

# Reworking a Tree



## Diener & Diener and Martin Steinmann felled and reused a Sequoia for a museum extension.

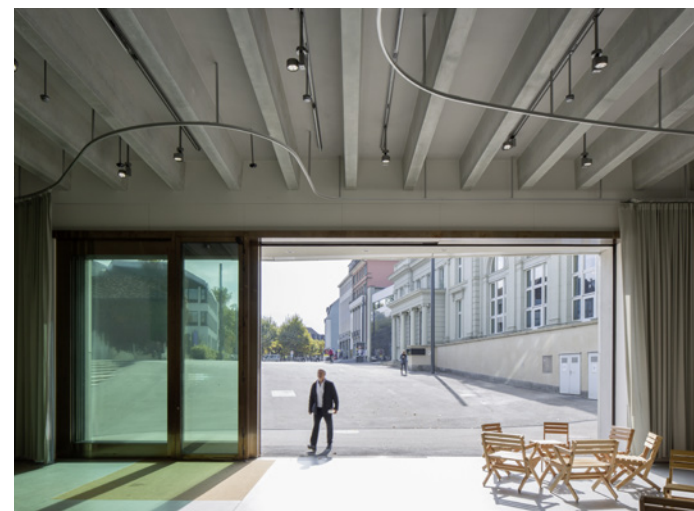
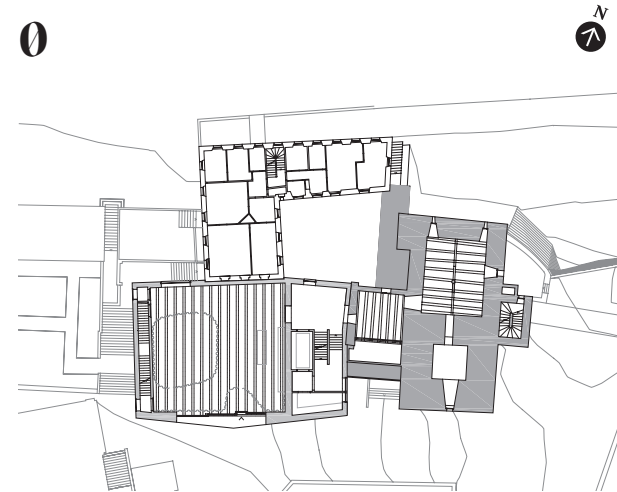
Text Katharina Marchal  
Photos Christian Richters

At the inauguration of the new town museum in Aarau, Roger Diener recalls the words of Luigi Snozzi, great theorist of Swiss architecture: 'Every architectural intervention represents a destruction. Destroy intelligently.' Premise of the design was the necessity to cut down a 120-year-old giant redwood to build the extension. This gave the Diener & Diener team and architecture theoretician Martin Steinmann the idea to use the wood of the tree in the design of the façade. The commission went to artist Josef Felix Müller from Sankt Gallen. He used the felled tree to make panels with representations. He created 137 panels with life-sized depictions of people, wielding a chainsaw as if it were a quill pen. These reliefs, converted into rubber matrixes, were used to cast the concrete façade panels. Roger Diener speaks of a 'profound architectonic theme that, like the tower's masonry, forms a whole,

but at the same time consists of individual building blocks'.

The 13<sup>th</sup>-century fortified tower, which has housed the town museum since 1939, had become too small, necessitating the extension. The new entrance looks like a big barn door, visitors enter the two-storey entry hall from the sloping plaza. Glass sliding doors can be opened in the summer, turning the hall into a kind of covered outdoor space. To connect the buildings, the floors of the extension correspond in height to two of the tower's floors. A spacious staircase functions as a hinge between the volumes. Concrete beams span both the largest exhibition space and the entry hall, which are therefore free of columns. The recessed glass upper floor, where the offices are located, is also striking. A pergola overgrown with ivy has been placed at an oblique angle, enveloping this floor like a second skin.

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Josef Felix Müller carved 137 images into wooden panels – from the tree that was cut down for the extension – which were subsequently turned into moulds for the façade panels.