

THE REICH CHANCELLERY

A WORK ANALYSIS

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THE MAIN FACADES OF THE FÜHRERBAU

ALBERT SPEER

New Reich Chancellery / Exterior / Voßstraße 5 / 1937-1956

Inhalt

Foreword	5
Source material for 3D reconstruction	6
The Naming Convention	7
The Initial Design.....	8
The Second Design	12
The Historical Development of the Plots	17
Voßstraße No. 8	19
Voßstraße No. 9	20
Voßstraße No. 10	21
Voßstraße No. 11	22
Voßstraße No. 12	23
Voßstraße No. 13	24
Voßstraße No. 14	25
Clearing the Construction Site	26
The Construction	28
The Difference Between Design and Construction	42
The Materials Used	42
The Significance of the Facade within the New Reich Chancellery Complex	43
The Basic Form of the Facade	44
The Central Building	46
The Articulation of the Central Building	46
The Attic	49
The Eaves Cornice	50
The Attic-Level Windows.....	54
The Mezzanine Windows	55
The Windows of the Main Floor	56
The Plinth	60
The Side Wings	62
The Court of Honor	66
The Basic Layout of the Court of Honor	66
The Lifting Platform	68
The Access to the Air-Raid Shelters.....	72
The Emergency Exits of the Air-Raid Shelters.....	74
The Balustrade	75
The Visual Effect of the Facade Under Artificial Lighting	84
The Destruction	87
The Destruction Caused by Aerial Bombs	88
The Damage Caused by Combat	90
The Demolition	96
Illustrations.....	102

Foreword

The Führerbau (Leader's Building) occupied a special place within the New Reich Chancellery complex. This section of the building housed Adolf Hitler's offices and ceremonial rooms. For this reason, it was designed to stand out architecturally from the rest of the New Reich Chancellery complex. The Führerbau extended from the Court of Honor on Wilhelmstraße to the Reich Chancellery building at Voßstraße 6. Despite its enormous size, the only visible element from Voßstraße was an elongated, doorless structure with a plain facade.

The street-facing facade of the Führerbau was situated between Voßstraße No. 4 (Presidential Chancellery) and Voßstraße No. 6 (Reich Chancellery). Yet, although the Führerbau constituted the most important facade of the New Reich Chancellery along Voßstraße, it was not assigned a street number.

Even though no official number was allocated to the Führerbau, this book series cites Voßstraße No. 5 as its address. This serves to enable the reader to clearly identify the various components

of the New Reich Chancellery complex. Albert Speer set the street-facing facade of the Führerbau back 19 meters from the building line of Voßstraße, thereby creating a Court of Honor in front of the facade. Although the courtyard cannot be considered a structural element of the facade itself, Speer designed it so that its distinctive shape enhanced the visual impact of the Führerbau's street-facing facade. For this reason, the courtyard and its access routes to Voßstraße are described in this volume alongside the Führerbau's street-facing facade.

The 3D reconstruction of the street-facing facade was based on the few architectural cross-sections that have survived and a handful of historical detail photographs. While relatively few photographs focused specifically on the facade of the central building compared to other parts of the Reich Chancellery, those that were taken aimed to showcase the architectural effect to best advantage.

Moreover, the photographs were of high quality, providing a solid foundation for a faithful reconstruction of the facade.

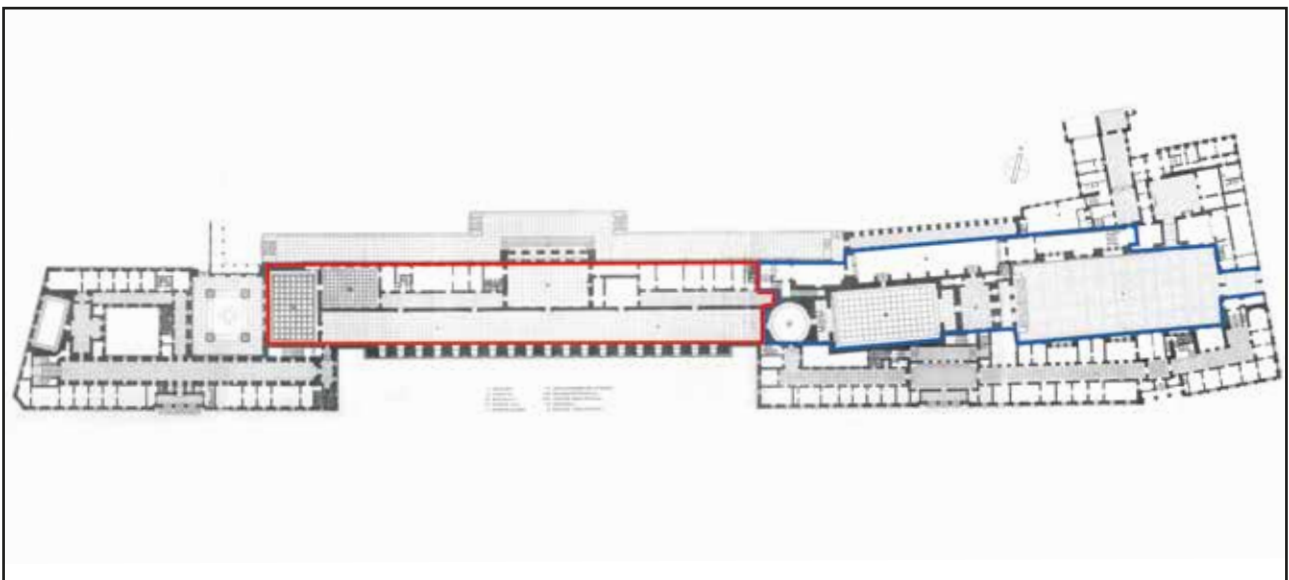


Fig. 2 Blue: eastern sections of the Führerbau / Red: the western section of the Führerbau



Fig. 58 The design of the Central Building created the illusion of ceiling heights that did not correspond to reality



Fig. 59 This section drawing shows the actual ceiling heights of the rooms behind the facade

The Attic

Albert Speer had an attic structure erected atop the eaves cornice. This attic matched the height of those on the administrative buildings. To reflect the significance of the Führerbau, Speer designed a more elaborate upper profile for the attic.

