



# The Perfect Wave

*Porsche has opened its brand pavilion at Autostadt Wolfsburg—with a spectacular design and the collective intelligence of a covey of Porsches leading the visitor from past to present to future.*

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The self-supporting steel roof of the Porsche Pavilion was inspired by the silhouette of the 911.



**S**aint Thomas, patron saint of architects, loves Porsche. While rains of biblical proportions are pouring down all around Wolfsburg, the clouds part over the Autostadt. The softly glimmering evening sun pushes through the towering clouds, with spectacular effect: just in time for the presentation, the steel roof of the new pavilion begins to shine—a bit of magic added to an already stunning event.

Glitz and glamour are in abundance. Around 200 special guests have gathered on this evening in mid-June to celebrate a truly futuristic building: the Porsche Pavilion. It is the first completely new structure in the Autostadt in 12 years and—true to Porsche form—was completed in record time. It was only in October 2011 that Porsche CEO Matthias Müller and Otto F. Wachs, managing director of the Autostadt, broke ground on the roughly 1,400-square-meter (15,000-square-foot) exhibition space. More than 500 people worked on the ambitious project for nine months—architects, engineers, landscape designers, and craftsmen. The latter worked mainly at night to avoid disturbing the theme park's daily operations. "A hell of a ride!" Müller enthuses. "And a bold architectural vision that, at the beginning, was more than we could imagine." With the inimitable flowing curves of the Porsche silhouette, the building rises imposingly in the southeast area of the VW realm. Dynamic. Elegant. The shape: a promise.

"We wanted to make the fascination engendered by the brand tangible. But how do you express the exhilarating performance of a sports car in a building? That was a problem at the beginning," says Gunter Henn, one of Germany's most renowned architects and the designer not just of the pavilion, but of the entire automotive theme park. He and his team found the solution with the Porsche designers at the Research and Development Center in Weissach. "There we took a good long look at the lines and tried to incorporate them in our design." The key: a building has to appear asymmetrical to convey the dynamics of motion. Moreover: the lines of a Porsche never ended in and of themselves, but always flowed into others. The Porsche



The new Porsche brand pavilion with its lagoon landscape is located in the southeastern part of Autostadt Wolfsburg in the immediate vicinity of the Volkswagen Pavilion.

Pavilion that emerged from these efforts is a revolutionary structure: the first seamless building of its size in the world. Utilizing the monocoque construction prevalent in aircraft construction and Formula One racing cars, the pavilion employs the “surface-active structure” principle. In other words, the roof— 2,550 square meters (27,440 square feet) and 425 metric tons (468 tons) of stainless steel—is a self-supporting structure that shapes the space within. Nine thousand individual steel ribs, comparable to the planks on a ship, were welded together in such a way that the finished structure appears as one vast unbroken surface. The highlight is the 28-meter, 130-metric-ton (90-foot, 143-ton) asymmetric canopy that seems to hover over the landscape. It is architecture that amazes. Streamlined curves flatter the silver-shimmering steel, which elevates the pavilion to a walk-in work of art, even a sculpture of sorts. Sensual, stirring, it is like Porsche Design—“or a perfect wave that puts a surfer in the zone,” Gunter Henn reflects with a smile. Handel’s *Water Music* chimes in just as brightly lit jets of water in a pond, which lies before the canopy, make figures in the air. It is a poetic spectacle that invites the guests of honor, the chairman of the VW Supervisory Board Ferdinand Piëch and the chairman of the VW Board of Management Martin Winterkorn, to move on to the second act—exploring the pavilion.

“In the beginning, I looked around and couldn’t find quite the car I dreamed of, so I decided to build it myself.” The famous quote from Ferry Porsche adorns the exhibition entrance, which leads guests up a ramp

and into the darkened interior. His dream, the Porsche 356 Number 1 from 1948, is the starting point for 25 silver 1:3 scale models, which skirt the wall on a sweeping silver highway that leads down to the lower-level presentation space.



“It’s like a concentrated museum,” says Stuttgart-based architect HG Merz, explaining the idea behind his creation. “Starting with the original Porsche, the development of the different models flows naturally outwards as a magnificently functioning swarm. Each car is unique, individual, but they are all unmistakably related. It’s a perfect representation of the collective intelligence of the brand.” Visitors instantly recognize the Porsche DNA in this extraordinary group, which leads up to the present, with current models in their full-size versions—at present the Boxster, 911, and Panamera. And they’re not just exhibition pieces. “No other car company has an aura like Porsche,” says Merz, “but not everyone can afford such a car. So we wanted to enable all guests to have this special experience. Just to sit in one of the cars, feel it, take in the atmosphere, let it sink in.”

Indeed, with every step the Porsche legend becomes more tangible. The interior itself, with its sweeping curves and lack of edges, recalls the classic interior of a Porsche. Films and sound effects give the pavilion adventure an emotional edge. One sequence, for example, shows a 911 barreling through a tunnel. The



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The pavilion, its creators, and its hosts (from left to right): Hinnerk Wehberg (Autostadt landscape architect), Otto F. Wachs (Autostadt managing director), Ferdinand Piëch (chairman of the VW Supervisory Board), VW head Martin Winterkorn, HG Merz (interior architect), Gunter Henn (architect), Wolfgang Porsche (Porsche Supervisory Board chairman), Porsche head Matthias Müller.

driver opens the window, floors it, and... wow! The motor roars, humming in sync with your heartbeat. The effect is goose bumps. Another sequence depicts the experience of a driver of a convertible who drives into a downpour and shuts the roof. Like clockwork, the technology slots the pieces together in an elegant choreography until the final move culminates in a satisfying click. This, too, is an acoustic masterpiece that will please any Porsche fan—such as one of the guests, actor Richy Müller, proud owner of a 1974 911 G. “You sense this amazing attention to detail,” he says. “I’ve never seen the brand presented in such an emotional way. It’s a complete work of art.”

From now on, the Porsche Pavilion is open to all visitors to Autostadt Wolfsburg. Far from being just a journey through the history of the sports car, the pavilion comprises a harmonious landscape of open

spaces and lagoons that invite visitors to daydream. On shady stairs and broad grassy hills, visitors can let their thoughts take flight. An average of 5,000 guests visit the Autostadt every day; to date, 25 million guests have visited the park since it opened in 2000.



“The pavilion’s attraction is the charisma of Porsche, and that’s a great asset for the Autostadt and the VW Group as a whole,” says Martin Winterkorn as he proudly surveys the new structure during his speech. The building is situated along the Koller axis, the defining line that connects different parts of the city of Wolfsburg, and within the Autostadt it is closest to the VW Pavilion. “A symbol of our common roots,” Winterkorn concludes. “And an affirmation of our common future.” ●

#### Autostadt in Wolfsburg

“People, cars, and what moves them” is the motto of the 28-hectare theme park in which the VW Group presents its brands in eight pavilions. Visitors are treated to a mix of architecture, design, and culture. Opening hours: Daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. [www.autostadt.de](http://www.autostadt.de)

#### BOXSTER (TYPE 981)

CO<sub>2</sub> emissions: 206 g/km to 180 g/km

Fuel consumption (combined): 8.8 l/100 km to 7.7 l/100 km

#### 911 (TYPE 991)

CO<sub>2</sub> emissions: 236 g/km to 194 g/km

Fuel consumption (combined): 10.0 l/100 km to 8.2 l/100 km

#### PANAMERA

CO<sub>2</sub> emissions: 293 g/km to 159 g/km

Fuel consumption (combined): 12.5 l/100 km to 6.3 l/100 km