

THE REICH CHANCELLERY

A WORK ANALYSIS

— CHRISTOPH NEUBAUER —

THE COURT OF HONOR

ALBERT SPEER

New Reich Chancellery/ Interior/ Voßstraße 5/ 1937-1950

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The differences between the first and second drafts

The west facade

In the second draft, the façade areas of the west façade flanking the portal branch off without windows. By simplifying the façade, Albert Speer ensured that the portal was more visually present in the western facade. Speer completely redesigned the entrance to the interior of the New Reich Chancellery for the second draft. He did this without the three doors of the same size and instead only designed a wider central door in the portal. The door opening was given a wide profiled frame.

Above the door, Albert Speer placed a strongly protruding beam resting on consoles. The door frame made the door stand out visually and at the same time served as a kind of pedestal on which the imperial eagle could rest. Speer also decided to have the portal flanked by statues in the second draft. He moved the stone blocks

flanking the stairs, which had already been planned in the initial draft, into the narrow façade areas flanking the portal. This meant he was able to convert the design into a staircase that also ascended to the side. The stone blocks no longer served solely as a visual boundary for the stairs, but instead became platforms for statues. The second draft of the courtyard and the associated decision to erect statues on the portal were only made shortly before construction began. In 1938, Albert Speer invited the sculptor Arno Breker to one of his model rooms to show him the first model of the Court of Honor. He commissioned Breker to design two figures flanking the portal for the courtyard. Arno Breker then created two figures with capes thrown over them and called them "The Torch Bearer" and "The Sword Bearer".



Fig. 13 This early version of the second draft shows the west portal without the bronze lanterns. In addition, the statues still have the capes originally designed by Breker.

The construction

The construction of the Court of Honor took place in several construction phases. The south facade was built in the first construction phase, together with the Presidential Chancellery at Voßstrasse 4. The southern facade of the Court of Honor formed the northern facade of the Presidential Chancellery. It is not exactly doc-

umented when the various construction phases were completed. However, it is possible to at least roughly narrow down the times of origin based on the dating of surviving documents and photos. On July 1, 1937, the Reich Chancellery was asked to give priority to the stone required for the facade in freight traffic in order to enable construction to begin quickly.³

3. Bundesarchiv (R43-II-1051b)



Fig. 24 The photo shows the air raid drill held in the government district on September 20, 1937. On the right you can see Voßstrasse No. 8. This means that at least plots No. 4-8 had not yet been completely cleared of the previous development at this point in time.

Accordingly, even though the Presidential Chancellery was not officially handed over until July 1, 1938, the south facade of the Court of Honor belonging to it was built between October 1937 and May 1938.⁴ In a letter dated February 12, 1938 to the Reichspostdirektion, Berlin, it was announced that the shell of the first compo-

nent was nearing completion. The construction of the west facade and the portal of the Court of Honor only began after the south facade was completed. The west facade was built during the second construction phase between June and August 1938.

4. Bundesarchiv (R43-II-1068a)

However, the viewer first had to walk the entire length of the extra-long courtyard to get to the portal, which then served as the central entrance at the end of the courtyard's visual axis. The viewer had no idea that he was already in the first room in the sequence of representation rooms in the courtyard.

Albert Speer wanted the guests of the Reich Chancellery to travel as long as possible on the way to Hitler's office or the Great Reception Hall. On this path they should

have to walk through the spaces that are constantly increasing architecturally and radiating power. The Court of Honor was deliberately designed by Speer as a transition area from the outside to the inside. With its enormous floor area of 26.00m x 68.16m, the courtyard clearly had the appearance of an outdoor area. However, Speer simultaneously designed the walls of the courtyard in such a way that they could be clearly recognized as external facades.



Fig. 47 View from the passage at Wilhelmplatz to the entrance portal in the Court of Honor

Due to the lack of a cornice delimiting the floors in the facade, the windows of the portal appeared as if they belonged to a single high room. Albert Speer further enhanced this effect with the columns that stretched across both floors and visually framed the portal niche. However, the lack of a cornice between the floors suggested to the viewer that there was a single, high room behind the portal niche.

