

# Pharmacies

## Construction and Design Manual



The pharmacy trade has undergone a profound transformation in the last few years: from dispensing chemists to a provider of health services with a wide assortment. This development is also reflected in the most recent pharmacy buildings, comprehensively introduced in the present publication by 30 projects with large colour photos and complementary true to scale plans. With specialists' contributions in the areas of interior architecture, building expenses, and the basics of planning laws. A detailed documentation of new pharmacies since 2005.

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Construction and Design Manual

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The colours flow fluidly from a soft blue into orange, and then into red and green. As many glances as the shop window attracts during the day, in the dark it is an absolute eyecatcher, even at a distance. One could almost believe that it is a light installation produced by art students trying to draw attention to grievances at their university.

Not all that long ago, the local pharmacy was still solidly fitted out with wooden furniture. The pharmacy still had the appearance of a workshop for health, where, in keeping with centuries-old tradition, the pharmacist was a craftsman who continued to produce some medicines himself. This practical experience in handling the materia medica produced an in-house manufactured insecticide, which was excellent in every respect. So everything was as it should be: The pharmacy employees were competent and friendly; the atmosphere was simple and pleasant – just like being in the corner shop; trust in the pharmacist's expertise existed on the basis of precisely such alchemical brews as the insecticide. For me, at least, the "apothecary's shop" had proved itself to be more than just a storehouse (Greek: apo = away and tithenai = lay) for a range of goods and a hatch for passing through prescribed drugs. Suddenly, however, the old, familiar pharmacy was closed down. Subsequently this new pharmacy, designed in white and enhanced by warm light colours, was opened, as if out of thin air. There

was no longer a clear physical separation between the pharmacist, as an expert adviser, and the customer on the other side – only a mental division. After all, the pharmacist knows that his position of privilege has been accorded to him step by step under law since the 12th/13th century, and that his practical, craftsmanlike profession has been recognised as an academic discipline since the 19th century. According to representative surveys undertaken by various opinion research institutes, alongside doctors, pharmacists enjoy an undiminished level of trust amongst the German public, with a rate of 84 to 93 percent. "Ask your doctor or pharmacist" is not only a slogan to warn against the side effects of certain medicines, but is also a formula aimed at arousing trust based on specialist expertise. The ladies and gentlemen in white coats as an outpost of the medical practice, who serve as its extended arm, are well aware of the respectful distance which the patients as customers accord them by virtue of their office. This means that the line separating the customer from the pharmacy's specialist, private area, once represented by the sales counter, can now be relaxed in optical and constructional terms. Only the window at the night service counter remains as it was.

Under law, pharmacies are obliged to ensure that in the public interest, the population is adequately supplied with medicines. In order to practice their profession, pharmacists are required to obtain a licence. The ever-present trust in the art

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## **THE HEALTH DESIGNERS PHARMACIES CAUGHT BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL TRADITION AND THE MODERN MARKET**

of the pharmacist has been legally guaranteed under law since the 13th century by controls imposed by the authorities. In this way, the pharmacist was protected from the competition of hawkers, miracle healers, and other charlatans. Has any pharmacist ever gone bust under the described system?

One of the last guild privileges to be preserved in today's modern market and consumer society also entails monitoring. Names such as "Ratsapotheke", "Hofapotheke", "Klosterapotheke", and "Spitalapotheke" (city, court, monastery, and hospital apothecary) demonstrate the prestige of pharmacies for the cities and territorial authorities, be they spiritual or secular. Frequently, outstanding architects were commissioned with the construction and interior decoration of these pharmacies. That many of them possessed luxurious furnishings was simply a matter of good taste. It is therefore nothing new that pharmacies were lent an identity, or a confirmed reputation, through location, furnishings, or quality of craftsmanship. The court doctor and apothecary formed an essential double act which was responsible for the well-being and health of His Grace and his family - precisely because of the already proven professional expertise. One could not train to become a court or city apothecary, one achieved this status by appointment. The pharmacy as a location therefore only reflected the respect which the pharmacist's skills had earned.

