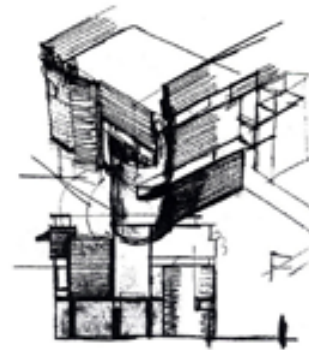


O.M. Ungers
Early Buildings in Cologne
1951-1967

UAA

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Author
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UAA Ungers Archive for Architectural Research
Cologne 2017

Introduction



This guide presents a selection of twelve buildings from the twenty-five projects remaining in Cologne from the early period of Ungers' professional career. The twelve help explain the evolution of his design approach as he investigated alternative ways of resolving architectural programs. They are presented in a somewhat geographical logic, beginning at the Haus Ungers Belvederestraße 60, today the Ungers Arch-

ive for Architectural Research (UAA), and concluding at the multifamily structure in Köln-Dellbrück.

After completing his studies at the TH Karlsruhe in 1950, Oswald Mathias Ungers opened his architectural studio in Cologne with Helmut Goldschmidt in a partnership that lasted until 1955. Early in the partnership, Goldschmidt and Ungers realized a number of projects for various clients, be they private homes or commercial buildings. The earliest existing works by Ungers are in Cologne and are from this period, including the multifamily building on Hültzstraße 4 and its neighbour, the *"Kleiderfabrik Jobi"* on Aachener Straße 5. These two projects represent one of the formal investigations followed by O.M. Ungers, based on the pure form and a compositional clarity.

By 1955, when O.M. Ungers began his independent practice, a number of his projects were housing complexes for resettled families from the eastern zone of Germany (the *"SBZ-Programm"*). His reputation, in projects constructed between 1955 and 1959, was of one who, given the limited resources and constraints for social housing, was still able to provide more inventive solutions than the expectations for such housing 9, 10 and 12, and it established Ungers as one of the leading architects in post-war Germany. These projects illustrate a second formal investigation, one of interlocking volumes that finds its early manifestation in the multifamily structure in Köln-Dellbrück 12, and its best in the Haus Ungers Belvederestraße 60 1. This direction evolves into one that defines figural space with clear solids, first clearly seen in the two-family house 2, which in a way also is a reinterpretation or transformation of

the pure forms of the earliest projects. These are the projects of the first phase of his professional activities.

Ungers' trajectory shifted in the 1960s when he was appointed to the faculty of architecture at the TU Berlin (1963), later becoming its dean (1965-1967). It was a period when he did not build but instead undertook significant research as part of his teaching, work that would have a major impact in coming decades. In 1968 he and his family moved to Ithaca, New York, USA, where he assumed the chairmanship of the Department of Architecture at Cornell University, remaining in that capacity until 1975 though he continued to teach there and elsewhere in the USA. Seminal competition projects from this period include his submissions for student housing at the TH Twente in Enschede, NL (1964), the German Embassy to the Holy See (1965), the Museums of Prussian Culture in Berlin (1965), and the Roosevelt Island (NYC) Housing Competition of 1974, proposals that allowed him to investigate ideas of morphology and typology. His return to Cologne in 1978 marks the beginning of his most productive phase, a period whose maturity drew from the early phase of his career, intertwined with intellectual vigor of the middle phase in Berlin and Ithaca.

Prof. Gerardo Brown-Manrique

NOTE: The Haus Ungers Belvederestraße 60 where the UAA is located is open for public tours (tel. +49 221-9498360); it is the subject of a monograph by Wolfgang Pehnt, Oswald Mathias Ungers: Haus Belvederestraße 60, Köln-Müngersdorf (Stuttgart: Edition Axel Menges, 2016. ISBN 978-3-932565-80-9).