However, due to the entrance hall extending over two floors, the upper windows were already on the second floor. The viewer could not see that behind

the three upper windows there were just normal, small office rooms and only the lower windows belonged to the Entrance Hall behind the portal. Albert Speer only placed the offices there because he needed three window openings here for the better visual effect of the portal. This resulted in the three offices within the New Reich Chancellery being in a very inconvenient location because they were far away from all other offices. Albert Speer valued the visual effect of the facade more highly than the practical function of the interior spaces behind it.



Fig. 65 The sectional view shows that the mezzanine windows of the portal belonged to small office rooms



Fig. 84 The east facade with the depression

During the final construction phase, Albert Speer still had to find a final solution for the design of the gate passage. A problem arose for him here from the fact that the highest possible overall height of the gate passage, dictated by the floor height of the old building at Wilhelmstrasse 78, did not fit the proportions of the eastern facade he designed. How important the perfect appearance of the Court of Honor was to him can be seen from the compromise solution he found. He favored the proportions of the gate in the Court of Honor compared to the gate on Wilhelmstrasse. Due to the structure of the old building, both gates had to be of the same height. At the same time, however, Speer wanted to make the



Fig. 85 The portal reflected in the recess

passageway as wide as possible for better proportions in the Court of Honor. As a result, the gates at Wilhelmplatz looked a bit compressed. This shows that the gate width of 5 meters originally planned by Speer was tailored to the proportions of the old building on Wilhelmplatz. However, with the passage widened to 8 meters, the outer gate now appeared compressed. However, Speer accepted this disadvantage for the better effect of the gate in the Court of Honor. Because of the sloping passage and the resulting 30 cm lower floor of the courtyard, the gate portal in the Court of Honor appeared higher. This meant that it was far better proportioned than the gate inserted into the facade at Wilhelmplatz.

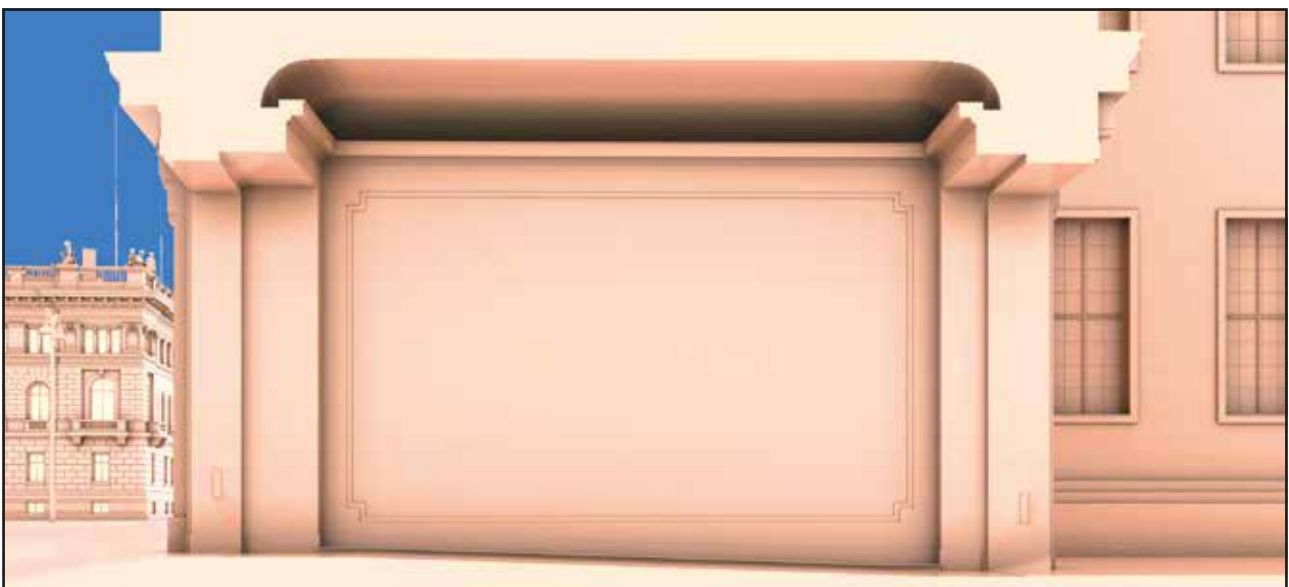


Fig. 86 Section through the passage; It is clearly visible that the Court of Honor (right) was lower

