

Above the Grid

Built on top of an existing multi-storey car park in Tübingen, the new shared centre for three vocational schools establishes a common focal point. Rising above the rigid grid of the existing structure, the campus building by a+r Architekten creates an open, shared place for learning.



Approaching the new campus building for the Tübingen vocational schools, visitors experience architecture as transformation. Where a two-storey car park, partly embedded in the ground, once defined the space along Primus-Truber-Straße, an elongated new building now stretches between the school buildings, the street and the banks of the small river Steinlach. Working with the existing structure, a+r Architekten of Stuttgart and Tübingen have created a new link between the Gewerbliche Schule Tübingen, the Wilhelm-Schickard-Schule and the Mathilde-Weber-Schule. The result is a shared building for around 5,200 students, accommodating a cafeteria, media library, flexible teaching spaces and learning areas.

For many years, the vocational school campus in Tübingen-Derendingen consisted of a collection of functional, stand-alone elements: three vocational schools, an existing multi-storey car park, various access roads, the Feuerhäggle sports hall, a nursery, a youth centre and the green riverside landscape of the Steinlach. What was missing was a place capable of bringing these neighbouring facilities together and giving the campus a shared identity.

A campus finds its centre

The new building brings a clear spatial order to what had previously been a disparate collection of functions. Extending along the length of the underground car park, it incorporates the existing infrastructure and transforms it into a public educational facility. The building defines outdoor space and creates generous open areas that form a lively centre for the three schools. An elevated terrace links Primus-Truber-Straße with the riverside landscape of the Steinlach. With spacious external staircases leading up from the north and south, the cafeteria terrace

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becomes a shared point of arrival while separating pedestrian movement from traffic entering and leaving the underground car park.

“We wanted the new cafeteria building to become a place that connects the three schools,” explains Walter Fritz, project architect at a+r Architekten. “With the cafeteria, media library and new learning spaces, the campus has gained a shared centre for the first time, fostering a stronger sense of community.”

Building on what exists as a design principle

The multi-storey car park, dating from the early 1970s, was retained as a valuable structural resource and became the starting point for the design concept developed during the invited competition in 2018. Originally engineered to support a landscaped earth covering, its structure offered sufficient load-bearing capacity to accommodate the new building above. At the same time, the existing structural grid, ceiling heights and load paths defined the framework for the new structure. In response, a+r Architekten designed the first new storey above the car park – the level containing the cafeteria and classrooms – as a reinforced concrete structure capable of spanning the large communal spaces while transferring loads into the existing building. By retaining the car park, around 2,000 cubic metres of concrete were reused, preserving a substantial amount of embodied carbon.

Above this base, the cafeteria level becomes the building's structural threshold. It translates the existing parking grid into the new programme and forms the supporting platform for the lightweight timber structure above. This layered construction expresses the building's underlying logic: the robust existing structure supports the new public functions, while the timber storeys accommodate the learning spaces and lend the elongated volume a lighter appearance.

At one end of the building, a new volume also completes the plinth level of the two-storey car park, accommodating service, technical and school facilities. The intermediate level contains the offices and ancillary spaces of the cafeteria, together with IT and server rooms. At ground level are a student workspace, a seminar room, sanitary facilities and the delivery area. In this way, the existing infrastructure is spatially extended while being fully integrated into the everyday life of the new campus.

The campus hub

The cafeteria and media library form the social heart of the new campus building. Located on the elevated terrace level, the cafeteria opens onto the terrace and surrounding landscape through full-height glazing. Its generous sense of space is created by the expansive open floor plan, a continuous window strip allowing daylighting and the exposed structural frame. Slender circular columns and V-shaped inclined supports along the western façade establish the rhythm of the interior while making the structural achievement of building above the existing car park immediately legible.

At its centre, a glazed atrium opens the cafeteria to the media library above. Glazed openings and rooflights bring additional daylight deep into the building while creating visual connections between the two levels. Long tables, informal

groups of tables along the façade and higher counter-height seating divide the large space into distinct zones without compromising its open character.

Above, the media library forms the building's prominent upper section. Supported by staff from the district media centre, it complements the cafeteria as a quiet place for research, study and focused work within the everyday life of the campus. Shelving, a centrally positioned service desk and long seating niches along the façade give the light-filled space both a clear sense of order and an inviting atmosphere.

A defining feature of the building's external appearance is the folded façade of the media library. Blue-green fibre cement panels wrap the upper storeys in a calm envelope. At the narrow end, this composition becomes more finely articulated, creating a subtle, layered profile. The façade lends the building scale and depth, filters daylight and is visible inside as a pattern of light and shadow and around the media library's seating niches.

