

Frei + Saarinen

Quart Publishers **Anthology 26**

Anthology 26 – Notat
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Each volume in this series is a report on the work of young architects. In that respect, it is aimed at making talented architects more well known and documenting and publishing their early designs. The medium is like traditional artist's catalogues, documenting a contemporary cross-section of their work. This volume is dedicated to Barbara Frei and Martin Saarinen. After studying at the ETH Zurich and gaining practical experience with renowned architects in Switzerland, Holland and Slovenia, they won the competition to convert a former school building, which had been used as a cinema and local meeting hall since the 1980s. With this first contract, the young Zurich architects demonstrated how a simple, "banal" conversion can become a sophisticated architectural task. Adhering closely to utilization requirements despite the constricted spatial conditions, they have created an exemplary form of functionalism that recalls early works by Le Corbusier and is planned down to the last centimetre, its uses considered with according thoroughness. Such distribution of mass and consideration of surfaces and spaces gives the building a very specific expression. Other tasks and solutions presented in this volume reveal the same intense development, including the most recently completed residential building in Kilchberg. It surprises with intensive spatial design in the sense of a "spatial plan" and with a balanced spatial continuum that extends up to the adjacent exterior spaces and spatially framed terraces. The designs follow no general concept. Instead, the architects immerse themselves in a permanent, careful self-reflection of the characteristic qualities of each task and set out in search of – and research on - an adequate solution and its architectural potential.

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Conversion and Extension of the Cinema Xenix, Zurich

Since the 1980s, the film club Xenix has been running an ambitious independent cinema in “school barracks”, established over 100 years ago as a provisional building. The cinema bar became a popular neighbourhood meeting place and now makes a vital contribution to financing the extensive cinema operations. Due to the increased professionalization, additional rooms were required for preparation and storage, as well as new sanitary facilities, housed in an extension on the front end of the building. At the same time, the task was to enlarge the bar and optimize the existing facilities in terms of space and function. As a result of a “blurring strategy”, old and new seamlessly merge beneath a sharp-edged tin roof, creating a new whole. Selected divergences from the existing structures create new qualities: the bend in the geometry, which made it possible to preserve an imposing horse chestnut tree, creates a zoned bar area with a pleasant ambience that can be opened up completely via a double-leaf entrance front onto the gravel plaza, which attracts crowds of people on warm summer evenings. The most conspicuous improvements to the existing structures are the funnel-shaped cinema foyer and the new offset construction of the movie theatre, in which the front rows once again comprise of the popular “sofa cinema” seats.

Lignum Pavilion

The concept of a pavilion for the umbrella organisation of the Schweizer Wald- und Forstwirtschaft is maximizing on more recent planning and production methods, in order to illustrate the spatial and formal potential of wooden constructions in an exemplary manner. In the form of a walkable sculpture comprising of twenty stacked layers, it leads the visitor in a spatial loop through a topography of wood, which has the appearance of caves, canyons or terraces, subsequently creating a surprising spatial surface area of 10 x 10 metres. The artificial nature of the non-referential shape has its corresponding counterpart in the synthetic character of the wood, laminated to form multi-layered boards. The puzzle made up of 541 computer-milled individual components has been screwed to high strength by thread bars, which guarantees the stability of what are to some extent quite considerable protrusions. These pixel-like “pre-stressed” wooden cover plates intentionally transgress the boundaries of a wooden construction that would conventionally be appropriate for the materials and instead seeks to achieve a highly productive composite effect as an analogy to reinforced concrete.

Conversion and Extension of Parish House St. Josef, Zurich

By means of numerous interventions, which range from careful reconstructions to radical reinterpretations, the task here is to convert a hundred-year-old “parish villa” into an inviting rectory house with optimized energy consumption. On the exterior, only a sharp-angled dormer and a main entrance front, incorporated with precision, indicates that there has been a conversion. These abstract surfaces, which “reflect away” from each other, avoid any proximity to Wilhelminian style architecture and due to their extremely reduced design, do not distract in any way from the existing structure. The new foyer is the real heart of the building: surfaces have been incorporated into the existing structure at crooked angles, creating a sequence of rooms that have a light and spacious appearance. A new, triangular skylight “slows down” the spatial dynamic, creating a centrepiece for the zigzag spatial ensemble at the entrance to the communal hall of the church. The traditional appearance of the panelling breaks the “coolness” of the crooked-angled, bevelled shape, creating a fittingly solemn ambience. The attic storey will be extended across a section of the former roof terrace towards the new rector’s apartment, using a similar formal design. In doing so, the existing slopes of the roofs will be incorporated into the extension in order that they are able to unfold their spatial impact as sloping interior walls, an element that in particular gives the newly-created, pentagon-shaped living space its distinct character.

