Düsseldorf in January 2017

Architecture in Düsseldorf

Architecture is the art of giving a city a face. Düsseldorf’s cityscape primarily reflects a sense of modernity. The expressionist Ehrenhof, for instance, was built in the 1920s. The Dreischeibenhaus is considered characteristic of high-rise construction in the late 1950s. The MedienHafen is adorned with contemporary, innovative architecture designed by Gehry and Chipperfield.

The Ehrenhof ensemble is located on the banks of the Rhine just behind the Oberkassel Bridge. Characterised by expressionism, the spacious complex was built in 1925/26 around the Kunstpalast, a structure which had stood on the grounds since 1902. Additional exhibition buildings, a planetarium and the Rheinterassen were built to plans by Wilhelm Kreis – altogether, an exhibition and trade fair centre of sorts for the 7.5 million visitors to the Gesolei (“Gesundheit, soziale Fürsorge und Leibesübungen” – “Health, Social Care and Physical Exercises”) which focused on the “new, able-bodied human being”. Today, this complex houses the Museum Kunstpalast, the Tonhalle (concert hall), and the NRW-Forum Kultur und Wirtschaft (Culture and Economy).

One of the first office high-rises in Germany – built in 1922/23 – is the Wilhelm-Marx-Haus in the Altstadt (Old Town), or more precisely, on Heinrich-Heine-Allee. Again, its architect was Wilhelm Kreis, until 1926 director of the Faculty of Architecture at Düsseldorf’s Kunstakademie (Art Academy). The 57-metre high building was named after one of Düsseldorf’s lord mayors. The tallest office building in Düsseldorf, however, is the ARAG high-rise in Mörsenbroich (125 metres). Not quite as tall but just as impressive in the city’s landscape are the Victoria Tower in Golzheim at 108 metres and the 94-metre high Dreischeibenhaus with its neighbouring Schauspielhaus (theatre) on Gustaf-Gründgens-Platz.

A walk just a few hundred metres along the Rhine embankment promenade towards the Rheinknie Bridge will take you past the two former Mannesmann buildings on the left. The high-rise to the right, viewed from the Rhine, was built between 1956 and 1958; at 93 metres it is one of the tallest buildings in Düsseldorf.

The parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia is located a little further south on the Rhine embankment. Built to plans by the architects Eller, Maier, Walter and Partner, the round building was completed in 1988 and now dominates the Rhine front. At around 240 metres Düsseldorf’s tallest structure, the Rheinturm (Rhine Tower) is a mere stone’s throw away. The view from the revolving restaurant at over 172 metres is a must for visitors to the city.
The architect of the tower, which was built between 1979 and 1982 and is made entirely of reinforced concrete, was Harald Deilmann. Light artist Horst H. Baumann designed the largest decimal clock in the world for the tower. It consists of group of portholes which are arranged at three heights along the tower’s shaft and at the time even made it into the Guinness Book of Records. The Stadttor (City Gate), an award-winning piece of architecture designed by Overdiek Petzinka & Partner, is located near the tower. The 75-metre high building consists of two rhomboid, parallel glass towers with three connecting top floors. The international real-estate trade fair MIPIM (Marché International des Professionnels de l'Immobilier) in Cannes voted it the best office building in 1996.

The MedienHafen is without a doubt a highlight not only in Düsseldorf’s urban architecture. Once a trading and industrial transhipment site, today it inspires international architecture enthusiasts with a symbiosis of tradition and modern age. This is where the Gehry buildings are located – which have quickly become one of the best-known landmarks in Düsseldorf. This three-sectioned “Kunst- und Medienzentrum Rheinhafen” (Rheinhafen Art and Media Centre) by Frank O. Gehry is asymmetrical: windows seem not to want to sink into the facade, irregular layouts and different materials lend individual characters to the buildings, which impress with sloping walls and leaning towers. There is not a single straight wall to be found here. Still, the central section acts as some sort of connecting element in which the partners to the north and south are reflected. Claude Vasconi’s Grand Bateau is berthed right next to the Gehry buildings. The immobile equivalent of a proud giant ocean liner welcomes visitors at the entrance to the harbour with maritime flair. The “ship” is home to the Landesanstalt für Medien NRW (North Rhine-Westphalian Media Institute). More architectural gems are to be found on Kaistraße, including the “Kai Center”, developed by Döring and Partner; the “Port Event Center” by architect Norbert Wansleben; the 16-storey “Düsseldorf Office Center Kaistraße” by Joe Coenen; the “SIGN!” by Helmut Jahn; and the new “Hyatt Regency” by Düsseldorf-based architects JSK.

Since the autumn of 2013 Düsseldorf’s city centre has been graced with a further architectural highlight: the “Kö-Bogen” designed by New York star architect Daniel Libeskind. In 2014 the Kö-Bogen won the prestigious MIPIM Award, which officially makes it the world’s best urban regeneration project.

From an architectural point of view, Düsseldorf’s bridges across the Rhine cannot be ignored either; they effectively dominate the cityscape. Three bridges cross the Rhine in the city centre zone – the Oberkassel, the Rheinknie and the Theodor Heuss Bridge. The Oberkassel Bridge hit the headlines in 1976 when the 12,500 tonne structure was moved around 50 metres downstream.