

Designed by the masters

Interior design blending style and sustainability

With its clean, contemporary design, the Estrel Tower combines striking architecture and open-plan room concepts to foster inspiring encounters, conversations, and perspectives. The interior uses certified native woods, warm materials, fine textures, and balanced lighting to create an inviting atmosphere where sustainability is not just visible – it's palpable.



The architect duo is known for visionary designs, an innovative approach, and timeless aesthetics (right: Frank Barkow, left: Regine Leibinger), © Estrel Berlin / Corinne Rose and Elke Selzle

The two founders of internationally renowned architecture firm Barkow Leibinger are the masterminds behind the Estrel Tower. Frank Barkow and Regine Leibinger established the German-American firm in Berlin in 1993, and today, they lead a team of over 60 architects, modelers, and industry specialists. Over the years, Barkow Leibinger has realized numerous projects in Germany and abroad. Their exceptional work has been recognized with numerous awards and features in a wide range of publications.

Six questions for the pioneering architects Regine Leibinger and Frank Barkow, Barkow Leibinger

The Estrel Tower is visible from many vantage points across Berlin. What does the building embody in the urban landscape? Is it a landmark, an orientation point, or a bold statement about innovation and growth?

Regine Leibinger: The Estrel Tower is all of those things at once. From almost anywhere in the city – and even for guests touching down at BER airport – it sends a clear signal: This is Neukölln, this is Sonnenallee, this is Germany's biggest hotel and Berlin's tallest skyscraper. The architectural ambition behind it is equally sky-high.

Triangular shapes reminiscent of the Tangram game are a central motif in your winning competition design. Which aspects of this idea were at the forefront during the long planning and construction period?

Frank Barkow: A key inspiration for us was viewing this huge construction as an interplay of various individual elements. The Tower is part of an ensemble of components, which also includes the Grand Hall and the Atrium. From a street perspective, these lower-level elements connect the skyscraper to the landscape of the city.

The facade has been described as a "shimmering shell" that changes with light, movement, and perspective. How does this interplay influence people's perceptions of the Tower on a day-to-day basis in Berlin?

Regine Leibinger: The facade gives a building its face, and we think it's important for this face to have character and versatility – especially given that people often perceive modern architecture as monotonous. Our facade isn't simply a flat surface that looks the same from all angles. The Estrel Tower is a mirror of the colors and moods of each day, and it looks different whether you are close up or far away. As you pass by, it seems to shift. Every time you encounter it, it's as if you're discovering it afresh.

The Atrium is a social space that invites guests to linger and connect. How important are hybrid, open spaces like this for the future of hotels and large-scale urban buildings?

Frank Barkow: They are meeting points – and key intersections between public and private spaces. Everyone is welcome in the Estrel Tower's Atrium: hotel guests, the office team, neighbors stopping by for a quick coffee. Spaces like this have to feel welcoming and generous, so that people aren't intimidated and put off from wandering in – and so that they then want to stay.

The interior concept of the Estrel Tower consciously avoids passing trends and specific themes. How did you approach balancing timelessness, versatility, and atmosphere?

Regine Leibinger: As architects, we avoid thinking in themes or trends, as these tend to go out of style quickly when tastes evolve. Instead, we drew inspiration for many elements of the interior design directly from the architecture itself. Light in particular sets distinct moods, both by day and night. Natural materials and colors, as well as a certain urban robustness – we are in Berlin, after all – play major roles in every facet of the Tower. Everything in the rooms revolves around the incredible views, with clean lines and built-in, wall-to-wall furnishings integrated directly into the design.

The Estrel Tower brings together a hotel, workspaces, events, gastronomy, and public areas. From an architectural perspective, what was the biggest challenge in combining these very different functions?

Frank Barkow: We've obviously had many challenges to contend with, from the varying floor-to-ceiling heights of hotel rooms and offices, to the technical and logistical infrastructure for such a range of functions – all at up to 176 meters above street level. But honestly, challenges like these are what make planning such a complex building so exciting – it's almost like a whole town in itself. Finding the right tone for every individual area, creating smooth transitions between spaces, and giving guests a perfect experience and employees optimal conditions for seamless coordination behind the scenes – that's what makes the Estrel Tower such a fascinating project for us and our team.

Regine Leibinger (born 1963 in Stuttgart) and Frank Barkow (born 1957 in Kansas City, USA) regularly teach in Germany and abroad, including at Harvard GSD in Cambridge, Cornell University in Ithaca, Princeton University, the Royal College of Art in London, and the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) in Switzerland. From 2006 to 2018, Regine Leibinger was Professor of Building Construction and Design at the Technische Universität Berlin, and more recently, from 2022 to 2025, she taught as a Design Critic in Architecture at the Harvard GSD. She is an honorary member of the American Institute of Architects and a member of the Architecture Section of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin.

Barkow Leibinger was awarded the Marcus Prize for Architecture in 2007. Further accolades include the DAM Prize for Architecture in Germany and the Honor Award for Architecture from the American Institute of Architects for the Trumpf campus restaurant in Ditzingen, the German Steel Construction Award, the AIA Honor Award for Architecture for the Trumpf Smart Factory in Chicago, and the BSA Honor Award for Design Excellence for the Harvard ArtLab.