

TOPOTEK 1

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE CLOISTER LORSCH

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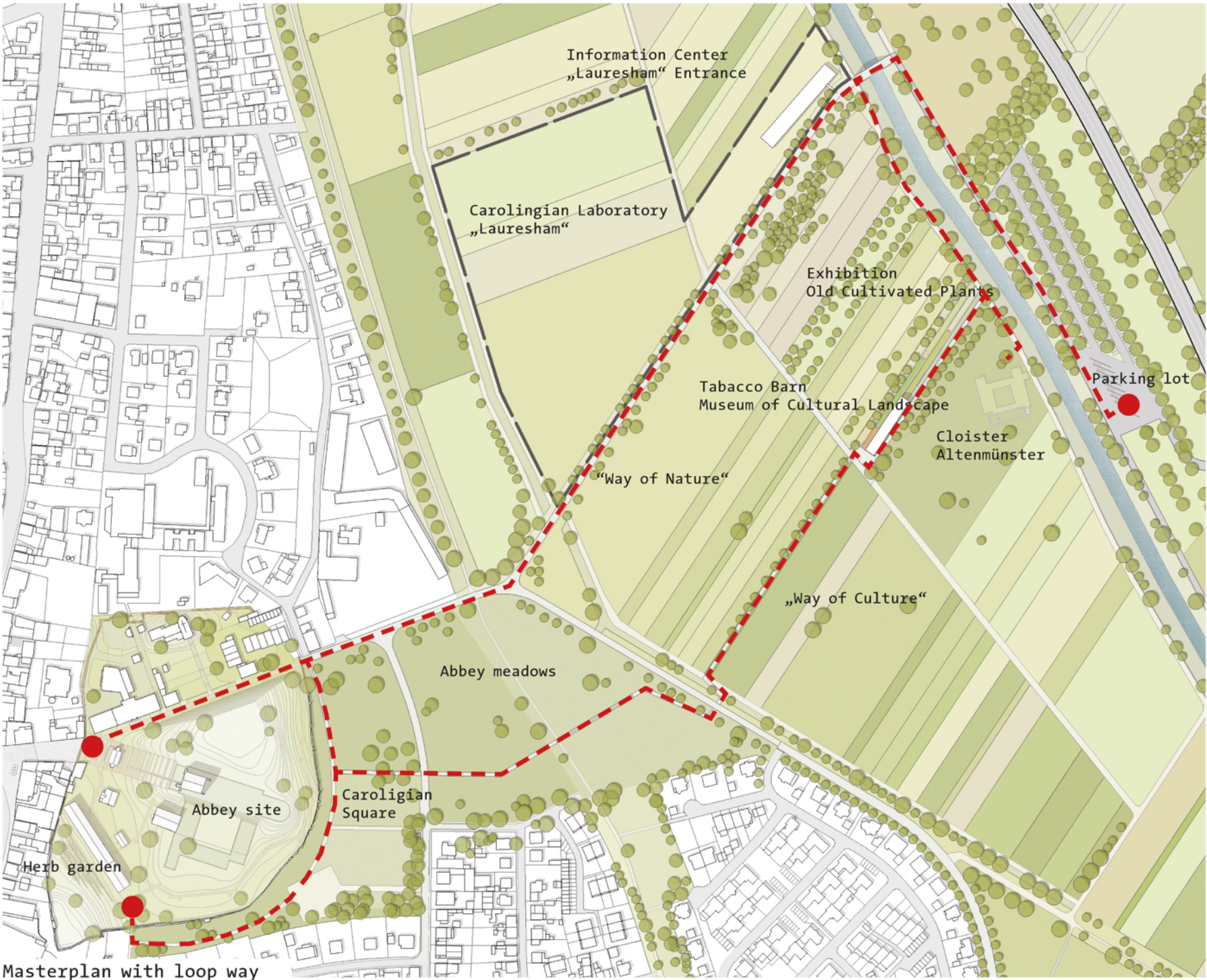
UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE CLOISTER LORSCH



Gate House (Torhalle)



