

A PORTAL FOR BERLIN

The Portal is an urban artefact with a symbolism originating in the railway heritage of the site, which unifies the Gleisdreieck site and creates a new element on Berlin's skyline.

The fragmentation of the Gleisdreieck site, resulting from the gradual accretion of modern infrastructure, has (perhaps unintentionally) created a rich ecology of small-scale urban spaces – underpasses and disused railway buildings, but also parks, musea, recreation zones and diverse neighbourhood life. This diversity pleads for an intervention of suitable scale that can develop and frame its various potentials. The Portal, spanning across entire length of the area, offers a convincing solution. Its improbable dimensions suggest not a building, but an industrial structural element with a symbolism originating in the railway heritage of the site – an inhabited truss that unifies the Gleisdreieck site and creates a new element on Berlin's skyline.

Connecting fragments

The portal prioritizes continuous connections, space for movement and interaction. Its fundamental urban gesture is that of an architectural “runway” consisting of an uninterrupted surface 480m in length linking the Parkhaus in the north to the Stellwerk in the south. This strip connects not only the fragments of the site plots, but also activates the adjacent elements. It bundles together pedestrian surfaces, bicycle lanes and street frontage for retail, galleries, and the other public amenities inhabiting the base of the portal, and is directly adjacent to car drop-off and underground parking access. Further design of the strip is flexible, pending more precise information on ground level obstacles and features (such as the new S21 line and DB emergency tunnel access). The remainder of the site is intended to be a car-free zone with slow circulation arteries, a zone which potentially could radiate outwards to envelop STATIONBerlin and the Technikmuseum.

Views

A typical low-rise solution would create a wall effect along the different plots in order to accommodate the ambitions for floor area. Instead, the lifting action of the Portal's towers create expansive ‘windows’ that preserve sight lines across the Gleisdreieck zone. In addition, the sculpting of the tower footprints where these intersect the railway lines creates additional corridors at grade.

Program + Flexibility

The portal is intended to function as a “social platform” containing three levels of spaces – the **base**, **towers**, and the top **bar**. The base, with floorplates sculpted out of the railway and slow circulation paths, contains retail, gallery space, hotel amenities and fitness program under a generous floor height. The towers, with slim but flexible plates, accommodate offices, hotel, and apartments, with the narrow footprint allowing for generous daylighting and minimum hallway space. The elevated bar contains higher-level offices, hotel and apartments within a linear configuration, creating adjacencies that suggest programmatic mixing between these zones. The standardization of elements in a highly regular grid allows for great flexibility, with the building typology able to respond to shifting demands of occupancy.

Phasing

While the portal unifies the sites in one gesture, it also intrinsically allows for phased construction, with individual towers and/or “rings” being lifted one at a time.

Structure

The shape of the Portal intrinsically offers solutions to challenges posed by the fragmentation of the site as well as the high density of underground tunnels and ground-level obstacles. The vertical loads of the towers can be transferred through the base in order to avoid landing on underground tunnels or obstacles. The base is supported by a table on columns (with supplementary anchoring by the cores), which are independent from the structural grid above, ensuring maximum design flexibility in order to accommodate the obstacles on ground.