

Bridging the Gap

Designed by Christ & Gantenbein, the expressive extension of the Landesmuseum in Zurich responds to the picturesque roof landscape of the existing building.

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The

huge extension of the Landesmuseum (or Swiss National Museum) in Zurich spans the adjacent park and connects both wings of the existing building. Park Platzspitz could not have been more beautifully situated. Like a peninsula, it sits at the confluence of the two rivers Limmat and Sihl. The modern zigzag shape of the extension contrasts with the romantic, almost sensual nature of the castlelike complex. But appearances are deceiving. Or, as Emanuel Christ of Christ & Gantenbein says: 'The new is neither hiding, nor can it exist without the old.' The sculptural form of the new building is a continuation of the existing complex. The expressive roof line of the extension responds to the picturesque roof landscape and the tower of the existing building – designed by Swiss architect Gustav Gull and built in 1898. 'The jagged plan with its many corners dovetails with the park's old ginkgo trees and paths,' says Christ.

The tuff of the old walls also returns in the new façade. Tuff was added to the exposed aggregate concrete to ensure that the colours of the old and the new buildings would be in harmony. Extensive research preceded the work in concrete. Achieving the right consistency for the processing of the concrete required determining the exact proportion

Top The main entrance of the museum has been relocated to the east side of the building.

Below Added tuff ensures that the colour of the new building corresponds with that of the existing building.

Opposite The west side of the new building connects to the first floor of the existing museum.

between tuff addition and limestone powder as well as between water and cement. Even the origin of the cement played a decisive role. Both the seamless concrete walls and the use of only a single material underline the monolithic plasticity of the building volume.

The angular extension changed the U-shape of the plan of the existing complex back into an O-shape, creating the possibility of a circuit. 'The interaction is clearly visible in the interior,' says Christ. A huge staircase covers a height of almost 10 m and continues to widen upward, where the exhibition spaces are located below the sloping roof. According to Christ, the staircase is the counterpart of the Hall of Fame located in the existing part of the museum. In the future, historically themed exhibitions can be organized in this dynamically ascending and descending space. A few very precisely placed porthole-style windows overlook the parkland and the courtyard between the two wings. Its deep days are a consequence of the high thermal demands the building had to meet in the course of the planning process.

The idiosyncratic shape is also reflected in the interior. Concrete walls rise to form high galleries and then narrow into cramped corridors. Christ talks about 'large-scale wall surfaces', referring to the fact that the flowing >



'The zigzag shape of the extension contrasts with the romantic nature of the castlelike complex'

spaces have evolved from a classic museum format into a single spatial continuum. The total floor space amounts to 6,100 m², the new building offers 2,200 m² of flexible layout exhibition space. Rough concrete walls create a skeleton for temporary interiors. Together with the technical elements strategically placed in the ceilings, the concrete creates a modern, almost industrial atmosphere: solid and spacious – open to various forms of staging and setup. Christ calls the new galleries of the Landesmuseum 'museum workshops' that are used for both storage and experiments. It is now up to the curators of the Landesmuseum to show how the spaces function during the opening exhibition on 1 August, a Swiss national holiday. In addition to the permanent exhibition 'Archaeology in Switzerland', they are also working on a temporary exhibition about 'Europe during the Renaissance'.

Before the new building was taken on, the monumental station wing was renovated. These previous, intensive interventions in the old building ensured that the new building became a confrontation with, rather than a correction of the existing complex. There is no dramatic rift between the new part and the

old one: the interior forms a spatial whole, the exterior a sculptural ensemble.

It posed a challenge to make the building meet the latest technical requirements in terms of, among other things, earthquake resistance, fire safety and thermal insulation. In addition, Christ & Gantenbein found it important to return the existing parts to their original state, but resisted the temptation to reconstruct any lost parts. The architects deliberately refrained from falling back on the decorative elements that belonged to the common architectural vocabulary of Gull and his nineteenth-century colleagues. Only the fire doors, produced using computer-controlled CNC cutting machines, are based on the original oak panelled doors, though they meet today's technical requirements. The cut-out ornament bears a floral motif that is the result of the digital processing of a photo of a flower, rather than of manual carving. The decision to not design the exhibition spaces as white cubes also stems from the characteristics of the existing complex. The presence of windows, terrazzo floors and columns repeatedly poses a challenge to curators designing exhibitions. Yet to its designers, the architectural quality of Gull's >