Furthermore—unlike the attics of the administrative buildings—he had the front face of the Führerbau's attic clad in natural stone. This visually integrated the attic into the Führerbau's facade. Because the attic was clearly visible from Voßstraße, Speer extended its narrow ends beyond

the Central Building of the Führerbau and deep into the roof structure. This created the impression that the cornice and attic encircled the entire Central Building, enclosing it as a distinct architectural volume. Unlike the attics on the administrative buildings, the attic on the Central Building of the Führerbau's street-facing facade fulfilled the traditional architectural purpose of such structures: concealing the roof and the eaves. In the case of the Central Building, the eaves were indeed positioned at the same level as the base of the attic.



Fig. 63 The attic parapet at the western corner of the Central Building

Albert Speer designed a balustrade for the Court of Honor on Voßstraße; its basic form was modeled on the natural stone plinth of the fence surrounding the Old Reich Chancellery.

The openings in the balustrade symbolized the entrances to the Old Reich Chancellery's Court of Honor. Although Speer opted against erecting a full enclosure

fence for the Führerbau, the balustrade nonetheless served as a modern, simplified form of fencing and gateway.

This transformed the courtyard in front of the Führerbau into a Court of Honor reminiscent of a classic French aristocratic palace, while its shape created a visual link between the Old and New Reich Chancelleries.



Fig. 84 The Court of Honor in front of the Führerbau of the New Reich Chancellery on Voßstraße

The courtyard floor was paved with granite slabs made from the same natural stone used for the sidewalk paving on Voßstraße. A vehicle lift was set into the courtyard surface in front of the eastern side facade. This lift allowed vehicles to be lowered to the entrance of an underground roadway that ran through the basement level of the New Reich Chancellery. The Court of Honor also housed the entrances and emergency

exits for the public air-raid shelters located beneath the Führerbau. The public shelters within the New Reich Chancellery complex—which were made accessible to the Berlin population—were situated in the basement levels of the Führerbau.⁹

9. The underground sections of the New Reich Chancellery, as well as the mechanics of the air-raid shelters and the vehicle lift, are described in a separate volume of this series. The present volume covers only those aspects of the lift and the shelter openings that were visible from the Court of Honor.

The lifting platform was large enough to accommodate a truck with a trailer. This made it possible to supply the New Reich Chancellery's heating system with coal or to transport other supplies to the delivery zone in the basement.

By installing the lifting platform, Albert Speer found a technical solution to connect the New Reich Chancellery direct-

ly to the road network without having to build an access road from Voßstraße. Since the lifting platform was located in the publicly accessible Court of Honor, it became a tourist attraction immediately after entering service. Whenever vehicles were lowered into the basement on the platform, passersby would regularly gather to marvel at the technology.



Fig. 86 The lifting platform was long enough to accommodate a truck with a trailer



Fig. 99 View of the Wertheim department store on Voßstraße from the western entrance to the Court of Honor

With the onset of direct combat operations in Berlin and the resulting constant shelling, the decision was made to keep only the entrance to Air-Raid Shelter 1 operational. This decision was likely prompted by the fact that Berliners remained inside the shelters throughout the sustained bombardment, leading to chronic overcrowding. A report compiled by the company "Dräger Werke Lübeck" during the final days of the war indicates that the fighting in Berlin—and the associated continuous shelling of the New Reich Chancellery—caused ventilation problems for the air-raid shelters. An inspection by "Dräger Werke Lübeck" revealed that the four closed access hatches had been completely buried under building components and rub-

ble that had fallen from the facade. This debris blocked the narrow ventilation slits located between the hatches and the paving of the Court of Honor. Since clearing the debris and opening the hatches was impossible amidst the ongoing hostilities, an alternative solution had to be found.

A post-war photograph (Fig. 120) shows a small ventilation shaft situated in front of the entrance to Air-Raid Shelter 1. This shaft was installed in the ground of the Court of Honor directly in front of the access hatch and was covered by a protective metal grate. It is assumed that this ventilation shaft was installed during the final days of the war to improve the supply of fresh air. It is not known whether similar shafts were installed at the other entrances.



Fig. 120 A Soviet soldier poses in front of the entrance to air-raid shelter 1

Shortly after the capitulation of Berlin, the Soviets exploited the powerful symbolism of the Führerbau at the New Reich Chancellery for propaganda purposes. To this end, they had captured German soldiers march along Voßstraße past the New Reich Chancellery. They sent General Helmuth Weidling—the final commander of the Berlin defense sector—to the entrance of air-raid shelter 1. From there, he and other high-ranking German military officers were required to step out onto the street in front of the Führerbau while being filmed. The footage, intended for Soviet newsreels, was meant to show the commander of Ber-

lin surrendering to Soviet soldiers after emerging from the Reich Chancellery's underground shelters. Naturally, the film omitted the fact that General Weidling's command post was not actually located in the Reich Chancellery, and that the shelter he emerged from was in fact a civilian air-raid shelter intended for the population of Berlin. After the war, the open hatch of air-raid shelter 1 and its lowered lift platform became popular subjects for photographs taken by Allied occupation troops; photographic evidence of the enemy's sophisticated technology made the victory over Hitler's Germany appear all the more significant.



Fig. 122 General Weidling leaving air-raid shelter 1 (May 6, 1945)