

Background information

MyZeil – History and significance of the location

The Zeil – A big-city boulevard

Starting out as a simple row of houses outside the city wall in the early 14th century, the Zeil in Frankfurt evolved in the 19th century into one of the country's best-known urban boulevards and is today one of the busiest and highest-turnover shopping streets in Europe.

The Zeil was a boulevard of city palaces and hotels, a place noted for its Neoclassicist splendour. In the economic boom years of the mid-19th century, the Zeil was transformed into a shopping street. As in other European cities, large department stores were established.

In the late 19th century, the Baroque and Neoclassicist city palaces gave way to large commercial buildings reflecting the business spirit of the times. Among the most splendid was the Kaiserliche Hauptpost, the imperial post office, completed in 1891 on the site of what is now the MyZeil shopping centre. With a crowning dome that helped to shape the city skyline, it presented a broad front ending in corner towers also topped with domes.

The challenge of city traffic

As the widest road axis of downtown Frankfurt, the Zeil always also reflected the rapidly changing face of urban traffic. The masses of pedestrians and carts were joined first by horse trams, then later by electric trolley-buses and motor vehicles. In 1972, the Zeil was closed to cars and declared a pedestrian precinct. Public transport moved underground.

The site

The MyZeil site is situated in downtown Frankfurt and extends from the north side of the Zeil, the historical site of the former post office, to the east side of Grosse Eschenheimer Strasse, the historical location of the Palais Thurn und Taxis.



Alongside the Palais Thurn und Taxis stood the Red House, the Russischer Hof (from 1826 on, one of the most famous luxury hotels of its time) and the Darmstädter Hof. In 1890-91, the Baroque and Neoclassicist city palaces had to give way to the construction of Frankfurt Central Post Office.

New role for Palais Thurn und Taxis

The Palais Thurn und Taxis was built in 1729-1739 by Robert de Cotte for the hereditary postmaster-general Prince Anselm Franz von Thurn und Taxis. The palace had a very colourful history: in 1748, it became the administrative heart of the Kaiserlich Thurn und Taxis'sche Post, the postal service of the Holy Roman Empire; from 1805 to 1813 it was the residence of the Sovereign Prince and Grand Duke of Frankfurt Carl Theodor von Dalberg. After Frankfurt's reinstatement as a free city, it became the seat of the Federal Assembly of the German Confederation, a status it enjoyed from 1816 to 1866. In 1895, Prince Albert I von Thurn und Taxis sold the palace to the imperial postal service – after first transferring all its contents to his castle Schloss Emmeram in Regensburg, where they are still to be found today. In 1905, the palace was acquired by the City of Frankfurt, which in 1908 made it into an ethnological museum to house the collections of the African explorer Leo Frobenius. In 1943 and 1944, the palace was heavily damaged in a number of bombing raids.

Space for new telephone exchange

In 1947, plans were drafted for the construction of a new telephone exchange. The presence of the old communication cables, which were still intact underground, and the convenient location swung the balance in favour of erecting the new building on the site of the post office destroyed in the Second World War and the partially destroyed Palais Thurn und Taxis. The complex was the biggest construction project of the early 1950s in Frankfurt.

At first, there were even plans to rebuild the palace. However, it was found that the cost of re-laying the cables which came together underneath the building would have run to millions. So, after lengthy negotiations, the city authorities voted for a compromise. The corps de logis, the central block of the palace, and the wings were demolished in 1951 and only the portals on Grosse Eschenheimer Strasse were preserved. Instead of the former mansard roofs, however, they were now given a parapet with balustrade.

In 1952, the more than 70 metre tall telephone exchange, with its directional radio antennas visible from afar, was erected on the site of the former garden and central block of the palace. It was one of the first steel-framed

high-rise buildings to be constructed in Frankfurt and formed a central hub of the German telecommunications network. To the south and east, the tower was flanked by two administrative buildings rising to 33 and 40 metres respectively. The part of the building bordered by the Zeil accommodated Post Office 1 with its administrative premises and service halls. At times during the 1960s, as many as 5,000 people were employed on the site.

With the construction of a network control station alongside the Europaturm in Bockenheim, the telephone exchange lost its central importance for the Deutsche Telekom network. In 2004, the entire building complex was demolished.

A stimulus for urban flair

The PalaisQuartier today – combining city palace and hotel, space for business and for shopping – stands in the tradition of all its former roles and thus continues to write history for Frankfurt city centre and, in particular, for the Zeil. It will generate the impetus for 21st century urban flair in terms of both city planning and retail activity.

A press portal with photos for download will be available at www.myzeil.de.

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