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Haus Ungers Belvederestraße 60, 1958-1959

Belvederestraße 60, 50933 Köln-Müngersdorf

Called a “manifesto building” by Reyner Banham, O.M. Ungers’ house explores a variety of themes including mundane ones such as resolving a corner between Belvederestraße with building form restrictions, and one without such restrictions along Quadrather Straße. In responding to these, Ungers explores the plastic use of brick masonry to create a volumetric play of pushing and pulling masses that accentuate the internal spaces, with the corner punctuated by a cylindrical one-story element hidden today by the tall hedge along the garden wall. As originally built, the house presented certain ambiguity, whether it appeared to be in process of being added to or parts being removed from it. The structure was originally a three-family house, with two flats on half of the ground floor and first level against the party wall, and the studio/office on the other half of the ground floor, with the family house on the first and second levels. It was altered once when the two flats were vacated, and again when Ungers built his new library and archives in the back garden. The house also lost some of its three-dimensional characteristics when double glazing was added flush with the walls. These changes notwithstanding, this seminal building remains one of the most significant German structures built in the early post-war period and is designated a NRW historic building.



2**Zweifamilienhaus, 1951-1953**

Werthmannstraße 19, 50935 Köln-Lindenthal

The two-family house on Werthmannstraße is a freestanding structure within a garden. The plan is resolved as three solids organized about a flowing space that includes the sitting area and dining spaces for each unit, with the garage a fourth, detached volume. One solid contains the bedrooms, another the kitchens and the staircase, and the third a cylinder with a library below, and formal sitting room above. The lower unit's bedroom solid is carved to provide a covered space that extends into the garden, while the upper unit only has a horizontal high band of windows serving the bathroom of that level. The living area of the lower house is a transparent square interlocked with the service solid on one corner, and the cylinder on the other, and connects at the opposite corners to the garden in front and behind. The upper house has a rectangular living space, also interlocked with the kitchen/stair solid and the cylindrical one, and opens to a terrace.

The smooth, rendered façades and the overall horizontal disposition of the composition connects this project to "Neues Bauen" examples of the interwar period. Ungers will return to the theme of separate volumes creating figural space at Köln-Neue Stadt **11** and later projects, foreshadowing his explorations of the theme of "city within the city" later in his career.

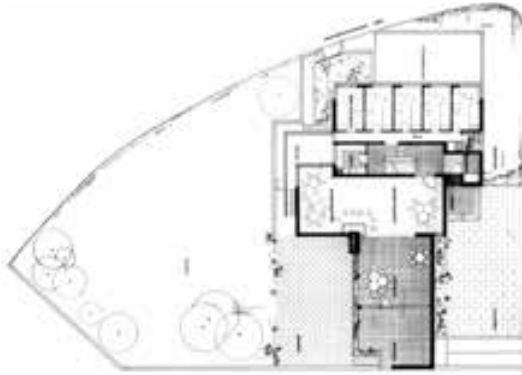


3

Studentenwohnheim "Nibelungenhaus", 1956-1957 Goldenfelsstraße 19, 50935 Köln-Lindenthal

The student residential hall "Nibelungenhaus" represents an early exploration by O.M. Ungers in displacing volumes that begin from a square plan. In its overall form, the shallow gable roof of the building relates to contemporary house forms. However, in plan the composition is a modified nine-square grid with one side slipped back from the center section, resulting in a subtle interplay between each segment. The composition is expanded to one side that in plan is a smaller square and in elevation a lower sloped roof. The volumes are further manipulated making the form appear to be a brick structure that has been eroded, exposing a layer of rendered wall underneath it.

