Summary

Objekttyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **Bauen + Wohnen = Construction + habitation = Building + home : internationale Zeitschrift**

Band (Jahr): **12 (1958)**

Heft 6

PDF erstellt am: **28.04.2024**

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Summary

Connecticut General Life Insurance Co., Bloomfield, Conn., USA (pages 177—185)

Once again the firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill has tackled an especially difficult architectural problem and solved it with outstanding success. The Connecticut Life Insurance Company, one of the oldest American insurance companies, has its head office in Hartford, the American "Insurance City," along with 41 other such companies, where 22,000 insurance employees work. Owing to the expansion of its operations, Connecticut Life has had to be moved outside the city limits. The directors of the company have selected an idyllic site in Bloomfield, a place painted at one time by Constable and celebrated by poets. The landscape here is slightly undulating and covered with old stands of oaks. A hundred hectares of ground were purchased and put at the disposal of the arcitects for the administration building. The building consists of a large rectangle, 99.75 x 142.65 m., with four square garden courts measuring 22 x 22 m. and the north wing measuring 22 x 65.75 m. The three-storey main building is connected with the four-storey north wing by means of a glassed-in footbridge. A cafeteria on the ground floor projects sharply from the main building over a pool. The buildings have been designed as place of work and recreation for 3000 employees. The architects have succeeded in putting their inimitable stamp on these buildings, using once again their simple, clear architectural idiom, which is so well-known to our readers. The buildings as a whole and all structural details possess that crystalline clarity and simplicity of design that never fail to arouse the admiration of all visitors. Our illustrations are eloquent testimony of the architects' success. The colour schemes and the lines of the buildings in the setting of the magnificent landscape all contribute to the overall effect of harmony, which makes this such a unique place of work. Early in the planning stage the owner and the architects engaged the services of one of the leading interior decorating firms of America, the Knoll Planning Unit. There was an ideal spirit of teamwork between this firm and the architects, which was all the more fruitful in results in that they worked together from the very beginning and not simply after the buildings had been designed or were even in a rough stage of completion, as unfortunately happens so often, at the expense of the owners, in Switzerland and in Europe at large. The owner's contract with Knoll Planning Unit defined the work of the interior decorator as an advisory associate of SOM. In line with this agreement Knoll worked out all problems involved in the interior construction and fittings, plans, wall and cloakroom construction, lighting, colour schemes, selection of materials and furniture. The most important problems were: a) to create efficient, pleasant and flexible working premises, which was difficult in consideration of the large number of employees; b) to arrange the rooms so that they would constitute harmonious units in the architectural whole; c) to create a feeling of interconnection in the enormously large rooms (around 100 x 140 m.). All the basic problems of organization were discussed in a spirit of close collaboration among the building committee, the architects and interior decorators. These conferences extended over several months. After these basic discussions Mrs. Florence Knoll as director of the Planning Unit was given an absolutely free hand in all departments. The basis for all studies were the plans drawn up by the architects on the scale of 1/4″ = 1′ — 0″. On this scale, models were assembled for the various floors, an exact study made of the location of the different activities of the company, the plans, the combinations of materials and the colour schemes were compared, discussed and decided upon. In the summer of 1955 the rough pattern had taken shape. The building committee had in the meantime approved the erection of a model house (proposed by the architects as a device to ward off costly investments which might later turn out to be ill-advised). With this mock-up on the scale of 1:1, which was set up on the building site, all proposals were carefully put to the test. Various ideas concerning lighting, Venetian blinds, ceiling and floor construction were tested here. The large work rooms in the main building are constructed without columns. This necessitated a construction involving movable posts to which partitions could be attached. By anchoring these supports in the ceiling and the floor any desired size of room was rendered possible. The Modulor system required a special design for most of the furnishings. Desks, filing cabinets and cocktail tables were designed separately. It is notable that the same rectangular steel tubing was used for the legs of all sofas, armchairs, desks and filing cabinets. The element of formal design was not restricted, however, to the furniture, but became in fact industrial design in connection with things like electrics switches, television, trays for the self-service cafeteria, ash trays, flower vases, picture frames or the EXIT signs required by the fire regulations. The fact that throughout this entire vast project there is an element of interconnection and continuity, an underlying idea tying the whole together, is only to be ascribed to the teamwork among all the various specialists who worked together in a spirit of friendly co-operation and mutual support.

