

# HOUSE OF ONE

## Kuehn Malvezzi Architects

Berlin, Germany

2012-2019



**Berlin is already an exceptional city. That there arises an unprecedented commission such as a shared church among Christians, Jews and Muslims only reaffirms this condition. This project by Kuehn Malvezzi –still in the search of funding– represents a possibility so exceptional that is remarkable in itself, especially if its architecture seeks to reaffirm this condition of strangeness within the urban context.**

KEYWORDS · church, religion, public space, strangeness, Berlin

Working on the competition for a house of prayer and learning in Berlin, we were initially struck by the language of the brief. It asked for a building that was supposed to be alien to its urban context, one which would distinguish itself by its strangeness. There was a further specification in the brief indicating the unique sense of the request: the awe in the face of the sacred was not to produce a torpor but rather a curiosity for something new and beautiful to be discerned through productive strangeness. So strangeness really became the starting point for our project.

Of course, there is a sense of strangeness residing in the building program as well. The idea of three separate sacred spaces for Jewish, Christian, and Muslim congregations, all enclosed in one building, already challenges our sense of identity. Considering this, the project was to produce a double distance, inward and outward, both in terms of the program and the context. The three monotheistic religions each require their own house of prayer, while all together they will be enclosed in one building; a building like a city, inwardly heterogeneous while identifiable from the outside.

Can architectural identity then reside at once in volumetric unity and in spatial distinction? If the volumetric unity is the expression of faith, religion might not need any symbolic representation on the outside. As Rabbi Ben Chorin remarked in one of our recent meetings, faith and trust are likely more

**Arquitectos / Architects**

Kuehn Malvezzi

Wilfried Kuehn, Johannes Kuehn, Simona Malvezzi

**Colaboradores / Collaborators**

Christian Felgendreher, Anna Naumann,

Yu Ninagawa, Bérénice Corret

**Ubicación / Location**

Petriplatz, Berlin, Alemania

**Cliente / Client**

Bet- und Lehrhaus Petriplatz Berlin e. V.

**Ingeniería estructural / Structural engineering**

Arup

**Materiales / Materials**

Ladrillo portante / Solid brick construction

**Superficie construida / Built surface**

4.597 m<sup>2</sup>

**Superficie terreno / Site surface**

936 m<sup>2</sup>

**Año de Proyecto / Project year**

2012

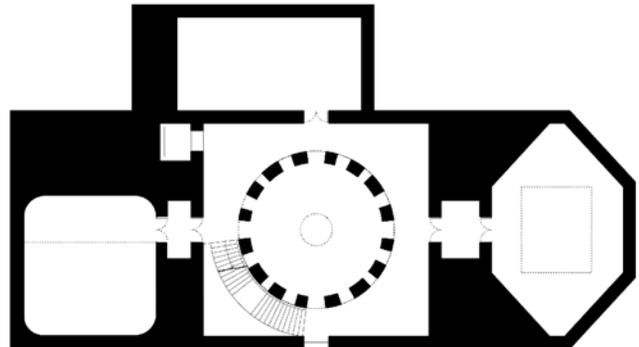
**Año de construcción / Construction year**

2019

**Ícono planta primer nivel / First floor plan icon**

E. / S. 1: 500

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**Corte transversal / Cross Section**

E. / S. 1: 500

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**Corte longitudinal / Longitudinal Section**

