

TECHNIK MUSEUM SPEYER

Media-Information

The Wilhelmsbau Museum at the TECHNIK MUSEUM SPEYER

On the grounds of TECHNIK MUSEUM SPEYER, just a few steps from the Liller Halle, the Wilhelmsbau is a unique museum that takes visitors back to life a century ago. These elaborately decorated rooms with high stucco ceilings, parquet floors, and wood panelling give some sense of the glamour and refinement of an era with such elegance that some call the "good old days".

The building which provides the atmospheric setting of this exhibition has its own eventful history. The 1917 building originally served as an office building for the Pfalz-Flugzeugwerke aircraft manufacturing company. After the Second World War, it was used by French troops stationed in Speyer and then handed over to the federal government when they left in 1984. The building then suffered from vandalism in the year that followed, with the rooms trashed out of sheer destructiveness, windows smashed, and doors kicked in. A fire in 1989 might have sealed the fate of the Wilhelmsbau, when it was threatened with demolition. The building was rescued when the grounds were taken over by the Technik Museum later that year. After a multi-year total renovation that ran into the millions, the Wilhelmsbau reopened on 20 November 1999 with a new splendour.

Long before the phonograph came into the world, mechanical musical instruments controlled by rollers, metal plates, or paper rolls had provided musical entertainment in cafés, pubs, and coffeehouses. The finest models such as the player pianos by Freiburg-based Welte were only available to a small group of wealthy music lovers. These machines allowed them to experience the performances of the most famous pianists of the era on demand. The Wilhelmsbau Museum now houses one of the largest collections of such mechanical instruments in Europe.

Technik Museum Speyer

Am Technik Museum 1
67346 Speyer

Telefon: 06232-67 08-0
Telefax: 06232-67 08-20

info@technik-museum.de
www.technik-museum.de



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The imposing staircase at the building's entrance leads to a lovingly arranged display, where each piece is like a time capsule. Whether historical fashions, contemporary accessories, old toys, and many other items from middle-class life more than a century ago, that's what you'll find at the Wilhelmsbau. Many of the fashions are displayed on mannequins that appear so lifelike that you might think that they are moving across the room. Another highlight is the unique collection of American dolls, with more than 2,500 dolls in different styles. The Winkler collection is displayed in precious, artfully lit mahogany showcases. In addition to uniforms, helmets, medals, badges of rank, sabres, and other military paraphernalia, the exhibition includes rare historical fashions.

The Wilhelmsbau Museum is open daily from 11am to 6pm. Guided tours for groups are possible at any time by appointment.

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press office: Corinna Handrich, tel. +49 (0)6232 / 67 08 - 68

e-mail: handrich@technik-museum.de, homepage: www.technik-museum.de