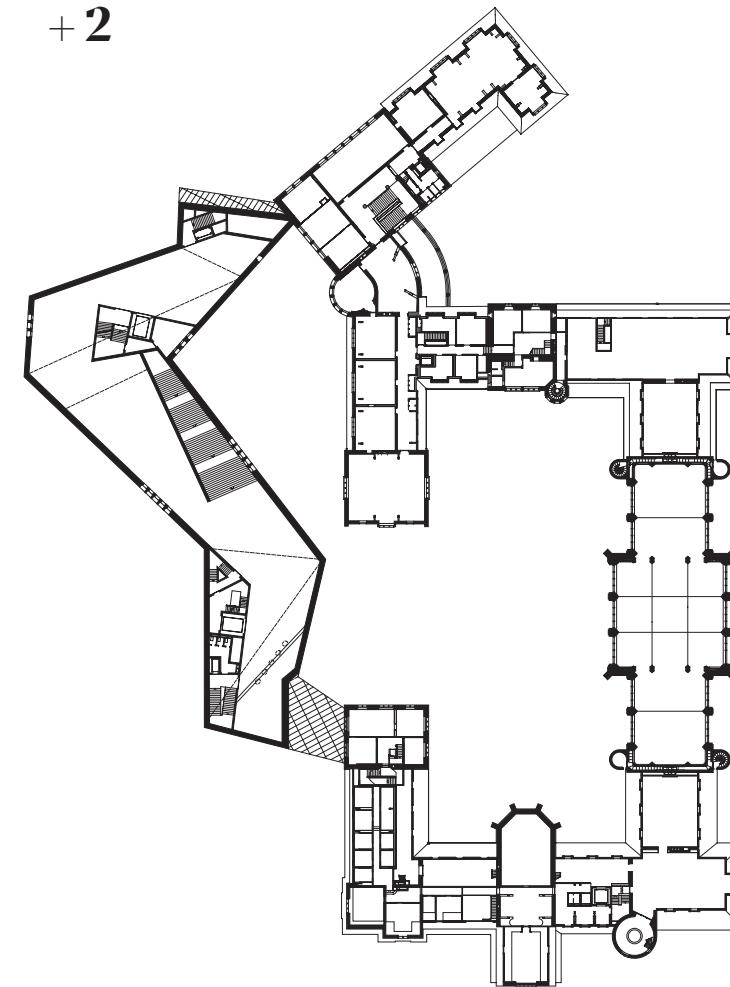
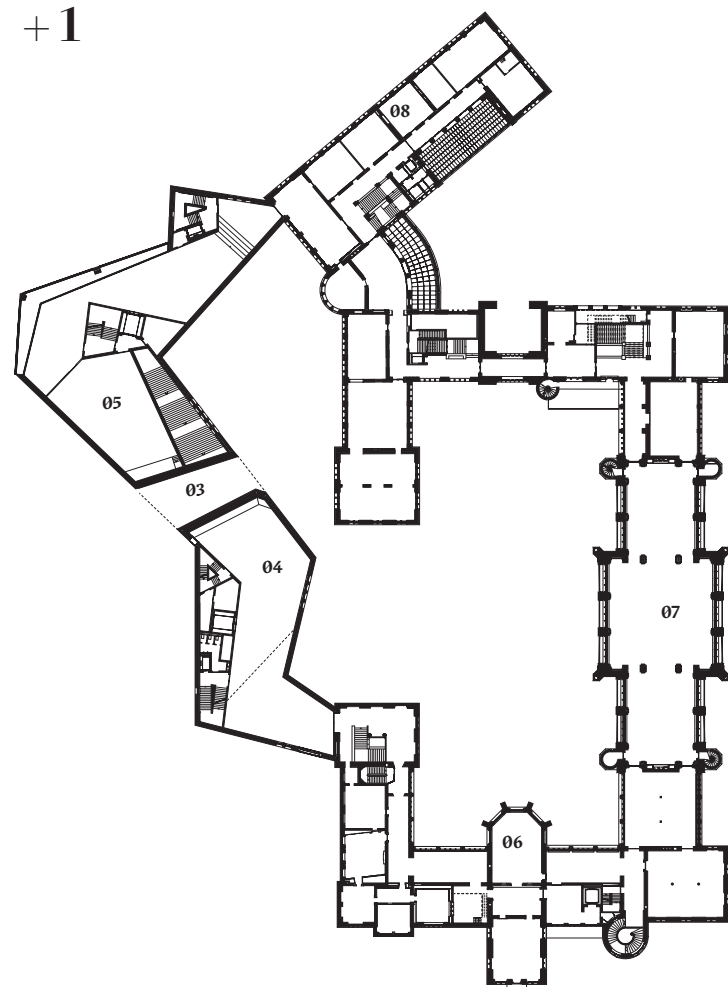
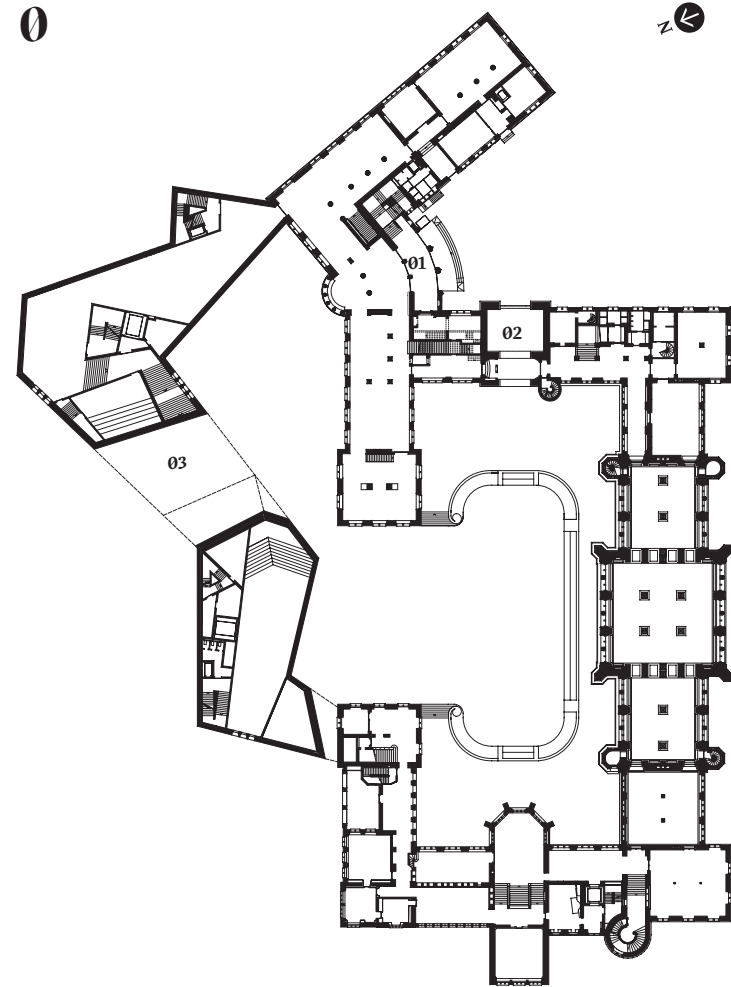


