

# THE REICH CHANCELLERY

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A WORK ANALYSIS

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FÜHRER BALCONY/LARGE DOUBLE PORTAL/GATE PASSAGE

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ALBERT SPEER

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New Reich Chancellery/Exterior/Wilhelmstrasse 78/1934-1949

## Content

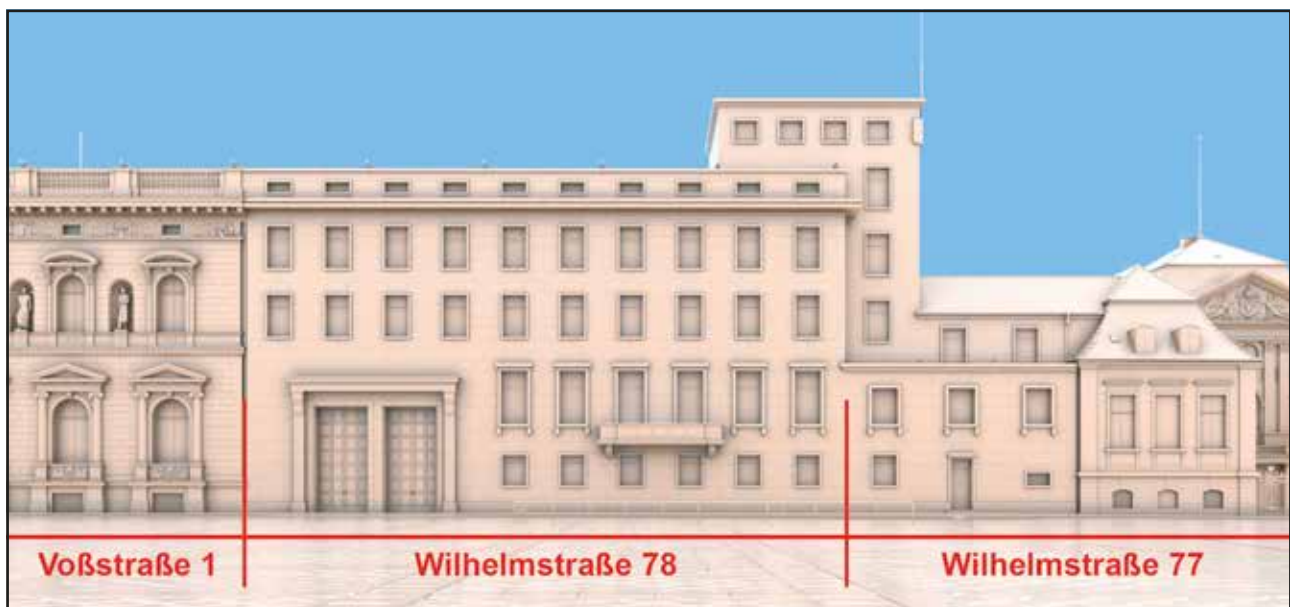
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## Preface

The building at Wilhelmstrasse 78 was not built by Albert Speer. However, due to the sometimes considerable structural alterations he made to the facade between 1935 and 1939, a separate volume in this book series is dedicated to Speer's renovations. The building at Wilhelmstrasse 78 was constructed between 1928 and 1930 by the architect Eduard Jobst Siedler and his assistant Robert Kisch. The new Reich Chancellery, built as an extension to the Reich Chancellery<sup>1</sup>, housed the offices and reception rooms of the Reich Chancellery and the Reich Chancellor. The building's construction history dates back to 1928. As early as 1934, Albert Speer carried out extensive renovations to the building's interior. This book focuses exclu-

sively on the alterations Speer made to the facade facing Wilhelmstrasse. To clearly distinguish the various components of the Reich Chancellery, Speer's other modifications to the building are described in other volumes in this series. The interior of the passageway in the Court of Honor was not an integral part of the building's facade. However, since it makes sense to consider the passageway alongside the portal on Wilhelmstrasse, it is also described in this book. This combined examination of the facade and the passageway is intended to help the reader recognize the visual connections Albert Speer deliberately created between them.

