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Bauhaus Visitor Centre Bernau:

New building in homage to the Bauhaus

An fully glazed pavilion marks the start of the visit to the Bernau Federal School World Heritage Site. The architects were keen to make the façade of the new visitor centre as transparent as possible. This was achieved with the thermally insulated VISS façade steel system and floor-to-ceiling glazed doors made of Janisol HI by Jansen.

From 1928 to 1930, the Bauhaus Director Hannes Meyer and the Bauhaus Master Hans Wittwer built the "Bundesschule des Allgemeinen Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes" (ADGB) in Bernau near Berlin. For decades, the so-called Meyer-Wittwer Building was overshadowed by the works of Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, which were already granted UNESCO World Heritage status in the 1990s and early 2000s; it was only in the summer of 2017 that the Bundesschule Bernau Bauhaus monument was also added to the UNESCO World Heritage List. Since then, the official name of the World Heritage ensemble has been "The Bauhaus and its Sites in Weimar, Dessau and Bernau".

In order to accommodate the expected increase in visitor numbers, a visitor centre was added to the Bundesschule Bernau Bauhaus Memorial. The competition organised by the city of Bernau was won by the Stuttgart-based firm, Steimle Architekten. The building they proposed - an fully glazed rectangular cube with an overhanging roof on the entrance side - is both subordinate to the listed ensemble and an architectural landmark in its own right. Covering just under 500 square metres, the building was created from just a few "honest" materials: Enveloped by a steel and glass façade, the roof appears to float above the visitor centre. "Our idea was to create a service building that doesn’t hog the limelight or scream for attention through a formal over-shaping. It assumes a mediating role and takes visitors on a journey through time, through the building’s history in the early years of last century, engaging with the Mayer-Wittwer building," says architect Thomas Steimle, explaining his design idea.

Highest priority: transparency

The architects were keen to make the thermal separation of the interior areas from the exterior as transparent as possible. This was achieved by means of the thermally-insulated steel profile Jansen VISS façade, with a

face width of 50 millimetres. The company commissioned to construct the façade, H.O. Schlüter, Lübz, manufactured the approximately three-metre-high post-and-beam construction in a grid of usually 300 centimetres. This grid is only interrupted by floor-to-ceiling French doors made of the Janisol HI steel system. On the west façade, facing the car park, three single-leaf escape doors (in accordance with DIN EN 179) were incorporated into the post-and-beam façade, and on the opposite longitudinal façade a further six further tilt-and-turn French windows were incorporated. In combination with triple insulating glazing (with solar control function), this results in an excellent U_{cw} value for the façade of 0.78W/m²K. The only double-leaf door is located in the northern gable: the main entrance door is a full panel door made of Jansen Janisol HI with access control system and revolving door drive to create convenient access for people with disabilities as well.

Prefabrication and assembly

Entrance, escape and French doors could be completely prefabricated in the factory by the metal manufacturer. All other profiles were prepared in the workshop as far as possible for assembly: cut to size, connectors and base plates welded and holes prepared for the necessary cabling. For the connection to the building structure, the steel plates welded on at the base point were dowelled to the raw concrete while at the head point, floating bearing brackets were fixed in a recess of the ceiling construction. This was the biggest challenge for the façade builder, because the upper recess left very little space to fasten the statically necessary steel brackets, taking into account the dowel edge distance. "All the work was carried out in a very confined space and required the profile position to be measured and calibrated with millimetric-precision, says Project Manager Roger Schober, explaining the construction site situation. "The fact that the special brackets for mounting the solar protection systems also had to be accommodated in the upper concrete recess made the assembly even more difficult." On the other hand, assembly by means of plug-in connections and the formation of the all-glass corners, occurring on both gable sides, were unproblematic. They were sealed with transparent silicone to make them weatherproof.

The new visitor centre is a successful prelude to a visit to the Bernau Federal School World Heritage Site. With a permanent multimedia exhibition on the history of the building and its use, and selected exhibits of the original furnishings, the transparent pavilion pays tribute to the architectural monument from the time of the Weimar Republic.Thanks to the fully glazed façade, visitors can also see the historic buildings at all times.

Project details:
Client: City of Bernau near Berlin
Architects: Steimle Architects BDA, Stuttgart
Façade construction: H.O. Schlüter GmbH, Lübz
Steel profile systems used:
Jansen VISS 50, Janisol HI
System supplier: Schüco Stahlsysteme Jansen, Bielefeld
System manufacturer: Jansen AG, Oberriet, Switzerland

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