



History of Umspannwerk Ost

Designed by the architect O. Springmann the Umspannwerk Ost was built between 1899 and 1900 by the Berlin Elektrizitätswerke AG as a transformer station and is now a listed building. In this building the high voltage alternating current from surrounding power plants was transformed to operating direct current voltage which was used in private households, smaller business enterprises and for tram traffic.

The substation was built in the same traditional style as its surrounding tenements. A high voltage plant was located in the cellar (now Jazz- and Theaterclub), the converters occupied a hall of seven metres height on the ground floor (now the Restaurant and Theater) and the two top floors accommodated transformer- and battery rooms. 6 kV rotary current was reduced to 110 V (later 220 V) by oil-insulated transformers and had to be changed into direct current by so-called converters in order to be fed into the distribution network. Excess capacity was used to charge the two storage batteries. The entire process was monitored and controlled from an elevated platform on the ground floor (now the Galerie - Restaurant).

Some parts of the converting station was destroyed in the Second World War and its remains were removed in the 1950s to make room for the new Stinallee which has been renamed to Karl-Marx-Allee since. From after the Second World War until 1997 the building was used as a factory to manufacture metal.

The top floors were converted to workshops and offices.

The façade of the ground floor is roughcast with light plaster to imitate a natural stone finish. Vast steel and glass windows provide an external structure to the façade whilst illuminating the building's interiority. Higher up, the façade is decorated with reliefs showing allegorical motifs of the four elements fire, water, earth and air, as well as symbols from electrical engineering. The converter station "Umspannwerk Ost" is the oldest of its kind in Berlin. It documents the rapidly growing importance of electricity in the Berlin of the turn of the century. The extant buildings are listed.