



Lois Welzenbacher as an Architect of the Nazi Air Force: New Perspectives on the Siebel Aircraft Factory

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The Siebel aircraft factory in Halle an der Saale, Germany, where scouts and bombers for the Nazi regime were produced, is architect Lois Welzenbacher's largest project, constructed in 1939–1944. The complex was severely damaged during the final years of World War II. Its remains were eventually dismantled in 1946. Existing monographs on the architect interpret it as a manifestation of the incorruptibility of Welzenbacher's modernist architectural vision. Newly discovered drawings reveal his designs for the site, which significantly differ from the realised structure. This paper explores these deviations and their underlying causes by recontextualising Welzenbacher's work in Halle. I argue that his more traditional-looking initial designs reflect not his incorruptibility, but rather his opportunism under the Nazi regime.

Keywords: nazi-regime; factory; inner-emigration; reception; interwar-period



Introduction

Lois Welzenbacher (1889–1955) was an outstanding architect and a professor at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts after the war. His most active years as a practising architect fall in the interwar period. Between 1918 and 1931, his work focussed mainly on Tyrol and South Tyrol, but he also designed buildings in Vienna, Linz, Feldkirch, Recklinghausen and elsewhere in Austria and Germany. In 1932, he was the only Austrian architect to be included in the influential *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* (MoMA 1932). From 1933, his building activities shifted increasingly to Germany, in particular to southern Bavaria (Sarnitz 1989: 115–139).

Welzenbacher's architectural vocabulary covers a broad spectrum. Scholars tend to overemphasise his 'built work, which is characterised by classical modernity',¹ as August Sarnitz puts it (1989: 10). In addition to Sarnitz's monograph and the earlier one by Achleitner and Uhl (1968), more recently Eva Maria Froschauer (1998) and Walter Bettauer (2007) have done research on Welzenbacher's projects in Halle. But most of these works were published several decades ago, a fact that in itself opens up new research perspectives for today's scholars, as views about the building under National Socialism and its protagonists have changed considerably.

With the construction of the aircraft factory for Siebel in Halle an der Saale between 1939 and 1944, Welzenbacher did seem to have found a 'niche' for continuing his interwar modernist ideas (Durth 1992: 126–130). Is that truly the case, though? What if a newly discovered set of plans and drawings were to show designs that puts all of that in a different light? On a website on which Daniel Müller (SFW n.d.) is collecting information about the demolished Siebel factory, plans for two of Welzenbacher's buildings appeared recently, which he had found in the Landesarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt (LASA). This set of plans was unknown to previous researchers. Their most striking feature is that some of the depicted designs lack the modern attitude that is usually attributed to him. Unlike the executed *Kameradschaftshaus* (community centre) of the Siebel complex, the original design shows more conservative elements.

In fact, Welzenbacher's other buildings — mainly villas in the countryside, designed during the alleged 'interrupted modernity' between 1933 and 1945 (Sarnitz 1989: 11) — represent a shift in his oeuvre that can also be observed among many architects of the time. The more traditional elements that he used from then on stood in stark contrast to his modern buildings of the 1920s and early 1930s. My paper examines these changes in detail, focussing on the largely destroyed Siebel factory as well as the surviving villa for its director, recontextualising Welzenbacher's work in Halle until 1944. I will concentrate mainly on designs for the *Kameradschaftshaus*, since it is the

most prominent building of the complex, and major deviations between plans and realisation can be detected for this building.

The Siebel Aircraft Factory and Previous Research

The Siebel aircraft factory was located in the northern part of Halle an der Saale (**Figure 1**). Its main aim was to supply the Nazi regime with scouts and bombers (Ebert, Mahn and Tack 2011: 39–41). The manufacturer had settled on the site in 1934 and immediately began to develop the area. Welzenbacher, who joined the project a few years later, was able to complete a total of four factory buildings: the Kameradschaftshaus; the *Torgebäude* (gate building), which housed the medical unit and the company fire brigade among other things; one industrial hall (Halle 22); and a tram stop, which is the only building that still exists today (see Bettauer 2007: 7). He also designed an urban planning concept for the entire site that was never realised (ABKG 2), and a villa for the factory director, outside the premises.

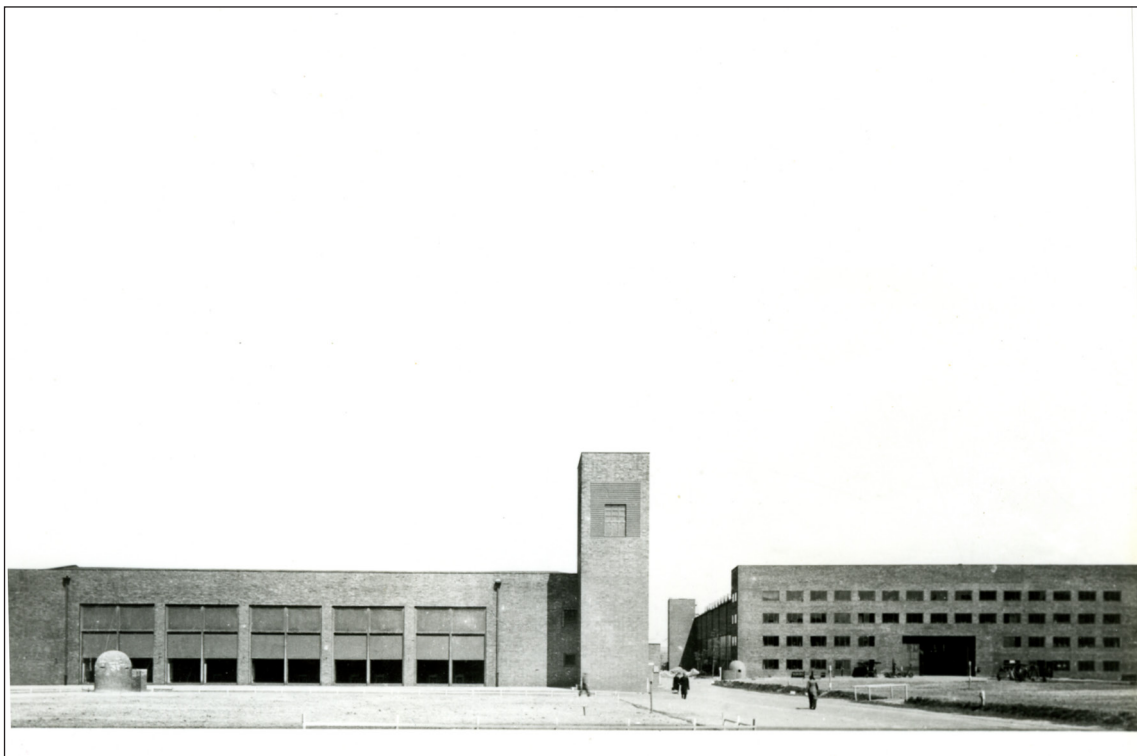


Figure 1: Siebel aircraft factory, Halle an der Saale, Germany. Constructed between 1939 and 1944 (destroyed), designed by Lois Welzenbacher. View from the south, with the Kameradschaftshaus on the left and Halle 22 on the right. Photographer unknown, ca. 1943. Source: ABKG 1-20-2416-21.

According to his wife, Grete, Welzenbacher received the commission through 'private connections to the Siebel company' (quoted in Sarnitz 1989: 133). It is not possible to reconstruct how these connections came about exactly, but Welzenbacher worked with Siebel probably as early as 1937 (Achleitner and Uhl 1968: 12). The two existing monographs give the impression that the Siebel ensemble is the only modernist project that Welzenbacher was able to complete during the Nazi regime.

