



**Federal President Joachim Gauck  
at the matinee event in celebration of architecture  
Schloss Bellevue  
3 July 2015**

I bid you all a very warm welcome. This is a special day. At Schloss Bellevue, we welcome many different guests, sometimes the Queen and sometimes our own citizens. Yet never before has Schloss Bellevue hosted a special reception for architects, building experts, architecture aficionados and critics, for commissioners of public buildings and private architecture offices.

So I am truly delighted that you have all come – and that so many of you are here today. For the protocol office has told me that a record number of people accepted the invitation to attend this event.

Why have we come together today?

As Federal President, I would like to expressly highlight the importance of architecture and architects to our country, to our society, to our sentiments and our experience of space and home.

Not that architects go unnoticed. That is something that one really can't say nowadays. In recent times, however, architecture has often been spoken or written about in a negative context. Forgive me for saying this, but I don't want to turn a blind eye to reality. It often doesn't even occur to us that architects are often not at all to blame when a building is not completed or becomes far too expensive. This is sometimes caused by other factors, too. But let us not dwell on this point at this meeting today.

Rather, I think it is time for a special gesture of gratitude. For there is an awful lot of wonderful architecture in our country and wonderful architects from our country who design buildings around the world. A lot of thought goes into good architecture here – and very many plans for good architecture actually come to fruition.

I am very glad that the reason for this gathering is linked to four names who all happen to have a landmark birthday this year. They are four names which represent outstanding architecture. They are also

different. In fact, the contrast between them is so great that I thought it would be appropriate to honour this country's architecture as a whole by celebrating these four individuals.

These four people have shown in an exemplary fashion what good architecture can achieve:

Good architecture can create spaces in which people experience their most profound spiritual feelings, indeed in which they can pray, for instance in the churches designed by Gottfried Böhm. The church he designed in Neviges is perhaps the best example of a beautiful building made of concrete, and it was the last true cathedral to be built in Germany.

It can, as is the case with Meinhard von Gerkan, produce railway stations and airports in which people do not feel they are being processed but, rather, create areas in which they can revel in the pleasure of setting off on a journey or arriving at their destination, areas which offers both: a sense of security and open space – and, what is more, are as practical as Tegel airport, which is unsurpassed in that respect.

It can erect unique landmarks such as Helmut Jahn's towers or his Sony Center here in Berlin, which has helped transform the face of this city. To visitors they convey the elegance and fascination of the extraordinary, and to the inhabitants of a city a feeling of home and a sense of belonging.

And it can, as is the case with the roof of Munich's Olympic Stadium, designed by Frei Otto, express how an entire country would like to feel. We would like to see our state, our country just as we see this roof: composed and full of verve, protective and transparent, with a solid foundation and full of lightness.

Frei Otto, who was invited here, died before his 90th birthday – and thus we celebrate this truly free spirit today. I am pleased that his wife Ingrid and his daughter Christine are with us here at this matinee event. A warm welcome to you!

All four of the men I mentioned are very different – and there are certainly great differences among those present today. We need this variety, our invitation was embellished with a depiction of a medieval choir ambulatory and the inscription that two men created this choir – "inter se disputando": "in joint discussion".

I chose this quite consciously, for this is what we have to do time and again: discuss architecture. Among architects – but preferably also among a wider section of society. I am aware that good architecture is not created through a popular vote. However, in contrast to a poem, a piece of music, a picture or a film, no one can avoid architecture. That is why it affects everyone. That is why everyone has something to say about it.

We therefore need competent architecture journalism which, on the one hand, understands and explains what is new and, on the other, can deflate the pompous project prose we sometimes come across. A journalism which reminds those responsible that living in people-friendly spaces is not an unreasonable aspiration. I would like to take this opportunity to remember Dieter Bartetzko, who died far too young and whose passionate plea for good buildings will hopefully inspire his contemporaries and future architects.

No architect is able to do anything without judicious clients – or against regulations. I am pleased that the Federal Construction Minister is with us today. Minister, I hope that our architects not only comply with regulations but that they can also enjoy the freedom to experiment. The public sector in particular could set an example, could try out something new, encourage creative solutions and give unusual ideas a chance.

I know that many of you here today have already followed new paths or are doing so now. On the one hand, these are the famous and celebrated architects, whose presence here today gives me special pleasure – for it is an honour for us all.

However, I am also pleased that there are a number of young architects among us who have attracted attention with interesting, sometimes even crazy solutions – including the first architecture school for children and young people in Bremen. Thinking of this latest example, it is never too young to start studying something like architecture, something which concerns us all.

And I would like to encourage these young architects today. I know it is not easy for you; I know that it is difficult for many of you to earn a living. That is why you are here and that is why I would like to encourage you, wherever you can, to set new directions in our country, to enrich the way we live and our society.

Incidentally, great architecture can also be sought and found in buildings less grand than the Frauenkirche, Cologne Cathedral or the Elbphilharmonie. Indeed it is perhaps more prevalent in more modest constructions. No terraced house, no cellar, no floor, no terrace, indeed no garage, is too peripheral or too unimportant to be designed with wit and ideas, with elegance and charm. This is perhaps where a master of this profession can make their mark!

I hope that both young and old masters, famous and less famous architects, will get to know each other today. Please feel free to approach anyone here in Schloss Bellevue. That is what it is here for!

Vitruv said that ...

Goethe said that ...

Adorno said that ...

No, I will spare you the usual quotes from great minds on architecture.

All there is left for me to do now, is to draw your attention to an ancient book. You may well have already guessed which book I mean. At the start of the Bible, utopia for humans is a garden – paradise.

At the end, however, the utopia of social coexistence is: a city! Heavenly Jerusalem. In effect, every architect plays a part in designing a world in which people want to, and indeed can, live together happily and peacefully, a world which calms and, at the same time, opens their souls. We could perhaps regard every successful example of architecture, every successful example of urbanism as the embodiment of the kind of home we all long for.

That we like being where we are, that we like working where we work, that we feel at home and, at the same time, get an idea of something bigger than us – good architecture can bring about all of that.

In this spirit, ladies and gentlemen, I invite you to raise your glasses to Gottfried Böhm, Meinhard von Gerkan, Helmut Jahn, to the memory of Frei Otto and in tribute to architecture. Allow me to once again bid you all a very warm welcome to Schloss Bellevue!