



A kindergarten school in Germany elucidates how clever planning is so important in such a space. With its colourful and multi-functional design the architectural firm establishes that it was the right choice for the job at hand.

SMALL AND BEAUTIFUL

Text By K Parvathy Menon
Photographs Michael Schnell
Courtesy The Architect



“We are small, but important!” These were the opening lines of Bernd Liebel, Principal Architect at Liebel/Architekten BDA, when tasked to design a kindergarten school for the St. Vincent Catholic Church. Says project leader, architect Steffen Kainzbauer, “that statement became the team’s guiding principle in the conception of the Kinderhouse”.

The church wanted to extend its school to include a kindergarten block and through a competition picked the German design firm, whose style according to them was ‘child-friendly’.

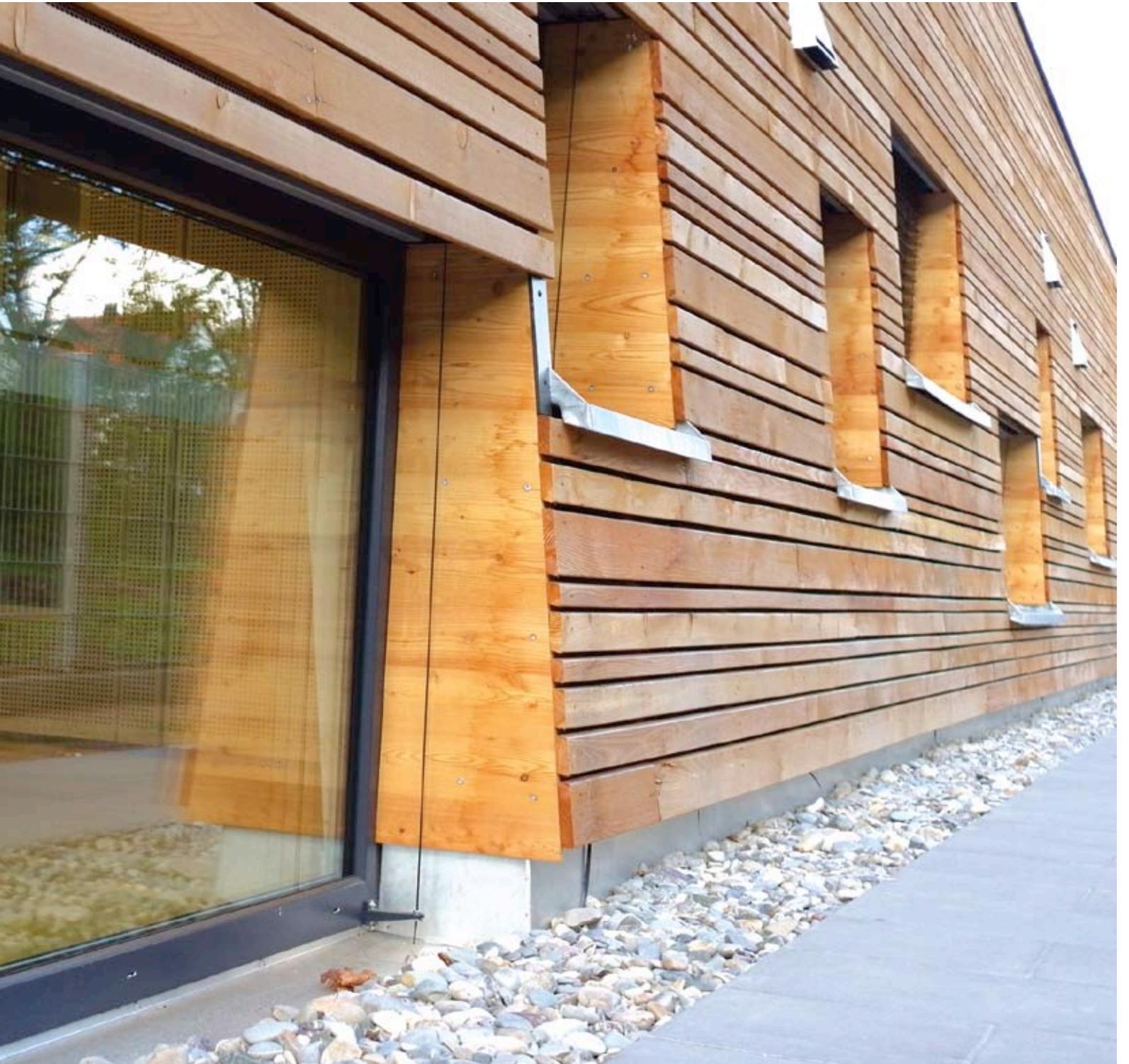
The first views of the school are ambiguous - a wooden sheathed wall speckled with windows of varying sizes; it is only as we come closer that colours, spaces and structural geometry come to the fore, promising us a fun adventure.