Friedrich Achleitner and Ottokar Uhl write that Welzenbacher's 'only industrial building (Siebel aircraft factory) shows in another way the incorruptibility of his architectural attitude' (1968: 119). Sarnitz describes the factory as follows:

Welzenbacher strictly adhered to the ideas of functional architecture in the Siebel aircraft factory, both conceptually and constructively. All buildings are made of brick; the production halls and workshops are covered with shed roofs, all other buildings have flat roofs. Welzenbacher largely follows the functional iconography of industrial buildings, occasionally using his own architectural symbols, such as a campanile with a large clockwork. Vertical building elements appear more frequently, entering into a design dialogue with the large horizontal structures of the production halls. ... The clear structure of the façades with the emphasis on the constructive axes is very reminiscent of the buildings of the late 1920s by Alfred Fischer, Hans Hertlein, Paul Bonatz and Peter Behrens. (1989: 134–135)

Whether the entire complex of the Siebel factory actually corresponds to the concept of a 'niche' for the continuation of his modern architectural ideas (Durth 1992: 126–130) must be analysed and put into perspective, considering the new archival findings. Sarnitz uses the term 'inner emigration' when talking about Welzenbacher's works between 1933 and 1945 (1989: 115). Ulrich Baron (2008) explains 'inner emigration' in the context of staying active under National Socialism without playing a part in it, adding that, in practice, however, it can be described 'as a somewhat more elegant variant of simply looking away' (2008). Taking into account that the Siebel factory was a major military project, involving serious ethical considerations, I want to show that such a view of Welzenbacher must be revised.

The complex was severely damaged during the final years of World War II. After a brief phase in which the Soviet occupiers continued to work on aircraft development, the workforce was deported to Russia in 1946; the remains of the factory were dismantled the same year (see Ebert, Mahn and Tack 2011: 4; SFW n.d.). It should also be mentioned that in 1944, a subcamp of Buchenwald, the KZ Birkhan-Mötzlich, was established close

to the factory premises to supply the Siebel factory with forced labour (see Grashoff 2010; Wingert 2008), but this topic is beyond the reach of this paper.

The Kameradschaftshaus: Planned vs. Built

The newly discovered set of plans and drawings² for the Kameradschaftshaus and Torgebäude in particular, both from 1939, is remarkable for various reasons. Welzenbacher's archival estate, which is held partly in the Archiv für Bau.Kunst. Geschichte, at the Universität Innsbruck, and partly at the Albertina Vienna, generally contains relatively few plans. Both archives have design drawings, sketches and photographs of the Siebel factory, but no plans. The fact that architectural plans of the Siebel factory have not been found until now could also be related to security aspects, as it was a key military site. Welzenbacher's own archive was burned in a bombing raid (Sarnitz 1989: 184), which is why for many of his buildings we have to rely on the plans that were published before 1943. The plans in question are also relevant in that they were signed by not only Welzenbacher but also the company's owner, Friedrich Siebel, and its director, Franz Carl Walter. Thus the plans acquired official status, showing that the design depicted was intended to be realised.

Another noteworthy aspect is that in these plans, the Kameradschaftshaus differs significantly from the completed building, which we thus have only known through photographs. Changes in the construction process are not unusual in themselves, especially during wartime, but the reception of the Kameradschaftshaus as 'modern' in this case is probably due less to Welzenbacher's design intention and more to other circumstances. This could refute the perception of the 'incorruptibility of his architectural attitude' (Achleitner and Uhl 1968: 119). Whether Welzenbacher deliberately presented a more traditional project and then steered it in a modernist direction remains hypothetical.

The Kameradschaftshaus is the central building of the Siebel complex. The most striking design feature of the Kameradschaftshaus as it was executed is the campanile at its southeast corner. The clock on top of it, mentioned in Sarnitz's description (1989: 135), is not seen in the surviving photographs, but is shown in numerous sketches (**Figure 2**), to which Sarnitz probably referred. In most of the photos the building appears to have a flat roof, but on closer inspection a relatively flat pitched roof is recognisable (**Figure 3**). The south façade is divided by five very large windows with integrated doors, which suggest a hall behind, as is evident in **Figure 1**.

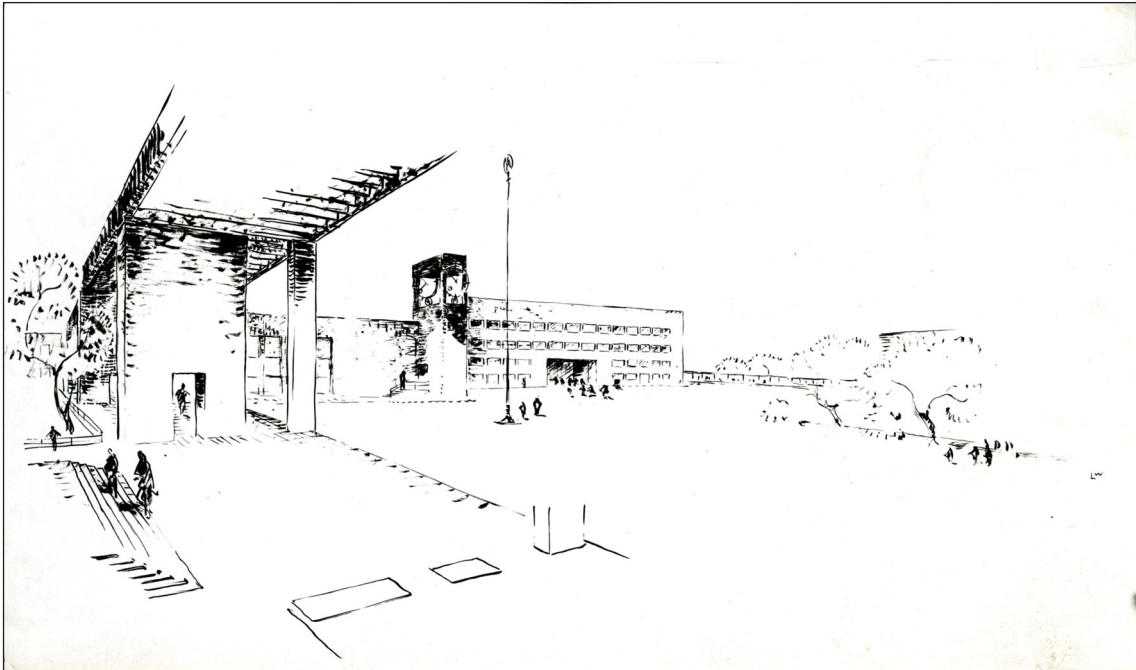


Figure 2: Welzenbacher's sketch for the Siebel aircraft factory, undated. View from the southwest, with an unrealised structure in the foreground. Source: ABKG 1-20-2416-39.



Figure 3: Siebel aircraft factory from the south. In the foreground: Torgebäude; in the background: Kameradschaftshaus and Halle 22. Photographer unknown, ca. 1943. Source: ABKG 1-20-2416-19.

In comparing surviving photographs of the south and east façades of the Kameradschaftshaus with the plans, some differences are apparent. On the 1939 plan (**Figure 4**), the south façade has six large windows, whereas the completed façade has only five windows, and those appear to be somewhat wider (see **Figure 1**). The plan shows a higher gabled roof with chimneys, and the drawn campanile is much more delicate than the solid realised tower. The small windows and the large clock are missing in the photograph, and the staircase consists of only two steps.

