

The new CATS Library in Heidelberg

A visit in July 2019, a month after opening

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The new 'Centre of Asian and Transcultural Studies' is a combination of four different, but geographically related study areas: The South Asia Institute, the Institute of Anthropology, the Centre for East Asian Studies, and the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies, which comprises of Asian Art History, Buddhist Studies, Media Anthropology, Cultural Economic History and Intellectual History. Languages taught are Tibetan, Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, Dari, Tamil, Nepali, Sinhalese, Indonesian, Hindi, Thai, Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese, Cantonese, Japanese and Korean. Predecessor of this centre was a research institution "Asia and Europe in a global context", founded by federal government in 2007. In 2013 it became the 'Centre of Asian and Transcultural Studies'. The centre is housed in four buildings of the former dermatology clinic, built between 1869 and 1886, and is located in the historically oldest part of the city.

The library at the Centre of Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS) comprises the collections of the Centre for East Asian Studies, the South Asian Institute, Anthropology, and the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies. To combine the library holdings of these formerly independently located institutions a new library building had to be planned.

Problems that arose with the situation of the former clinic were that it is heritage listed, so building structures could not be altered deliberately. The compound is also situated close to the Neckar river, which has its own challenges, like a high ground water level. Erecting a new building within the compound was not feasible either due to the heritage listing.

Well, if you can't go up, you go down. And that's what they did, 4 levels deep (16 m).

Basically the whole building was placed into ground water: this was achieved with the help of 300 waterproof-concrete pillars within which the building was set:

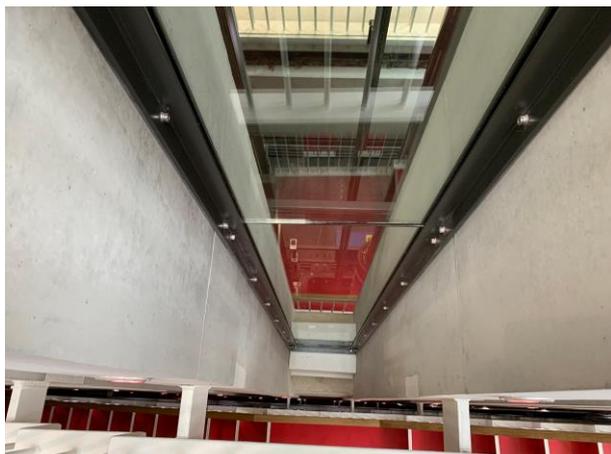


(Image courtesy of Universität Heidelberg – KuM. Image use is restricted. For more images see: <https://www.cats.uni-heidelberg.de/bauvorhaben/>)

This is how it came out:



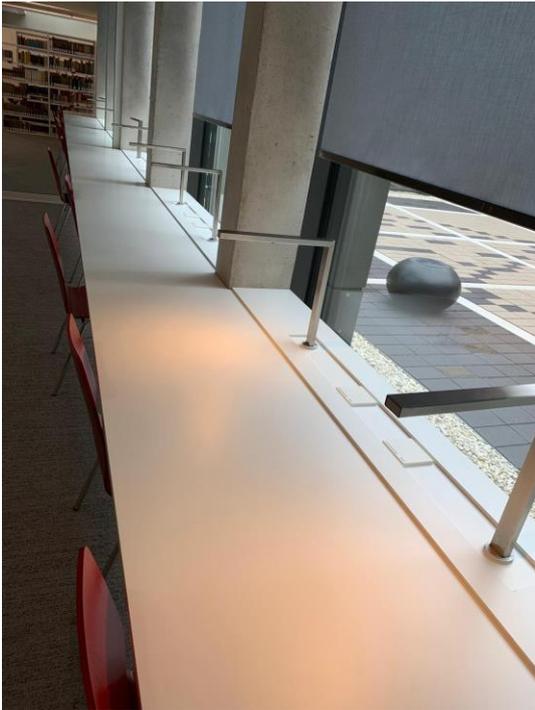
Final result. To be clear: there are three more levels under this one.



Down, down down.....

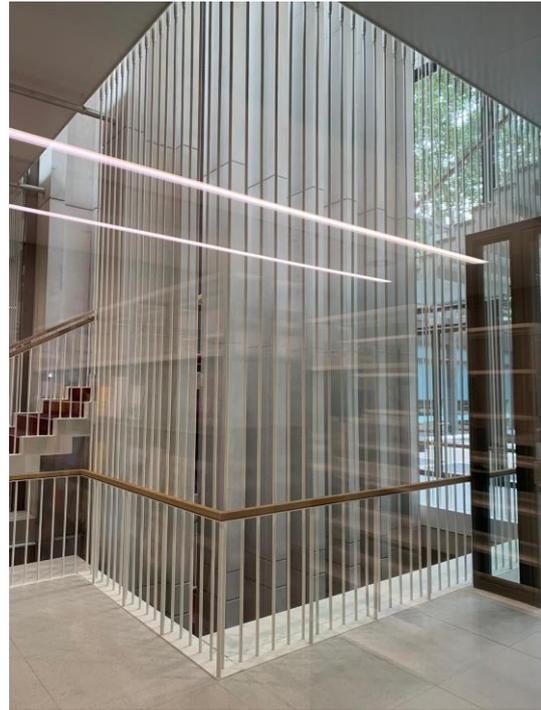


set in (concrete) stone...



Work spaces

All images courtesy of Remo and Iris



a bit of interior design around the stairs

The lower levels of the building are storage only, there is no public access to these levels. Library administration is located in a building next to the library and has subterranean access to the library and the repository. Loans are ordered from storage and provided at the desk.

As of now this special Asian Studies library holds about 600 000 volumes in monographs and serials. The reading/reference room holds about 15 000 reference works, with 52 work spaces, 13 carrels and 2 group study rooms. As for other media there are 8000 films and 4000 audio materials, 160 000 slides, and about 12 000 microforms, many of those are journals from the republican era in China, and a few thousand posters. About 600 journal titles are currently being subscribed to. Two full time Asian specialist librarians are in charge, with a various number of students working there on a part time basis.

The German Federal Government, the State of Baden-Württemberg, and the University of Heidelberg invested 31 mio Euro (50 mio AUD) in the renovation and rebuilding of this centre, and the building of the library. It felt good to see that there is major engagement with Asia in some places.

More information about the centre and studies there is available here:

<https://www.cats.uni-heidelberg.de/about/>