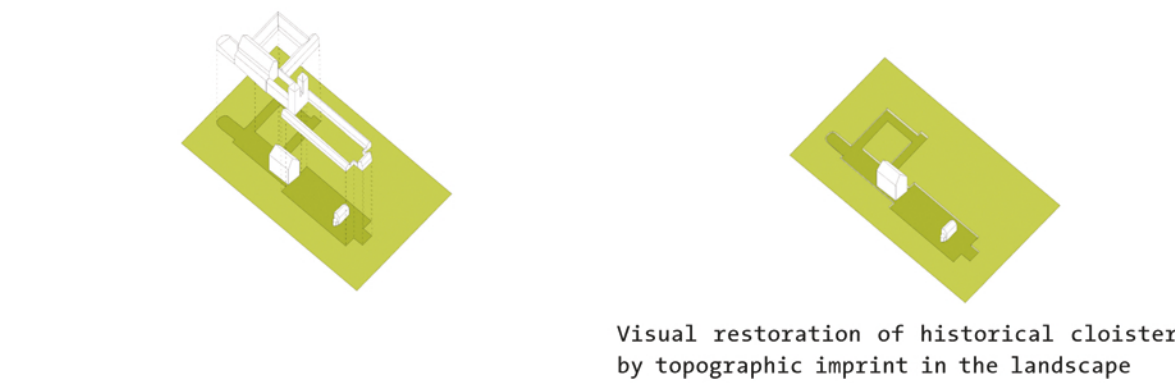
Footprint of former monastery



Masterplan with loop way

PROJECT DATA

Project:	UNESCO World Heritage Site Cloister Lorsch
Site:	Lorsch (Hesse), Germany
Client:	Administration of State Palaces and Gardens Hesse / City of Lorsch
Project Team:	TOPOTEK 1 with hg merz Architekten
Contractor:	August Fichter GmbH (Abbey site, Cultural axis), Hebau GmbH (Nibelungen Street)
Competition:	1st Prize, 2010
Planning and Realization:	2010–2014
Size:	6 ha



TOPOTEK 1 was founded in Berlin in 1996 by Martin Rein-Cano. Lorenz Dextler joined as Managing Partner in 1999 and in 2014 Francesca Venier joined TOPOTEK 1 as partner. Topotek 1 are landscape architects, urban planners and architects, that reflect, calibrate, or intervene both sensitively and playfully in the different contexts that their projects engage in – in high density urban situations or more rural environments. All of their projects are deliberately hybrid. This concerns the choice of material, function, aesthetics and meaning, as well as crossing over to other disciplines – such as art, design, cultural studies and sociology. In the many projects across Europe and Asia they draw methodically from cultural and historical references and let other influences become part of their work.

Martin Rein-Cano was born in Buenos Aires in 1967, he studied art history at Frankfurt University and landscape architecture at the Technical Universities of Hannover and Karlsruhe. //Lorenz Dextler was born in Darmstadt in 1968, he studied landscape architecture at Hannover Technical University. Both Martin and Lorenz lecture at internationally renowned universities and cultural institutions, and regularly participate on competition juries. // Francesca Venier was born in Milano, Italy in 1971. She studied architecture at the Politecnico di Milano and the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Stuttgart. Since 2010 she has been responsible for the projects and competition department at TOPOTEK 1.

TRANSFERRED MEMORY - UNESCO World Heritage Site Cloister Lorsch

The classic scriptures of antiquity are almost all lost. We know about the biblical paradise or Herodotus’ historiography mainly from transcripts that were created in the medieval scriptoria of monasteries. One of the most important centres of such re-edition of cultural memory was the Benedictine Abbey in Lorsch, Germany near the river Rhine. Dissolved as a monastery in 1557, and acknowledged as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1991, the site shares the destiny of the antique scriptures: little is left of its original substance.

The old Torhalle gate, from the 9th century, and the church building were the only left remnants of the now gone monastery, creating a void in the structural and contextual understanding of the site as a whole. The old church in itself is a conglomerate of history, containing traces of construction practices from the 8th to the 18th century, being one of the most important preserved buildings of the decisive Carolingian Era, east of the River Rhine.

Prior to 767 A.D., the monks lived in a monastery sited next to the Weschnitz River, not far from the current Lorsch site, the monastery was relocated over the existing small hill encompassed by wall. A visual connection existed between the two sites. The design dramatically altered the former visitor entrance experience by relocating the entrance and parking approach from the former abbey, as such the visitor traces history chronologically, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of the larger historical context.

