





Roduit House, Chamoson (2004/05) by Savioz Fabrizio Architects, Sion © Thomas Jantscher



Interior of Roduit House, Chamoson (2004/05) by Savioz Fabrizio Architects, Sion © Thomas Jantscher

SWISS SENSIBILITY

The Culture of Architecture in Switzerland

Francesco Borromini is widely known as an Italian Renaissance architect, but he was actually born in Bissone near Lugano in the Old Swiss Confederacy. He began his career by following his father's footsteps as a stonemason. Le Corbusier originally came from La Chaux-de-Fonds, a small town in Neuchâtel canton; his father painted delicate images onto the dials of watches. Peter Zumthor, one of the most revered contemporary architects, was born to a cabinet-maker and started his career as a carpenter. These examples highlight the relationship that many Swiss architects have with craftsmanship and their intimate knowledge of working with materials. It is this deep understanding of the physical nature of making objects out of real materials – wood, stone, glass, concrete – that shines through the buildings of many Swiss architects, both historically and today.

Swiss Sensibility examines the rich and deep-rooted tradition of architecture in Switzerland, the sensibility of many Swiss architects and a pervasive culture of architecture. That such a small, land-locked country has produced the wealth of fine architecture is testament to this tradition. The volume of work produced in Switzerland might not seem significant when compared to larger nations, but the resonance and influence of the work is considerable. *Swiss Sensibility* traces the history of this trajectory, examining the country's architectural prosperity and the development of its many talented architects.

Why is it that architects in Switzerland have managed to achieve their standard of excellence? What are the forces at play that have combined to create the fertile ground for the discipline to flourish? Switzerland has a large reservoir of small, creative practices that support a sophisticated culture of building design. This resource, coupled with an excellent standard of architectural education, high quality craftsmanship and a tradition of open competitions allowing new talent to emerge, are all aspects that influence the production of architecture in this country. In most countries the role of the architect has been diminished, whereas in Switzerland architects still tend to have authorship of their work; steering their designs from the sketch stage all the way through to the final finished building.

Building in Switzerland's alpine topography poses a significant challenge but, at the same time, forces architects to think three-dimensionally from the onset. Though one can't talk of a Swiss style per se, what is evident is a certain understatement and a strong sense of belonging with the context. The extreme weather impacts on detailing; keeping the icy cold out and the heat inside is vital to survival. Additionally, there are not many natural resources like oil and steel in Switzerland, so architects have had to be innovative and use the natural resources they have had at their disposal in abundance: stone and wood.

If the definition of sensibility is having an acute awareness and responsiveness, then the architecture presented in this book shows in myriad ways Swiss architects' keen sensitivity to their environment and history, whether it be the restrained renovation of an old farmhouse in Ticino or a bold, new Youth Hostel in Graubünden; a multi-storey apartment building in Basel city or a museum in Flims village. Buildings, both large and small, each display the architect's attention to detailing and material, beautiful craftsmanship and precise construction. The catalogue of projects shown have been designed by Swiss architects and built in Switzerland during the past few decades. Each project is examined with the aid of texts, photographs, and drawings. Twenty-four projects from across the country by seventeen architecture practices are interspersed with five essays by prominent academics – both architects and non-architects – and an interview with a master architect. The chosen kaleidoscope of buildings is intended to inspire the reader and convey the admiration shared by many.

Swiss Sensibility is not about promoting a brand, but rather sets out to illustrate the broad approach to a highly valued discipline. The book is an exploration of the difference and uniqueness that gives this small country its great architectural reputation and pays homage to architecture produced with hard graft, passion, and integrity.

– Anna Roos



Casa d'Estate in Linescio (2009/10) by Buchner Bründler Architects Basel © Giuseppe Micciché



Anna Roos studied architecture at the University of Cape Town and a postgraduate degree at the Bartlett School of Architecture at UCL in London. Moving to Bern, Switzerland in 2000, she worked as an architect, designing projects in South Africa, Australia, and Scotland. She has been working as a freelance architecture journalist since 2007 and writes for A10, En-suite Kultur Magazin, Monocle Magazine, and Swisspearl Architecture Magazine. She also copyedited books for numerous publishing houses in Germany and Switzerland including: Lars Müller, DOM, Gestalten, DETAIL Green, Birkhäuser and Prestel. Anna seeks to convey her passion for architecture in her writing about the discipline. *Swiss Sensibility* the first book she has written and edited. Photo: Dominique Uldry

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