



UNIVERSAL
ARCHITECTURE #01

Bruder Klaus Field Chapel

Peter Zumthor





Bruder Klaus Field Chapel

Mechernich-Wachendorf, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, 2007

Peter Zumthor

Peter Timmerman



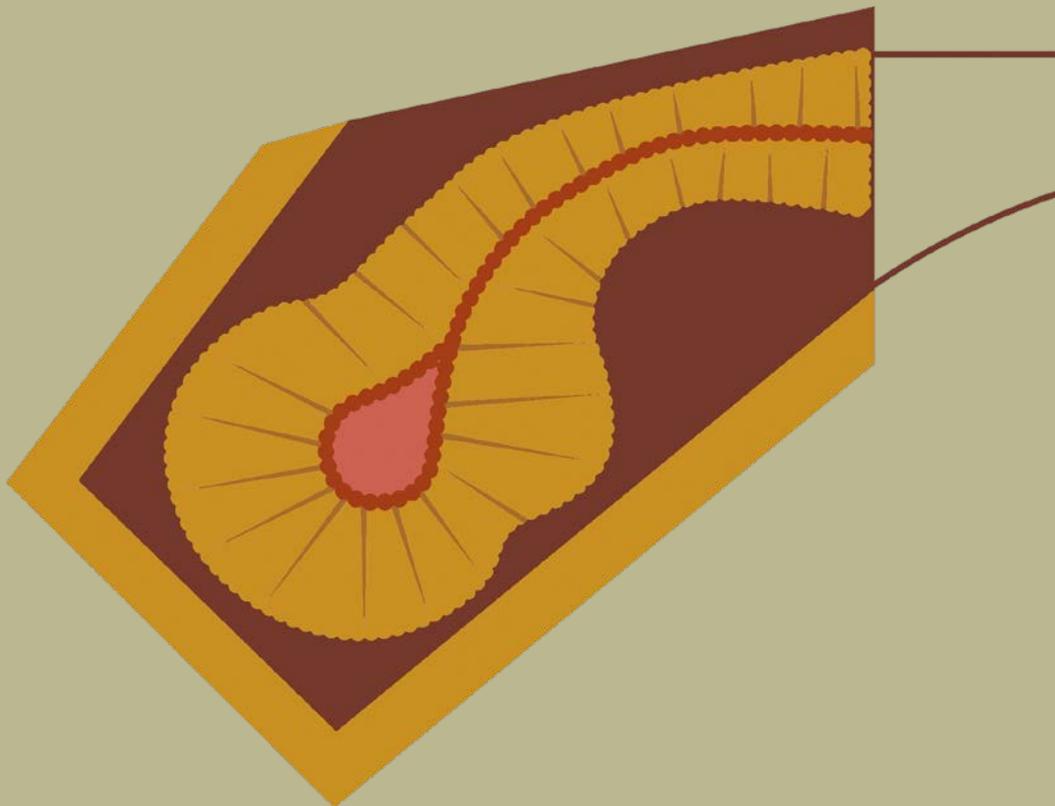
Text and Photographs
Peter Timmerman

Graphic Design
Mirjam Fraipont

Printing Supervision
Trudy Dorrepaal

Publisher
Architectuur in Beeld
© 2026

ISBN 978-90-836520-0-9
NUR 648, 653



The Bruder Klaus Field Chapel by Peter Zumthor

Anyone walking through the rolling Eifel landscape, approximately 50 kilometres southwest of Cologne, will see a remarkable object standing in a field near the villages of Mechernich and Wachendorf. This is the Bruder Klaus Field Chapel by Swiss architect Peter Zumthor (1943). From a distance, the narrow, tall concrete structure looks like a mysterious monolith from another world, almost alien **1**. The exact shape of this twelve-metre-high object – with an irregular pentagonal floor plan – is difficult to discern from a distance. The intention is that you approach this chapel on foot via a 1.5-kilometre-long route. The perspective changes a few times along the way, giving the building different appearances **2**.

When you get closer, the futuristic door catches your eye **4**. Above the pointed, triangular door is a subtle Greek cross, which casts a beautiful shadow on the concrete during sunny days **5**. Only here does it become clear that this is a religious building. The striking door arouses curiosity and invites you to enter. Those who enter the chapel find themselves in a completely different world **7**. The austere, minimalist forms of the exterior give way to ridges, curves and tapered walls. A narrow, slightly curved corridor **13** + **14** leads to the chapel itself. It's an intimate space that seems to drape itself around the visitor. There is only room for a handful of people. The interior walls resemble a naturally formed stalactite cave rather than man-made walls. Inside the chapel, the eye is naturally drawn upwards to the oculus at the top **11**. Here, the roof of the building is open. Not only does light fall in, but on wet days, so does rain or snow. The building is ingeniously designed so that you always stay dry under the sloping walls. The water forms a puddle on the floor that beautifully reflects the oculus **12**.

The chapel's furnishings are quite austere: there is an elongated metal container filled with sand, where candles can be placed, a small bench and a cabinet for candles **7**. There is also a modest statue of Bruder Klaus, created by sculptor Hans Josephsohn (1920-2012).

Bruder Klaus

The chapel is dedicated to Bruder Klaus, whose official name was Niklaus von Flüe (1417-1487). Von Flüe was a Swiss hermit, ascetic and mystic, and also the patron saint of Switzerland. The chapel was commissioned by the Catholic couple Trudel and Hermann-Josef Scheidtweiler. They wished to honour Bruder Klaus, whom they greatly admired, with a beautiful chapel. When they read an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* about the construction of the Kolumba Museum in Cologne, they wrote a letter to the architect, Peter Zumthor, asking him if he would design a chapel for them. They also enclosed a sketch. Zumthor replied that his fee would probably be too high and that – if he were to do it – he wanted to design everything himself. Years passed before the Scheidtweiler family received another letter from the architect. Zumthor had thought it over carefully and wanted to design the chapel. The deciding factor was that his own mother was also a great admirer of Bruder Klaus. To save costs, Zumthor wanted to use only materials from the surrounding area and local labour for the construction. So Trudel, Hermann-Josef himself, with the help of farmer friends from the area, helped to build the chapel. Zumthor himself also came to check on the progress and showed himself to be closely involved in the construction process.

Building with earth and fire

The construction is a remarkable story and took a total of two years (2005-2007). Zumthor first had 112 perfectly straight spruce trees transported from a nearby forest to the construction site. He used these to construct a kind of teepee tent that defined the inner shape of the chapel and also formed the inside of the concrete formwork **16**. On the outside, straight wooden planks were











Universal Architecture

The buildings highlighted in this series transcend the space and time in which they were built. They are fine examples of timeless, universal architecture. Buildings that matter and appeal to everyone's imagination, regardless of one's background or age. Buildings that give you goosebumps!

 In this first edition architectural writer and photographer Peter Timmerman pays tribute to the Bruder Klaus Field Chapel (Mechernich-Wachendorf, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany), created by the Swiss architect Peter Zumthor (1943).

 #02 shall reveal the beauty of Sedlec Cathedral - the Church of the Assumption of Our Lady and Saint John the Baptist (Kutná Hora, Czech Republic), a baroque gothic masterpiece by Jan Blažej Santini Aichel (1677-1723).



architectuur-in-beeld.nl