*1. The extension to the Reich Chancellery built on the property at Wilhelmstrasse 78 was referred to as the new Reich Chancellery until the construction of the New Reich Chancellery (1938–1939)*



**Fig. 2** View from the western side of Wilhelmplatz with the property lines of the Reich Chancellery marked

At first glance, it appears as if the new Reich Chancellery extended from the south wing of the Old Reich Chancellery to the Borsig Palace. In reality, a building that had originally belonged to the Old Reich Chancellery was converted and integrated into the facade of the new Reich Chancellery. The same applies to the northern section of the Court of Honor located behind the facade of the

new Reich Chancellery. The construction of the new Reich Chancellery, therefore encompassed the properties at Wilhelmstrasse 77 and 78.

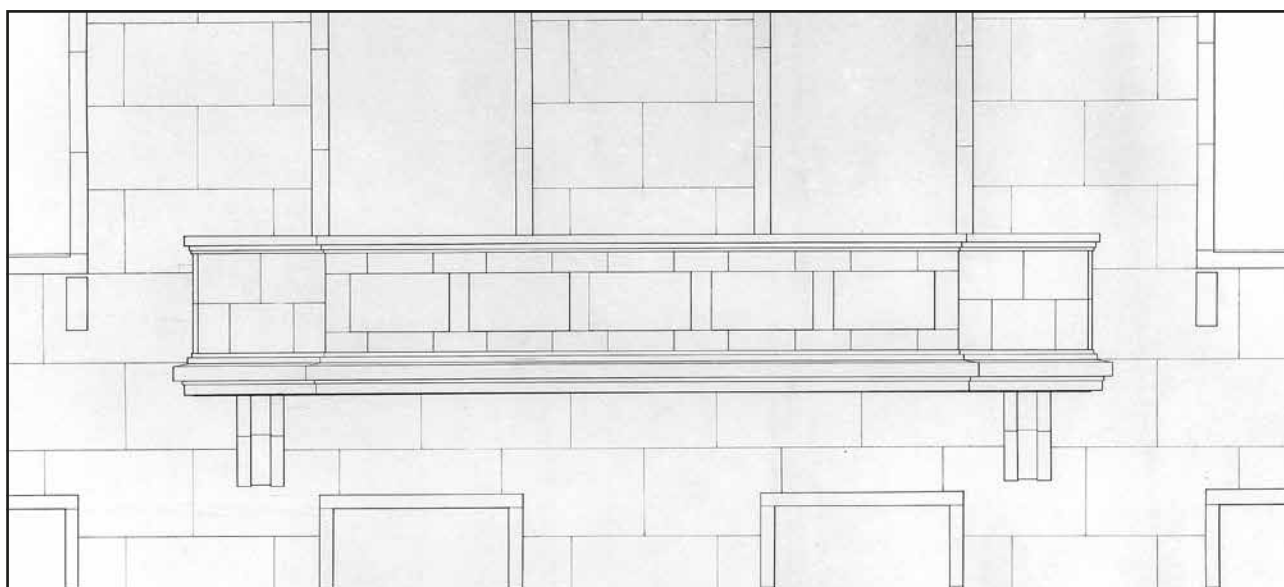
This volume focuses solely on the section of the new Reich Chancellery located on the property at Wilhelmstrasse 78. The description of the sections of the building belonging to Wilhelmstrasse 77 will be provided in a later volume in this series.

