

Fiechter & Salzmann

Anthology 33 – Notat
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Sometimes, architecture brings back stories from the past and restores them to the present, producing enchanting appearances and touching a kind of collective memory: for instance the new school building in the rural Lucerne community of Ballwil. There, the young Zurich architects Caroline Fiechter and René Salzmann have produced a fine example of this kind of architectural quality. For centuries, the Lucerne types of timber buildings have been maintained in the region. Examples include the small fire station building with a central tower for hanging up hose parts, the clubhouse in varying sizes, the outbuilding, the shed, the farm building and even the covered bowling lane in Landgasthöfen and the delicate little apiary. To use the words of Phaidrus in Paul Valéry's dialogue "Eupalinos or the Architect", they are all buildings that express "a relationship between the beautiful and the useful". All these traditional types of simple timber construction are reflected in the wooden cladding of the school building in Ballwil. The impression is further enhanced by the simple design of its surroundings.

Indeed the architects maintain a close relationship with the tradition of building. In the case of the school in Hünenberg near Zug, the existing building from the 1970s was heightened by two storeys and received a new floor plan that fulfilled today's requirements. In doing so, the architects achieve a surprising added value through a large hall that connects all the floors. They replace the old suspended façade with a new "gown" consisting of a solid construction that unites all the building parts. Window elements, entrance portals with a striking canopy, and a prestigious staircase all refer to a school building that is anchored in a kind of historical memory. And that recalls "Eupalinos", which considers resistance of the architect against the diverse, ephemeral skill of nature: "It therefore also seeks to be lasting or sustained."

Lucerne, November 2015

New school extension, Ballwil

Project competition 2008, 1st Prize, constructed 2011–2012

Somewhat withdrawn from the Ballwil village road, two slim, red-varnished timber buildings extend the existing school facility. The delicate structure of both buildings recalls finely made wooden furniture.

Their façade consists of wooden cassettes in different formats, which are aligned towards each other in a staggered way. The façade fronts are closed and enhance the furniture effect of the ensemble; by contrast, the sides are perforated. The finely structured cassettes give the building, which is intended for use by children in the kindergarten and primary school, its appropriate scale. The building draws its references from the Swiss timber construction tradition, as found for instance in the Appenzell region. At the same time, the cassettes express a construction method that uses a highly mechanised process. To prevent standing water, the façade jumps two centimetres forwards with every horizontal upward shift. The overhang created in this way can hardly be seen, yet it strengthens the presence of the building with its projecting roof. The dark red tone of the façade also characterises the rest of the building. It is thus used in the interior for the jambs of the windows and doors, as well as the wardrobes and skirting boards.

Conversion, Raiffeisenbank branch, Zurich-Wiedikon

Competition 2009, 1st Prize; constructed 2010

The new Raiffeisenbank branch is situated on a busy junction at the Wiedikon forge in the centre of Zurich. Its carefully redesigned façade gives the bank a new presence in the public space. The original perforated façade was converted into a long window band with black and white glass, which follows the line of the road and is clasped by a bronze-coloured anodized frame. Like the façade, the broadly overhanging, round canopy has a greenish-toned sgraffito. Especially at night, the street space is enhanced and enlivened through the large windows that provide views into the customer area.

Three translucent spatial volumes structure the customer area. They provide wooden-clad niches for customer consulting and achieve the required privacy. The cladding made of stained spruce wood makes the customer area pick

up on the theme of the original salon bench. At the same time, its technical elements and operative requirements such as heating, ventilation and display areas can be integrated easily in to the architecture.

The three translucent glass volumes are covered in a light-permeable wallpaper, creating a bright and friendly atmosphere in the interior meeting rooms.

School conversion and extension, Hüslerberg

Competition 2011, 1st Prize; constructed 2013–2015

The school building from the 1950s in Niederrohrdorf, Argau, accommodated four classrooms and one assembly hall. It has an idyllic location on the southern plateau of the Hüslerberg, with a fantastic view of the nearly undeveloped landscape.

The extension for the facility to provide 17 classrooms was aimed at further developing the qualities of the existing structures despite their size. At the same time, an attempt was made to avoid exceeding the scale of the building – which can be seen from afar due to its exposed situation. The volume was therefore organised into several smaller individual sections that are grouped together. The plateau itself remains undeveloped apart from a wooden bicycle pavilion.

The two existing buildings were heightened by two additional volumes that were longitudinally aligned along the edge of the slope, thereby adding two floors to the existing school. All four building sections have a saddle roof and different building heights. In this way, the existing development remains legible as a portal with its small-scale windows in the façade.