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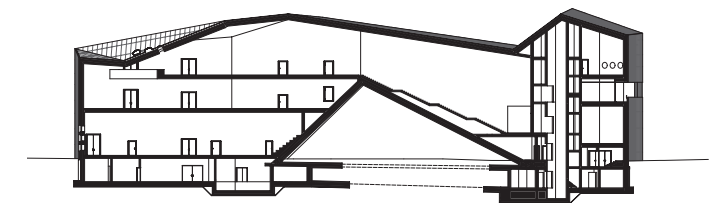
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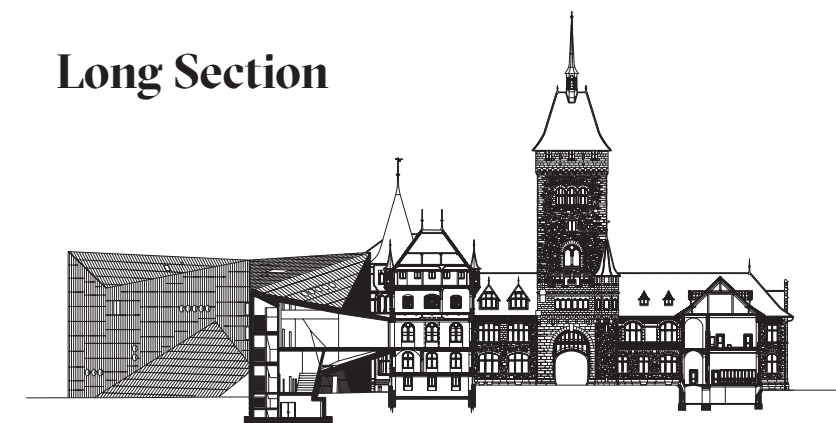


- 01 New main entrance
- 02 Former main entrance
- 03 Void under bridge
- 04 Permanent archaeology exhibition
- 05 Library
- 06 West wing (historical furniture and rooms)
- 07 Station wing (national history)
- 08 Study centre (formerly school of arts and crafts)

Cross Section



Long Section





A huge staircase has a height of almost 10 m.



The interior of the new building is executed in exposed concrete.

‘The concrete creates a modern, almost industrial atmosphere’

Site



old building lies in the fact that it meets a basic human need: to find oneself in a concrete space, built of physical, tactile architecture rather than in the abstract white shell of a white cube. That is why the new spaces have terrazzo floors, why the walls are not parallel and why they offer so many possibilities for future exhibitions.

The relocation of the main entrance to its original spot on the square opposite Central Station creates more space for the museum shop, a foyer and a restaurant. The restaurant's summery outdoor terraces and the bar on the new museum square will surely improve the experience of this centrally located urban space. The Landesmuseum now also possesses a public study centre with a library overlooking the Limmat.

The total renovation of the Landesmuseum takes place in three phases.

The first comprises the renovation of the station wing, the second the new building and the third the restoration of the wing with the school of arts and crafts. That is, the old west wing and the tower will be renovated during the third phase, from 2017 to 2020. Once completed, a process that lasted more than 20 years will have run its course. As early as in 2002, the then young firm of Christ & Gantenbein won its first major open design competition with this project. The realization of the extension and renovation required several referendums, which are mandatory in Switzerland in cases such as these. In that sense, the conclusion of the entire process will be a historic moment for the Landesmuseum, which seems to have been predestined for this extension for a hundred years. —

christgantenein.com