## Albert Speer's Design

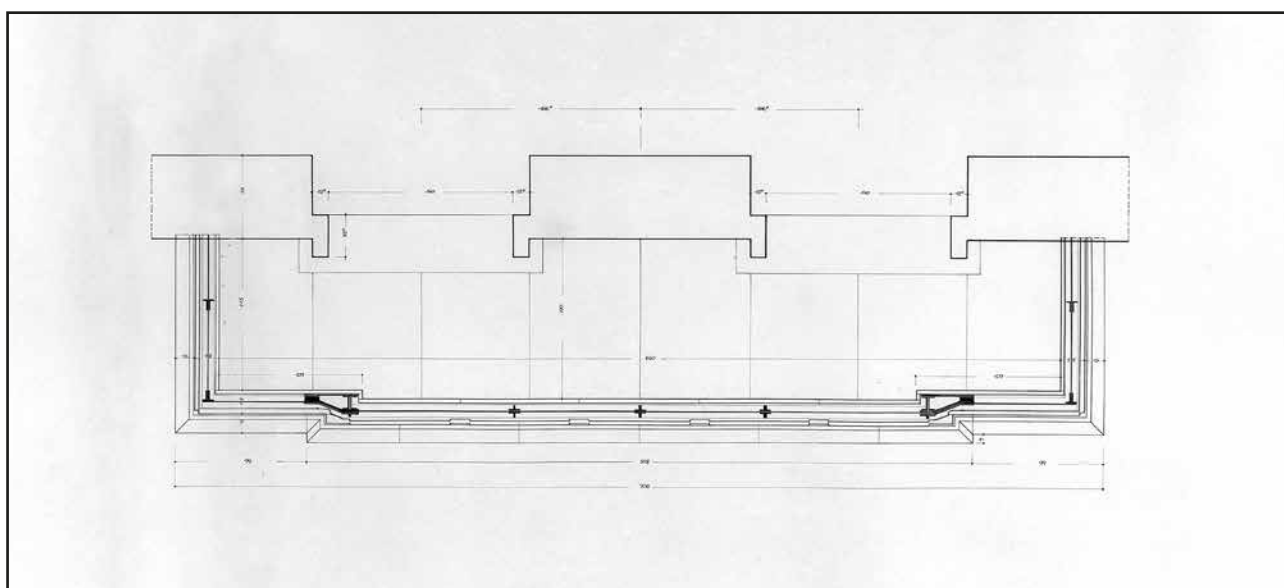
Albert Speer had the unenviable task of revising Hitler's design so that the balcony would, on the one hand, meet Hitler's expectations and, on the other hand, be architecturally integrated into the existing facade. The construction plans for the Führer balcony have been largely preserved.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, a very detailed reconstruction of the balcony is possible. The plans were completed by Albert Speer in July 1935. While he based his design on Hitler's sketch, he simplified the lines so that it would integrate seamlessly into the

existing facade. He omitted the spherical finials on the balcony railing that Hitler had envisioned. He also shortened the balcony by extending it across only two window bays instead of three. This eliminated the segmentation created by the two central posts. Instead of the pilasters, Albert Speer designed a projecting bay along the long side of the balcony railing. This extended the outer window reveals in the balcony railing. Speer designed the entire balcony to rest on just two large corbels, which visually reinforced its structure.

*6. copies are held, among other places, in the Bavarian State Archives*



**Fig. 8** Elevation; construction drawing, dated July 10, 1935



**Fig. 9** Horizontal section; construction drawing, dated July 10, 1935

## How the Gate Control System Works

Each gate leaf weighed 3.5 tons. Since the gates had to be opened and closed several times a day, their considerable weight posed a problem that Albert Speer had to solve. He found the solution with the company "Marcus Metallbau Berlin," which not only manufactured the gates but also supplied them along with a mechanism that could open and close them electromechanically using an electric drive.

To provide sufficient support for the heavy gates, massive copper frames were anchored in the gate jambs. The gates were suspended from these frames. Presumably, the weight of the gates was also supported by the drive rods protruding from the basement rooms beneath them.

