

# bulletin



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# Space adventure. Moving to new headquarters is a test for Erste Group's corporate culture

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**T**he rejection or neglect of common sense entails serious moral consequences. For generations common sense in the design and development of the headquarters of banks has been to demonstrate the safety and reliability of the institution by a very generous use of brick and mortar, concrete and steel, hectares of marble and tons of exotic timber.

But today no coherent argument can be derived from sheer exhibition of wealth or pretence. Confidence building is no longer achievable with the construction of high rises, the towers of Frankfurt. The City and the Street have become symbols of an industry of past rather than future glory, reminding us very much of the formerly proud towers of San Gimignano.

Erste Group is a dedicated retail banking group. It has to convince its large portfolio of small and medium sized clients of its ability to continually provide innovative services while at the same time operating on a reasonable cost basis (thus consequently being able to offer their services at competitive prices). So when Erste Group, which has a strong foothold in eight CEE markets, decided to obtain new headquarters in Vienna, the challenge for the project was to follow a seemingly simple formula: More creativity, less cost.

Cost efficiency would be achieved by uniting staff, which had been working in more the 20 different locations scattered all around Vienna, in just one location and by applying state-of-the-art technology in a highly efficient building.

But how do you propagate creativity within an institution that is defined by rules of compliance rather than via the free-wheeling spirit of high-tech start-ups? There are two broadly competing narratives about how the idea of new headquarters evolved into the vision of Erste Campus, promoting team building.



*Garden deck and courtyard. Erste Group © Christian Wind.*

Was it the quest for a new, transparent and creative corporate culture, which dictated the need for an architecture, which promotes interdepartmental, informal communication and cooperation through open spaces and horizontal instead of vertical expansion? Or was it the openness of the architectural concept, which created the demand for not just moving people and files but for a transition in corporate culture at the same time?

What was first? The decision for a new physical centre or the push for a renewed entrepreneurial identity? Today we can look back on this question as a Good Problem to Have. In December 2015, the first departments of Erste Group in Vienna moved into the new Erste Campus, in March 2016, the tangible act of relocation was completed. Over more than two years the employees have been directly involved in the design of their new work spaces and – at the same time – have had the chance to prepare mentally for a world without corner offices (actually

no individual offices exist at all, not even for the nomenclature) and personally attributed desks. The transition has been set into movement and it definitely is no round-trip.

Erste Group staff will not just work in Erste Campus - they will develop ideas, make plans and translate visions into actions. For Erste Group, the new building is, first and foremost, the basis for a new working environment. The shorter distances between departments will encourage team building and help to increase productivity. Staff will find the new headquarters an inspiring and exhilarating workplace, promoting communication between individuals and teams and strengthening team cohesion. In order to translate this vision into reality, staff have been actively involved in workplace design.

It was particularly important to the architects of Erste Campus, Henke and Schreieck, that the staff of Erste Group should feel happy about coming into the office every day; that they should feel comfortable at their place of work; and that



Entrance and welcome desk. Erste Group © Christian Wind.



The curving architecture hugs the surrounding environment. Erste Bank Group © Christian Wind.

they should feel proud about working on Erste Campus.

The curving architecture hugs the surrounding environment and welcomes everybody who works at the Campus or visits it. Henke and Schreieck, the winners of a multi-step contest, intended to create an urban cityscape through the integration of green spaces and thus to provide a motivating atmosphere and a sense of well-being.

The individual buildings have been designed in such a way that changes to work processes or business areas, even retrospectively, can be accommodated at any time without any great structural alterations. What's more, the buildings have been designed to be barrier-free throughout.

The very highest of building standards will ensure economic viability and will thus lead to lower operating and energy costs. Through the use of new technologies and by offering service, leisure and shopping facilities in the publicly accessible areas, the Erste Campus offers more than just a pleasant working environment. Rather it offers an atmosphere, which will improve the quality of life and work. Working in a place where a high standard of work is expected and delivered every day should also be an enjoyable experience and linked to a modern, urban environment.

Through its location, Erste Campus embodies a very clear strategy - a conscious orientation towards Central and Eastern Europe.

The Erste Campus location at Vienna's new Hauptbahnhof (main railway station) is unique - it is one of the districts of Vienna which is most steeped in history. With cultural jewels such as the Belvedere Palace close by, this district stands for human achievement and economic progress. Even in the 19th century, the Südbahnhof railway station was not just the gateway to the south but also a military and a historical hub which held a particular attraction for many people

from all parts of the empire, with all their hopes and expectations.

It is easy to wax idealistically about a company's vision and mission. In the case of Erste Group the assessment, whether practice reflects theory or not, will soon be delivered in hard currency. Adaptability to a new working environment will doubtlessly mirror the same quality employees display toward the clients of the bank. If the employees on Erste Campus embrace the opportunities of their new workspace they should be prepared for the challenges of the changing environments on the market place. ●

#### Erste Campus at a glance. Facts and figures.

Client	Erste Group
Project developer	Erste Group Immorent AG
Facility management	Group Services/s OM
Architect	Henke Schreieck Architekten
Construction costs	max. EUR 300 million
Work stations for Erste employees	4,500
Additional area for offices and retail	2,000 m <sup>2</sup> + 12,500 m <sup>2</sup>
Surface area of property	25,000 m <sup>2</sup>
Gross floor space	117,000 m <sup>2</sup> (above ground)
Parking spots	approx. 600
Height	29-50 meters (7 to 13 upper floors, up to 3 lower floors)
Proximity to city center	2.5 km