

VOLKSHAUS

— BASEL —

379 Volkshaus Basel, Basel, Switzerland
Project 2011-2012 realization 2011-2012
Volkshaus Brasserie & Imi Bar

The history of the Burgvogtei, a medieval manor and later the Volkshaus Basel, goes back to the 14th century. The location has always been a site of concentrated and varied use — a piece of city within the city. In 1845, a brewery with a restaurant was erected there and expanded in 1874 to house a beer and concert hall. When the premises were taken over by the city of Basel in 1905, the facilities, with their diverse spaces, became a hub of political, social and cultural activities. The popularity of the location led to a shortage of space and the ensuing architectural competition in 1919 was won by the architect Henri Baur.

The new Volkshaus Basel, built in 1925, incorporated the existing concert hall and was expanded to include new halls of various sizes, offices, conference rooms, a library, a restaurant and a hotel. In the 1970s, the Volkshaus just barely escaped demolition; the interior was completely renovated and the building refurbished to meet the latest technical standards. However, in consequence, the building underwent substantial change and today nothing remains of the original character of the beer and concert hall. The concert hall is architecturally defined by the acoustic requirements of its use as an orchestral recording studio. All of the galleries and window openings had to be walled up. The bar and the brasserie were also remodeled to such an extent that little of the original spirit of the space has survived. In particular, the integration of HVAC and other technological facilities led to invasive architectural modifications. The diversity of uses was reduced as well since the head building is now used primarily for offices.

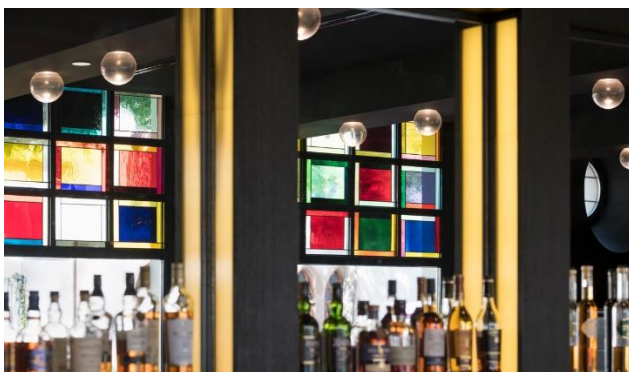
In several steps, the Volkshaus will now be remodeled and former uses reinstated such as hotel, shop and library. Our intervention aims to revitalize the diversity of this location which is so important to the life of Basel, while at the same time restoring its architectural identity. The extent of our intervention will vary from room to room, determined by the individual requirements of each space and based on detailed analysis of its current status. Based on the original architecture of 1925, the Volkshaus will be preserved in all its diversity and complexity and will reflect the spirit of its own history.

In order to achieve this, we started out by removing all the built-in additions and cladding applied to the building in the late 1970s. Whenever possible we recovered the original architecture of 1925. Where this was too costly, technically unfeasible or unreasonable, we worked with the current status. The study and analysis of plans and visual materials from the archives played an important role, enabling us to identify the original character of the architecture and the defining elements of the interiors. The next step involved working out how the later addition of HVAC and technical services could be integrated into the original architectural idiom, with only slight modifications. In the brasserie, we removed the lowered ceiling to reveal the old ceiling beams and then doubled them to house the ventilation ducts. The distinctive spatial structure of the brasserie is thus restored and even enhanced. Since the original room dividers no longer exist, we added high-backed seating to subdivide the brasserie into various zones. The historical chandeliers resonate in the pendant LED lamps with thick, mouth-blown glass diffusers. The chair is a reconstruction of the original Volkshaus chair, except for the back which can be automatically individualized thanks to computer-aided production. The tin traditionally used for the countertop now covers the entire bar and the tabletops

VOLKSHAUS — BASEL —

as well. It was important for us to work exclusively with quality materials like tin, leather and wood, which acquire a patina through years of use. Striking architectural elements of 1925 have been reiterated elsewhere in various scales and articulations. For instance, the oval window above the entry resonates in the window to the public passage that leads to the inner courtyard, in the swinging door between the bar and the brasserie, in an opening that reveals the historical staircase and in the mirrors of the restrooms. The sinks in the restrooms are recycled items found in Basel's building components exchange. Seventeenth century etchings have been transferred to the wallpaper used in the antechambers of the restrooms, thus establishing a link with Basel in the days of the former medieval manor.

Herzog & de Meuron, 2012



379.1 Volkshaus Hotel Basel, Basel, Switzerland
Project 2018-2019, realisation 2020 Herzog & de Meuron

4 Star Boutique Hotel Volkshaus Basel

The Volkshaus Basel, originally the castle bailiwick, can be traced back to the 14th century. The location has always been a site of dense and varied use—a piece of city within the city. A brewery with an adjoining restaurant was built on the premises in 1845, with a concert and beer hall added in 1874. After the city of Basel took over the facilities in 1905, the site became a hub of political, social, and cultural activities, which ultimately led to a shortage of space and a competition in 1919. The winner, architect Henri Baur, built the new Volkshaus Basel, inaugurated in 1925, integrating the existing concert hall and supplementing it with halls of varying sizes, offices, conference rooms, shop, restaurant, and accommodation for personnel. In the 1970s, the Volkshaus just barely escaped demolition, instead undergoing complete renovation, both inside and out, to make the complex meet the latest technical standards. These measures substantially prejudiced the character and identity of the Volkshaus. Nothing remained of the original architecture of the concert and beer hall. Renovation of the concert hall was dictated by the acoustic requirements of its use as a recording studio for the orchestra. All of the galleries and windows were walled up, the original atmosphere of the bar and brasserie modified almost beyond recognition, and the former architecture of the rooms practically obliterated by the built-in HVAC system. In addition, the diversity of uses was reduced since most of the head building housed office space.