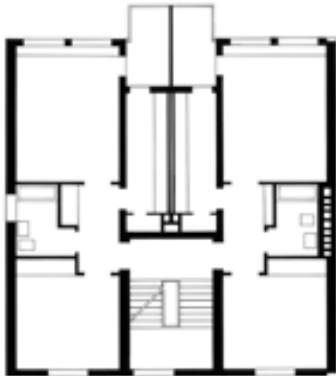
As originally built and in plan, the overall interlocking volumes at the lower level contained the building mechanical spaces to the front, with the housekeeper's apartment facing the rear garden; at ground level, the entry, circulation core and shared kitchen forming the middle segment, common spaces to one side, and five residence rooms on the other. The upper floor contained two more sections of five residence rooms on either side of the central core with the shared bathrooms. The building no longer houses students, but rather is a medical research institute.



4**Mehrfamilienhaus, 1951-1953**

Hültzstraße 10, 50933 Köln-Braunsfeld

Together with the neighboring building „Jobi“ **5**, this multifamily building is one of the earliest works by O.M. Ungers, done in partnership with Helmut Goldschmidt. The front façade of the building presents a taunt, abstract, and smooth rendered plane with perfectly square window openings. The otherwise clearly symmetrical composition is disrupted by the location of the entrance, three windows at the entry level and landings between upper levels, and two small windows to the basement. The floor plan for the three levels is a simple adaptation of the nine-square grid: an apartment on either side of the staircase, with a smaller room facing the street and the larger one toward the court, separated by the bathroom and closet. The central third of the composition contains the common staircase, the kitchens of the two apartments, and the two terraces also facing the court. The clear composition of the front façade, foretells future explorations by Ungers, seen as early as in the building on Eckewartstraße in Köln-Nippes **8**.



5**Kleiderfabrik "Jobi", 1951-1953**

Aachener Straße 421, 50933 Köln-Braunsfeld

The "Kleiderfabrik Jobi" is one of the earliest projects by Ungers in partnership with Helmut Goldschmidt. The composition of both front and rear façades of the "Jobi" building is an asymmetrical arrangement with the entrance and vertical circulation core, as well as services, on the extreme left side from the front, with three pairs of square window openings appearing as crisp voids. The first of the infill buildings designed by him, it is resolved in stark contrast to the later projects in Köln-Riehl **9**, on Aachener Straße **6** and the Hansaring **7**. Together with the multifamily building behind it, facing Hültzstraße **4**, the building that was originally a clothing factory is among the earliest explorations by Ungers on the abstract composition based on the 1:1 (square) proportion. Today the building serves other purposes, but its rendered façade has been restored to nearly its original condition, save for the sculptural metal element added along its base.



6**Mehrfamilien- und Geschäftshaus, 1958**

Aachener Straße 308, 50933 Köln-Braunsfeld

This apartment and commercial building on Aachener Straße is one of a series of explorations of infill buildings that began with the "Kleiderfabrik Jobi" **5** located across the street. Here, the ground floor level is occupied by businesses, while on each of the four residential levels Ungers arranges two apartments in mirror image. Facing the street are the living spaces, while the bedrooms face north to the back courtyard. The composition of the façade in exposed brick with reinforced concrete lintels and balcony floor slabs is a play along three planes, with the apparent voids of the horizontal band of windows on the property line proper, and the volumetric push and pull of the balconies and recessed wall planes creating the other two. At the ground floor the building has an asymmetrical composition, with the entrance to the building placed on center but countered by two sets of windows of different proportions on the left side, and two smaller windows and the vehicle entrance to the rear courtyard on the right. While the bottom level of the façade appears almost whimsical, the upper levels are quite clearly alternating bands of windows and voids, and solid brick bands protruding over the sidewalk, a pattern that will be repeated in the housing block in Köln-Niehl **10**. This play of volumes and planes, while fairly restrained in this building, began with the infill building in Köln-Riehl **9** and will evolve to its most elaborate investigation on the Hansaring **7**.