E. / S. 1: 500

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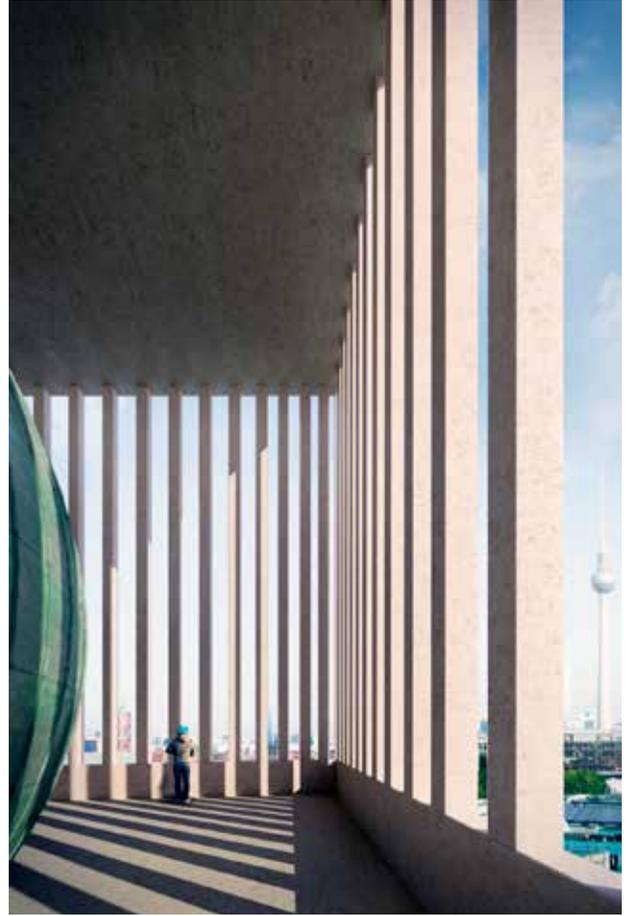
Mezquita desde Gertraudenstraße  
*Gertraudenstraße, Mosque*  
© Kuehn Malvezzi, Visualization:  
Davide Abbonacci, Kuehn Malvezzi



Sinagoga desde Gertraudenstraße  
*Gertraudenstraße, Synagogue*  
© Kuehn Malvezzi, Visualization:  
Davide Abbonacci, Kuehn Malvezzi



Hall central y domo / *Domed central Hall*  
© Kuehn Malvezzi



Loggia superior, vista hacia la ciudad / *City Loggia*  
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durable than religion as such. He pointed to the fourth space in the center of the building, a space with a dome and a centralized plan, higher than the three surrounding houses of prayer. This fourth space acts as a threshold to the sacred spaces, bringing the public space of the city into the building.

As architects, we were confronted for the first time with the design of a sacred space. Ultimately, we hope that the strangeness and yearning for the new and the beautiful called for in the brief positively resides in our plan for the Bet und Lehrhaus.<sup>1</sup> **ARQ**

## HOUSE OF ONE: THREE EXCEPTIONS

Felipe De Ferrari

Plan Común Arquitectos

'House of One'<sup>1</sup> is the result of a competition held in 2012 to design a house of prayer and learning in Spreeinsel –the island of museums– at the heart of Berlin. It is a historical setting with a privileged position in one of the most important tourist areas of the city of Berlin.

From this context arises the idea of running a quite singular architectural competition, driven by three monotheistic religions –Judaism, Christianity and Islam– which join forces to build a new palace dedicated to worship and spiritual education in the city of Berlin. Below, three exceptions that define the initiative and the project.

### TYPOLOGY AND PROGRAM

Jews, Christians and Muslims living together under the same construction built on archaeological ruins. The three types of rituals and spatial structures –a synagogue, a church and a mosque– are interrelated without losing their autonomy or specific character. The meeting point between the three religions is a communal hall at the center of the building, conceived as a place of learning and debate. Without establishing any hierarchy among religious communities, the tower is of public use, shared by the three project partners. A bet in which everybody win.

