

Press information



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Press information | Ulrich Müther and the World of Shell Structures

In architecture, shell structures symbolise innovative strength and the pursuit of material-efficient designs. In the mid-20th century, only a handful of architects worldwide were able to master their sculptural impact and technical precision. Ulrich Müther from Binz (1934–2007) was one of them. An extraordinary abundance of these unique shell structures can be discovered on his home island of Rügen.

His buildings are known as the 'Teepott', 'Seerose' and 'Ahornblatt', and have made architectural history. Ulrich Müther, a building contractor born in Binz, designed and constructed countless shell-shaped structures throughout his life – around 75 in total – some of which were even built in Cuba, Libya, Kuwait and Finland. He moulded concrete in a way never seen before, laying it out like velvet or hoisting it like sails against the wind. Müther drew inspiration from the natural landscape of the island of Rügen: as a child, he had played with shells on the Baltic Sea beach at Binz and was fascinated by their thin yet incredibly resilient shells. Driven by the visions of his childhood, he realised his fantastically appearing shell structures a few years later in Binz, on the island of Rügen and all over the world. He thus became a leading figure of architectural modernism.

The civil engineer Ulrich Müther

Born in Binz in 1934, Ulrich Müther – a trained carpenter and graduate of the Neustrelitz School of Engineering – took over his parents' construction firm at the age of 24. Even at that early stage, Müther was interested in the extraordinary shell structure theories of Hungarian and Romanian mathematicians, which inspired him to carry out his first experiments with model structures made of canvas and moulds created from mounds of sand. A few years later, at construction exhibitions in Budapest and Leningrad, Müther met leading international shell structure engineers such as Jörg Schlaich, Stefan Polónyi and Heinz Isler – marking the beginning of a formative professional exchange.

In 1963, as part of his degree project, Ulrich Müther designed a curved shotcrete slab to serve as a terrace roof for a holiday home in Binz. Although concrete was regarded at that time as a building material offering unlimited possibilities, no one had yet been able to calculate the force distributions of such structures with precision. Müther's expert knowledge was highly valued, and so he was appointed to a newly established chair in Berlin. There, he spent four months experimenting with models and calculating force distributions before the first construction trials took place.

His first masterpiece, a 'flying' slab, caused quite a stir, as it was a revolutionary structure for its time. Shortly afterwards, commissions began to pour in. Müther used his skills to continually vary the dimensions and curvatures of his concrete shells. During the day, he ran the construction firm he had inherited, though following its nationalisation he served as the boss elected by the workforce. After work, he tinkered with designs featuring multi-curved shell structures.

Müther's buildings were an important export for the GDR. He built a series of Zeiss planetariums in Kuwait, Tripoli and Helsinki. In Wolfsburg, too, he designed and built the dome of the local planetarium between 1981 and 1983, for which the car manufacturer VW, in return, supplied several thousand cars to the GDR.

After 1990, more and more of Müther's buildings were threatened with demolition due to lack of use and fell into disrepair. Although Müther himself took charge of the renovation of some of his coastal buildings,

these structures – which still appeared modern – were not preserved everywhere. In the years that followed, Ulrich Müther withdrew from active architectural practice and from then on enjoyed engaging with young, ambitious students. As a ‘regional master builder’ – as Müther jokingly described himself – he ran workshops, taught at universities and shared his knowledge at specialist conferences. In 2007, Ulrich Müther passed away in his hometown of Binz.

Müther’s Art in Binz and on Rügen

The Baltic seaside resort of Binz served as both a source of inspiration and a workshop for the engineer Ulrich Müther. This is where it all began; this is where the ideas took shape and the first distinctive concrete shells were created. As early as 1964, whilst still a student, the architectural virtuoso designed the roof for a multi-purpose hall in what was then known as the ‘Haus der Stahlwerker’ in Binz. The futuristic-looking structure was demolished a little later. The bus shelter, erected in 1967, met a different fate: with its roof tapering to a point in the centre, it can still be admired today as the ‘Müther Shell’. Yet this structure was originally conceived merely as a test and experimental building for a multi-purpose hall in Rostock.

At the southern end of Binz beach, a structure resembling a stalk eye peeks out strikingly from the dunes. This curious-looking structure has been attracting curious glances since as far back as 1982. Rounded, smooth and featuring large oval windows on all four sides, the concrete capsule – which resembles a UFO – stands on a narrow base and provides a striking contrast to the seaside villas and guesthouses. With this lifeguard tower and its extraordinary appearance, Ulrich Müther has created one of his smallest structures. Lifeguards were stationed here until 2003. Since 2006, the tower has been open to the public: as a branch of the Binz Registry Office and for exclusive events.

On Rügen, in 1966, Ulrich Müther realised his third concrete shell: the approximately 320-square-metre wide-span roof of the ‘Inselparadies’ restaurant in Baabe. It was also his first to take the form of a mushroom-shaped shell. With the ‘Ostseeperle’ restaurant in Glowe on Rügen, built in the late 1960s, the island gained another spectacular building. Müther had a roof built right on the beach, tapering sharply towards the water – a so-called tilted hyperbolic shell. The entire façade is glazed, offering an unobstructed view of the sea. The list of Ulrich Müther’s extraordinary concrete shell structures continues with the Sassnitz ‘Kurmuschel’ (music pavilion) in the shape of a whale’s fin, the diving-helmet-like bus shelter in Buschvitz, and the spectacular ceiling of the indoor swimming pool in what is now the Cliff Hotel Rügen in Sellin.

The Müther Theme Week, a week of architecture and art in Binz, takes place every year at the end of September, inviting visitors to discover the life, work and fascinating architectural legacy of civil engineer Ulrich Müther. The programme includes special bus tours, guided tours, lectures, readings and workshops. The Müther Theme Week 2026 will take place from 28 September to 4 October.

The legacy of an architectural visionary

With the HYPARFORUM, established in Binz just under 20 years after Müther’s death, a platform has been created dedicated to preserving Müther’s legacy centred on the hypar shell, with the aim of inspiring interested parties and future generations with this extraordinary feat of engineering. As a forum for architecture worthy of preservation, the HYPARFORUM has set itself the task of showcasing the architectural treasures and the unique architectural history of Eastern Modernism.

A key component of the HYPARFORUM is a specially designed permanent exhibition on the world of shell structures at the welcome centre Haus des Gastes in Binz on Rügen. It will be on display from the end of September 2026 under the title ‘Müther – Transcending Boundaries’. The exhibition pays tribute to the outstanding achievements of civil engineer Ulrich Müther and his colleagues and invites visitors to rediscover these cultural monuments.

On the tour, which takes in seven exhibition stations featuring eight 3D models of Muther's buildings and six audio stations with original recordings of Ulrich Muther and his contemporaries, visitors gain insights into the architectural, technical, political and personal boundaries that Ulrich Muther pushed. His biography traces his journey from craftsman to visionary and master of shell construction. Construction files in a retrospective exhibition provide detailed insights into 44 of his shell-construction projects. These are followed by explanations of the specific construction techniques and history of shell construction.

The exhibition comes to life through anecdotes and stories from a unique political era, as well as in the film room, where Margarete Fuchs's documentary 'Für den Schwung sind Sie zuständig' is screened (with English subtitles). The exhibition also explores the themes of heritage buildings and demolition, and examines the question of why Muther almost fell into oblivion. The tour concludes with an overview of the world of shell-construction buildings, from the island of Rügen, through Germany, to other countries, where many of his buildings can still be admired.

8,954 characters

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