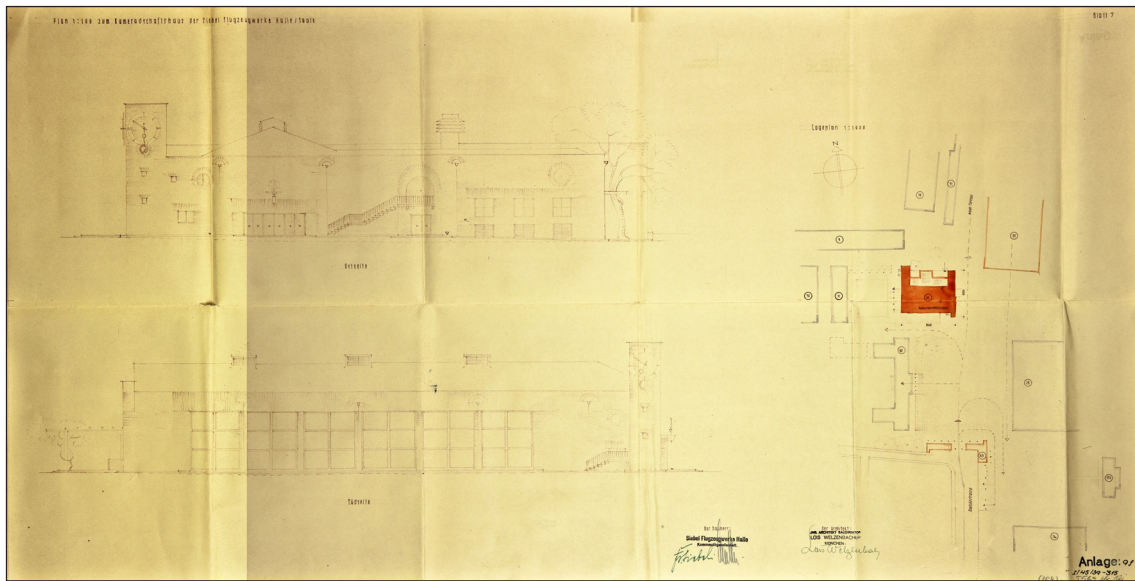


Figure 4: East and south elevation of the Siebel aircraft factory, site plan, 1939. Source: LASA, I 569, Nr. 12.

The differences are more evident when comparing the built east façade (**Figure 5**) with the drawn east façade (see **Figure 4**). Unlike the composition of the south façade, that of the realised east façade was not clearly defined. The photographs show three entrances, each with a few steps. The southernmost entrance is emphasised by a porch that is closed at the top and sides with a protruding brick structure, which suggests that this is the main entrance. Another design element is the wall projection on the first floor, which frames a row of floor-to-ceiling windows. Individual elements, such as the three large windows, the two large openings one above the other, and the location of the main entrance, can also be found in the 1939 plan, but with significant deviations. For example, the frame of the upper window, which is recognisable in the plan as another entrance with a round-arched opening, is missing, as are the stairs leading up to this entrance and three of the six recognisable large windows. The plan also shows a gabled roof behind the façade, which the photographs do not reveal; however, this could be due to the perspective from which the photographs were taken. Furthermore,

the masonry details around the openings that Welzenbacher envisaged are missing in the finalised building.

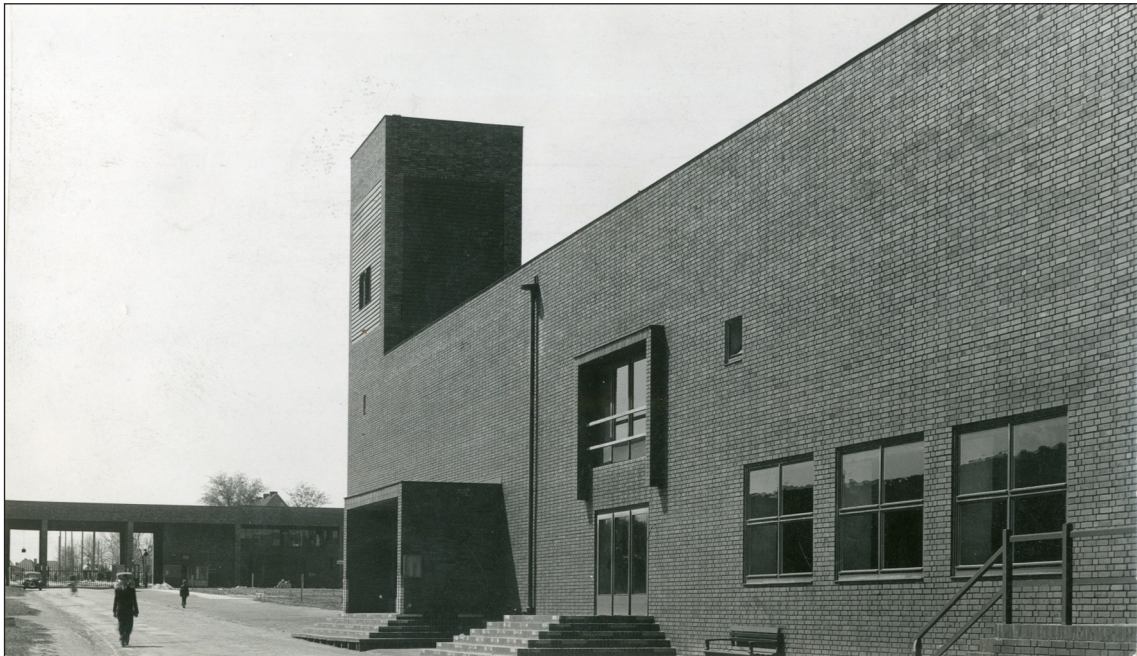


Figure 5: Siebel aircraft factory, from the east, ca. 1943. In the background is Torgebäude. Photographer unknown. Source: ABKG 1-20-2416-47.

Comparing photographs of the west façade of the Kameradschaftshaus (**Figure 6**) with the drawings for the west and north façade (**Figure 7**) is particularly interesting. The functional, modern, industrial building suggested by the existing photographs is difficult to identify in the drawings. Even if a flat roof can be assumed for the west façade, no modern elements can be identified in the drawings, especially in the northern part of the building. The mullioned windows, which reoccur in a smaller format on the upper floor, and the round-arched entrance, which can be reached via two short staircases on either side of the landing, are more reminiscent of a typical small town hall or school building from around 1900. Another interesting detail is the curved projection of the southern corner of the building. The only modern elements of this western façade drawing are the large windows, which refer to a large hall or ballroom behind.

The northern elevation clearly shows the inner courtyards already indicated on the site plan (see **Figures 7** and **4**), as well as the gabled roof that spans the ballroom. The drawings for the central part of the north façade show large-format mullioned windows, which can be interpreted as modern elements in this part of the building. The left and right side of the façade deviate strongly from this, however: they are more reminiscent of a residential typology with wooden gates and arbours.



Figure 6: Siebel aircraft factory from the west. Photographer unknown, ca. 1943. Source: ABKG 1-20-2416-46.

