

# Beer Merz

Quart Publishers **Anthologie 39**

## Anthologie 39 – Notat

Heinz Wirz

It is in the nature of the architectural profession that the first works by young architects are often smaller, manageable building tasks. They are like five-finger exercises with which the architects apply what they have learned, testing and developing their architectural senses. Early on, their talent and passion for the profession is evident in all of its clarity and freshness – as is the case with Anja Beer and David Merz.

The two architects have produced a double kindergarten, a small residential home, a garden pavilion and countless housing conversions in the first seven years of their careers. The conversions follow the mandate of respect and integration. In the case of the small townhouse in Basel for instance, the architects connect two apartments through precisely placed internal stairs. The existing rooms were preserved with care and authenticity. By contrast, the newly formed zones are designed in fine, contemporary materials, allowing old and new aspects to contrast and also carefully interweave with each other with respect to materials, details and colours. Sculptural, new elements such as the T-shaped structure of supports and girders on the ground floor, or the trapeze-shaped new dormers enhance the building architecturally.

The recently completed double kindergarten in Sulgen reveals a different architectural approach. Beneath a broadly expansive saddle roof, the two main rooms rise all the way up to the roof area, giving them a light and festive character. A similar spatial effect is achieved by the central connecting room through its conical narrowing in the upper section. Daylight shines in through a large skylight, giving it a very special, mysterious atmosphere. The small room plainly demonstrates what architecture is able to achieve.

*Lucerne, July 2017*

## Double kindergarten, Sulgen

Competition in 2015, 1<sup>st</sup> prize; constructed 2016/2017

The defining aspect of the overall concept in the competition was to provide more space while respecting the already existent structures. Despite the considerable spatial requirements, the additional buildings were to be integrated into the existing facility in as reserved a way as possible, which was achieved for the double kindergarten using a single-storey building. It does not undermine the importance of the historical school building, which had been erected on a hill in the village centre.

The different measures clarify the entire school facility in its spatial and functional order, while preserving the copper beech, which is over a century old and serves as a central point of orientation.

The double kindergarten is conceived as a single-floor pavilion building. The middle zone, with its central skylight, is accessed from the two cloakrooms and connects the main rooms, while providing additional space for events if required.

The two main rooms beneath the saddle roof extend across the entire breadth of the building, thereby achieving a specifically “house-like” character. All decisions concerning the materials were taken simply and directly: wood for construction, varnished wooden composite boards for the interior furniture, and tiles in the toilets. This makes the kindergarten accessible and tangible for its young users in a very simple, intuitive way.

## Klosterfiechten residential home, Basel

Competition in 2013, 1<sup>st</sup> prize; constructed 2015–2017

Collaboration with Stump & Schibli Architekten, Basel

Embedded into the countryside and yet not far from the city, the Klosterfiechten residential home provides ideal conditions for caring for people with autism and challenging behaviour. The placement of the building volume follows the contours of the topography and is embedded into the terrain and its existing vegetation. The demanding use of the building is above all legible in the floor plan organisation: the residents, who react very sensitively to external influences, have access to both residential groups via separate entrances on the basement floor. By contrast, the carers require short, direct routes; the main access path connects all four residential areas, the official rooms and service rooms. Since the groups of residents also spend time outside while remaining separate from each other, the exterior spaces are situated directly in front of the respective residential areas on the four sides of the building, without any direct visual references to each other. Despite the high demands with respect to general safety and the robust properties of the materials, a cosy building was required that allows its residents to feel at home.

## Modernisation of BVD real estate at Münsterplatz, Basel

Competition in 2014, 1<sup>st</sup> prize; construction 2015–2018

The preservation-listed real estate complex of the Basel city building authority at Münsterplatz is being entirely modernised and adapted to today's requirements in terms of fire safety, barrier-freedom, sanitary facilities, multimedia cabling and personal safety, while taking the historical significance of the building into account. Those overriding themes are supplemented by targeted modernisation measures such as a cafeteria, an elevator, a reception area, a meeting room and redesigned individual offices. The many measures are brought together through a general colour and materialisation concept designed to homogenise the overall appearance of the buildings, which had only been individually renovated over a period of many years. Wherever possible, the existing materials are retained and renewed. A number of installations are being dismantled and new elements with reserved forms and materials will be integrated into the existing structures.

## Conversion of an owner-occupied apartment, Basel

Project in 2012; construction 2012/13

The apartment building built in 1880 had been converted and renovated several times over the years. That situation led to the decision to carry out substantial structural measures and create a new, open sequence of rooms on the ground floor. Supported by tailored carpentry work designed to highlight the horizon, the original rooms are legible, allowing natural light to reach the entire depth of the apartment through the large, new window towards the garden. The already existent, high-quality materials were supplemented with those elements and enhanced by a colour scheme that was designed for spatial effect. On the upper floor, the spacious bedrooms received new bathrooms. The three rooms on the street side were connected in a spatial sequence designed as an enfilade.

## Conversion of a residential building, Augst

Project in 2013; construction in 2014

The renovation and extension of a semidetached house built in 1940 for employees of the Augst power station was orientated towards the requirements of its new residents. Despite the considerable measures, the original character of the small house is still tangible. A large bathroom and a playroom were installed in the annexe, which had previously been used as a laundry and storage facility, without any major changes to the façade proportions. Despite being scaled in size, the windows retained their original geometric form. A new platform spans the converted section and the main building, giving the residents a view of their garden from a slightly raised level.

## Conversion and heightening of an apartment building, Basel

Project in 2015; construction in 2016

The small apartment building (built in 1880) is situated on a pedestrianised street directly beside the historical centre of Basel. Although the building is not preservation-listed, the existing structure and its appearance in the street was considered worth preserving. The extension to add one floor had to conform to that approach. Following the fold of the mansard roof, three gently sloping shed dormers are inserted into the façade. On the courtyard side, the house had already been extended on the ground floor during the last conversion measure in 1946. The garden façade, which is characterised by staggered terraces, was extended with a loft that is also inserted with only modest changes to the façade appearance.

Inside the building, its careful conversion created two apartments in which the street-side rooms have retained their original materials. In the converted zones on the ground floor and the new loft, two spacious living, kitchen and dining areas were established that – in accordance with contemporary handling of space and materials – complement the existing structures in an autonomous and clearly legible way.

## Lakeside garden house, Boniswil

Project in 2013; construction in 2014

The project was inspired by the desire to be able to enjoy a large fire in the garden with an unobstructed view of the lakeshore. The sun patio at the front, the herb garden, the large erratic boulders, the sun deck on the roof and a canopy over the reed-covered slope are the result of intensive collaboration with the residents. From the residential building, a gravel path leads through the herb garden and berry orchard to the small building at the furthest boundary of the property. The light wooden roof resting on two V-shaped supports covers the concrete platform, allowing one to take a seat in front of the large fireplace, protected from the rain, snow and sun.

Quart Publishers Ltd.

Denkmalstrasse 2, CH-6006 Lucerne

[www.quart.ch](http://www.quart.ch)