A learning wing along the car park

From the building's head, the learning wing extends eastwards along the full length of the existing car park. Teaching rooms, learning hubs, open-plan study areas and ancillary spaces are arranged on two floors along a central corridor. On both levels, student support services and staff offices complement the teaching areas, providing easily accessible points of contact throughout the school day. The spatial quality is defined by the clear linear organisation, outward views and the open study areas along the southern façade. The new addition supports the daily activities of all three schools through short distances and flexibly usable spaces.

Standing the test of everyday use

The choice of materials combines robustness with a warm atmosphere. Sandblasted concrete surfaces define the two lower levels both inside and out, from the staircases to the precast concrete façade elements. Above, blue-green fibre cement panels, colour-matched to the existing school buildings, wrap the upper storeys in a finely articulated envelope. Inside, silver fir is used for windows, doors, built-in furniture, wall cladding and seating niches. Reconstituted stone provides durability in heavily used areas, while glazing creates visual connections.

These decisions reflect the project as a collaborative achievement between client and architects. Alongside environmental considerations, sustainability is understood here in terms of retaining existing structures, making thoughtful material choices, ensuring graceful ageing and creating a building that performs well in everyday use. "We assessed the materials, maintenance requirements, ease of upkeep and ageing characteristics from the very beginning," says Stefanie Lüdigg, Head of Department at the Tübingen District Authority and the client's representative. "It was important to us that the surfaces would withstand the demands of daily school life, retain their quality over the long term and give the building a lasting and appropriate presence."

For a+r Architekten, this commitment extends well beyond completion in all of their projects. Walter Fritz regularly revisits earlier projects to observe how materials

MEDIA INFORMATION

weather, how surfaces acquire signs of use and how buildings continue to perform in everyday life. "A good building should still feel right many years after it has been completed," says the project architect at a+r Architekten. "That requires materials that can gracefully accommodate the traces of everyday use."

Data and facts

Project: Campus Building, Tübingen Vocational Schools

Client: Tübingen District Authority

Location: Tübingen-Derendingen, Primus-Truber-Straße

Users: Gewerbliche Schule Tübingen, Wilhelm-Schickard-Schule, Mathilde-Weber-Schule

Architecture: a+r Architekten, Stuttgart/Tübingen

Competition: 2018

Start of planning: 2020

Start of construction: November 2022

Completion: March 2026

In use: since April 2026

GBV: 25,292 m³ (excluding underground car park)

GFA: 5,695 m² (excluding underground car park)

Usable floor area: 4,960 m² (excluding underground car park)

Heating: District heating

Energy: Photovoltaic panels on the roof

Photography: Roland Halbe

Stuttgart, August 2026

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1 The new campus building by a+r Architekten spans the existing multi-storey car park, extending between the school buildings, Primus-Truber-Straße and the small river Steinlach. Set atop the existing car park, the elongated building creates a new shared centre for the three vocational schools. Photo: Roland Halbe

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2 On the northern side, facing the neighbouring Wilhelm-Schickard-Schule, the building's layered composition becomes clearly visible, comprising the plinth with the existing car park, the terrace level and the folded upper volume. The external staircase leads to the elevated cafeteria terrace, linking the new building with the circulation routes of the campus. Photo: Roland Halbe

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3 The aerial view shows the campus building in relation to the existing school buildings. Following the full length of the 1970s car park, the new building brings together the various circulation routes across the campus. Photo: Roland Halbe

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4 With its full-height glazing, the cafeteria opens onto the terrace level. At its centre, a glazed atrium creates a visual connection between the dining hall and the media library on the floor above. Photo: Roland Halbe

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5 Workstations along the folded façade make the media library a bright and welcoming place for work and focused study. Views to the outside create a connection between the interior and its green surroundings. Photo: Roland Halbe
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6 The photographs by Roland Halbe shown on the contact sheet are available only after image rights have been cleared with a+r Architekten. Please contact Julia Raff at pr@aplusr.de to arrange permission.

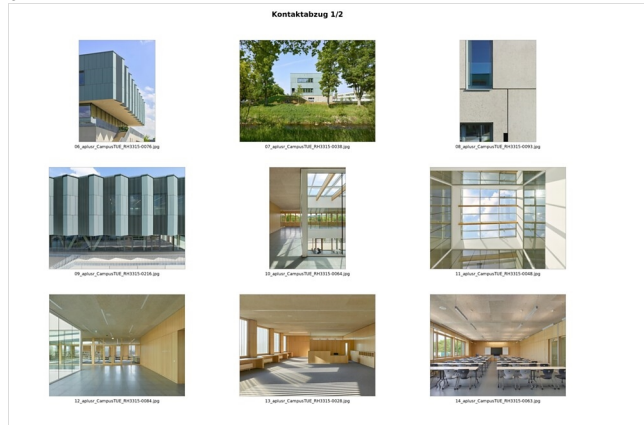
7 The photographs by Roland Halbe shown on the contact sheet are available only after image rights have been cleared with a+r Architekten. Please contact Julia Raff at pr@aplusr.de to arrange permission.

