



## ► Façade making an *impression*

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# Façade making an *impression*

People tend to think of the Swabians of South-West Germany as being down to earth, thrifty and just a little conservative. Looking at the “Sparkasse Arena,” the new venue for sporting and other events in Balingen in the Swabian Jura, could, at least at first glance, lead one to doubt this. The architect’s decision to transfer this concept to the vertical might have been inspired by Hollywood films such as “The Matrix”.

The front entrance area with its striking shoe impressions was not in fact originally planned this way. The primary motivation was second division handball club HBW Balingen’s need for a new venue with space for around 2000 spectators. The model was a similar arena already in use in the Allgäu region.

However, the project could only be implemented if the new sports hall could also be used for other large sporting events. This is how the parties involved in the project came into contact with construction and concrete casting company Georg Reisch GmbH & Co. KG based in Bad Saulgau. Reisch had been responsible for the hall mentioned above.

The idea of bringing the construction company on board as a ‘private partner’ seemed like a contemporary solution to keep costs for the municipality and the club under control. Through the construction company, distinguished Ravensburg architectural practice “Architektur + Freiraum,” who had previously dealt with planning and site management for the Allgäu sports hall, became involved.

The new hall in Balingen, measuring around 50 m x 50 m, stands on a 3 m high raised plateau. The playing area is, however, at the original ground level, 3 m lower. This has made it possible to lay out the stands for the spectators in a stepped arrangement around the whole circumference of the hall without having to raise the hall roof. The changing rooms and players’ entrance to the playing area are located beneath the stands. Two entry areas with ticketing and catering areas and visitors’ toilets were to be integrated into the hall, but separated visually. The architect responsible, Katja Heinrichs, Dipl.-Ing. (FH), decided on an inserted cube with a continuous fair-faced concrete surface both inside and out. She wanted, however, to execute the external fair-faced

concrete surfaces as a striking stylistic element. This is what gave rise to the idea of designing the exposed areas with stylised impressions of sports shoes to create an expressive connection with the arena’s purpose.

Designer Marc Kiecok, from Dorsten in Westphalia, put the concept into practise on the drawing board and computer. Discussions with the construction company led to the recommendation that they approach RECKLI, a market leader in the manufacturer of flexible polyurethane (PU) structural formliners, for the purpose of achieving a practicable implementation of the design, especially with regards to the formwork.

Implementing architectural designs involving adding a personal note to fair-faced concrete is core business for RECKLI. With the aid of computer controlled tooling, we are able to mill almost any kind of moulding panel quickly and inexpensively.

In this case, a flexible, rubber-like PU matrix was cast from a CNC milled mould in accordance with the designer’s specifications. This was then used in the Reisch concrete plant to manufacture the finished elements stamped with this striking texture. The flexibility of RECKLI formliners meant that it was possible to remove the formwork without difficulty from the square-edged structures of the shoe-shaped impressions without damaging them. The imprints are around 10 mm deep and have no conicity, i.e. they are exactly perpendicular to the surface. In conjunction with a special release agent, also from RECKLI, it was possible to manufacture these unusual fair-faced concrete elements to a superlative quality without difficulty.

Having the positive master and the elastic mould manufactured by a single company, expert on site advice and almost 40 years of experience in the manufacture of reusable formliners guarantees the highest level of quality without losing sight of cost efficiency – as both concrete factory and architects were able to testify.

Although in California it’s celebrity hand prints which are to be found imprinted in concrete, you still get the feeling that a little bit of Hollywood has come to Balingen, even if it is in a slightly Europeanised style.