The new connecting path meanders through open fields where visitors are met with a series of cultural checkpoints, such as the old tobacco manufacturing building, now turned into a museum, or the open field museum, which displays a series of buildings and workshops which are unique pieces of the Carolingian era. The landscape space is purposely left open, so that the visitor can effortlessly build an idea of how the whole area worked in the past.

The ancient Torhalle, which was standing alone, once an entrance to the city, through design is integrated and connected to the urban tissue through interweaving hard surfaces of the urban space with the soft greens of the monastery by way of a striped gradient of stone and grass. This gradient will be soon incorporated to

the adjacent Benediktiner Platz, completing the lost connection. The central design idea within the boundaries of the historic Lorsch Abbey, is to render history visible as landscape space, aiming to make the remnants and former existence of the monastery legible again. At the site of this historic Lorsch abbey most of history had been wiped clean, the historic monastery is in fact missing the monastery. What was left is a void of history, a nothingness strikingly elegant, powerful and compelling. Our aim was to exemplify and emphasis this emptiness, to express presence and history through the sites inherent and austere nothingness.

Unlike former, often historicising visualizations, the new design is based on the language of the ground. What today can safely be considered the true extent of the waned monastery is retold through topographic gestures. To resurrect historical tangibility, the footprint of the lost compound and the central axis of the monastery were traced and etched into the landscape. The outlines of the church, the walled entrance court and the conclave with its cloister are defined and represented by slightly protruding terrain. A sharply drawn raised slope, some thirty-five centimetres high creates an imprint of lost architectural volume generating absence legible in space.

The open lawn terrain and grass-covered traced footprints are materially seamlessly unified. Like the tactile writing system of braille, the landscape undulates with physical symbols craving to be read.

Across the open field the sharp angles of the former architectural footprints jut out into the agape terrain, creating provocative architectonic forms across the lush green landscape. Through the juxtaposition of the scenic landscape and the raised geometric forms a quiet yet dramatic poeticism is born. These graphical imprints read as the ghosts of history stamped on the historical open landscape. While at first perhaps perceived as incidental insignia, as the viewer steps away full forms are born through the raised outlines. Shapes become recognizable, building imprints legible and architectural volumes imagined.

The design language in relief poses history tangible and openly accessible, defying practices associated with archaeological sites such as limited access and walled infrastructure. Here the designers show history beneath your feet. Evolved from what is missing the dimensions of the monastery and the structural

composition of the site are resurrected. History can be walked through.

The Lorsch Abby’s forgotten herb garden has been recreated behind the Zehntscheune on a small hill, following the existing topography creating a series of elegant stripes, contained by dry stone walls, which can be used as linear seating. The planting is based on the “Lorsch Pharmacopoeia”, written in the year 795 A.D., which was named a UNESCO registered Memory of the World in 2013. It is the oldest preserved book about monastery medicinal herbs of the early Middle Ages. Several recipes and treatments are described, based on the Four Humours doctrine. In addition, the garden contributes to the site, creating an aesthetically appealing plant combination of flowers, smells and colours to the area. Within the monastery walls, newer additions to the site contain archaeological objects on display, discovered in recent diggings, as well as a museum where the visitors can learn about the rich history of the site.

What today is represented at the Lorsch Abbey is what we know about the site at present. Left open, the site purposefully remains accessible for future archaeological digs to make new discoveries. If something new of the structural form is discovered, the outlined footprints can be altered to match the findings. The topographic description of the former monastery is thus a representation of the past but looks to the future, offering its form to be malleable to the gained knowledge of history.

When engaged in projects of restoration designers are confronted with the task of remaking and reinventing, it is essentially an act of reconstructing history. Here we chose not to resuscitate the lost reality of the Abbey but instead to link the past with the present. The open lawn provides a textural backdrop to the site and allows for overall free access: the visitor here experiences the UNESCO site as an uninterrupted park in which one can interpret history. Read like ancient markings of a lost civilization, the legacy of Lorsch Abbey becomes a topographic transcript. The physical abbey, lost for centuries, becomes palpable and the historical significance of the site given quite dignity. In creating the historical reliefs there was no excavation, as an essential facet of the plan, the strata of history remained intact.



Gate House Area (before restoration)



Monastery Church Area (before restoration)



Herb garden (before restoration)



Gate House Area (construction site)



Footprint of former monastery (construction site, 01/2013)



Footprint of former monastery (construction site, 10/2013)