8 Site plan of the Campus Building, Tübingen Vocational Schools. Drawing: a+r Architekten

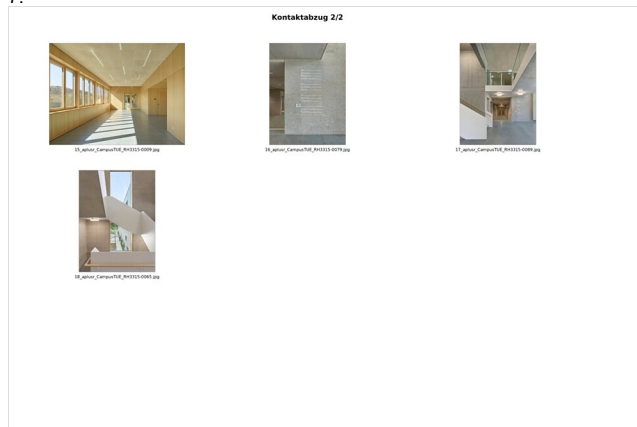
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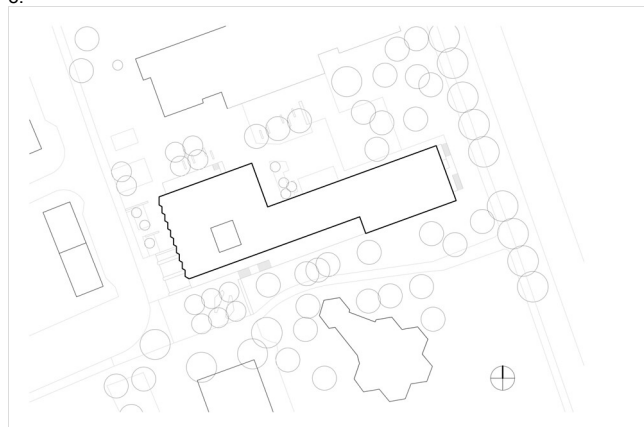
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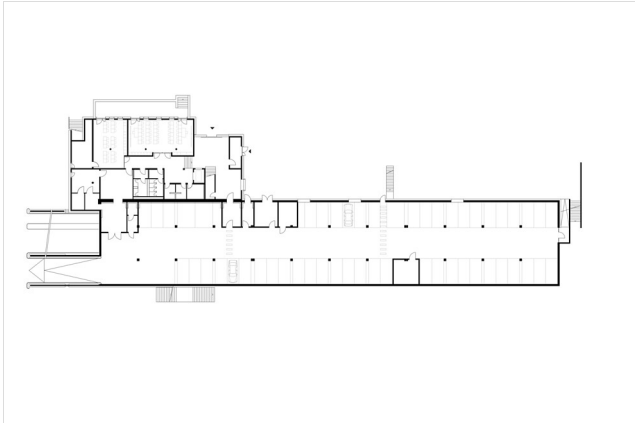
9 Ground floor plan (Level 0) of the Campus Building, Tübingen Vocational Schools. Drawing: a+r Architekten

10 Level 1 floor plan – Cafeteria level, Campus Building, Tübingen Vocational Schools. Drawing: a+r Architekten

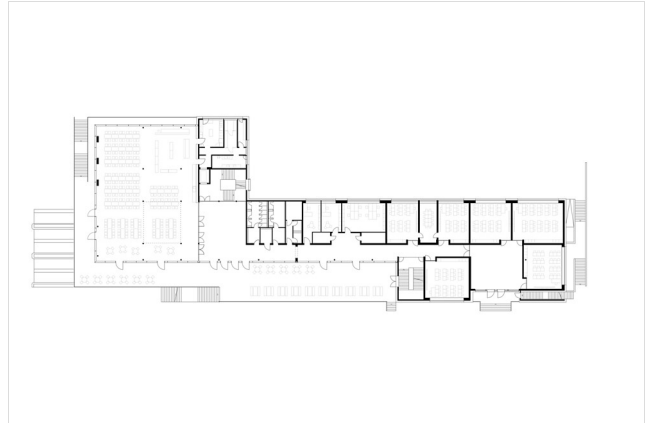
11 Level 3 floor plan – Media library level, Campus Building, Tübingen Vocational Schools. Drawing: a+r Architekten

