



Libraries through the lens

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DESIGNED by the Swiss architecture firm Herzog & de Meuron, the library of the BTU Cottbus opened in February 2005 after more than a decade of planning and construction, writes librarian and photographer Thomas Guignard.

The organic contours of its glass facade and the bold colour scheme of its interior earned the project instant international recognition, as well as inevitable criticism. The site of the library, on top of a small hill in an open park, inspired its shape as a small castle with corner towers. But this fortress is not made out

of stone, its walls are transparent, glass panes inscribed with a pattern of numbers and letters in different alphabets. Depending on the light, the walls thus appear either opaque or transparent and at night, the library turns into a lantern.

This tension between protecting heritage and distributing knowledge is at the core of the architectural project, but 20 years after the construction of the library, it is also fueling controversy between proponents of keeping the building as it was designed and those in favour of adapting it to the needs of today's students. A story to be continued.