### The pharmacy as designer shop

The difference to today lies in the egalitarianism of pharmacies. The aristocracy has fallen, the royal households have been abolished, and city councils no longer have their own pharmacist with corresponding premises. Pharmacists and their business premises are part of a great whole beneath the pharmacy sign reserved for guild members, and as such they are already privileged. How, therefore, can an individual member of a free profession amidst a network of 21,500 pharmacists make himself stand out and - above all - in comparison with whom? As made clear by the *Federal Union of German Associations of Pharmacists*, competition and danger threaten not from amongst their own ranks, but rather from outside - and in several respects, as well.

In a sophisticated culture such as ours where, in the public perception, medicine has practically banished illness - thus also its worst case scenario: death - and it is now a question of remaining healthy, that means young and full of vitality, for as long as possible, the pharmacist's role has changed. Nobody goes to the pharmacy anymore because of questions of life and death - or at least if they do, they don't let it show. What people go to the pharmacy for is to register for a yoga course, or holistic healing, or to buy a dietary supplement. The trend which is changing and will continue to change pharmacies is known as "wellness". This is the word,

written in large, clear letters that one sees first in the window of the local pharmacy on the corner. And it is this sense of well-being that determines the fit-out. The trend is towards a health system which spends a fortune on the luxuries of "forever young" and "living forever" and has allowed these to penetrate the system at every level. Even the statutory health insurance funds have erased illness from their self-image, and have exchanged it for the fresh scent of flowers and the happy faces of naturally healthy people. It's a question of health. "Health fund" or "the enterprise of life" are the new advertising slogans. So the change lies in the system.

The other change is the market which results out of this. Thanks to the trend described above, the pharmacies' product ranges are competing on this level with health food stores and drugstores. This is the result and is down to the fact that the classical pharmacies are suddenly competing with health food stores and drugstores, as well as completely new types of pharmacy such as branch outlets of certain companies like *DocMorris*, the international pharmaceutical mail-order company, or online sales with their incredible aggressive pricing policies.

However, it is the citizen himself who decides. Green awareness has not only given many people to understand - at least theoretically - that man is part of a greater natural diversity, but has also led to a new physical awareness. In contrast to orthodox medicine, the so-called alternative



**1-3 Leibniz-Apotheke, Berlin**  
Illuminated display window of a pharmacy.

healing methods and practices which treat physical ailments based on the idea of the person as a body-mind-spirit being have discredited the pharmacist as a public supplier of pharmaceuticals, which are prescribed by doctors and produced in the laboratories of chemical companies.

The orthodox medical troika of doctor, pharmaceutical industry, and pharmacist as the pharma vendor no longer functions. The cause lies with the citizen whose awareness has been heightened, thus offering him a choice with regard to the concept he wants to use to become or remain healthy. Surveys notwithstanding, the orthodox school of medicine is tarnished and the pharmacist who is right in the middle has a problem. The visible and undeniable strength of nature, its healing plants, and the substances extracted from them are just as much in demand as is knowledge about the body's powers of self-healing. In the midst of all this, the pharmacist's expertise as an advisor and person of trust, traditionally developed through practical experience and sanctified with academic titles, is asserting itself more than ever before. There is also the cash crisis within the health system. Medicines from the pharmaceutical companies are becoming more expensive and the health funds are nearing financial collapse. The orthodox exploitation chain of pharmaceutical industry, doctor, pharmacist, and customer is also financially creaky, compared with the affordable

competition from mail-order and online purchasing which is aggressive and highly successful. This is why the pharmacy has diversified from being a legally privileged dispensary of prescription medicines, into a store for natural healing remedies and health consultancy. The binding force between all of these elements is expertise, that means training and certification.