The electric motors, the machinery, and the gate control system were housed in the basement rooms. The gate control

system was manufactured by the company "C. Haushahn, Maschinenfabrik, Feuerbach."<sup>16</sup> Thanks to the motor drive, it was possible to open or close the gates within 11 seconds.<sup>16</sup> Since no keyhole is visible on the gates in the surviving photographs, it can be assumed that the gate-locking mechanism was linked to the gate automation system and that the gates locked automatically when closed. The gate handles only needed to be used manually in emergencies and therefore had a rather secondary function. The gates were operated by push buttons on control panels located inside control boxes integrated into the gate jambs. No photographs or plans of these control panels have survived. Therefore, for the 3D reconstruction, image sources showing similar control panels from when the gate automation system was developed were used.

16. *Bauwelt-Katalog 1940 - 9. Jahrgang*

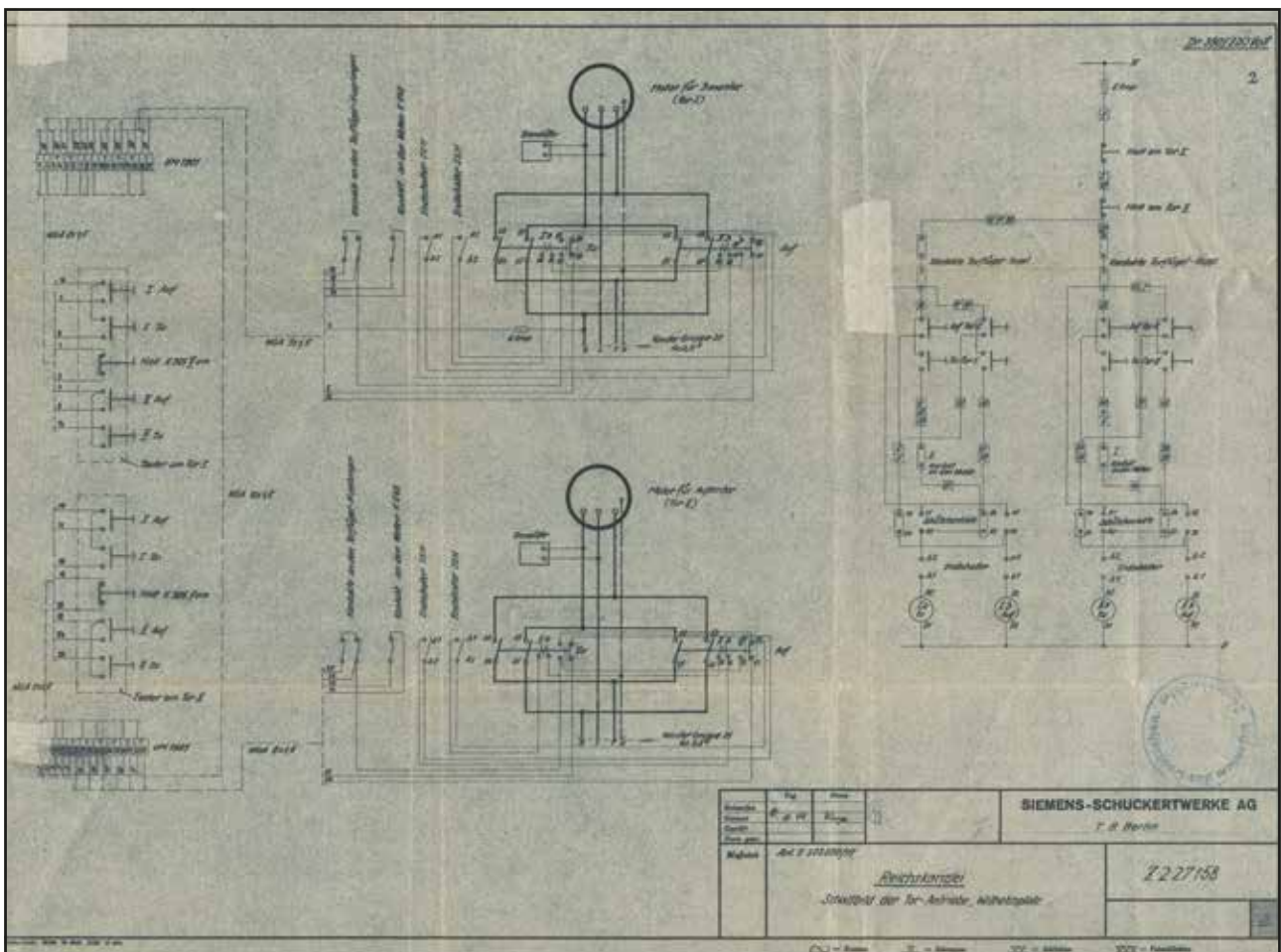


Fig. 67 The wiring diagram of the gate drives at Wilhelmplatz

## Fall Protection

The large events held on Wilhelmplatz were always a major attraction for Berliners. On such occasions, people arrived early to secure a good standing spot. The monuments and trees on the east side of Wilhelmplatz were also climbed by children and teenagers during these events. From these elevated positions, they had an unobstructed view of the events. It is therefore not surprising that onlookers also gathered at the windows of the Reich Chancellery and the other buildings on Wilhelmplatz to get the best possible view of the activity on the square. However, leaning out of the windows of the third floor of the Reich Chancellery could

be dangerous. On this floor, the windows extended closer to the floor than on any other floor. Anyone leaning out of the window on this floor risked falling head first. It is likely that the risky behavior of some onlookers prompted the installation of brass bars to secure the third-floor windows. These bars were anchored in the window reveals at a height of approximately 50cm and provided protection against falls when the windows were open. The installation of the fall protection system is not documented in the Reich Chancellery's records. However, by analyzing historical photographs, the installation date can be narrowed down to a short period. According to these photographs, the installation took place between April 20 and May 22, 1939.