7

Mehrfamilien- und Geschäftshaus, 1959

Hansaring 25-27, 50670 Köln-Neustadt-Nord

The last and most plastic of the infill buildings by O.M. Ungers is the apartment and commercial building on the Hansaring, and culminating Ungers' explorations in plastic interplay of volumetric forms first begun in Köln-Dellbrück 12. The building's main entrance is flanked by two businesses, the entrance forming a tower element that clarifies the binary character of the composition. Above the base of the building housing the entrance and flanking commercial spaces, left and right sides are nearly identical volumetric compositions between the first and fourth levels, with the volume on the right protruding from the building wall, the one on the left formed by the recessed wall of the volume housing the kitchen and breakfast area of those units. Both sides are formed by a solid vertical element on the left, and the cantilever balconies on the right. In terms of the formal character of the composition, these balconies appear to have been pulled away from the central tower of the staircase. Functionally, the units are very clear in their layout, with the living spaces of each apartment facing the street and the bedrooms the inner court.



8**Mehrfamilienhaus, 1959-1961**

Eckewartstraße/Neue Kempener Straße/Gernotstraße 5-19,
50739 Köln-Nippes

This multifamily structure in Köln-Nippes marks a significant departure from Ungers' prevailing prior themes. Located on a large parcel and bounded by three streets, the building incorporates an existing structure to create a quadrangle from which one enters the various segments of the building. From the outside, the composition of the façades is a strictly repetitive pattern of evenly spaced square openings punched into a taunt, white, rendered wall, similarly to the previous solutions for the two-family house [2](#), the building on Hültzstraße [4](#), and the "Kleiderfabrik Jobi" [5](#). The square openings are either windows or recessed balconies. On the courtyard side, the composition is more varied. The eight entrances and stairwells are indicated by the doorways themselves topped by square openings filled with glass block at the intermediate landings. On either side along the south wing of the building, these are flanked first by small, vertically proportioned window openings followed by square ones of identical height. On the west and north wings, the window openings are the identical squares seen around the outside. The pattern of this investigation will continue at the Köln-Neue Stadt project [11](#).

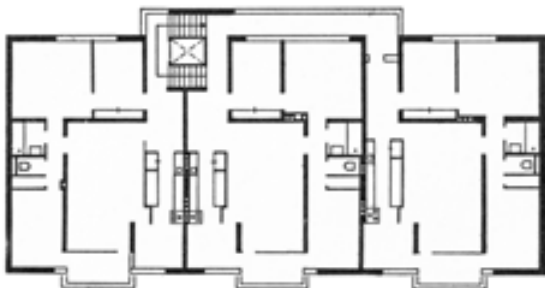


9

Mehrfamilienhaus, 1955-1958

Garthestraße 18, 50735 Köln-Riehl

The multifamily building in Köln-Riehl is the earliest of the infill buildings that explores a plastic play of volumes, here very subtly restricted to the protruding volumes of the balconies at the second, third and fourth floors, each of which is flanked by asymmetrical window openings that visually extend the voids of the balcony recesses. At the base of the brick masonry building, the left third contains the vehicle and pedestrian entrance to the building. The vertical circulation is located to the rear. There is a half-floor difference in floor levels between the apartments above the entrance opening and those in the rest of the building. This provides the front façade with some dynamic compositional tension, as the horizontal bands alternate between being window and voids of the balconies to solid brick wall and protruding balconies, or vice versa. The compositional exploration reaches its zenith with the Hansaring structure 7.



10

Mehrfamilienhaus, 1957-1958

Graditzer Straße 44-52, 50735 Köln-Niehl

One of the social housing projects designed by Ungers, this freestanding multifamily building is divided into five pairs of apartments per floor, with a total of thirty units. Its garden façade continues the compositional investigation that Ungers began with the Aachener Straße building 6. It is formed by alternating bands of solid brick wall and exposed concrete floor of the protruding balconies, and the windows and the voids of the balconies. This results in horizontal, very clearly regulated segments. On the other hand, the north-facing street façade rigorously counters this with clearly vertical elements. A series of towers containing the main apartment bedrooms are placed in front of the main plane of the façade, punctured by the off-center windows. Between these towers are narrower gaps that form the entrances with horizontal full-width windows at the intermediate stair landings, alternating with wider ones pairing the full-height windows of the kitchens of the apartments. The ends of the building combines window elements matching those of the staircase landings, here providing light to the kitchens and bathrooms of the end apartments, and the larger windows of the main bedrooms.