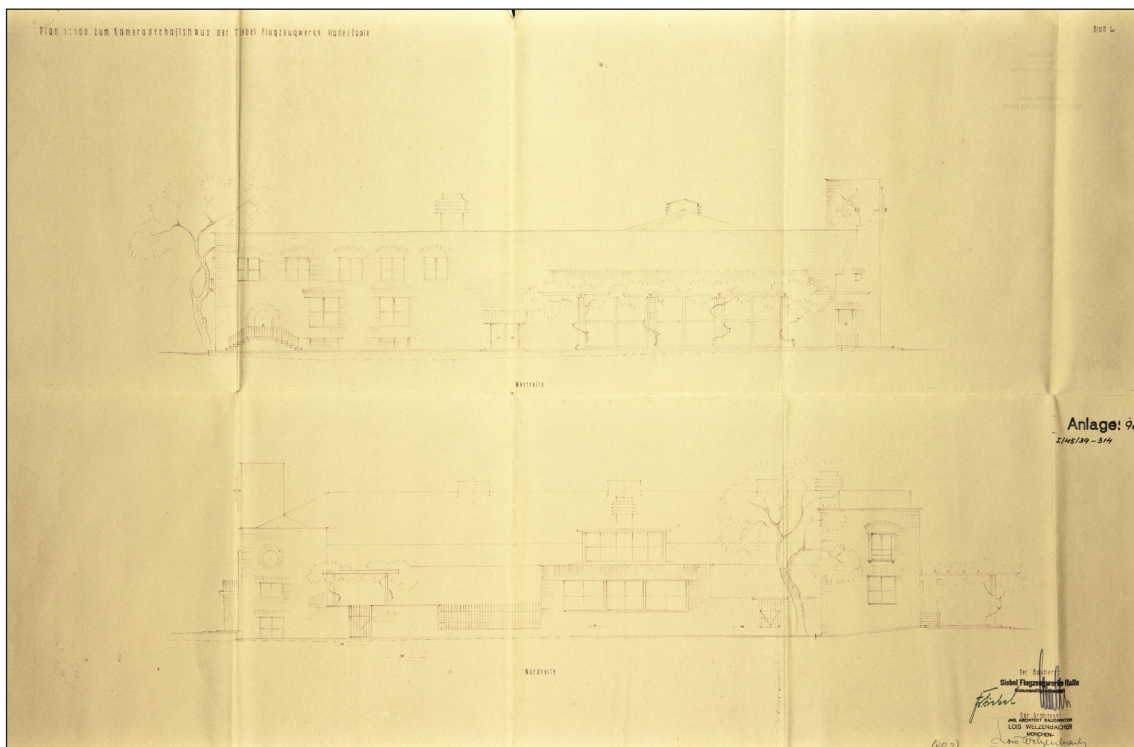


Figure 7: West and north elevation of the Siebel aircraft factory, 1939. Source: LASA, I 569, Nr. 11.

The section apparently shows the aforementioned gabled roof, which spans the ballroom over a length of 22 metres (**Figure 8**, section A–B). On the drawing, the wooden construction rests on supports crowned by curved capitals. Welzenbacher's archival estate contains sketches illustrating this situation (**Figure 9**).

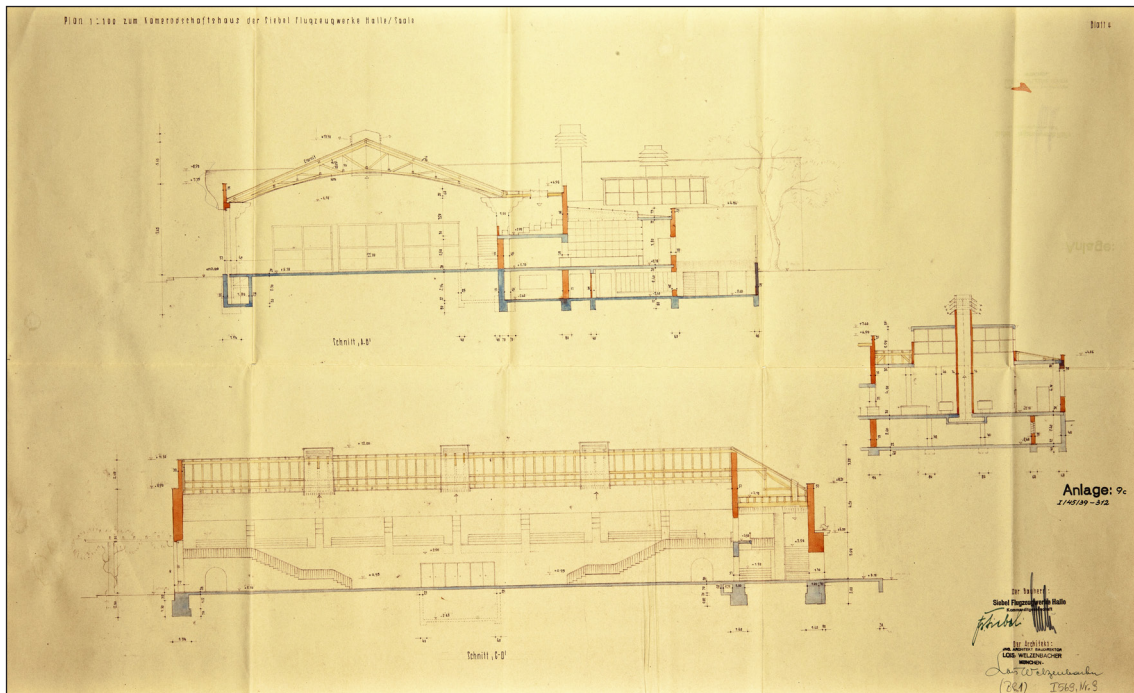


Figure 8: Sections of the Siebel aircraft factory, 1939. Source: LASA, I 569, Nr. 9.

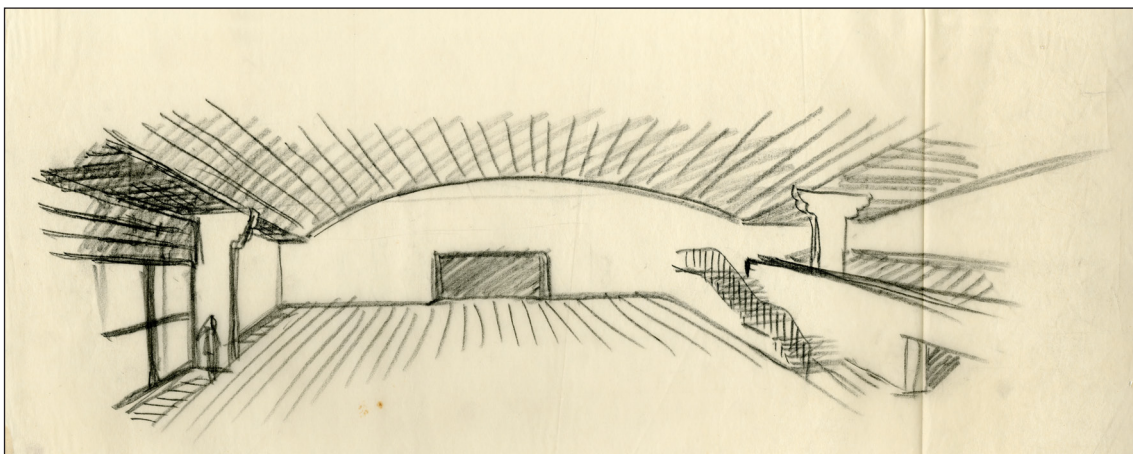


Figure 9: Welzenbacher's sketch for the hall in the Kameradschaftshaus, Siebel aircraft factory, undated. Source: ABKG 1-20-2416-49.

