including the former railroad administration building and remains of the large hall of a former repair workshop. The existing industrial architecture

### Your press contact

Heike Bering  
bering\*kopal, Büro für  
Kommunikation  
t +49(0)711 7451 759  
15  
heike.bering@bering-  
kopal.de  
www.bering-kopal.de

### Architects contact

a+r Architekten GmbH  
Rotebühlstraße 89/2  
D 70178 Stuttgart  
t +49(0)711 722355-31  
f +49(0)711 722355-22  
[pr@ackermann-raff.de](mailto:pr@ackermann-raff.de)  
[www.ackermann-raff.de](http://www.ackermann-raff.de)

constitutes an important structural document of railroad history in Aalen — these are the remains of typical local buildings with some striking characteristics, such as a sandstone façade and short side gables. “Our central idea was to carefully preserve this heritage and to further develop it into a forward-looking cultural centre for the twenty-first century,” explains Hellmut Schiefer, project manager and lead architect at a+r Architekten.

### **Historical construction and contemporary industrial architecture**

The extensively destroyed façade was replaced in a stylised way with coloured fair-faced concrete. Where possible, the architects sought to revive the historical character. For example, the sandstone façade was completed and repaired by stonemasons in the corresponding places. Due to the smoother surfaces of the new sandstone, the new components were deliberately left visible as such. The roofs of the short side gables were also rebuilt according to the historical design. The longitudinal gable, by contrast, was treated quite differently: a+r Architekten replaced it by an elongated, cuboid-shaped volume clad in folded perforated plate, thus creating a spatial reference to the urban edges of the neighbourhood bordering to the south. “In contrast to the historical sandstone façade with its ornamental craftsmanship and massive appearance, the superimposed cuboid is plain and restrained. The semi-transparent perforated sheet façade allows the cuboid’s volume to shine through, creating associations with a cloth-like curtain and contemporary industrial architecture,” the project manager describes the design concept.

### **The “house-in-house” principle allows for great flexibility of the interiors**

The historical façade provides the shell of a generous space. New boxes were placed inside this completely gutted space, zoning it for different uses. These boxes also support and stiffen the new load-bearing structure. The large halls and public uses are located in the old building. The music school and the theatre workshops are housed in the new, cuboid-shaped volume built on top. These rooms “serving” cultural production and education symbolically arch over the show stages for the culturally interested public. An important aspect for the architects was to use historical components such as materials, windows and a visible roof construction to create an authentic and independent ambience for the different cultural venues. “The entire material and design concept is based on the idea of interrelating the industrial architectures of the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries in a variety of ways,” explains Hellmut Schiefer.

### **Resource optimisation and synergy effects**

In addition, pragmatic aspects come into effect: in the opinion of the town of Aalen, a shared building for the diverse cultural venues, which were previously spread across several locations, should contribute to optimising resources, pooling synergies and ensuring cost savings in the long term.

Stuttgart/Tübingen, April 2021

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**1** The longitudinal gable of Kulturbahnhof Aalen was replaced by a long cuboid-shaped volume clad with folded perforated plate. In contrast to the historical sandstone façade, the attached cuboid is plain and restrained. Photo: Brigida González  
PLEASE NOTE: Direct your inquiry to a+r Architekten, Julia Raff, to clarify the usage rights of this photo: [pr@ackermann-raff.de](mailto:pr@ackermann-raff.de).