In 2011 we began rebuilding the Volkshaus in several stages, piece by piece, and have since reinstated lost uses such as accommodations and a shop. We hope that our modifications and the renewed diversity of uses will not only revitalize this extremely special location in Basel, but also revive the architectural identity of the Volkshaus. The extent of our interventions varies from room to room depending on the needs of each space and in accordance with in-depth analysis of the complex as a whole. We aim to preserve the overall multiplicity and complexity of the Volkshaus, based on the original architecture of 1925 and imbued by its own history.

When the new building of the Volkshaus Basel was inaugurated in 1925, it contained a concert hall, restaurant, bar and shop, with conference rooms, administrative offices, and living quarters for the caretaker and manager accommodated in the building in front. Bedrooms for staff were located in the attic above. In the wake of renovation in the 1970s, all the floors were converted into office space. The rooms of the historical building were plastered throughout with a synthetic crust of Resopal paneling, needle-felt carpeting, suspended acoustic ceilings, and plastic cable ducts.

Exactly 95 years later, and eight years after the first phase of renovating the Volkshaus Basel, a hotel with 45 rooms has been completely integrated into the Volkshaus, replacing the offices previously located in the head building. The original diversity of the Volkshaus Basel has been reanimated and made fully accessible to the public.

As in the renovation of the brasserie, the bar, and the small event halls, completed in 2012, we started by removing the “crust” that had been applied in the 1970s, naturally hoping to make interesting historical discoveries. We soon realized that none of the original substance had survived except for the windows, so that we had to rely on other clues to work out our design. Historical plans of the

bedrooms in the attic were one source of information—simple rooms with bed, closet, and washbasin, of the kind still found in historical hotels today, especially in Switzerland. On the other floors, rows of closets lined the central corridor, interrupted by doors, placed flush, which led to administrative and conference rooms. We also drew on some of the ideas underlying the 2012 renovations of the brasserie and the bar to ensure a congenial, consistent ensemble of carefully selected materials and forms throughout the Volkshaus, which was no doubt also the case in 1925.

We had the idea of using a thick wall of storage space lining the corridors to enter the hotel rooms and also to accommodate closets as well as toilets and showers. Both facilities are integrated into the stained black oak wood closet that runs the entire length of the room. To implement this idea, the shower has to jut out slightly, thus rhythmically structuring the corridor. Ceramic tiles, glazed black and dark green, underscore the feeling of being enveloped in these two spaces, which have been inserted into the closets with meticulous precision. Oval windows, like those in the brasserie and bar, afford a view into and above all out of the shower and toilet. In most of the rooms, the shower has been positioned to allow a view straight through the room and thus out of the window as well. The rest of the space is unobstructed, divided only by a central shaft clad in black glass, which also forms the back wall of the freestanding washbasin.

This wall disappears behind soft, thick curtains that face the room and can be drawn to close the sleeping area off from the entrance. The bed is centered directly in front of these curtains, with a headboard of oak slats that reference the beer garden benches designed specifically for the Volkshaus Basel. The windows have been elaborately restored as much as possible to their original state. The curtains are the same as those dividing the room, their pale green reflecting the green used repeatedly throughout the Volkshaus Basel. The wallpaper, showing etchings from the 17th century, bridges the centuries since the beginnings of the Volkshaus. When the curtains of the windows and room dividers are drawn, the “textile” bedroom becomes a place of warmth and shelter. The dark terrazzo floor resonates with the diversity of terrazzo flooring throughout the building. In addition to a simple table and the Volkshaus chair, conceived for the bar and brasserie, every room is furnished with a lounge chair which we designed. The matching ottoman can also serve as a luggage rack. Thanks to the careful and caring renovation of the historical building, none of the rooms are identical and each have a character of their own.

The new lobby on the ground floor is a companion to the bar, somewhat like a “negative” or a copy, same but different, with the color concept inverted. The mosaic floor is black and green, the walls above the wainscoting and the ceilings are painted white. We have also reinstated the entry through the original door, with flanking “window vitrines”, as the central access to the beer garden and concert halls. As in 1925, the lobby once again accommodates a shop for smaller items. Along with the 2012 renovation of the bar and the brasserie, as well as the beer garden and the adjoining halls, the completion of the hotel has re-created the Volkshaus Basel, with its diversity of uses, as a vibrant and exciting piece of city within the city.

Herzog & de Meuron, 2020

VOLKSHAUS

— BASEL —

