

Aarhus School of Architecture // Design School Kolding // Royal Danish Academy

Silent contemplation

Søberg, Martin

Published in:

Petersen - a magazine about brickwork and responsible architecture

Publication date:

2022

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for pulished version (APA):

Søberg, M. (2022). Silent contemplation. *Petersen - a magazine about brickwork and responsible architecture*, 46, 2-3.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

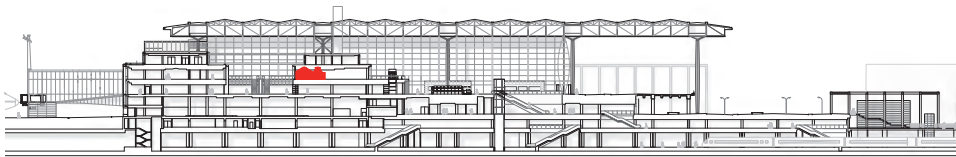
Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Access to Raum der Stille (Room of Silence) is via the main check-in area, through an entrance hall clad in golden walnut panels.



Raum der Stille is designed for devotion, prayer and meditation. In the first room, visitors are met by a niche in the wall where the word “silence” is written in bronze in six different languages.



Section of the airport with Raum der Stille marked.

Silent contemplation

RAUM DER STILLE, AT THE HEART OF BERLIN’S NEW AIRPORT, INVITES DEVOTION, PRAYER AND MEDITATION. A COMBINATION OF KOLUMBA, SIMPLE GEOMETRIC SHAPES AND SOPHISTICATED LIGHTING EFFECTS GENERATES AN ATMOSPHERE OF PERFECT TRANQUILLITY.

The new airport, Flughafen Berlin Brandenburg Willy Brandt, is designed to accommodate 33 million passengers a year. People from all over the world will cross paths in this gateway to the German capital. Along the way, some may feel a need to pause and take a break from the practicalities of travel. Raum der Stille (Room of Silence) is actually a series of rooms for contemplation, devotion, prayer and meditation. Situated on the central axis of the terminal building, where landside meets airside, the location underlines the symbolic significance of the rooms. They are open to all around the clock and are accessed via the main check-in area.

Raum der Stille comprises two parallel sections arranged symmetrically around a central axis. From the shared entrance on the left are an anteroom and a Christian chapel; and on the right, a similar anteroom and a multifaith chapel. Both chapels are exactly the same shape and size.

“The spaces and their symbolism are identical. For us, they send a message that different religions can live together,” explains Hans Joachim Paap, architect and partner at the Architects von Gerkan, Marg and Partners (gmp), the studio that designed the whole airport.

The site itself also plays a special role in fostering this narrative of equality and community. “Berlin used to be split into East and West, and the new airport stands for both – the reunification of both the city and Germany,” he explains.

The Christian chapel has a Greek cross set into a niche on the wall. The rooms’ simple shapes and use of bricks were inspired by early Christian and Islamic architecture.

