

Arnulfpost

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HELLO, MUNICH

Bavaria and its capital are famous for their traditions: from Lederhosen and folk music to pretzels, Obazda cheese, Weißwurst sausages, and charming beer gardens. But Munich is also a highly modern city, home to leading universities and many tech companies, including Google. The historical Arnulfpost complex reflects these two sides of Munich – the traditional and the modern – in fascinating ways.

On the one hand, Arnulfpost has always been a place of innovation and progress. From the 1930s onwards, Munich's postal packages were sorted here using a cutting-edge processing system, then delivered to addresses all over the city via electric vehicles. Fittingly, the history of Arnulfpost chimes with Google's mission: "To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." On the other hand, the complex – which today is a listed historical site – is steeped in tradition, having once been a trailblazer of Munich's modernist Postal Building School architectural movement.

Paying tribute to this important architectural legacy is a priority as we transform the site into a center of innovation for future generations. In this edition of our newsletter, you'll find out how we're working with building preservationists, architects, stonemasons, restoration experts, and other specialists to protect the history of Arnulfpost as it is redeveloped. This twice-yearly newsletter will continue to be our key communication channel with locals and others interested in our work. (If you missed the first few editions, you can find them at realestate.withgoogle.com/arnulfpost/).

Our team is always eager to hear any ideas, questions, or suggestions you may have. You can reach my colleagues at arnulfpost@google.com



Sincerely,
Dr. Wieland Holfelder
Site Lead Google Munich



Our wing building's new roof - a contemporary interpretation of the original design approach



BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO TRADITION

When Arnulfpost was built a century ago, it was well ahead of its time. The architects behind it – Robert Vorhoelzer, Franz Holzhammer, and Walther Schmidt – were pioneers of Bavarian modernism and the New Objectivity movement in Munich. The three set new benchmarks in engineering and design, and their innovative approach is evident in many of the Arnulfpost building's features. For example, the rotunda once had 58 entry gates that were custom built for the 58 electrically powered trucks that used to deliver to Munich's 58 postal districts. The glass dome roof flooded the interior with daylight, while also giving the building its distinctive appearance.

Today, the rotunda – often referred to as the "Post Palace" – is a listed historical building, as is the rest of the Arnulfpost complex. "The entire ensemble has historical significance," says Andrea Schambeck.

“That’s why all the surviving features of the period are being restored during construction.” The trained architect is a Senior Project Architect at allmannwappner, the architectural firm leading the renovations of the building’s shell and core. Andrea and the team are working closely with historical preservation advisors and authorities, who are involved in both overall structural planning and selecting partner firms to carry out delicate restoration work.

But before the restorations could begin, some detective work was needed: The team pored over photos and plans from the time Arnulfpost was built to determine its original state – and made some surprising findings. For example, analysis to find out the age of a wooden roof truss revealed that it was actually a replacement part, installed decades after the building’s construction.



“Historical preservation is about keeping as much as possible, and – when that isn’t possible – developing a contemporary interpretation of the original design,” explains Schambeck, who specializes in building redevelopment and listed historical buildings. She cites the iconic glass dome as an example, which is also a key feature of the new Arnulfpost, now fitted with smart glass that darkens automatically in bright sunlight. “This aligns with the ethos of architectural New Objectivity, specifically its focus on functionality.”

Andrea Schambeck
Associate, Senior Project Architect

Period features closely intertwined with local building traditions are also being preserved elsewhere at Arnulfpost: for example, sections of the extra-wide corridor with dark red ceramic tile in the wing buildings that used to be passageways for mail delivery trucks. Or the original façade plastering once typical of Munich, which was applied thickly mixed with color pigment rather than being painted over as it generally is today.



Visualization of the archway after restoration



PRESERVING AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE



Neuschwanstein Castle, Munich's Siegestor, the Walhalla memorial: Dr. Pfanner GmbH, a firm specialized in masonry, sculpture, and restoration projects, has worked on some of Bavaria's most iconic buildings. For the Arnulfpost project, the prestigious firm's focus is restoring the building's historical façade. Architect and project manager Florian Winkler explains the unique appeal of this project.

