

Work reports on young architects

am-architektur

Quart Publishers **Anthology 36**

Anthologie 36 – Notat

Heinz Wirz

Over a period of twelve years, this series of books has grown to include 36 volumes. Many of the young Swiss architects presented in the series work in major Swiss cities, where the architectural “biotope” is especially fruitful. However we are also interested in what is created outside the major agglomerations, where ambitious architects often face the challenge of working with patience and persistence despite constricting, conservative building laws and sometimes strong resistance from the local population.

Since 2003, the team around André Meier based in Lenzburg, a small historical town near Aarau, has been continuously developing an oeuvre that has its foundations in Modernism and has prevailed with its solid nature in the plethora of Swiss Plateau settlements. In its designs, a special emphasis is placed on the buildings’ utilisation. For instance in the case of the single-family home in Teufenthal, which was completed in 2004, two architectural themes are closely connected to its use: a continuous route through the building receives the residents without any detours, leading them room by room to the farthest part of the building. The interior rooms are also closely interwoven with the carefully structured exterior spaces, creating an organic spatial continuum that remains closely orientated towards its use.

Completed nine years later, the Widmi residential development in Lenzburg is a colourful estate. The theme of the spatial continuum reappears in a different guise: through the rhythmic rows of homely loggias resembling a string of pearls. Spaces, colours and materials interact to produce the joyful, symphonic unity of an estate that seems to deny the fact that it is situated in a region of architectural potpourri somewhere on the Swiss Plateau.

Lucerne, September 2016

Single-family home, Teufenthal

2004

The recessed three-storey building stands like a small castle on the steep western slope. The last building in a row of other houses, it closes the gap to the wood on the slope side and thereby characterises the settlement perimeter. The clay-coloured building allows no views into it from the street. A large opening in the façade announces its entrance. The auxiliary rooms on the base level remain hidden from visitors behind thick concrete walls. From the cave-like entrance, a staircase leads upwards to the living area, which is bright with natural light. However, no view of the valley is provided. The large sliding doors towards the terrace framed by broad balustrades allow the smooth transition from the interior to the exterior spaces. The massive kitchen area defines the spatial partition of the dining and living area. Behind the kitchen, narrow stairs lead to the bedroom level. The top floor with a bedroom, bathroom and an office is supported by a chimney block and protrudes into the exterior space. While the bright office opens up towards the terrace and the valley, the bedroom looks upon the woods and a large skylight provides natural daylight for the bathroom. All views are enhanced by the geometry of the rooms. The material concept is simple: ceilings and walls of raw, untreated concrete and a painted cement floor contrast with the dark, glazed wooden windows, the walnut furniture and the painted wooden composite boards. The relief-like form-worked chimney wall contrasts with the otherwise smooth concrete surfaces.

Single-family home, Boniswil

2012

High above Lake Hallwil, a well-proportioned cuboid single-family home resides on the steep slope. Clever interlocking with the terrain allows it to use the hillside location ideally. For instance on the ground floor, a garage volume is shaped out towards the valley. Together with the diagonal supporting wall that follows the terrain, it forms a small entrance courtyard. On the top floor, the terrace slides out of the loggia like a drawer into the slope.

A shallow staircase along the projecting garage volume provides access to the spacious entrance area beneath a narrow canopy. The cell-like bedrooms and

sanitary areas are situated on the first floor. On the second floor, the spatial continuum opens out into an open space with an all-round view. It includes the living and dining area with the kitchen and loggia. Inside the house, access is the forming element that connects the floors on the slope side, thereby creating an exciting interplay of light and darkness. While the large, fixed glazing of the punch windows with narrow ventilation wings in the bedroom and living floors provide an ideal view of the lake to the southeast, a west-facing loggia at the top catches the evening light.

The building with its watery blue colour recalling the lake is inserted in a very natural way into the green hillside.

Apartment building, Lenzburg

2014

Bahnhofstrasse in Lenzburg is regarded as a special use zone and is planned for dense urban development. A multistorey apartment building has been erected there that enables peaceful living despite the central location, with a view of Lenzburg Castle. While the property is surrounded by buildings on three sides, it remains open towards the south since it overlooks the Angelrain lower secondary school.

Two basement floors accommodate the technology and underground car park, while the ground and three upper floors comprise a total of eight apartments. At the top, there is a loft with a spacious terrace. The recessed glazing creates loggias towards the south, keeping the street noise out and also providing privacy. A powerful incision into the building volume marks the building entrance in the north. The stairwell with a large skylight is left in fair-faced concrete, its golden coloured railings creating an elegant, warm effect. The rounded corners of the cube and the earthy clay-like façade tones give the building a soft, elegant appearance in the densely developed quarter.