There are very few photographs of the interior of the Kameradschaftshaus: only a few small illustrations can be found in the factory magazine (SH-1). These show massive wooden beams resting on white plastered supports. One of the reproductions depicts an exhibition space, which cannot be located in the drawings, however. This further indicates that the work carried out inside also deviated greatly from the plans. In 1998, Eva Maria Froschauer had already expressed doubts about how closely the designs corresponded to the built structure:

Only a few surviving drawings show the interior of the halls and the community centre, and even these can only be assigned with reservations. It remains to be seen whether the community house actually had an almost rustic interior. In any case, it would have been quite at odds with the austere outer skin of dark brick. (1998: 1454)

The Kameradschaftshaus, as it appears in the surviving photographs, is thus very different from the building depicted on the plans. The latter show almost no signs of the final functional, industrial building (Sarnitz 1989: 134–137). On the drawings, modern planning approaches (such as the large windows, the perspective flat roof and what seems to be a ventilation system) can be identified alongside relatively conservative elements.

Due to the eventful history of the Siebel factory (see Ebert, Mahn and Tack 2011; Grashoff 2010), the sources are limited. An attempt to understand why the building was realised differently is only possible by contextualising the project, and Welzenbacher's position, within the wider scene of architecture.

Questions of Style in National Socialist Industrial Architecture

Today the fact that modern architecture was part of the 'stylistic repertoire of programmatic eclecticism' (Fehl 2000: 190) — and thus part of the National Socialist architectural propaganda — is well known. This remit of the Neues Bauen encompassed everything that was not 'about conveying "higher values"' (Fehl 2000: 192), such as party buildings. To put the stylistic choices, and others, in the Siebel aircraft factory into context, let us take a look at a few parallel cases and the concept of the Kameradschaftshaus itself.

One of the best-known industrial sites built for the 'rearmament' of Germany (Durth 1992: 127) is the Heinkel aircraft factory in Oranienburg near Berlin (1936–1939). The site was planned by the office of Herbert Rimpl (1902–1978). The factory halls represent state-of-the-art industrial architecture, in which the 'functional interior corresponds exactly with the functional exterior' (Fehl 2000: 199), in line

with National Socialist propaganda. Modern architecture indeed became the ‘style of technical progress: cars, aeroplanes, steamers and railways; in short, everything that was associated with transport, science, high performance and technical perfection’ (Fehl 2000: 192). At the same time, even within this realm, not everything followed the same stylistic principles. Albert Speer (1905–1981), looking back at architecture of this time, observed that

Hitler was not doctrinaire. He understood that a motorway service station or a Hitler Youth Home in the countryside could not look like an urban building. Nor would it ever have occurred to him to have a factory built in his representative style; he could be downright enthusiastic about an industrial building in glass and steel. (Speer 1969: 157)

This is perfectly exemplified within the Heinkel factory in Berlin. In contrast to the halls are its residential buildings and community centre. The steep-roofed dwellings with wooden extensions do not allow any connection to the ideas of Neues Bauen, at least from the outside. It has been suggested that Neues Bauen was not permitted in residential construction, ‘because it was not “progress” but “Heimat” and “attachment to the land” that was to be signalled’ there instead (Fehl 2000: 195). The Heinkel community centre differs greatly from both the industrial halls and the residential buildings. It is defined by its axial structure and pillar arrangement, high vaulted roof and orientation towards the assembly square (Figure 10).

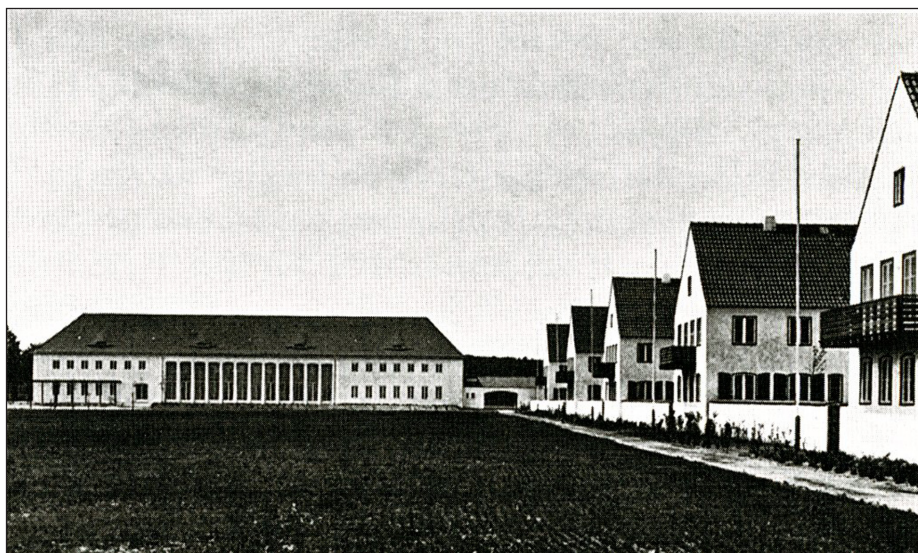


Figure 10: Heinkel aircraft factory, Oranienburg, Germany. Constructed in 1936–1939, architect Herbert Rimpl and office. Here: Gemeinschaftshaus and Siedlung Leegebruch, ca. 1938. Source: Rittich 1938: 145.

Large industrial sites also entailed so-called community houses (*Gefolgschaftshäuser* or *Kameradschaftshäuser*) (Petsch 1976: 153). The typology goes back to Bruno Taut's 1918 concept of the *Volkshaus* (see Taut 1918; Schmitz 2022: 215–219), which was intended as a space for both educational activities and assembling for the working class. Like most symbols of the labour movement, in the 1930s the *Volkshaus* came to be 'reinterpreted in the spirit of National Socialism', as Joachim Petsch has aptly articulated (1976: 153). The design of the *Gefolgschaftshäuser* was mostly based on villa typologies, including elements of the 'Heimatschutzstil' (homeland defence style), with floor plans and layouts inspired by manor houses. The main building was usually set back and framed by wings, which on the one hand drew the eye to the main building, and on the other created a space for gatherings. In addition, there was usually a place to engage in physical activity nearby:

The architectural centrepiece of the *Gefolgschaftshaus* was the large hall, usually located in the central axis and highlighted on the outside by large rectangular windows. This is where the staff came together for 'serious celebrations', while adjoining rooms were used for 'evening leisure'. The main room is designed as a hall, with rustic forms (slabbed walls, beamed ceilings, open roof trusses and wood panelling) giving it an intimate character. Its furnishings and equipment for communal events evoke associations with a church interior. The pews are occupied by the followers, with a bench of honour at the front reserved for the manager and his entourage. The seating is orientated towards the platform and the podium, which is surmounted by the emblem: it is from here that orders are given. Consecrated events were intended to strengthen the sense of togetherness, the 'will to defend' and the 'patriotism' [*Vaterlandsliebe*], with the hierarchical spatial and architectural arrangement and orientation reflecting the order within the company community. (Petsch 1976: 154)

The case of the Siebel factory adheres to this typology perfectly. Although the *Kameradschaftshaus* in Halle was not flanked by wings, there are certainly traditional elements of its plans that could be recognised as forms of the 'Heimatschutzstil'. At least the planned north and west façades quote elements that could be ascribed to a feudal estate. The large event room in Halle, along with its rustic forms, such as the curved columns, also harks back to that traditional type. A parade or assembly ground can also be recognised between the campanile and the gate building.

