



“At The Fontenay, the furniture must take its cue from the architecture.”

Interview with Hamburg Architect Jan Störmer

Jan Störmer was born in 1942 in Berlin. After finishing his studies in Bremen, Hamburg, Delft and London he founded the Hamburg Design GmbH for architecture, industrial and graphic design in 1970. In 1990, the office of Jan Störmer Architects came into being which later merged with Will Alsop to create Alsop & Störmer Architects, Hamburg, London, Moscow. Holger Jaedicke joined as a partner in 2002, and Martin Murphy in 2004 resulting in the change of name to Störmer Murphy and Partners. Jan Störmer has significantly shaped the realm of architecture in Hamburg. He has an extensive role as judge in architectural competitions and holds lectures in Germany and abroad.

You receive an invitation to tender for The Fontenay – what happens next? Do you simply go to your desk and get started?

The desk is more of a distraction, instead, the searching and organizing takes place in the mind. During every new project, the strength to find a solution springs from this initial uncertainty. The project's location plays a crucial role in the process. The first sketches are by far the most challenging even if just quickly sketched with a soft pencil. At this stage, all creative minds experience great tension. Whether it's the first notes of a composer, a stage design for the theatre, creating a dress for a new fashion collection or an artist in front of a blank canvas – the transformation of the bubbling confusion in the mind onto paper signifies the birth of a project. The next phase is about visual searching and evolution until it becomes reality. The composer or artist remains in solitude until the completion of his work. The architect transforms into a conductor who must, with great discipline and responsibility towards his contractor, realize and defend his commissioned work.

How long does the process take from being nominated in the initial tendering until the completed model?

Being nominated means that one has already won. Afterwards the phase begins in which to implement and appropriate all contractual and scheduling commitments of all parties involved. The finished model is the overture for an orchestra.

Do you have THE idea right away, or do a few end up in the bin to begin with?

This question can only be answered by every creative mind for themselves. Mozart scribed his notes directly on paper. Beethoven searched for them. Both brought their musical works to perfection.



THE FONTENAY HAMBURG

How did you begin your tasks for The Fontenay?

The old building (Hotel Intercontinental) was built in the 1970s and did not fit in at all with the Alster lake. I deliberated at length on which form of architecture would be best suited for such a unique landscape as it is one of a few parks around the outer Alster lake. Many of the surrounding buildings are from the post-war period or from the late 19th century, and were built in line with the Alster lake ordinance. The ordinance requires that all buildings around the Alster lake be white. I went to the site and sat there imagining what such a building could look like. That is how I came up with the idea of a fluid form of three circles, intertwining with one another creating two large courtyards, with a very organic exterior shape. It was crucial that a hotel in the park not have a back side as it is surrounded by trees and should be flooded with light.

Comments about the sculptural, organic shape...

The circular shape repeats itself throughout the building. Straight walls, except for the partitioning walls, do not exist. The three circles intertwine and narrow in the centre where the elevators carry guests to all levels of the hotel and where courtyards branch off to both sides – an enclosed atrium and an open landscaped courtyard that brings the park into the hotel. The shape of this hotel is so prominent that every single piece of furniture must take the architecture into consideration.

The hotel was conceived in a way that the guestrooms are located on one side, while the other side allows for a view into the courtyards. The path to the guestrooms and throughout the entire hotel complex must always be an experience with beautiful views and perspectives. The public areas are vast. Unlike in other hotels, guests can go for a proper stroll following the circular shapes. There are wonderful views into the atrium, a 27-metre high hollow column with lounge and bar, in a sense the living room, where you can meet and comfortably lounge around enjoying the views above. The walls of the lounge feature a subtle light installation bringing movement into the atrium.

Does the circular shape have anything to do with free-flowing energy?

Yes! Everything follows the principles of Feng Shui.

In terms of structural engineering, what is/was exceptionally difficult to implement for the architecture to take on the desired look?

Dealing with six different circles and radii proved challenging for the designers and construction workers. The supporting structure had to be engineered in a way that wouldn't disturb the organic and fluid shape of the façade with thick supporting columns blocking views and restricting flexibility. The solution was a circumferential mega support beam along the corridor walls extending upwards over five floors.



THE FONTENAY
HAMBURG

Are the porcelain panels on the façade a special tone of white? What is special about porcelain in general as a façade?

Pure white. The enamel coating is especially tough and very resistant to dirt. The large, rounded form of each element has an appealing appearance. The terracotta originates from the Land of Berg – a low mountain range region within the German state of North Rhein-Westphalia – where the terracotta is also processed.

To what degree are you, as an architect, of the opinion that the modern classic style will fulfill the demands of international, cosmopolitan guests. Is The Fontenay an architecturally universal language?

I believe that precisely this type of clientele anticipate architecture that is understood as a universal language.

Does The Fontenay have what it takes to become a world famous hotel?

It must become one!

How did you incorporate the aspect of yourself being the guest, or rather, what is crucial for you as a guest?

I enjoy being welcomed. It's hard to find a place in an urban development location where this is a possibility like at The Fontenay. That was the concept inspired by the "Feng Shui" element of water and the water stone. When I enter the hotel lobby I want a wow-effect that surprises me. I love terrazzo, making a building timeless and noble like an Italian villa. It should be brightly lit and in the evening the lighting should create a new atmosphere. The way to my room should be an experience and my room a sense of calm. I like to have different places to enjoy time alone or with a group. I enjoy being exposed to art.

Do you choose your vacation hotels based on design/architecture?

Also, but not exclusively. However, this does not mean I would choose an architecturally unattractive hotel in favour of location or price.

What are you most looking forward to? Is it the completion of individual construction phases or that point in time when you can walk through the completed hotel?

The first night, when I can stay at „my baby“ that I raised and thereafter fledged.