Bavarian State Food Administration in Munich (pages 186—189)

In September 1953 the Bundesminister der Finanzen invited for a competition concerning the erection of a new building of the Bavarian State Food Administration in Munich. The project awarded with a prize was executed.
The site is situated in the north of Munich. The vacant area is to be converted into a park.
The annuitants hindered in going enter a glass main-hall from whose the organization of the whole edifice can be surveyed. All important rooms are situated on the ground floor and can easily be reached by the public. These forwarding wings are to the left and to the right of the hall. The main-building over the longitudinal hall on the ground floor has three storeys.

Carbonic Acid Plant in Hamburg-Altona (pages 190—193)

The owner ordering the new construction and the renovation is a Dutch company operating on a European scale with most of its production facilities located in West Germany. The basis of its production are natural carbonic acid reserves tapped by borings. The natural carbonic acid is compressed on the spot in steel cylinders. Customers in areas where natural reserves do not exist are supplied with acid in special cars in whose large tanks the acid is concentrated at high pressure and transported to local filling plants, where it is transferred to steel cylinders. Thus producers of carbonic acid endeavour to make themselves independent of the chance fluctuations which arise in connection with the exploitation of natural deposits. The basis of artificial carbonic acid production is coke. The derivation of carbonic acid from coke presents no insuperable technical problems, and the almost complete absence of waste products results in an exceedingly clean production process. The cleanliness of the production of artificial acid was an important factor behind the design of the plants, in which it was sought to impress upon consumers the truth of the abovementioned fact. The heat generated by the machinery necessitated high, airy sheds, and they have been given varied colour schemes which stress the function of the different technical installations. The various apparatus and movable machinery stand on immaculate plastic floors, and they are connected together by the system of supply pipes, whose colour symbolizes their role as a kind of chemical circulatory system. The whole plant is supervised by the workers on duty from a glassed-in control station. The architectural success of the new construction has certainly been decisive in inducing the management to convert the old buildings of the former filling plant and to adapt them to a great extent to the design of the new construction.

The America-House in Hamburg (pages 194—197)

A new U.S. Information Center has been built on the Moorweide in Hamburg in the immediate vicinity of the Dammtor Station and the new University. This new building comprises, in addition to a large library, discussion and lecture rooms, a music library as well as administration offices and exhibition rooms and an auditorium with a seating capacity of 420. On the basis of the overall city plan and in consideration of the purpose of this building, the auditorium on the corner of Rothenbaum- and Tesdorpfstrasse has been housed in a structure of its own. The library premises along with the discussion and administration rooms are located in a three-storey building on Tesdorpfstrasse. The exhibition rooms with utility rooms and the entrance constitute a one-storey connecting structure between the auditorium and the library. This arrangement produces a secluded courtyard, which in fine weather can be utilized as an outdoor reading room. In the basement, which gets its light from the courtyard, the offices, the shop and the technical installations are housed. In order to keep the roof clear and not to disturb the compact effect given by the building, the chimney is free-standing completely separate from the complex of buildings. The construction starts from a reinforced concrete skeleton. The pier masonry on the ground floor and the gables of the main building, a part of the connecting structure as well as the stays in the auditorium are of facing brick. The upper floors of the main building are, between the skeleton elements, faced with green-glazed hand-formed clinkers. The entrance wall is faced with red Main sandstone slabs. The interior gives an effect of airiness and intimacy, and the colour scheme in the rooms is in keeping with their functions. The lighting fixtures in the offices are installed above the windows so that they reinforce the natural daylight. Built-in ceiling fixtures have been provided for the library, lobby, drafting room and the small hall. The lighting of the auditorium is effected by fluorescent tubing installed on the upper side of the suspended acoustic ceiling.