11**Köln-Neue Stadt, 1961-1967**

Chrysanthenenweg 2/Asternweg 1-13/Akeleiweg 3,
50769 Köln-Seeberg

The Köln-Neue Stadt (KNS) complex is located in the new district on the north side of Cologne that was initially planned in 1957. O.M. Ungers was one of the competition participants selected to build a segment of the new town. As built, the complex includes a cluster of structures with 120 apartments built between 1961 and 1963, and a senior housing center built in 1967. The complex is organized as eight building clusters along a pedestrian pathway between Chrysanthenenweg and Asternweg that terminates across the street at the entrance to the senior housing center. Along the spine Ungers places eight clusters of apartment buildings.

The formal organization of each cluster is a continuation of the exploration begun with the two-family house in Köln-Lindenthal **2**. At the KNS it begins as a variant of the nine-square grid (in reality becoming a five-by-five module) where the central cross contains the staircases and service spaces. Pulled away from it are the corner modules containing the bedrooms, with the space between being the living areas and their balconies. The result is a series of pure rectilinear structures with rendered façades, with the solids forming towers that frame the voids of the balconies. In their clear, pure forms they continue the investigations begun at the Hültzstraße **4** and "Jobi" projects **5** and the Eckewartstraße complex **8**.



12

Mehrfamilienhaus, 1955-1957
Schilfweg 6, 51069 Köln-Dellbrück

O.M. Ungers begins to investigate designing with interlocking forms with this freestanding six-unit multifamily building situated in a quiet residential area in the eastern district of Köln-Dellbrück. When seen from the street, the apparent symmetry of the overall volume implied by the hipped roof, and the centrally located entrance and staircase, and the centrally located entrance and staircase, is in fact something different. To the left of the entrance, a vertical volume projects from the façade, and it is carved by two corner windows. On the other side, two windows are punched into the brick wall, one atop the other. As one experiences the volume three-dimensionally, the composition of the building becomes apparent. It consists of three variations of a basic module that is one of the three apartments of the two levels. There are two mirror-image units on either side of the entrance and staircase, with their bedrooms on the side towards the street, and their living areas opening to the sides, each with a balcony. The third unit faces south to the rear garden. The balconies of each unit are cutouts from protruding solids, a composition that Ungers will repeat at the Hansaring 7. The social housing project was built with public funds.



