



WORLD WIDE WEAVE

The Blue Whale

Metallic fabric encases concert hall in Argentina's prestigious new building project

Starting from Buenos Aires, the tango argentino conquered the world in the 1920s. Today the Argentinian capital is seen as the Paris of the South and is equally famous for its European flair as for its world-class cultural offering. The country's colonial past has characterised the architecture and atmosphere of the city right up to the present day. And now, with the opening of the Centro Cultural Kirchner in the heart of Buenos Aires, the metropolis boasts the largest cultural centre in Latin America, which few cultural buildings worldwide can measure up to. Although it is officially named after the former President Néstor Kirchner, the building is commonly known as *Ballena Azul (Blue Whale)*. It owes this name to its interior, whale-formed concert hall wing with an area of 2,200 square metres that forms a central element of B4FS arquitectos' design. Its visually seamless shell made of Escale metallic fabric from GKD – GEBR. KUFFERATH AG reflects the blue paintwork of the skirting and walls. As the new base of the national symphony orchestra, the shimmering ellipsoid really makes the new landmark of Buenos Aires stand out.

With a population of around 11.5 million, more than a quarter of all Argentinians live in the Buenos Aires region. Since the city's building boom in the wake of the economic upturn of the 1990s, glittering skyscrapers, luxury hotels and exclusive loft apartments have been a common sight in the centre of the bustling metropolis. The old docks have been remodelled as high-class promenades that attract tourists and Argentinians alike to their



restaurants, boutiques and bars. The historic city centre is home to the former Correo Central, the grand headquarters of the Argentinian postal service opened in 1928. In 2006 the then President Néstor Kirchner decided to renovate the listed palace and turn it into a superlative cultural centre. Following his death in 2010, his wife and successor as President, Christina Fernández de Kirchner, continued to pursue this idea until the project was completed in 2015. The planners from the Argentinian architectural firm B4FS prevailed in an international architectural competition for the renovation of the tradition-steeped main post office. Their design, a mix of architectural avant-garde and faithful restoration, aimed to create a place where culture could be encountered and experienced over 116,000 square metres in a space that is emblematic and people-oriented in equal measure. Thanks to its location on the Parque del Bicentenario between the historical centre with numerous important buildings and the modernised harbour area of Puerto Madero, the cultural centre became a revived, attractive focal point for the whole area.

Breathtaking combination of monument and avant-garde

The purely symmetrical design – both wings of the building are exactly the same – reflects the strict architectural concept of the planners. A sophisticated network of freely accessible areas on the various floors connects the modern function rooms with the historical parts of the building. The architects from B4FS thus combine painstakingly restored furniture, plasterwork, ironwork and woodwork with brave architectural structures and modern construction materials. Behind the faithfully restored façade, the restored elegance of neoclassicism enters into a fascinating union with the expressiveness of the modern. Even when entering the spacious foyer, almost 5,000 restored letterboxes, tables and chairs really bring the tradition-steeped building to life. The main dome of the palace, the slated roof of



which was replaced by 496 window panes with an integrated LED lighting system, plays a key part in this effect. This construction lights up the dome in all colours during the evening and at night. For state visits, the lights show the colours of the guests' respective national flags. As the city's first public viewing platform, the crowning glass dome on the ninth floor also allows the Porteños (people of the port), as the people of Buenos Aires call themselves, to enjoy previously unknown views. Moreover, with three restaurants and its possible use as a function room it also offers an arena for culinary pleasure and entertainment. Alluding to the traditional chandeliers in theatres, the architects designed two glass rooms, fixed in place by Virendeel girders, that hover two levels above the stage. With an area of 220 square metres, this gigantic, abstract chandelier is planned as a flexibly usable space for art exhibitions of all kinds.

Woven metallic dress for three-dimensional structure

The real attraction of the building, the enormous *Blue Whale*, can be found beneath the chandelier allegory. Its curved stomach contains a concert hall with space for 1,950 spectators in the stalls and on the balconies, as well as a chamber music hall that accommodates 540 listeners. For its construction, the respective building section was gutted behind the original façade and a large steel cage set up as a supporting structure. The colossal construction has a fascinating effect thanks to its shimmering skin, which seamlessly covers the ellipsoidal body and gently reflects the blue of the surrounding walls and skirting. When choosing a flexible material that would completely encase the idiosyncratic structure, the architects opted for Escale 7 x 1 metallic fabric from GKD – GEBR. KUFFERATH AG. This mesh can be formed in three dimensions and has already been tried and tested in a multitude of famous buildings – including Bertelsmann's "Planet m" pavilion at Expo 2000 in Hanover or the "Children's Palace" children's hospital in



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Guangzhou – impressively demonstrating its ability to provide completely homogeneous cladding. For the shell of the *Whale*, the architects chose a customised version of the mesh with 70 millimetre-high stainless steel spirals and aluminium rods. For the cladding, which covers a total area of 5,500 square metres, GKD manufactured over 1,200 individual elements that were fixed to the top and bottom of the shape-giving frame structure using fastening hooks without any visible joints or connections. The international network of the world's leading manufacturer of architectural metallic fabric proved its worth once again in the realisation of this challenging project: even during the detailed planning phase GKD was able to rely on the expertise of planners from formTL from Radolfzell, who specialise in 3D structures and with whom GKD had already successfully collaborated for the projects in Hanover and Guangzhou. The elements were mounted in the former main post building in Buenos Aires by the local GKD representative office in Argentina, Gutmetal. Following the official opening by the Argentinian President Christina Fernández de Kirchner, Buenos Aires now boasts a new landmark in the form of the Centro Cultural, allowing the past, the present and the future to be experienced under one roof.

7.036 characters incl. spaces

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