Welfare Building of Ciba in Basle (pages 198—201)

The main elevations of the new canteen face west and east, so that all the rooms have ample sunshine. The construction material utilized in all the supporting elements, the foundations, the walls, supports, ceilings, stairs and the roof is reinforced concrete. This material allows for wide spans and also offers all the advantages of fireproofing. A feature of the new building are the large windows with horizontal grid of Peraluman treated with CIBA colours. The ground floor comprises the lobby with a large cloakroom and two telephone booths, plus the centrally located kitchen with the snack kitchen, the scullery, the rinse room and the dishwashing room grouped around it. On the north there is a separate entrance for goods deliveries and the canteen employees, two offices and a lounge. The breakfast room with separate entrance and a newsstand are situated on the south. The four dining-rooms, each of which has a seating capacity of 186, and the four cafés with a seating capacity of 78 each, are distributed over the first and second floors. The managers' dining-room occupies the south wing of the third floor, whereas the north wing of this floor houses a lecture hall with a seating capacity of 300. The central kitchen on the ground floor is equipped with steam-heated pivoting kettles, or autoclaves, with a total content of around 2200 litres. The rinse room is equipped with a large automatic washing machine. Underneath the kitchen are cold storage rooms with space for a minimum two-month supply of potatoes, vegetables and beverages. All the self-service counters have their own hot and cold tables, which can also be used for the pre-heating of plates. Mention should be made finally of the loudspeaker equipment in all the dining-rooms for the broadcasting of music or of news reports.

Welfare Building of a motorcarfactory in Barcelona (pages 202—205)

A Spanish motor-car works has erected a welfare building for the employees of its establishment in Barcelona. The building site is situated on the south-west corner of the factory grounds. The dining-rooms have been planned for 1600 workers, 300 office employees and a hundred engineers, meals being served in two shifts. One of the dining-rooms could without large-scale alterations be converted into an exhibition hall, and in another dining-room cocktail parties for visitors could be held. There are five dining-rooms altogether with four courtyards in between, which are filled with plants and in part adorned with pools. The courtyards are enclosed by covered passageways which are open on the sides.

The three principal construction materials are aluminium, glass and raw brick. The dining-rooms have pent roofs and on the south-east large windows extending from floor to ceiling, the upper half of which, above the roof of the passageway in front, is fitted with brises-soleil. These brises-soleil on the rooms facing south-east are vertically adjustable, on the north-east room and on the kitchen horizontally adjustable. The whole construction project may be characterized as eminently successful in that it has made an uncompromising use of the given construction materials: aluminium, glass and brick. The framework headers constitute frames the uprights of which taper toward the bottom. A particularly light effect is conveyed by the perforation of the flanges.

Welfare Building of Linde's Eismaschinen AG, Mainz-Kostheim (pages 206—208)

The problem confronting the architect here was to build a welfare building in which 1200 meals can be cooked and served in three half-hour shifts. Since the preparation itself takes about 20 minutes, that leaves 10 minutes for serving. The basement floor was intended for dressing rooms, lavatories and showers. The building had to be ready for use six months after the awarding of the contract. The plan guarantees the smooth functioning of all the operations to take place in the building, the design of which bears witness to the architect's endeavour for simplicity and crystalline clarity.

Brazil builds its new capital city (pages 209—212)

The construction of Brasilia, the new capital of Brazil, is progressing rapidly. The airport, with a landing strip 3 km. long, has been in service already for more than a year. Construction is under way on the Congress Building, the Presidential Palace and a church in accordance with the plans by Oskar Niemeyer, and President Kubichek hopes that it will be possible for him to end his term of office, in 1961, in the new capital. By that time the city will have been completed and ready to function as the new centre of the Government, and its population will probably come to around 30,000 or 40,000. When the capital is transferred, from 15,000 to 20,000 government employees will be moved to the new quarters. The shift of the capital to the geographical centre of the country, the central plateau of Goyas, will contribute to counteracting the present concentration of the population in the coastal cities and will tend to displace it toward the thinly inhabited interior. The new capital, which is approximately 1000 km. from Rio de Janeiro, can be characterized as an artificial device of the Government to divert the stream of immigration, which at the present time moves almost exclusively into the large industrial areas on the coast. A waterfall in the vicinity of the city has made possible the construction of a reservoir 48 km. long and in places 4 km. wide, which assures the new city of a source of electric power. For the carrying out of this gigantic undertaking there has been set up a semi-governmental Urban Development Commission to handle the planning of the new city along with the necessary technical installations such as the water system, canalization, power production and highways. The basic idea behind the city plan grew out of a national competition set on foot during 1956—57. The problem was to elaborate, not just any city plan, but a plan for the capital city of Brazil. The first prize was awarded to the plan submitted by Lucio Costa, by an international jury.