The updates from 1940

In the summer of 1940, the mosaic strips were installed in the floor of the Court of Honor. This completed Albert Speer's design for the Court of Honor, more than a year after the official inauguration of the New Reich Chancellery. There is no information in the files of the Reich Chancellery as to when exactly the mosaic stones were brought in. However, by evaluating dated photos it can be determined that this work was carried out between May 1st, 1940 and July 7th, 1940. During this update, the monochrome gray small paving

stone that was originally laid in a polygonal pattern was replaced by a mosaic that formed a pattern of dots and lines. An alternating light line of dashes and dots framed each group of plates. In the middle of each mosaic strip, Albert Speer had a line of widely spaced individual light stones inserted. These points decoratively broke up the darker mosaic stripes. The design of the Court of Honor floor was completed with the installation of the mosaics. However, the unanswered question remains why Albert Speer did not also have the granite slabs, which were obviously incorrectly laid, corrected on this occasion.



Fig. 102 Albert Speer and Adolf Hitler (center) on the occasion of viewing the new mosaic on August 15, 1940. They are currently assessing how removing the lanterns will affect the effectiveness of the portal

Albert Speer could not control the weather and the direction of the sun's rays. However, he was able to artificially illuminate the Court of Honor at night, similar to a stage set. This gave Speer the opportunity to control the light down to the smallest detail and allow the courtyard to appear in the lighting atmosphere that completely corresponded to his artistic ideas. He therefore anticipated the nighttime effect of artificial light when developing his design and was then able to present the Court of Honor under ideal

lighting conditions at least at night. Albert Speer placed the lighting of the Court of Honor in a direct connection with the lighting of the representative rooms inside the New Reich Chancellery. While he mainly used classic wall and ceiling lights to artificially illuminate the interior, in the Court of Honor he used spotlights that were embedded in the floor and were therefore barely visible. For the viewer, the lighting literally came out of nowhere and therefore appeared mystical and deliberately threatening.



Fig. 108 Speer integrated the spotlights into the portal niches of the longitudinal facades



Fig. 109 In the portal, the spotlights were placed in the floor in front of the walls and between the columns

Another effect of the night lighting was that due to the extremely different effect of the Court of Honor during the day and at night, the New Reich Chancellery appeared even larger to the guests than it actually already was. Since the receptions and events often began in the afternoon, the guests usually entered the Court of Honor in daylight. But when the reception ended in the evening, they left the New Reich Chancellery through the

Court of Honor, which was illuminated at night. Since the two versions of the Court of Honor seemed so fundamentally different, the guests often had the feeling of having left the New Reich Chancellery through another room that was new to them. The mystical-looking nocturnal Court of Honor was the last and defining impression that they took home with them from their visit to the New Reich Chancellery.



Fig. 117 The passage, which was rather inconspicuous during the day, was visually highlighted by the light at night

The first post-war photos of the Court of Honor were taken by a Red Army propaganda unit. It wasn't about documenting the condition of the building, but about the question of Adolf Hitler's whereabouts. In order to present the victory in Berlin in the press as a particularly great triumph, they naturally wanted to present the dead Adolf Hitler to the world. When the Soviet troops took over the Reich Chancellery, his remains had not yet been found, let alone identified. A media-effective alternative solution had to be found for the propaganda photo. They were found in the garden of the Reich Chancellery. During the fighting, the defenders of the Reich Chancellery placed the corpses of the soldiers died in the bunker hospital in

a dry fire extinguishing pool. One of the corpses lying above looked very similar to Adolf Hitler. The gunshot wound in the middle of the forehead suggests that the dead man was the Polish forced laborer who was shot by security personnel while climbing over the garden wall at the Führer's Bunker while Adolf Hitler's body was being burned.¹⁸ The Soviets demonstrably only temporarily stored the body in the dining room¹⁹ and then placed it at the portal of the Court of Honor.

18. In an interview conducted by the author, Hitler's bodyguard Rochus Misch recalled that he recognized the man in the propaganda photos as one of the two Poles shot at the bunker during Hitler's cremation.

19. The corpse was also photographed by the propaganda unit in the dining room of the New Reich Chancellery.



Fig. 128 A soldier from the Soviet propaganda department films the “false” Hitler in the Court of Honor