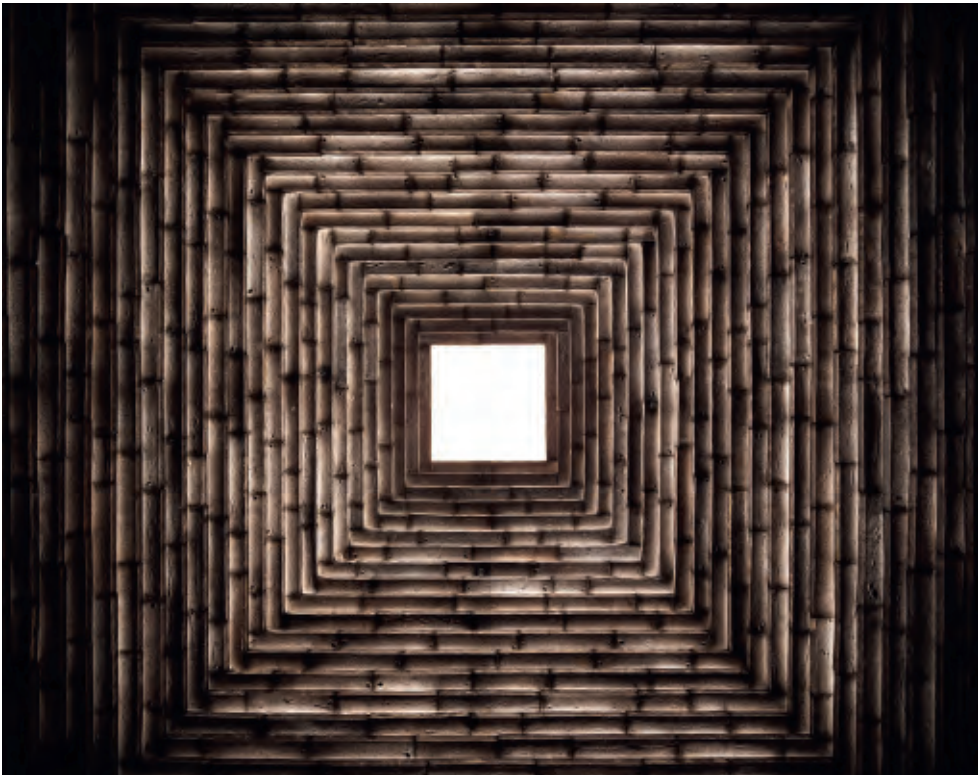


The entrance room, as well as the anterooms and chapels, all have square floor plans, which grow successively larger as you proceed. All the surfaces – floors, walls and ceilings – are clad in Kolumba, which creates a sense of cohesion, as if all of the rooms were carved from one huge block of stone. In the ceilings, each row of bricks protrudes slightly, forming a pyramid shape, at the top of which is a “skylight” illuminated by concealed LEDs.

The extensive use of bricks placed heavy demands on quality. “Kolumba is a very nice brick with a fantastic surface. The warm, dark-brown shades create a good atmosphere. Each brick is individually made – you can clearly see fingerprints left when they were removed from their moulds. The brick endows the space with a sense of both eternity and security. Time seems to stand still in these spaces, allowing you to focus on your thoughts,” Paap continues.

The third key architectural element, in addition to the clean geometry and consistent choice of just one material, is the use of light. The ceilings consist of progressively smaller square frames of Kolumba attached to a steel structure, with a 2-cm gap between each frame. Behind the frames are lamps that emit light through the gaps between the bricks. The effect is that the bricks appear to be dissolving into the light – not unlike the way in which medieval Gothic cathedrals filter light through a filigree of specially hewn stone. Light also seeps through a gap between wall and floor, which aids orientation in the space and enhances the deeply contemplative atmosphere.

In all five rooms, the ceilings are pyramid-shaped and made of Kolumba. The bricks are spaced 2 cm apart, so that light seeps in from lamps behind them.

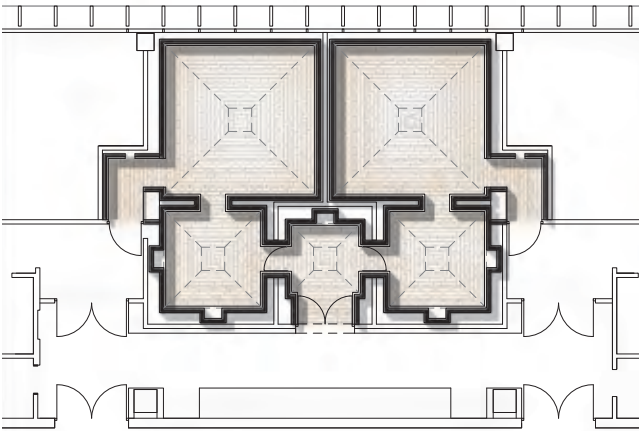




The central part of the new airport consists of a big bright hall covered by a steel and glass filigree roof. The architects envisioned articulated façades and clear geometric shapes, evoking associations with both Schinkel and Bauhaus.



Section of the arrivals area and the two anterooms.



Ground-floor plan

Raum der Stille, Flughafen Berlin Brandenburg Willy Brandt, Germany

Client: Flughafen Berlin Brandenburg
Architect: gmp · Architects von Gerkan, Marg and Partners
Design: Meinhard von Gerkan and Hubert Nienhoff with Hans Joachim Paap
Contractor: K. Rogge Spezialbau GmbH
Engineer: schlaich bergemann partner, Schüßler-Plan Ingenieurgesellschaft mbH
Built: 2020
Brick: K57
Text: Martin Søberg, PhD, architectural historian
Photos: Marcus Bredt

Dark-brown shades of Kolumba are used throughout Raum der Stille. Brick, light and clear geometry combine to create an atmospheric setting for contemplation.

“Each brick is individually made, you can clearly see fingerprints left when they were removed from their moulds. The brick endows the space with a sense of both eternity and security.”
Hans Joachim Paap, architect

The simple, stereometric shapes give the spaces an archaic feel, inspired by ancient Zoroastrian buildings in Iran and early Christian and Islamic architecture – which were also typically made of brick. The choice of material is also appropriate to the location, as both Berlin and Brandenburg have very strong traditions of brick construction. Even the way in which Kolumba is made contributes to the symbolic narrative of Raum der Stille.

“The brick is an expression of elements that are fundamental to human existence: fire, earth and water,” Paap concludes.

As a counterpart to the Christian chapel, a neutral space welcomes those with other beliefs. Both are exactly the same shape and size, articulating equality between people of all faiths.