#### **Architecture as a creator of identity**

In a market where, on the one hand, borders are blurring and, on the other, its privileges are being removed, just like any other business pharmacies need to demonstrate quality to the outside world and make their own role - apart from certified privileges - visible. The magic formula is "corporate identity", which must be visible both from a distance and on entering the pharmacy with regard to attitude, behaviour, and the communication of specialist skills, all the way through to the internal organisation. It is a question of corporate design. "Who am I, where am I, what am I, what do I have to offer?" All of these questions concerning the pharmacy should be answered clearly for all the senses by architecture. For these are precisely the questions to which the customer expects an answer, which he subconsciously registers and which help him to decide whether to go into the pharmacy or not. The range of designed identity extends from the business's own logo and all communication material, to the design of the business and the corresponding internet platform.

The architect has to bear all of these elements in mind because, as with any other provider of branded goods, this is an issue which involves nothing less than creating instant brand recognition, a question of ensuring and intensifying the customer's identification with "his pharmacy". It is the coherent unity of all these elements which allow a pharmacy to create a good external impression.

Inside, the colours, materials, and structure need to be coordinated. A restrainedly elegant and harmonious use of all three elements is essential here. Designing a pharmacy is, first and foremost, the job of the interior designer. It is evident that it is the offices who are equally at home with the disciplines of design, interior design, and architecture, who predominantly prove best at designing pharmacies. Or the designers may also be architects who have adequately demonstrated skills of the highest order in other areas such as living, gastronomy, offices, commercial premises or in different selected sectors.

The underlying design rule is: "Form follows content and function". In other words, a clear shape vocabulary and superior materials are required, and the two must be combined to create an atmosphere of integrity, as well as a spatial separation between the customer area and the pharmacy's working areas. A pharmacy is not a drugstore, and its design is required to meet the demands of a designer store - for example



an optician's shop. This is because, in keeping with their professional claim to provide expert guidance and specialist knowledge as the customer's person of trust, the pharmacy ranks in the premium league of retail trade. Based on their products, pharmacies are superior sales outlets. They have to be – and that's the way their furnishings have to look as well. Design details are oriented to the size, location, and contentual self-image of the pharmacy.

Apart from having friendly personnel who are highly skilled at what they do, a good pharmacy primarily distinguishes itself externally through the use of colour. At a time when even delivery rooms and hospitals or medical practices are decorated in cheerful colours, nobody wants to go into a pharmacy that is chalk-white. As far back as 1791 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was already examining the effect of colours on people's behaviour and mood. We have the Brazilian theologian Dom Hélder Pessoa Câmara to thank for the following finding, formulated in simple yet moving words: "The light which falls on things transforms them." Therefore, for a professionally designed pharmacy, the choice of colour for floor, ceiling, walls, and furnishings is elemental for the design of the spatial atmosphere, whereby the effect of external light and the reproduction of colours by means of artificial light should also be considered. It is a question of atmosphere. If this is right, and goes hand in hand with competent

advice that creates trust, and friendly, skilled service, the pharmacy has won: both the customer and the turnover. If the first is not right, all the expertise in the world is of little or no use. Dark shades for the floor ensure that the customer feels looked after and secure. A change from dark to light flooring makes it possible to show the border between the public area and that of the personnel. The colours used should be calming and solid, and this should extend to the furniture, as a relaxing atmosphere is also an aid to well-being. If restrained background and material colours are also used, what is truly central will automatically become the focus of attention: the products.

It is important that these materials are correctly chosen. Because the pharmacist as a profession has a longstanding tradition, materials should be chosen which will age gracefully. Nothing is worse than a dispensary which looks like a DIY store. A corporate culture is a thing of lasting value which, like wine or love, matures with age, and should never be allowed to become tarnished. Fashion trends come and go, but a good pharmacy is like a mature individual, who is serene in himself, regardless of trends. Change may, at most, emerge out of the pharmacy's own corporate self-image.



**4-10 Leibniz-Apotheke, Berlin**  
Illuminated display window of a pharmacy.