Very early on, Architect Steffen Kainzbauer and the team consisting of Carmen Jochim and Britta Neumann, realised that the location of the project in an industrial zone, next to two high traffic roads and a rail line caused numerous issues like, raised noise levels, security risks and uninspiring vistas.

The team explains, “We had to design around these location challenges. The new building reacts to the environment: it is closed and compact, opening only to the garden. Also the single-storey building supports the St. Vinzenz pedagogic concept, where kindergarten groups are periodically changed.”

So, the team by removing and retaining some of the old structure derived a story that narrated the spatial architecture travelling through restricted, confined spaces or Baufensters as the Germans phrase it.







The new building is set alongside the old structure and a central path between the two leads you towards a fenced garden courtyard at the end. The floor plan of the new building created a central courtyard in this path which helped the designers a great deal as 'the focus was on short distances'; this they felt was necessary to ensure maximum supervision and a minimum risk of accidents.

The design started by creating a good barrier in the form of a large wall which would block out unwanted noise coming from the railway track. The wood clad walls got a touch of chaotic charm with their irregular fenestration pattern - windows, varying in size were placed at different levels, reflecting the child friendly scale the designers used in the interiors.

One of the most notable feature and a justification for the Church to pick out Liebel/Architekten BDA as winners was the child friendly scale used in the school. As we walk through the bright yellow street like corridors, it is hard to miss how the design fuses architectural scales, both big and small, to accommodate adults, kindergarten children and tiny toddlers. Inside there are niches and recesses at ground level for the children to enjoy the garden views from almost everywhere.

Yet another interesting aspect is how the team divided the major rooms into sub-regions using different ceiling heights, open spaces, niches and corners. **Colour schemes identify different activity areas in different rooms, giving the children a clear sense of orientation and a variety of spatial experiences.** Planned skylights, fully glazed walls, atriums and windows flood these rooms with both the southeast and the southwest sunlight, allowing the children to experience the progression of the day using all their senses.

The roof has been a decisive element which the team used to realise their design concept. Extending from the lateral wooden sheathed wall it reaches the old structure; en-route it covers the central spine, courtyards and integrates the two distinct structures. The architects folded and sliced the roof plate, altering the geometry that filters ample natural light not only into the new building but also into the old structure.

The design team expounds further, "The folded reinforced concrete ceiling has greatly affected the design. It is not just the illumination, but the form also reflects the interior functions; high ceilings in the central multipurpose room and classes while lower heights in the sleeping rooms."

It is no surprise that the interactive and explorative interior spaces of the school have been a recipient of many awards including the Hugo Haring Award 2014. Working the constraints to their advantage, Liebel/Architekten BDA designed the school in a simple and clear spatial narrative, involving the children to experience the changes happening around them in an ocular and tactile setting, proving 'We are small but important'.



Despite the lesser footprint on ground, the designers went for a single storied structure to maximise supervision and minimise accidents.

✉ buero@liebelarchitekten.de
www.liebelarchitekten.de