to 25 minutes the Stadtbahn whisk
you from Stuttgart’s main station
to the southern hilly outskirts.
Here an almost rural landscape
with patches of green generously
spread between and in front of the
houses. Amid this pastoral idyll is
Schlosspark, the newly
constructed centre for the community
of Ostfildern, with its population of
up to 10,000 new inhabitants. Ten
years ago the 140 hectare site was
occupied by the US army’s
Nellenburg Barracks, but now there
are few reminders of that past.

The town’s new Stadthaus, by
Berlin architect Jürgen Mayer H,
turns part of its urban masterplan
by Jens von Stuelpnagel from
Stuttgart. Encouraged by the city
developers, they created an area of
urban experimentation which
advances alternative forms of
housing and building. Along these
lines, the name ‘Stadthaus’ could be
interpreted as a pun on the English
town hall with overtones of the
German ‘Volkshaus’. In other words,
this is new and experimental
territory.

The first sight of the Stadthaus
confirms the sense that something
out of the extraordinary has taken
place. A sharp-edged, clean cut,
monumental structure inclined 5
degrees towards the east
implanted in the middle of a vast
plaza. Knoll-like, with cream and
dark brown horizontal bands and
crisscross of black windows indicating
the four main floors, the building
dominates its surroundings of brick
and terracotta-clad facades. At
night, a field of 14m high black
walls illuminates the plaza with
lines of fibre-optic cable.
On the west side, a canopy
terraces out 8m along the
building’s entire length. This
artificial sky, 14m above the
entrance, disperses orchestrated
emissions of water (several
programmes are available, from
‘snow beams’ to ‘rain drops’) and
grows seductively at night.

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visitors rise through the building,
each floor is covered in differently
coloured rubber to match the hues
of the aluminium panels on the
facade. The stark impression of
the in situ concrete walls, with their
precisely punched openings in the
atrium walls, and the steel and glass
facade of the large-scale lighting
elements enhance the pervading
impression of disciplined geometry.
Yet despite this rigour, spaces and
buildings, such as the staircases,
are generously proportioned and
bathed in a cool neon light
augmented by natural daylight
filtering down from the enormous
atrium roof. The stairhall itself
climbs five degrees to the north-west, a
90 degree turn on the building’s
main external incline.

In Kubrick’s film 2001, a black
monolith symbolizes mankind’s
journey of knowledge and
discipline. Here, in contrast, the
data is lost in the moment and in
the act of translation, the
monolith is discarded and
replaced by multiple layers of
engraved signs, each one of
which becomes a separate
language that can be read only by
the eye of the beholder.

CITY VARIETIES

An unusual mix of uses and architectural ingenuity make
this municipal building both dramatic and popular.