

# RENOVATION OF A MULTI-GENERATION HOME

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**INTERVIEW**



## MATERIAL MIX WITH HIGH QUALITY LOOK

**A renovated multi-generation home is located on the very edge of a residential area, adjacent to a forest in the town of Düsseldorf. The old existing building – a very large structure – was preserved as well as possible, and nevertheless the house now shines forth in a high-quality, harmonious guise.**

**Among other architectural elements, the material combination of the titanium-zinc roof and the clinker façade are also responsible for this. We asked the architect in charge, Ralf Breuer, about the challenges involved in such a renovation and the advantages that come with it. We also wanted to know what the huge glass dormer is all about.**

**Why did you choose RHEINZINK titanium zinc as the material for the roof?**

Previously, the black slate covering fitted like a cap on the existing building. We now wanted a rather light material that would not weigh down the building and, above all, harmonise well with the clinker brick on the façade. That's why we chose titanium zinc prePATINA blue-grey.

**What advantages do you see in the zinc material from RHEINZINK?**

For one thing, it visually fits in well with the area in which we installed it, but of course the aspects of durability and sustainability also played a role. The property borders directly on a forest and, above all, on a small mountain, so it is located in a natural area.



We wanted to create a visual bridge to the Alpine region here. This was a further argument in favour of zinc as a material. Moreover, I have been self-employed for 17 years now, and before that I worked in a large architectural office, so I have had plenty of experience with zinc. I have always liked working with it because of the good sustainability aspects and the contemporary look it has. We have also used titanium zinc a lot on public buildings, for example.

**Can you say something about the material mix zinc & clinker? Why this combination?**

The client wanted to use clinker for the façade. The old existing building was also clad with clinker. Then the question arose as to which material would visually fit on a gable roof, and then the decision actually became clear very quickly. Zinc simply rounds off the overall appearance.

**What is the arrangement of the windows all about?**

On the one hand, the existing building had to remain, of course. But since the owner moved in with his three sons plus their families, there were very different demands regarding the living space. Each side had different ideas, which is why this arrangement came about, which we also had to arrange a bit in the architectural planning - always with a view to doing justice to all the families. When you are inside the house, you quickly notice that there are visual relationships. The multigenerational house is located at the highest point in Düsseldorf, and from one side you can see almost all the way to Cologne in the Rhenish lignite mining area.

***Of course the aspects of durability and sustainability also played a role.***

## **What were the special challenges involved in this project?**

This property was a very difficult structure to build. It was important to us that we manage to take all individual requirements into account. No room, no window, no floor covering is repeated in the five flats. We had to create unity in diversity. For some, the apartment building may also look a bit oddly proportioned, but we had to take the former two duplexes and create something new without demolishing the existing building.

## **Were there any challenges involved in the planning?**

In the case of new buildings, you can plan everything at the level the client wants. That's not so easy with renovations. For example, the individual floors of the house had to be barrier-free, i.e. without steps. At the same time, we had to combine the most diverse floor structures: large-format tiles, natural wood floorboards, parquet, the underfloor heating systems had to be adapted. That was a big challenge in itself.

## **What gave rise to the idea of turning a two-family villa into a multigenerational house?**

The family wanted to move closer together. However, the family situations were very different, so a new solution was needed. This is how the multi-generation house came into being, which now contains elements of a maisonette, a flat on one floor or a flat in the attic and offers garden space for all inhabitants. A total of five dwellings lead off from a large staircase. Another argument in favour of the multi-generation house was the scarce living space in Düsseldorf. The existing building could therefore be put to optimal use.

## **Apart from the zinc roof – how is the building sustainably positioned?**

After the renovation, the apartment building naturally meets all the latest standards. These include, for example, the gas condensing boiler, a heat exchanger from Schüco and, we have installed a photovoltaic system on the roof on the sun side.

# **A VERY LARGE BUILDING MASS**





**What architectural elements would you say distinguish the residential building?**

We wanted to guarantee the longevity of the building. This we achieved with the zinc roof, among other things, but also with glass façades and the clinker front wall. Incidentally, the client deliberately decided against a red clinker brick from the Westphalia region, as a more modern, light appearance was to be created despite the massive structure.

**The dormer of the building at the front is huge. Is there a particular reason for this? If so, what is it?**

We had to demolish parts of the two semi-detached houses and put in a new staircase from which all five flats can be accessed. It is now located in a glass dormer window. In addition, some of the rooms of the flats are still located there. For instance, one can look into the clouds while bathing.

**On the subject of renovation – how costly is renovation compared to new construction, or what are the advantages and disadvantages for you as an architect?**

In an initial concept, we would have liked to use 100 per cent of the existing building.

***Grey energy is always desirable if an old building can be reused as much as possible.***

Due to the client's ideas, however, we were forced to demolish a little more. You always have to consider what possibilities we have and what the client has in mind. The basic problem with this project was that such a large building mass – and one located on the edge of a forest – would probably not be approved nowadays. Therefore, the core of the approved existing building had to be retained.



# GLASS DORMER WINDOW: A UNIQUE VIEW

## What is your favourite detail of the building?

I think the glass dormer window is very special. The glass façade is great and offers a unique view of the city. There is also a cosy atmosphere in the flats themselves with open fireplaces or wood-burning stoves. In my opinion, the top floor has become the grandest flat.



After 15 years of design and project management work in a large Düsseldorf office, the architectural office Ralf Breuer was founded in 2005. The team of architects and engineers has additional qualifications such as energy consulting, project development, building biology and the English-language processing of building projects.

Source: [www.ralf-breuer-architekt.de](http://www.ralf-breuer-architekt.de)