The interior of the new development also assumes the concept of the existing building. The classrooms are accessed via corridors. However, this very simple constellation makes it possible to design the route through the four buildings in a spatially diverse way. That allowed a wealth of different views towards and relationships with the surrounding landscape, providing pupils with a variety of gathering places and different lighting situations.

New Raiffeisenbank branch, Zurich Airport

Competition 2013, 1st Prize; construction 2015–2017

The new Raiffeisenbank branch at Zurich Airport is situated on the edge of the settlement at the busy “zum Wilden Mann” junction in Kloten. According to the design plan, it supplements the block perimeter at its north-eastern corner. The project occupies the maximum perimeter and combines with the recessed building volume at the junction to form a corner situation. The small exterior forecourt area highlights the entrance to the bank.

The façade attempts to give the bank building the necessary high profile in the heterogeneous structure of the location. Between the simple, village houses from the 1980s, the terraced towers of the 1960s and the more recent clinker brick housing, it presents a decidedly urban stance and remotely recalls the expression of a palazzo.

The concrete façade is made of a granulated mixture of coloured gravel, Andeer granite and white cement. The profiled supports and cornices are cast as elements and combined using an in-situ cast node to create a monolithic unit. The elaborately produced façade is achieved by serially producing all of its elements.

Skylights from the interior courtyard light the bank’s two-storey customer hall. Its material in light in-situ cast concrete refers to the façade design. The terrazzo flooring is cast from the same mixture as the façade’s concrete elements. Instead of being granulated, it is polished, whereby the green Andeer granite also becomes visible inside the building.

School facility, Hünenberg

Competition 2011, 1st Prize; construction 2013–2016

The existing school building from the 1970s is a very extensive, spatially expansive two-to-three storey volume with 16 classrooms in the centre of Hünenberg. The façade had to be replaced due to its poor condition. The small classrooms needed enlargement to fulfil today’s requirements and were extended to include four new classrooms.

To avoid occupying further land, the footprint of the existing facility was not enlarged, so the structure with its three-winged volume and supports was retained and heightened by two storeys.

A spacious foyer leads from the entrance to the atrium, which represents the

heart of the building. All upper levels are reached from this four-storey atrium by means of differently winding stairs. The bright room serves the school children as an attractive gathering space and break hall. Due to the great depth of the building and the resulting darkness in the entrance area, a new interior courtyard provides pleasant indirect lighting and offers pupils an inviting entrance to their school building.

Conversion and extension of “Haus Felsenau”, Bern

Competition 2009, 1st Prize; construction 2015–2017

The centre of the “Gefangenen- und Entlassenenfürsorge Bern” (an organisation that supports prisoners and released convicts) is situated on the grounds of the former spinning mill near the River Aare. The ensemble, which consists of four houses, was originally built to provide accommodation for female factory workers. The two preservation-listed timber barracks that were constructed in 1947 had to be demolished due to their dilapidated condition. The existing situation as a loose group of low buildings around an interior courtyard was however used as the starting point for the concept to expand the organisation’s operations.

Beginning with the typology of an Italian farm that combines working and living by means of a central inner courtyard, two building volumes were connected by a pergola that lines the green courtyard.

The building refers to the demolished barracks and is conceived as a pure timber structure that stands on a slightly projecting concrete base. Due to the very limited means, the interior uses low-cost materials (OSB and wood wool boards). Simple measures such as coloured wooden panels to cover the joint grooves enhance the materials, giving the interior a surprising atmosphere. The workshops that fill the entire depth of the building are all lit from two sides and reveal the roof area on the upper level, which is designed to give the residents a highly agreeable atmosphere.

VZ3, administrative building, Zug

Competition 2013, 1st Prize; in planning

Three buildings are planned to centralise the cantonal administration on a property near Zug station that is hardly used today. In addition to offices, they will include a training centre, a canteen, a state and city archive and the emergency services for the Canton of Zug.

The urban structure of the nearby surroundings has been developed recently and is very heterogeneous. To avoid a further lack of clarity, simple densifying buildings are used around an inner urban square.

The architectural expression of the façades is orientated towards the industrial architecture in Zug. Powerful concrete supports vertically organise the façade. The base is smooth, while the pilasters have channels that are filled with clinker brick and are reduced upwards.

Clinker brick is also used for the concrete elements of the balustrade areas. Visitors enter the administrative building with two courtyards via a two-storey hall. From there, they can use a prominent staircase in the first courtyard that picks up on themes of the exterior façade design in its architectural expression.

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