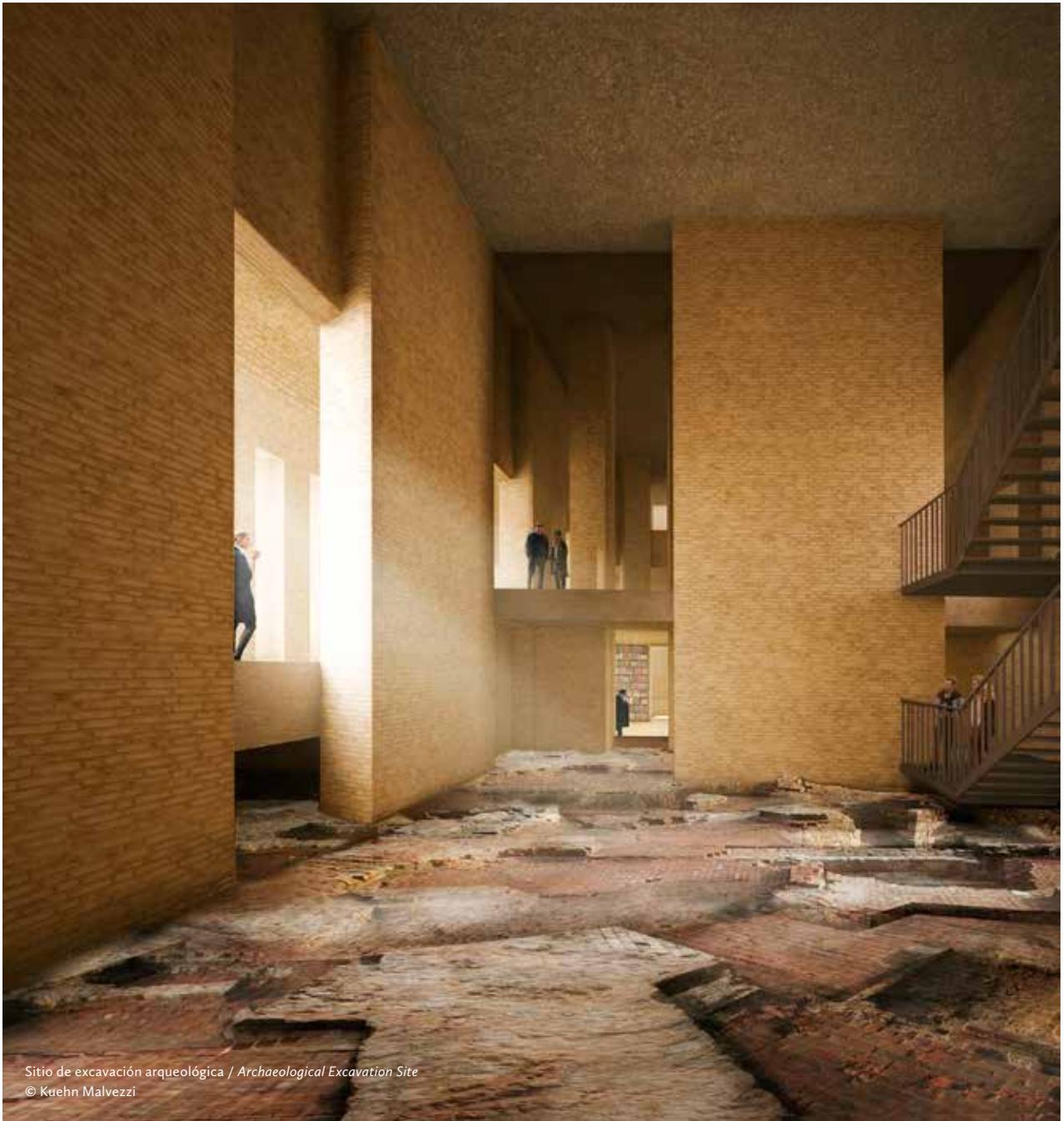
### FUNDING STRATEGY

The 'House of One' works through a system of on-line grants (micro-patronage)<sup>2</sup> available to the entire community through its website, as if it were a *kickstarter* campaign. So far this form of management has remained unexplored for the development of architectural projects. While the initiative aimed to raise 43,5 million euros –the estimated value of the complex– donations by February 2016 –of over 1,800 contributors since the campaign started– achieved only over one million euros.<sup>3</sup>

### SCHEDULED CONSTRUCTION

The previous does not mean that the project has been rejected or that it failed. On the contrary, the curious collaboration implied by this project has gained visibility and media coverage. In this context, the organizers are seeking for various financing alternatives according to the three stages of implementation initially defined.

Although there is no certainty that the 'House One' gets to be built, it represents a clear example of a shared venture, involving horizontal collaboration among institutions with different traditions and the definition of a system of coexistence through the strategic and transformative power of architecture.



Sitio de excavación arqueológica / *Archaeological Excavation Site*  
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**KUEHN MALVEZZI**

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Founded by Simona Malvezzi, Wilfried Kuehn and Johannes Kuehn in Berlin, the firm has designed the reorganization of contemporary and historical art collections, and dealt as well with preservation issues for listed buildings in Vienna, Frankfurt and Berlin. Public spaces and exhibitions are the main focus of their work as architects, designers and curators. Their critical approach to reconstruction is shown in the entry for the Humboldt-Forum competition in Berlin, awarded with the 2009 German Critics' Prize in the architecture category. Their projects have been shown in international exhibitions, including the Architecture Biennial in Venice and the Chicago Architecture Biennial.