What explains Welzenbacher's playful design, on the one hand, is the fact that the Siebel *Kameradschaftshaus* is not, strictly speaking, an industrial building itself. In addition to the comparative example in Oranienburg, other surviving examples — such as the Weberei Koswig *Kameradschaftshaus* in Finsterwalde (1936–1937) and the

HASAG Werke Kameradschaftshäuser in Leipzig (1938) and Altenburg (1940) — show that these special typologies cannot be assigned to the modern canon of forms alone. In fact, for the architecture of air force bases during National Socialism, regionalist, historicist and classicist elements were predominantly used (Kopper 2023: 313). This emphasises that the construction task at Siebel, an industrial complex, entailed more than using a ‘functional iconography’ (Sarnitz 1989: 133).

On the other hand, and more importantly, Welzenbacher’s work from the 1930s shows that he often found a way to adapt to ‘dictated’ typologies, as can be seen in the cinema in Mittenwald, the Hotel by the Lautersee (Figure 11), and his countryside villas (see Sarnitz 1989: 115–139). The modern-looking Siebel Kameradschaftshaus in Halle, which survives in photographs, indeed stood out clearly in the contemporary ‘canon’ of such community buildings of factories, making the initial traditionalist ideas for it all the more intriguing.



Figure 11: Hotel Lautersee, Mittenwald, Germany. Constructed in 1935–1936, architect Lois Welzenbacher. View from the south in 2022, with hardly any changes in the exterior. Photograph: Lydia Constanze Krenz.

At the same time, it cannot be forgotten that the Siebel Kameradschaftshaus was built in the midst of the war — it was probably completed in the second half of 1942 (Bettauer 2007: 7) — which raises the question of whether a typological factor still played a considerable role. The shortage of labour and materials might have easily brought about changes to the design. Hitler's war strategy led to the construction and expansion of numerous major projects, such as the Autobahn, the West Wall and various industrial plants (see Kopper 2023). Although the armaments industry was prioritised over other construction projects, it was 'less and less able ... to cover its horrendous labour requirements on the open labour market' (Schütz and Gruber 1996: 78).

In 1936, Hitler had initiated the so-called Four-Year Plan to rearm Germany and make it fit for war (see Schulte 2001: 106). In 1938, Göring issued a 'compulsory service ordinance', which gave the labour offices the option of forced recruitment (Schütz and Gruber 1996: 81). By that time the labour shortage was massive, and consideration was now given to exploiting Jews in road and canal construction, although until the summer of 1938 this option had been rejected for racial ideological reasons. As early as 1937, convicts and prisoners were forced to perform 'the hardest physical labour' (Schütz and Gruber 1996: 84). Forced labourers for the Siebel factories are documented beginning in 1941 at the latest (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung 2009), and it is difficult to imagine that Welzenbacher would have been unaware of that. An invoice for expenses shows that Welzenbacher was still regularly in Halle at the Siebel factory until September 1944 at least (ABKG-1).

As of 1937, if not before, building materials had become increasingly scarce, probably also for the favoured aircraft industry (Schulte 2001: 111). In 1943, an article in *Bauwelt* titled 'Kriegsmäßiger Industriebau' (Wartime Industrial Construction) postulated that 'the particularly keenly felt compulsion to use building materials and constructions with the utmost economy as a result of the war is nothing other than the necessary return to the fundamentals of industrial construction' (*Bauwelt* 1943: 1). At the same time, the article wrote about those 'planning architects who, for example, planned industrial halls with lavish use of factory stone cornices', which meant the 'blurring of the technical task they had to solve'. This statement is an indication that changes were often made to the design on the grounds of 'pure appropriateness [*Zweckmäßigkeit*]' (*Bauwelt* 1943: 1) to conserve resources.

Another indication of the possible reasons behind the changes to the initial design for the Kameradschaftshaus in Halle is an invoice issued by the Siebel factory to Welzenbacher on 28 September 1944, which explains that 'the construction sum of 500,000 [*Reichsmark*] is assumed as the basis for the fee as compensation for the changes and alterations made by the factory alone' (ABKG-1). This calculation importantly not

only shows that significant changes were made, but also that Welzenbacher did not initiate them himself.

The question of authorship is also to be taken seriously here. Research on architectural history oftentimes focuses on individual persons and their professional ideals, without taking staff and office structures into account. Welzenbacher was apparently on site ‘every fortnight or even more often’ (Froschauer 1998: 1454), while his employee Karl Haas was in charge of the actual planning in Halle. After Haas entered the war in 1942, Werner Buch, a former student of Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969), took over the planning work at Siebel (Froschauer 1998: 1454). The extent to which both Haas and Buch had an influence on the design cannot be proven, but they probably affected the final result in some way.

In the context of the plans that have now surfaced, Welzenbacher’s previously known numerous sketches and drawings for the Siebel factory (ABKG–2), which lack any conservative or traditional references, pose another major question.³ Abstraction and scale might be playing a role here, since the sketches show urban planning designs, while architectural and decorative details (as in the Kameradschaftshaus) are not illustrated. A further obstacle is that the dating of the drawings is difficult, sometimes impossible. Both the site plan and the photos of the Siebel factory model from the Archiv für Bau.Kunst.Geschichte (ABKG–2) show a highly idealised urban planning situation in which, except for a few buildings, the actual existing buildings on the Siebel premises and outside the complex were disregarded (**Figure 12**). However, this overall urban concept contains elements that were realised in the same (or in a very similar) way. Examples of this are the tram stop, the gate building and the industrial hall, Halle 22, which indicates that Welzenbacher elaborated on his already realised ideas.

The newly discovered set of plans also includes an insightful site plan. In contrast to the urban planning study in the Archiv für Bau.Kunst.Geschichte (ABKG–2), this is a detailed site plan in which both the existing buildings and the detailed demolition or new construction plans are presented. The plan header shows that the current status dates to 1 October 1939, with the words ‘with planned buildings’ beneath (LASA I 569–1). Only three of the buildings planned by Welzenbacher can be found on this site plan: the Kameradschaftshaus, the gate building and Halle 22.

The tram stop, which still exists today, is missing on the site plan (LASA I 569–1), however (**Figure 13**). Other plans in the set show smaller site plans for localisation but, again, the tram stop is nowhere to be found. This supports the assumption that Welzenbacher’s urban planning studies, which have survived in numerous sketches, as well as the photo of the model (see **Figure 12**), were not produced before the start of construction, i.e., as a draft, but rather during its final stages.

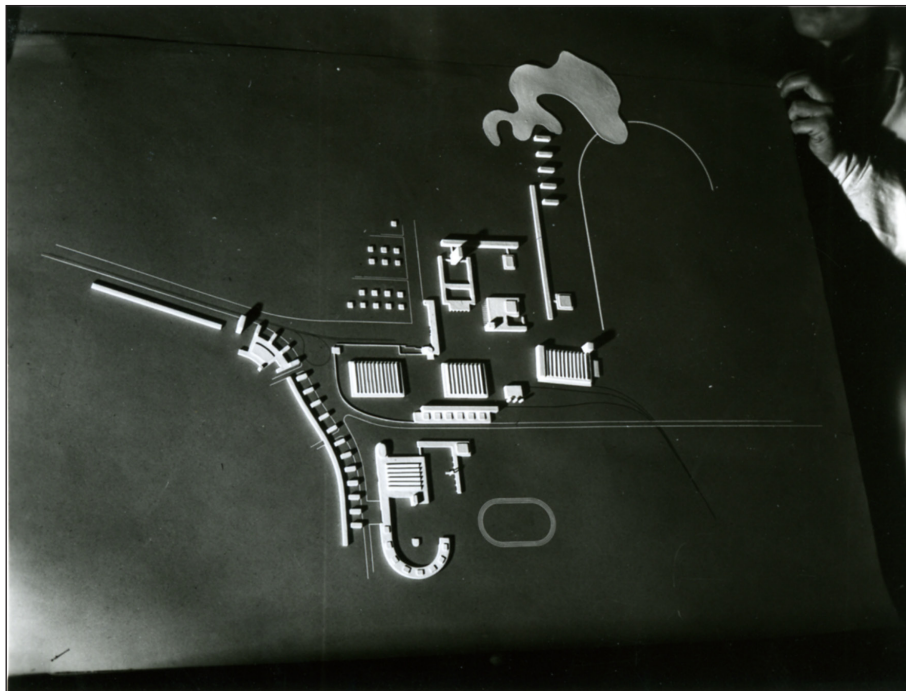


Figure 12: Model for the Siebel aircraft factory, undated. Source: ABKG 1-20-2416-34.