**Fig. 79** Onlookers lean out of the upper windows to see Hitler on the balcony (April 20, 1939)



**Fig. 87** View of the Reich Chancellery buildings from the Hotel Kaiserhof



**Fig. 88** A direct comparison shows how the artificial light changed the square

The passageway, which during the day is a relatively dark space between Wilhelmplatz and the Court of Honor, became the brightest point on the facade at night due to the illumination.

This automatically drew the viewer's eye to it. To achieve this effect, Albert Speer had spotlights mounted on the cornice of the passageway. The resulting cove lighting created indirect ceiling illumination,

visually separating the ceiling from the walls and making it appear almost weightless. Albert Speer introduced his design concept right here at the entrance to the New Reich Chancellery: the reversal of daylight areas into night time shadow areas. This lighting concept was developed for all the rooms of the New Reich Chancellery and extended throughout the entire building.



**Fig. 93** View from Wilhelmplatz through the passageway into the inner Court of Honor

As Soviet troops advanced into the center of Berlin, the Reich Chancellery was structurally reinforced for defense against attacks. In this context, the defenders of the Reich Chancellery converted the Führer balcony into an observation and machine gun emplacement. For this purpose, the balcony was raised and covered with a multi-layered structure of thick wooden planks. All three sides of the balcony were fitted with firing ports embedded in the wooden structure. From the balcony, the defenders could observe and fire upon Wilhelmplatz and Wilhelm-

strasse. The fact that the Führer balcony showed signs of infantry ammunition impacts indicates that it must have been involved in the fighting, at least briefly. This raises the question of whether the defenders of the Reich Chancellery were aware of the steel plates embedded in the Führer balcony and converted it into a machine gun emplacement specifically because of the integrated splinter protection. What is certain is that the Führer balcony offered its occupants reliable protection from infantry ammunition and shells impacting the building's facade.



**Fig. 104** This photograph, taken on July 1, 1945, shows the Führer balcony reinforced with wooden planks