**2** View of the new Kulturbahnhof Aalen on the site known as the Stadtoval. The Kulturbahnhof plays a central role in the inner-city expansion. Photo: Brigida González  
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**3** The extensively destroyed façade was — where possible — revived. The roofs of the short side gables were rebuilt according to the historical design. Photo: Brigida González  
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**4** After a fire in 2014, only fragments of several historical groups of buildings with distinctive sandstone façades and short side gables existed on the site. Photo: Brigida González  
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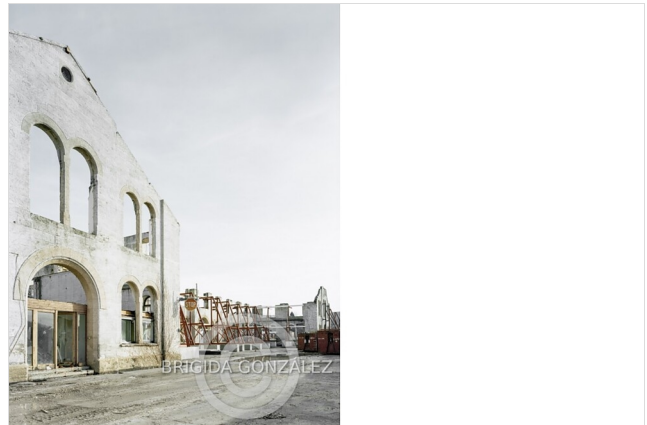
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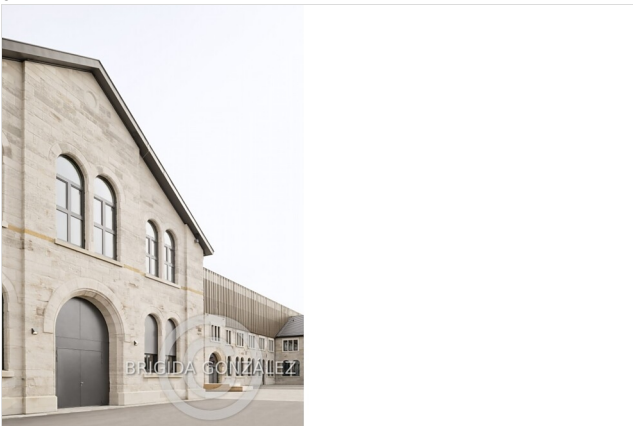
**5** The main idea behind the design was to carefully preserve the heritage and to further develop it into a future-oriented cultural centre for the twenty-first century. Photo: Brigida González  
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**6** The extensively destroyed façade was replaced in a stylised manner in coloured fair-faced concrete; where possible, the historical character was revitalised. Photo: Brigida González  
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**7** The historical façade provides the shell of a generous space. New boxes were placed inside this completely gutted space, zoning it for different uses. Photo: Brigida González  
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**8** The building now houses a cinema, a theatre, the music school, function rooms for cultural events and premises for catering. Photo: Brigida González  
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**9** The large event halls and public uses are located in the old building. Photo: Brigida González

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**10** View into the spacious foyer. Photo: Brigida González

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**11** View into the theatre. Photo: Brigida González

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**12** The cinema. Photo: Brigida González

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## MEDIA INFORMATION

**13** With historical components such as materials, windows and a visible roof construction, an authentic and independent ambience was created for the various cultural venues. Photo: Brigida González  
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**14** Where possible, the historic character was revived. Photo: Brigida González  
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**15** In the past, the area now known as Aalen's Stadtoval was occupied, among other things, by railway tracks.

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### About a+r Architekten

a+r Architekten stand for solid, environmentally compatible and future-oriented architecture with impressive expertise in the field of sustainable building — also in existing building contexts. Founded in 1985 by Professor Gerd Ackermann and Professor Hellmut Raff, the office with branches in Stuttgart and Tübingen has around 100 employees and is today headed by Professor Hellmut Raff, Oliver Braun, Florian Gruner, Alexander Lange and Walter Fritz. a+r Architekten mainly build for public clients, industry and commerce, municipal housing companies and social institutions. The office focuses on appropriate, ecological, functional and the resulting innovative construction methods and has been awarded prestigious prizes for this approach: most recently, DAM Prize 2020, Exemplary Construction Award 2020 by the Baden-Württemberg Chamber of Architects, “best architects 2020” and first place in the Competitionline Ranking 2019/20 as the most successful competition office in German-speaking countries.

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