What are the fundamentals of restoring historical buildings?

Preserving as much as possible of the original structure is always our goal. We don't want the building to look new when we're finished. Its historical roots can and should still be clearly recognizable.

What does that mean for your work?

We alter the substance of the building no more than is necessary. Obviously, we carry out any essential repairs, such as ensuring rainwater runs off the façade properly. But we wouldn't replace all the natural stone if simply fixing a few problem spots would do the trick. This means we have to make a lot of case-by-case decisions as we go, often in dialogue with the historical preservation authorities.



One of our gorgeous archway before the restoration works - 100 years of brickwork craftsmanship

Your firm has restored some of Bavaria's most prestigious historical buildings. What was it about Arnulfpost that appealed to you and your colleagues?

The variety of materials used in the building is interesting. Usually, we work on buildings that are constructed entirely from one material – like natural stone or brick. Arnulfpost has both, as well as artificial materials like concrete and plaster. Also, we were drawn to the 1920s architecture, which is relatively rare these days. Some buildings from that era were destroyed in World War II and, after that, the architectural style changed. Architecture like this on such a large scale, and in combination with new builds, is really quite something.

Which aspects of the work have been especially challenging?

A particularly unique task has been reconstructing the nine-meter-wide northern archway, which we modeled on the preserved southern archway. Nobody builds architectural features like these anymore, so we had to turn to some traditional construction techniques: Bricks were laid layer by layer over a scaffold, working from the outside in, and then up to the vertex. That took us several weeks, and we had the bricks specially cast in custom sizes.



Work in progress - detailed archway brickworks

How can you tell which parts of the building are still in their original state and which have been altered?

Arnulfpost has been well-researched by construction specialists, and we still have many of the original building plans. Nevertheless, we often find specific parts that haven't been clearly documented. For example, at first, we weren't sure whether the cornice was originally painted and, if so, what color it was. So, we sent four different samples of the stone off to a lab for analysis and discovered that the cornice had not been painted. In the future, restoration specialists will have a far easier job to do: These days, every single step of the construction process has to be documented and photographed.



CRAFTSMANSHIP ROOTED IN TRADITION



Peter Heise is a certified expert in carpentry and structural engineering, currently overseeing Hohlneicher construction firm's work on the new Arnulfpost's roofs. He talks about the long tradition of his craft, and the logistical challenges of large-scale roof renewal.

What are your thoughts on the role traditions play in carpentry?

I like the fact that many traditions are still alive and well in my industry – and I think tradition has real value, too. These days, not many young apprentices dress in classic carpenters' workwear or spend a year traveling the world to develop their craft: an old rite of passage known as the Walz. But carpentry schools still teach the basics of traditional techniques, and our historic carpenters' guild is very useful, bringing firms across our sector together to share knowledge, among other things.

Do you often work on old buildings?

Yes. I mainly work in redevelopment, often on listed historical sites that are at least 100 years old.

What attracts you to projects like these?

You get to see the work of carpenters from generations gone by, and the kinds of wood they used. And you often have to think on your feet, because when you're working on old buildings, things never go as smoothly as they do with new builds.

What exactly is your role in the Arnulfpost project?

Our roofers and plumbers are handling all the roof construction work. This encompasses the roofing on the wing buildings and on the rotunda.

Which aspect of this is the most challenging?

The logistics, without a doubt. We're building 88 dormer windows alone, which have to be crafted from wood, delivered to the site, and then installed. On top of that, there are 110 skylights, as well as various sheet metal and timber constructions. But the sheer scale of this site isn't just challenging, it's also one of the exciting aspects of the project – especially because working with the various other firms and experts has been wonderful so far.



Wing building's new wooden roof at initial structure stages

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Erika-Mann-Strasse 33
80636 München