Figure 13: Tram stop of the former Siebel aircraft factory in 2022. Photograph: Lydia Constanze Krenz.

The comparison of the site plans and the newly discovered plans with the urban planning study from Welzenbacher's archival estate is also interesting, because the cubature and the location of the courtyards in the Kameradschaftshaus differ significantly. Assuming that Welzenbacher's study was produced during the construction period, and not before, the layout of the courtyards in the realised Kameradschaftshaus probably corresponds more closely to those in the urban planning study from the archival estate (ABKG-2). The difference therefore indicates that changes were made to the design of the Kameradschaftshaus during the building process. It can thus be stated that a clear distinction should be made between the unrealised plans, the actual buildings and the urban planning visions, which were probably not created until 1941 or 1942.

In addition to the drawings that can be clearly assigned to the Siebel factory in Halle an der Saale, a number of illustrations have been preserved in the Archiv für Bau.Kunst. Geschichte that go beyond its specific construction task. Welzenbacher and probably also the architects Haas and Buch were engaged in numerous studies for Siebel, which Froschauer explains was an attempt to avoid military service:

The architects in Halle tried to occupy themselves with new projects for as long as possible, as this was the only way to maintain their status of 'indispensability' and postpone military service. The plans for the further expansion of the Siebel factory, a development plant in Oberstdorf (Bavaria) and a project X, also known as the Rotterdam plant, date from this time. (Froschauer 1998: 1454)

Another reason for the additional urban planning model and the numerous drawings could be that Welzenbacher tried to get the project published. He was not successful; the reasons remain unclear. The fact that it was a military site did not seem to play a role, as Rimpl's buildings for various aircraft factories were widely published (Rittich 1938; Troost 1943). After the war, however, the typology of an aircraft factory was soon no longer relevant (Sarnitz 1989: 135).

Between 1939 and 1944, Welzenbacher worked mainly for Siebel. He was by no means an inner emigrant who withdrew and did not take part in everyday life under the regime. Instead, he used the opportunities that presented themselves to him to continue working as an architect. Whether Welzenbacher shared the regime's political ideas cannot be proven, but in 1933 he was already a member of the Reich Chamber of Culture (ABKG-3) (he did not become a member in 1941, 'after long hesitation', as Bettauer (2007: 6) has suggested). Welzenbacher was one of many architects who tried to position themselves within the new world order.

Excursus: The Villa Walter

Welzenbacher planned not only the Siebel aircraft factory in Halle but also a private villa for the factory director, Franz Carl Walter (see Bettauer 2007). The villa is located about five kilometres from the factory complex, in the Kröllwitz district, at Fuchsbergstraße 27, and is today a listed building. It was constructed between 1939 and 1940. ‘At first glance, the building appears ... backward-looking’, according to Froschauer (1998: 1456): ‘Like many other modern architects, [Welzenbacher] created a cloak of invisibility that was able to pass the censorship of the artistic advisory board’.

In contrast to the Schmucker House in Ruhpolding, Bavaria, which has been seen as a highlight of Welzenbacher’s work (Sarnitz 1989: 124–132), the Villa Walter was indeed ‘much more restrained and far less dramatic in its sculptural arrangement’ (Froschauer 1998: 1456). Even if Welzenbacher was unable to reproduce the architectural quality of Ruhpolding in Halle, the two buildings are similar in terms of their floor plan configuration and spatial structure. Both villas are U-shaped, placed around a central yard, and have open, flowing rooms and staircase configurations and open beamed ceilings. In both cases, Welzenbacher merged traditional elements and materials with modern design.

The Villa Walter is of particular interest here because the building file shows that changes were proposed in the process, and partially implemented by the Artistic Advisory Board of the City of Halle an der Saale. On 25 February 1939, for example, this committee advised on the chimneys and windows:

The chimneys, which protrude far above the base of the house as an architectural motif, are not typical of the area and could not be approved in this form. The windows of the main building facing the garden and sun courtyard are generously dimensioned and could be somewhat reduced in size. (SH–2)

The enclosed plans clearly show the changes made on the basis of this ruling: the sweeping, partly round, partly stepped chimneys have been straightened and drawn closer to the house (**Figure 14**). On the southwest façade, the modifications to the windows are indicated, but they are not recognisably altered, merely outlined. On closer inspection of the first window, however, thin lines can be observed that indicate a subsequently drawn cross-division (**Figure 15**). When comparing the plans with the photographs from the 1940s, it becomes apparent that both the chimneys were built in accordance with the updated plans, and the windows too appear smaller than in the initial drawing and have a cross-division (**Figure 16**). Even if the changes in the case of Villa Walter appear minor, the example of Schmucker House shows how central the

chimneys were in Welzenbacher's design. This case also demonstrates that the minor changes in fact were quite far-reaching.

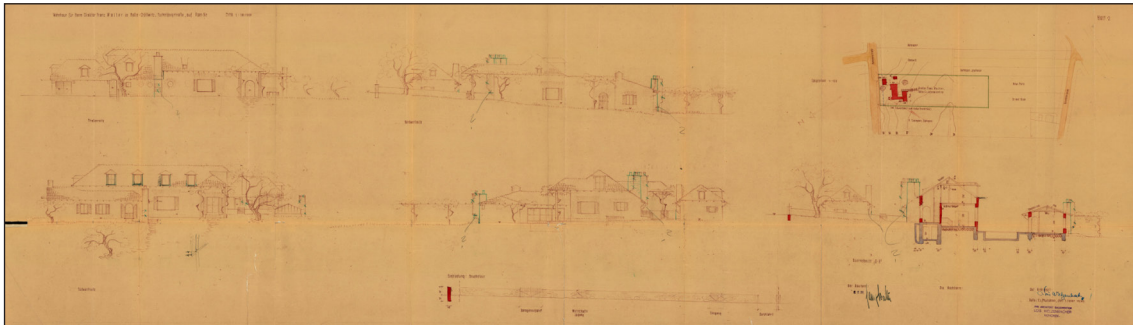


Figure 14: Villa Walter, Halle an der Saale, Germany. Constructed in 1939–1940, architect Lois Welzenbacher. Plans with alterations from the artistic advisory board, February 1939. Source: SH, Fuchsberg 27_003.