Widmi Baufeld 1 residential development, Lenzburg

2013

Only a few steps away from Lenzburg's old town, two four-storey buildings have been erected with a total of 74 apartments and a view of the castle and Widmi Park. Between the buildings, the diagonal alignment of the western development creates a funnel-shaped main urban space that opens out towards the south and invites people to play and gather. The apartment entrances face that courtyard are. While the buildings have an almost rigid, angular appearance towards the street and the park in the west, the courtyard façade lines are broken. The important view towards Widmi Park is provided by a spacious incision. The bright rented apartments with a range of sizes from 1.5 to 5.5 rooms are accessed using seven staircases. Their natural lighting creates a reference to the nearby surroundings. The exterior spaces of the apartments are designed as loggias and also face the collective yard space, thereby encouraging communal living. The apartments on the ground floor are designed as a mezzanine opposite the courtyard, while the private garden space can be entered at ground level. Beneath the courtyard, there is an underground car park. A tree pit creates a visual connection from the underground car park to the courtyard. The opening for the trees facilitates ventilation and lets natural light shine in. The residential development was built according to the Minergie standard, with a photovoltaic system and FTTH cable connection.

Alesa production facility, Seengen

2008

The tools factory, which operates worldwide, received a striking three-storey extension building in the centre of the village in which its headquarters are situated. Taking the requirements of Cantonal monument preservation authorities into account, a finely structured, sculptural building was erected between the production halls and the office building to accommodate additional production facilities. Its large-scale glazing ensures ample natural light for the rooms and modern industrial workplaces. This precise, transparent spatial structure reflects the high-quality work of the company and its Swiss production location. In the new building, in addition to the colourful design of the production site, significant

infrastructure facilities were also planned, including offices, meeting rooms, a training centre and an ecological woodchip heating system with cogeneration for the nearby restaurant/hotel. The basement houses the building technology and an underground car park. The upper level is wheelchair accessible. A physiotherapy and gym centre, as well as an innovative start-up business, ensure diverse building utilisation.

The solid construction method with an integrated steel structure must support use loads of up to 1.5 t/m² without vibrations. The metal façade is joined. The windows appear to be large cut-out areas. The “sharp”, precise incision edges between the window space, façade and joints create a reference to the effect of the metal cutting tools produced inside the building.

Prison renovation, Lenzburg

2009–2016

The star-shaped building of the prison was opened in 1864 and required continuous adaptation to the requirements of the time. Practical experience and technical advances (especially with respect to security) led to numerous improvements, the extension of the prison building, as well as the demolition of formerly important elements of the overall facility. It originally consisted of a panoptical main building with five wings of different lengths, two individual exercise courtyards, two warehouses and the security wall around the entire facility, including a gatehouse.

To allow the “five-pointed star” of Lenzburg prison, which was designed by the architect Robert Moser, to remain open, the Canton of Aargau implemented the nationally required minimum standards for the building, refurbishing it in stages and carefully renovating it.

The former business spaces in the main buildings were converted into waiting rooms. The cells were reinstalled and furnished, while the windows were enlarged. Between the cell wing and the main building, finely structured glass endings were installed that provided views from the central area to the main building, restoring the original idea of visual surveillance. In close collaboration with the Cantonal monument preservation authorities and the operators, an interior and exterior colour concept was developed based on original findings.

Former prison painting workshop, Lenzburg

2015

Beside the “panoptical star”, the architect Robert Moser also erected two warehouses with a courtyard in front of the administrative wing of the prison. Before their renovation, the two original “raw material stores” were operated as a tailor’s and painter’s workshop. Since both new spaces were retained in the new development, one of the warehouses could be converted into a multi-functional group space. Inside, it was gutted, revealing the exterior walls and the building’s beams. That made it unnecessary to install ventilation systems. The old ceiling beams contrast with the white of the walls and the ceiling cladding. Benches were inserted into the old wall niches. The dark cast floor gives the room support and dignity. The façade was restored to its original colour for monument preservation reasons.

Prison greenhouse with a processing hall, Lenzburg

2009

The new greenhouse replaces the much too small original building erected in 1952. Numerous technical requirements, such as access for agricultural vehicles and a clear grid that was enhanced by a rational solution in the steel construction, led to an elegant, calm building with a length of 105 m and a breadth of 16 m.

Office building, Malters

2015

The 34 ha company grounds of the horticultural business Hodel & Partner is situated on an open field along the Cantonal road from Littau to Malters. The previous locations of the office, warehouse, yard and tree nursery are brought together at the new location.

The office building, which is surrounded by a park facility, presents itself as a tall, temple-like garden house. A two-storey, narrow, elongated office building is inserted beneath the roof supported by columns. It is recessed along the entire latitudinal side, creating shade for the arcade area towards the south.

The building's colour allows it to merge ideally with the surroundings. The open, vertical wooden formwork in brown-grey and the façade paper behind it in orange makes the expression of the building change depending of the perspective and distance from which it is observed, as well as the angle of the sun.

As a gardening company, the client insisted on an ecological and energy-efficient timber construction. The use of materials has a direct connection to the business. In addition to the exterior wooden appearance, materials inside were also deliberately used in an untreated condition. For instance the "Brettstapel" packed wooden ceilings and the OSB board planked walls are merely varnished and the cast flooring is left as untreated as possible. The clear building structure and the simple materials lead to an impressive overall image for the building in the garden park.

Quart Publishers Ltd., Heinz Wirz
Publishers for Architecture and Art
Denkmalstrasse 2
CH-6006 Lucerne
Telephone +41 41 420 20 82
www.quart.ch, books@quart.ch