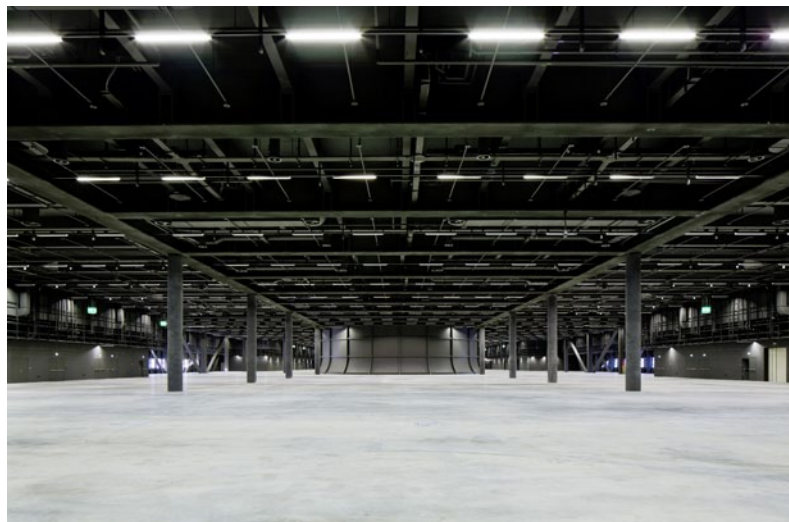


Herzog & de Meuron weaves a façade



Photo MCH Group



One of the new congress halls.
Photo MCH Group



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Photo Iwan Baan

You won't find many congress and trade-fair centres in inner-city locations nowadays. As fairs increase in size, they are forced to find accommodation on the outskirts of town or even in the countryside. Needing to expand and partially renew its congress centre, the city of Basel opted to maintain the present site of the complex close to the town centre. The plan for the new-build extension, by Herzog & de Meuron, meant a radical change, however, not only for the neighbourhood in question but also for the city as a whole – the reason being that the three-storey-high building would cover the Messeplatz and interrupt an existing sightline from the inner city to the station. Another problematic factor was the size of the building, wholly beyond the imagination of most of Basel's population.

The architects faced a dilemma. How could they design a building with a floor area of 38,000 m² and a 200-m-long façade and end up with a volume that would look smaller than it is? And how could they achieve their goal without minimizing the prestigious character of the building? Herzog & de Meuron solved the problem with a slightly staggered arrangement of the two upper floors and with a uniform façade cladding for those levels – a smoothly undulating, twisting surface of strips of woven metal. These two storeys appear to hover above a transparent ground floor, and the façade material divests the building of its mass, as the woven metal reflects both sky and surrounding environment. Those inside the building have a view of the city through the interlaced 'fabric'.

The covered Messeplatz is a public traffic route that organizes the flow of visitors. Two foyers, one on either side of the square, lend access to the congress halls. Concave and convex glass façades circumscribe the outdoor space – the so-called 'City Lounge', which is illuminated through a large round opening in the roof. Bars and restaurants occupy the curving niches of these foyers.

The new 8-to-10-m high halls provide space for trade-fair stands with two or even three levels and connect to the older halls of the complex. The highlight of the column-free events hall is a sculpture consisting of a pair of criss-crossing stairways.

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