

Columbarium in the Maria-Schutz church, Kaiserslautern

Anchor and resting place

Churches are special places. We need these places where we can come to rest and recharge our batteries. Churches create identity and have a social significance that goes beyond their actual sacred function. In times of social upheaval and change, their value is once again being recognized. It is foreseeable that the decline in membership will make it increasingly difficult to maintain and renovate churches. This makes the preservation of each individual building all the more valuable - especially when, as in this case, it is possible to extend the historic building with a related use as a columbarium and at the same time give the rooms a new quality and harmonious atmosphere.

Bayer Uhrig Architekten took on the task of integrating a columbarium with 1,300 burial chambers into the church and adapting the premises to this extended use in the course of a renovation. The architects arranged the urn walls in the two flat-roofed side aisles orthogonally to the outer walls and thus at right angles to the nave of the church. In this way, they created ten small chapels within the listed sacred architecture. The new spatial structure for the gravesites blends naturally and respectfully into the rhythm of the arcades. In comparison to the originally planned approach of lining up the urn walls lengthwise, i.e. parallel to the nave, the realized solution has its own convincing quality: the spatial concept of the chapels creates places of security and retreat that nevertheless relate to the larger space. They are both protected and part of the whole.

With just a few interventions, it was possible to integrate the new use, carefully renovate the historical substance and thus give the church interior a meaning beyond its sacred function. Old and new have been brought together into a harmonious whole. In addition to the extension as a columbarium, the architects have renovated the central area of the pews as well as the shell of the church interior. The corner chapels have been rededicated and the former baptistery has been converted into a prayer room that can be used for small funeral services. The baptismal font is now positioned centrally in the entrance area in the axis to the altar. The parish church welcomes the deceased into its midst, where parish life and community celebrations also take place. It becomes a place of remembrance. The fact that life and death are inextricably linked is reflected in the spatial concept.

The architectural design is deliberately restrained, nothing pushes itself to the fore - and yet it is the subtle, well-coordinated details that contribute significantly to the atmospheric power of this room. The main ornamental motif is the rose window of the large stained glass window of the historic church façade in the west building. The structure of the motif

becomes the theme of the design of the urn walls made of steel: once in the form of a relief in the glazed ceramic panels that close off the individual chambers, once in an open, filigree structure in the upper part of the niche fields. Here, the ornamental pattern becomes a light filter through which a warm light indirectly falls into the niches. The basic structure of the sacred space is visible through these light spaces in the pointed arches. The ceramic panels that close the urn graves are arranged like a fold, making each individual field legible as such and thus giving it a meaning. The name of the deceased is engraved on small brass plaques. The mourners have the opportunity to place a personal sign of farewell and remembrance: small, simple containers are provided for flower arrangements. The room radiates warmth and invites you to withdraw and linger.

In the sacred main room, the dark wooden pews have been carefully renovated. It stands on a dark base, also made of wood, and, surrounded by the warm gold and cream tones of the columbarium in the side aisles, conveys the feeling of being supported and grounded. Colors are used with the utmost restraint. They are reserved for the historical elements, the large rose window in the west façade and the coffered ceiling, which is subtly colored. Only the color violet is taken up in its liturgical significance as a symbol of transition and transformation in view of the new use as a columbarium.

The result is a space of great clarity, calm, strength and warmth. The redesign of the church interior with the expansion of its use is a gain: spatially, architecturally, atmospherically - and as a space for the community that carries into the future.

Kunstschmiede Wilperath

During the first meeting, we got to know the architects' basic ideas.

The location and the concept for housing almost 1600 urns were decided.

In the collaboration that followed, we were able to agree on the materials used.

- steel body, cream white powder-coated (fine structure, matt) and trowalized brass sheet for the inscription of names, date of birth and date of death and, of course, also with the very specific technical questions of the structure and the serial production of the urn walls.

There was an initial model for the design and construction. During this phase, there were repeated meetings with the architects and exchanges with Dean Kühn and the parish columbarium committee, especially on questions of daily operation, cleaning, handling, durability and the appearance of the columbarium walls in the church. The urn walls, 4 large elements each, which were screwed together on site, stand in the openings of the transverse arches. This arrangement creates 10 chapels that are respectfully integrated into the listed architecture. Above a height of around 2.5 m, the ornamentation is delicately

continued and the pointed arches of the subdivision of the side aisles become visible through the ornamentation illuminated from the inside.

The urn compartments are closed with ceramic panels that echo the ornament. The fact that the ceramic panels are arranged at an angle in each urn compartment creates a surface for the brass plaque with the names and dates of the deceased. Due to the design and volume of the project, we decided to cooperate with the company DICK - Metallkonstruktionen und Laserschneidetechnik GmbH. This company helped us with the technical planning and laser cutting of the individual parts.

The first element was manufactured. During the trial installation, various problems and other imponderables came to light, from a collision with the walls of the church to unnecessary difficulties during assembly. The solution to the problems even led to an increase in the number of urn spaces. The solutions, some of which were found on site, were taken into account when a second sample wall was built and its usefulness confirmed with a second trial installation. After a final "fine-tuning", series production began and the effort put in beforehand with two "dress rehearsals" was rewarded with a pleasantly problem-free installation. The use of a ceramic part was somewhat unusual for us. In order to present it in advance, we produced it using 3D printing and then used paint to achieve an almost ceramic look. Building the columbarium in the Maria Schutz church was a challenge for our company, also due to the ambitious schedule. The great commitment of all employees and the companies involved, a fruitful cooperation with the architectural office "bayer uhrig" and an almost smoothly organized construction process made the project a success.