Chronological list of early works in Cologne

- 1951-1953 **Einfamilienhaus**, Belvederestraße 102, 50933 Köln-Müngersdorf (significantly modified)
- 4 1951-1953 **Mehrfamilienhaus**, Hültzstraße 10, 50933 Köln-Braunsfeld
- 5 1951-1953 **Kleiderfabrik "Jobi"**, Aachener Straße 421, 50933 Köln-Braunsfeld
- 1953 **Barbetrieb "Moulin Rouge"**, Maastrichter Straße 6-8, 50672 Köln-Neustadt-Nord (significantly modified)
- 1953-1955 **Geschäftshaus "Pesch"**, Kaiser-Wilhelm-Ring 10, 50672 Köln Neustadt-Nord
- 1953-1955 **Tanzschule "Dresen"**, Salierring 33, 50677 Köln-Neustadt-Süd
- 1955 **Mehrfamilienhaus**, Balinger Straße 2-12, 14-18, 50739 Köln-Nippes
- 1955-1956 **Mehrfamilienhaus**, Rottweiler Straße 2-12, 50739 Köln-Nippes
- 12 1955-1957 **Mehrfamilienhaus**, Schilfweg 6, 51069 Köln-Dellbrück
- 1955-1957 **Mehrfamilienhaus**, Alsdorfer Straße 11, 50933 Köln-Braunsfeld
- 1955-1957 **Mehrfamilienhaus**, Edenkobener Straße 2-8, 50739 Köln-Nippes (significantly modified)
- 3 1956-1957 **"Nibelungenhaus"**, Goldenfelsstraße 19, 50935 Köln-Lindenthal
- 9 1956-1958 **Mehrfamilienhaus**, Garthestraße 18, 50735 Köln-Riehl
- 1957-1958 **Mehrfamilienhaus**, Frankenthaler Straße 2-6, 50739 Köln-Nippes (significantly modified)
- 10 1957-1958 **Mehrfamilienhaus**, Graditzer Straße 44-52, 50735 Köln-Niehl
- 1957-1958 **Mehrfamilienhaus**, Ravensburger Straße 80-86, 50739 Köln-Nippes
- 2 1957-1958 **Zweifamilienhaus**, Werthmannstraße 19, 50935 Köln-Lindenthal
- 1957-1959 **Mehrfamilienhäuser**, Maueneheimer Straße 129-133, 50733 Köln-Nippes (significantly modified)
- 6 1958 **Mehrfamilienhaus**, Aachener Straße 308, 50933 Köln-Braunsfeld
- 1958-1959 **Mehrfamilienhäuser**, Jakob-Kneip-Straße 40-50, 51105 Köln-Poll (partly demolished)
- 1 1958-1959 **Haus Ungers**, Belvederestraße 60, 50933 Köln-Müngersdorf
- 7 1959 **Mehrfamilienhaus**, Hansaring 25-27, 50670 Köln-Neustadt-Nord
- 8 1959-1961 **Mehrfamilienhaus**, Eckewartstraße/Neue Kempener Straße/Gernotstraße 5-19, 50739 Köln-Nippes
- 1960-1964 **Verlag u. Druckerei "Müller"**, Stolberger Straße 84, 50933 Köln-Braunsfeld (significantly modified)
- 11 1961-1967 **Köln-Neue Stadt**, Chrysanthemenweg 2/Asternweg 1-13/Akeleiweg 3, 50769 Köln-Seeberg

Biographical Data

- 1926 Born in Kaisersesch/Eifel, on 12 July.
- 1947-1950 Studied at the TH in Karlsruhe under Prof. Egon Eiermann, receiving the professional degree of Dip.-Ing. Architekt.
- 1950-1955 Begins architectural practice in Cologne in partnership with Helmut Goldschmidt.
- 1955 Continues as sole partner in his office.
- 1963 Appointed professor of design and building at the Technische Universität in Berlin.
- 1965-1967 Dean of the Faculty of Architecture at the TU Berlin.
- 1968 Moves with his family to Ithaca, NY.
- 1969-1975 Chairman of the Department of Architecture at Cornell University.
- 1973 & 1978 Professor of Architecture at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
- 1974 & 1975 Professor of Architecture at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).
- 1978 Returns permanently to Cologne.
- 1979/1980 Visiting Professor at the Hochschule für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna.
- 1982 Member of the Academia di San Luca in Rome.
- 1986-1990 Professor at the Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf; named Professor Emeritus upon retirement.
- 1986 Named Fellow of the Academy of Sciences, Berlin.
- Awarded the Großer BDA-Preis of the Bund Deutscher Architekten.
- 1988 Named Honorary Fellow Society of German Architects (BDA), Berlin.
- 1997 Awarded the Great Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.
- 1999 Awarded Doctor of Engineering "Honoris Causa" (Dr.-Ing. h.c.) by the TU Berlin.
- 2000 Awarded the Großer DAI Preis für Baukultur of the Verband Deutscher Architekten- und Ingenieurvereine.
- Member of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin.
- 2004 Awarded "Laurea ad Honorem" by the Facoltà di Architettura "Aldo Rossi" - Cesena, Università di Bologna.
- 2007 Died in Cologne on 30 September.

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