Extension Bergtrotte, Osterfingen

Used by winegrowers from the region since the 16th century, the Bergtrotte Osterfingen mutated to an event venue in the warm season. An extension with a hall, restaurant and degustation room, as well as other auxiliary rooms should make it possible to use the facility the whole year round, while the space that gives the old Trotte building its identity will be given a new function as a wine-growing museum. A decoupled new building is planned, which is connected below ground and provides a maximum of new qualities indoors and outdoors: disguised behind a supporting wall that has been gently incorporated into the slope, the main rooms, which merge into one at the corners, unfold as a series of spaces. As an architectural landscape intervention, the structure avoids any form of rivalry to the time-honoured solitaire, creating something interim, a place with an open view of the surrounding countryside that enhances the value of the outside space for the whole village. The vines above the imposing roof

slab require deep ground soil, which is visible as a result of the skylights that have been added above. The internal elevations are a reference to the wooden wine boxes and form an effective contrast to the strong impact of the concrete ceiling, giving the rooms a parlour-like ambience.

Residential Building in Kilchberg

Three key ideas define the concept of the residential building: on the one hand the ground floor consists of a convoluted ensemble of rooms that have a zoning function, meandering to link the east and west garden via three slightly offset levels. On the other hand, there are communal spaces (in contrast to the modest dimensions of the individual spaces), which have been designed as spacious areas that can to some extent be used as living space – perhaps the most consistent option in the event of the excessively wide, central hall in the attic storey, which can be merged with the adjacent terrace areas to form a surprisingly spacious S-shaped continuums. Thirdly, the steps themselves have been offset, creating a 40-metre long promenade that is characterized by a wide range of gaps, openings and views, as well as very different ceiling heights. A constantly recurring element is the L-shaped wall surfaces, which create ambiguous tensions, as well as a distinctive, characteristic space due to the direction of the light entering the space – carefully balanced by means of 20 windows. The materiality and colour of the outer appearance are a reference to the neighbouring buildings from the 1970s, although here the dark gabled roof has mutated to become a cube-shaped “tin roof”.

Conversion of Werkhof, Glattbrugg

The task here is to convert an ensemble consisting of three buildings from the 1970s to meet today’s requirements. Using the example of a commercial building with office and catering rooms, as well as wardrobes, the objective is to show how the typical heavily pre-fabricated buildings of this era can be adapted to meet today’s requirements in terms of operative and energy efficiency, without sacrificing the characteristic readability of their modular construction in favour of a new exterior insulation: the spatial grid comprising of concrete posts and ledge elements determines the architectural expression and has been left virtually untouched, despite structural-physical deficits. In contrast,

the wall elements that have been incorporated into the structure appear more exchangeable, which is why they will be replaced by high-quality, insulated outside wall sections. The resulting overall balance of energy consumption meets today's requirements and the partial replacement creates new potential: strips of windows can be realigned, increasing the quality of the interior rooms and creating a harmonious outside appearance. All the spaces, except for the stairwell and the window ledges will be re-structured. As a result, the rounded, yellow, polished, developed view of the walls, which creates a new, communal intermediate area, comprises a distinctive new element, which modifies the stringency of the grid architecture.

Swiss Art Award

The “big airport” is an experimental think-tank, which does not emphasize practical usability but rather fundamental considerations regarding the reality of today's planning practice. In the light of conflicts exacerbated by and increase in aircraft activity above the developed areas, that are constantly increasing in density, it would seem strange to cling to the politics of small steps in the hope that this “Gordian knot” will untie itself. Those who hope for much quieter engines are predestined to be disillusioned by the sheer physical impossibility. On the other hand, airports could drastically reduce the emissions caused by aircraft at a particular height above the heavily populated areas of the valley and still be very easily accessible. Admittedly, both the spatial and temporal dimensions of the proposed centenary sculpture on top of the Jura mountain near Egerkingen are by no means typical of Switzerland. It is interesting that the work is considered utopian, although it is neither “placeless” (Greek utopia), nor does it question society and its desire for increased mobility. Due to the development of areas that have become free in the obsolete airfields in Zurich, Basel and Geneva, the Grand Projet could also be financially feasible. The questions remains: for what reason and in what context does an idea become a utopia?

Front Building of Chliriethalle, Oberglatt

The entrance wing of a triple gymnasium from the 1970s, which is also used for events such as concerts, trade fairs and festivities, fell victim to a fire and is to be replaced by a new building that corresponds to today's requirements in terms of functions and ambience. The conceptual design has similarities with the Xenix cinema: a roof surface that has been seamlessly extended combines the existing building and the extension, making it possible to develop these, in line with the conditions of the interior spaces, without allowing the new Chirlie Hall to deteriorate into a division between old and new. A foyer that can be partitioned, which has a view of the park-like environment, is connected to the lounge on the upper storey via a ramp. The lounge provides a new connection to the existing gymnasium grandstand and can also be used for smaller gatherings. Further rooms, for example a clubhouse or a canteen kitchen, have been integrated into the new front building, while the more or less public areas in the very differently designed facades are clearly visible. The folded roof section made of prefabricated wood elements zones the crossing that extends from the lounge to the west façade opposite, giving the rooms below an appropriate height.

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