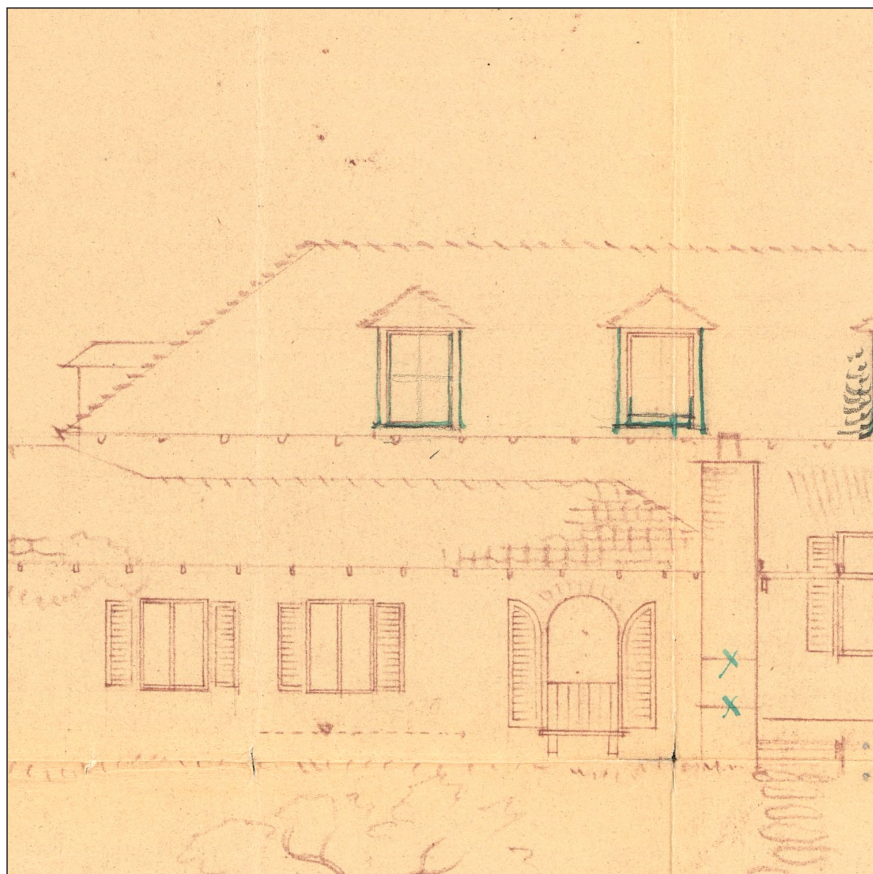


Figure 15: Plans for Villa Walter with alterations from the artistic advisory board, February 1939, detail. Source: SH, Fuchsberg 27_003.

The building file for Villa Walter refers to the fact that the house was being built in accordance with the regulations of the Four-Year Plan. Yet the example also displays that lavish commissions for wealthy private individuals were still possible at the beginning of 1939, when the Four-Year Plan had already been effect for two years. This case is thus essential for demonstrating the extent to which the Nazi administration was able to influence the design of buildings through artistic advisory boards. Even though the advisory board's influence on the Siebel factory cannot be proven at this point, the example of the villa shows a tool the Nazi administration could use to have such an influence.



Figure 16: Villa Walter from the north east. Photograph: Annemarie Giegold-Schilling, ca. 1940s. Source: SH: GS_2702.

It must not be forgotten that the subjective taste of the respective clients also had an influence on the designs and realisations, of course. As Frank Schmitz states, 'The

chosen regionalisms were not [always] enforced by regulations, but were based on the individual wishes of the clients and were not necessarily politically motivated' (2007: 37). It can furthermore be speculated that the personal tastes of Friedrich Siebel and the director Franz Carl Walter played a role in the original design of the Kameradschaftshaus.

When drawing conclusions about Welzenbacher's buildings in Halle, Froschauer has argued that his two projects are exemplary for 'the split in the official architectural diction [*Architekturdiktion*] and its niches' as well as for the change in the architectural expression of the respective architects during the National Socialist regime (1998: 1456). The Halle 22, the gate building and the tram stop are indeed representative of the 'industrial building niche' of the era, while Villa Walter — as well as the planned, but not realised, Kameradschaftshaus — can be seen as representing adaptations to the dominant 'architectural diction'. Consequently, the latter two buildings can be viewed in the context of each other. Both the villa and the plans for the Kameradschaftshaus show clear rustic, down-to-earth and native (*heimatliche*) elements, combined with modern and functional features.

Conclusion

Welzenbacher's plans for the Siebel factory must be viewed in a more differentiated way than they have been in the existing research. Halle 22 very much corresponds to the ideas of modern industrial architecture as conveyed by contemporary architectural propaganda. No evidence of significantly divergent plans for this building can be found. The same applies to the gate building, even if minor deviations between plan and execution can be identified. A few photographs of the interior of the gate building confirm the external impression: the rooms appear to have been equipped and furnished in a very modern style (SH-1). The tram stop is most directly linked to Welzenbacher's creative phase of the 1920s and early 1930s through its formal language.

A question should be raised regarding the Kameradschaftshaus in this context, however. The newly found original design for the Siebel Kameradschaftshaus, with its traditional elements, seems to fit the typological context of factory community houses of the era better than the executed one. The changes to the design in the course of construction, which shaped the appearance to a more modernist expression, were probably the result of the scarcity of resources during the war as well as other yet unknown factors. It is likely that these changes were not made or influenced by Welzenbacher, but by the Siebel factory. Nonetheless, the Siebel factory was a modern industrial complex, of which the other three buildings should be considered illustrative, rather than the Kameradschaftshaus.

Although in the end, some questions cannot be answered conclusively and the discussion is based on conjecture, the historiography of the Siebel aircraft factory is clearly based on suggestions rather than facts, having thus far been guided foremost by suggestive photographs. The Kameradschaftshaus, of which only fragmentary photographs survive, has been too easily equated with Welzenbacher's vision, without questioning the underlying conditions. The narrative of the modernist Welzenbacher, who sought a niche during the difficult years of the National Socialist regime and found it in industrial construction, is omnipresent in previous scholarship. The plans that have now emerged reveal that this narrative is too simplified and is no longer viable. Welzenbacher did adapt his architectural approach to the demands of the regime, and he did that both in his rustic villas and in major industrial complexes, such as the Siebel factory. Even if future scholars can prove that Welzenbacher was indeed responsible for the changes, he still submitted a version that conformed to the regime's expectations, which argues against the concept of an industrial 'niche'. The Kameradschaftshaus is a case that does not illustrate the 'incorruptibility' of his architectural choices, but, on the contrary, his adaptability and opportunism.

Notes

- ¹ All quotations from German sources have been translated into English by the author.
- ² The plans at the LASA for the Siebel factory contain a site plan; four elevations, site plan and six sections of the Kameradschaftshaus; floor plan, elevation and section of an unidentified building; floor plans, elevation and section of an extension building; and floor plans, elevations, sections and site plan of the Torgebäude. All date from 1939. Only some are signed by Welzenbacher. The entire plan stock can be viewed on the website (SFW n.d.).
- ³ Another issue is the correspondence mentioned by Sarnitz (1989: 135) concerning questions of design, which can no longer be found in the present-day archive.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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ABKG–2: estate Lois Welzenbacher, inventory numbers: 20–2416–1 to 20–2416–68.

ABKG–3: estate Lois Welzenbacher, inventory number: 20–2430–21.

LASA (Landesarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt): inventory numbers: I 569, 1; 6–14.

SH–1 (Stadtarchiv Halle): *Siebel Flugzeugwerke Werkzeitschrift* 1943, 30/31.

SH–2: building file for Fuchsbergstraße 27, Halle and der Saale.

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