12 Isometric drawing of the Campus Building, Tübingen Vocational Schools. Drawing: a+r Architekten

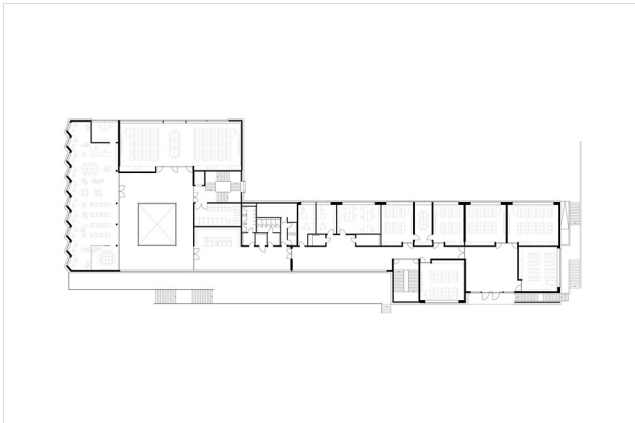
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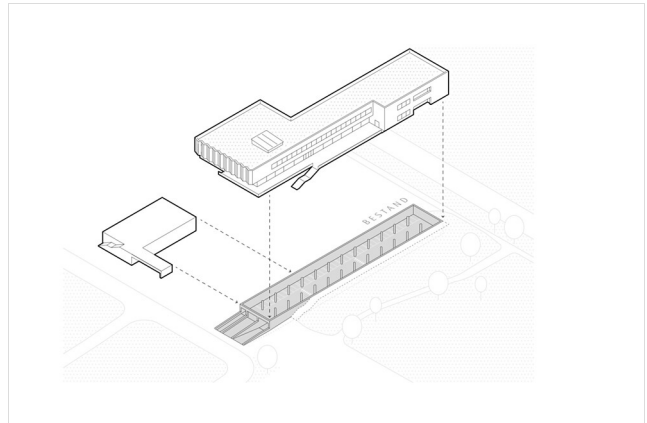
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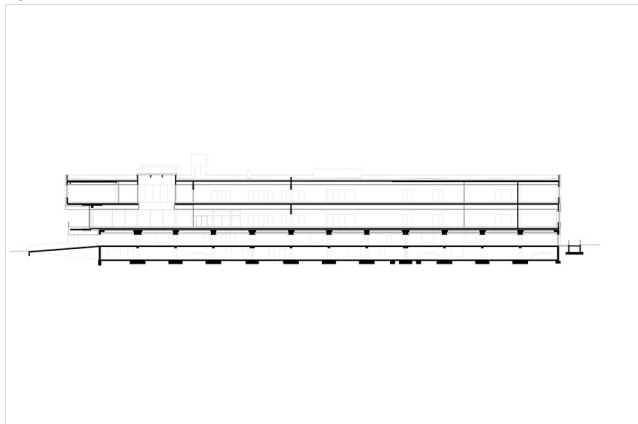


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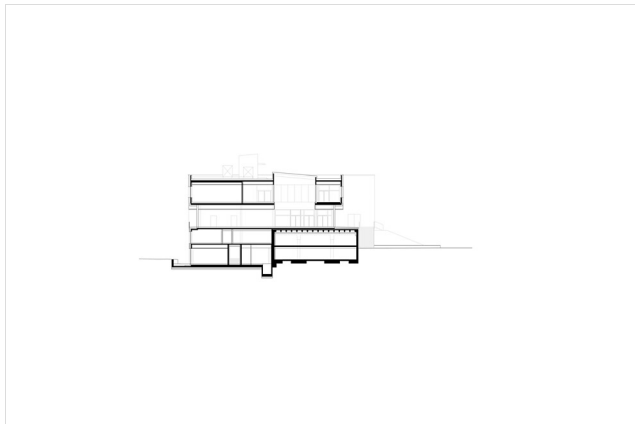
13 Longitudinal section of the Campus Building, Tübingen Vocational Schools. Drawing: a+r Architekten

14 Cross section of the Campus Building, Tübingen Vocational Schools. Drawing: a+r Architekten

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About a+r Architekten

a+r Architekten stand for solid, environmentally compatible and future-oriented architecture with impressive expertise in the field of sustainable building — also in existing building contexts. Founded in 1985 by Professor Gerd Ackermann and Professor Hellmut Raff, the office with branches in Stuttgart and Tübingen has around 130 employees and is today headed by Oliver Braun, Florian Gruner and Alexander Lange. a+r Architekten mainly build for public clients, industry and commerce, municipal housing companies and social institutions. The office focuses on appropriate, ecological, functional and the resulting innovative construction methods and has been awarded prestigious prizes for this approach.

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