

Press-Information

Reconstruction of Frankfurt's Old Town – Groundbreaking Ceremony with Lord Mayor Petra Roth

Frankfurt, 30 January 2012 (tcf). Over the next few weeks, people walking across the Römerberg on their way to the Emperor's Cathedral will automatically find themselves facing a gigantic construction site. What's happening here in the heart of Frankfurt's old town, passers-by may ask. It is, simply put, one of the most controversial and, at the same time, one of the most spectacular reconstruction projects currently going on in Germany. While other cities squabble over the reconstruction of individual buildings, Frankfurt am Main has been discussing the reconstruction of an entire quarter. The chronology of the steps it took to bring the project to fruition says much about the general state of mind of Frankfurt's citizenry, for it was they that helped to bring about what the casual observer might call the obvious solution. But the influence exerted by Frankfurt's inhabitants is not surprising, really. After all, the city has been referred to as the "cradle of German democracy" since the landmark events of 1848.

The approximately 7,000-square-metre area in the heart of Frankfurt's old town will now be reconstructed on the basis of the original blueprints of the quarter. Once completed, it will comprise nearly 30 townhouses, eight of which being exact replicas of their historical predecessors. An entire housing row will be rebuilt along the path of the former alley "Hinter dem Lämmchen", these houses being formerly known as "Junger Esslinger", "Alter Esslinger", "Goldenes Lämmchen" and "Klein Nürnberg". Two further townhouses, named "Goldene Waage" and "Rotes Haus", will be reconstructed just north of the archaeological gardens. These gardens were set up right alongside Frankfurt's famous cathedral in 1972/73, a more or less unintentional by-product of the subway line construction that took place then. Various historical eras and styles are on display here, the reconstructed walls and bronze sculptures representing Roman times, the High Middle Ages and the typical design of the imperial palaces of the time.

In an effort to recreate a typically vivacious urban quarter, the buildings to be developed will feature residential space on the upper floors and shops, pubs, offices and restaurants on the ground floor. The design of the buildings, meanwhile, will resemble the style of the original constructions.

Over ninety percent of Frankfurt's historical centre was destroyed during the air raids of World War II. Until then, the location had been the home of Germany's largest mediaeval old town. The half-timbered structures around the cathedral burnt down straight away, while most of the nearby sandstone buildings were completely destroyed in the hail of bombs or demolished shortly thereafter. After the war, Frankfurt's old town was rebuilt in a more modern and car-friendly manner. Later, in the 1970s, a modern multi-storey concrete building housing the city's building and planning authority was built on the grounds between the cathedral and the Römer, where the planned old town reconstruction will be taking place.

The intense and, at times, controversial discussions concerning the planned reconstruction of the old town section between the Dom und Römer, which would also include the demolition of the home of the building and planning authority, lasted over two years. After a municipal jury had recommended a more modern development of the area in 2005, Frankfurt's citizenry raised its collective voice, demanding reconstruction of the site according to its former historical style. It was the unequivocal desire of the people to return Frankfurt's historical centre, which had suffered so greatly during the Second World War, to its former glory. So, in autumn of 2006, Frankfurt's municipal council organised a planning workshop with the express purpose of enabling Frankfurt's citizens to present their ideas and design recommendations. In September 2007, the city council resolved to put the results of this combined workshop into action. Two years later, in 2009, the DomRömer GmbH was founded. This subsidiary of the City of Frankfurt am Main has been charged with the planning and realisation of the project at hand.

In 2010, a request for bids for this prestigious reconstruction project was made. The project was divided up into 27 separate sub-projects, each representing one of the new townhouses to be created. More than 170 architects' offices and design studios from around the world took part in the competition. By March 2011, a special committee made up of architects, politicians and administrators had handpicked the best proposals.

The first sales contracts with private investors were concluded at the end of 2011. This occurrence marked the beginning of a new phase of what is surely Frankfurt's most exciting and highly anticipated urban development project. A week ago, on 23 January 2012, Lord Mayor Petra Roth broke the ground at the construction site, symbolising the commencement of work. And in only a few years, visitors of the old town centre will happen upon a new yet old quarter, a lively place teeming with pubs and restaurants, shops, offices and residences.

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