



Anatomical Institute

Modernist landmark sensitively remodeled

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LMU's Institute of Anatomy resides in the first edifice in Europe to be made entirely of reinforced concrete. Built in the years 1905-1907, it is now being renovated, and the project has won the Bavarian Gold Medal for Heritage Conservation.



Renovation of this section of the Anatomy Institute is complete. The Institute's Collection is displayed on the ground floor, the Dissection Area is on the upper level, and the Microscopy Lab. is under the dome.

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In Stefan Milz's office, the noise generated by the core drills is impossible to ignore. Every so often, the walls, the floor and the furniture shudder and vibrate: In the East Wing of LMU's Institute of Anatomy, renovation work is in full swing. But it could well take longer than planned, given that the building familiarly known as "die Sektion" is more than a century old and apt to present the craftsmen with unanticipated problems.

Indeed Milz, a professor in the Department of Neuroanatomy headed by Professor Christoph Schmitz, has himself encountered such surprises. He recalls the time when he tried to install a wall cupboard in his old laboratory in the East Wing: "It was impossible to anchor it securely, because a section of the wall had been patched up with ... paper!" Apparently, when part of the nearby Surgical Clinic took a direct hit during a wartime bombing raid, the detonation had caused localized damage to the nearby Anatomy Department. The hole had been provisionally repaired, the incident was soon forgotten and the makeshift solution became permanent. Over the many decades that have elapsed since its construction, the fabric of the building has also been

continuously exposed to the effects of corrosive chemicals, such as the formaldehyde used to fix cadavers. As a result, the whole ventilation system has had to be replaced and modernized. In the central section of the Institute of Anatomy with its characteristically rounded forms and cupolas this part of the work is now complete, and the façade which faces onto Pettenkoferstrasse has been restored to its original splendor.

Conservation and occupational safety

Lots of work has also been done on the interior. Anyone who remembers the old Anatomie with its depressing air of grayness will be pleasantly surprised to discover the bright and airy atmosphere inside. The foyer, dissection room, lecture theaters and the space that houses the Institute's collection of anatomical specimens have been refurbished from the ground up, and the technical infrastructure has been brought up to date. Where laboratories once stood there are new spaces for seminars and the work of the technical personnel. Indeed, the architects and engineers involved in the project, which is under the general supervision of the State Office for Planning and Construction (München II), have successfully reconciled two apparently conflicting demands: They have been able to meet modern-day standards concerning occupational safety and accessibility for the disabled without overstepping the constraints imposed by the need to conserve the character and architectural significance of the building.

Directions written in the cursive style that was in use when the building was erected help students to find their way 'Zum Mikrosk.-Saal', for instance, and serve as visual reminiscences of the early 20th century. Such details stand in startling contrast with the new "Microscopy Room", which is dominated by up-to-the-minute computers. High-resolution images of histological preparations can be disseminated via an internal network, and displayed and analyzed at every workstation. This is microscopy for the 21st century. We utilize a software system for teaching purposes which, to the best of my knowledge, is not used in that context anywhere else," says Milz.

Cheaper than a visit to the "Schichtl"

While research on topics such as biodegradable metal implants – one of Professor Milz's particular areas of interest – is an important element of the work here, teaching remains the Institute of Anatomy's primary function.

Every medical student at LMU becomes intimately acquainted with the complex on Pettenkoferstrasse. – After all, all ongoing physicians must earn certificates of proficiency in Macroscopic Anatomy, Microscopic Anatomy and Neuroanatomy before they are allowed to proceed to the Physikum (the first part of their final exams). Each year around 1000 medical students acquire their knowledge of human anatomy here, imparted using the latest methods in medical didactics – which is not to say that the classical approach has been abandoned. The Institute still possesses its collection of anatomical specimens, which is now on display in a space just off the dignified and splendidly appointed new foyer.

The collection is primarily used for teaching purposes, and is open to the public only on Mondays. This restriction is in part a response to the fact that revelers from the Oktoberfest on the nearby Theresienwiese have often regarded the collection as a chamber of curiosities, and a cheaper source of entertainment than the "Schichtl" (a popular theater attraction "auf der Wiesn"). "The admission fee was lower then," Milz remarks drily. "But the collection is not intended to amuse; it is used to teach medical students and inform medical professionals.

Professor Reinhard Putz, a former Director of the Institute of Anatomy and Vice-President of LMU, did all he could to extend the collection, and new specimens continue to be added. The exhibition thus allows everyone to refresh and enhance one's knowledge of the structure and function of the diverse organ systems that make up the human body.

The Institute of Anatomy is listed as a major example of Early Modernism in architecture. The painstaking and respectful modernization of this representative of the dawn of Modernism not only gives us a good impression of the original form of a unique architectural achievement, but equips it to fulfill the demands of modern medical education and research.

