



ASTORIA HOTEL

A TREASURE CHEST WITH A MINIMALIST HEART

**IT'S THE DEFINITION GIVEN
TO THE HISTORIC ASTORIA HOTEL
IN LUCERNE, EXPANDED AND REDESIGNED
BY THE FAMOUS SWISS STUDIO HERZOG
& DE MEURON. MIRRORED FAÇADES
AND AN ESSENTIAL INTERIOR DESIGN**

Lucia Ugge

“ A building is a building, and it can't be read like a book. It doesn't have credits, subtitles or labels as in a photo gallery. In this sense, we are absolutely anti-representational. The strength of our buildings is the immediate, visceral impact that they have on the visitor ”

The association of Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron is a famous one that was further strengthened by the reason for the 2001 Pritzker Architecture Prize, awarded to the pair for the Tate Gallery project in London: “Herzog and de Meuron work with a complementarity that does not allow for distinction. Each of their twenty masterpieces expresses a precious harmony that is understood and celebrated by the choice to honour them with awards together. Their architecture combines the artistic quality of an ancient profession with the fresh approach of the technical abilities of this new century”. Born in Basel, Switzerland, they have been friends since grade school and they both enrolled at the same university, the ETH in Zurich, where they took courses with Lucius Burckhardt, Dolf Schnebli and Aldo Rossi, under whose guidance they arrived at a striking disciplinary autonomy, giving attention to the images of architectural memory. In 1978 they



The exterior with its monolithic glass façade recalling the icy formal cleanliness of the hall and the conference room with the original circular skylight.





established the studio “Herzog & de Meuron Architekten”. Amongst the many projects they have completed, there are also impressive international projects such as the expansion of London’s Tate Gallery for Contemporary Art in the old Bankside power station on the Thames in 2000, the project which won the Pritzker Architecture Prize.

Another example is the spectacular Allianz Arena stadium in Munich, a coliseum of 66,000 seats and 6,500 m² of surface area, containing, amongst other things, shops and restaurants. The futurist external shell is composed of 2,874 diamond-shaped ETFE panels, 2 mm thick, each of which can be lit up individually with different colours. There are also the projects which are about to be finished: the home of the Hamburg Philharmonic and the glass tower of the Schatzalp in Davos, a building measuring 105 metres in height in an unusual glass beehive shape which will become the tallest building in Switzerland; the Prada Epicentre Store in Tokyo and the new MAM in Miami, Florida. Today, the studio is comprised of five partners, and boasts 200 collaborators and branches in various parts of the world. Amongst their many projects, they had designed and completed the most diverse kinds of architecture, but they had yet to design a hotel.

The First Herzog & de Meuron Hotel

Herzog and de Meuron also work in the field of design, as demonstrated by the Compasso d’Oro design award they received in 2004 for the Pipe lamp, designed for Artemide, made of flexible steel tubing covered with clear silicone, and conical light diffuser. A highly innovative project, just like the project for their first hotel, the Astoria. In fact, the historical Lucerne hotel has just been enlarged with a new wing, planned by the two architects, containing 90 high-design bedrooms and with completely redesigned interior spaces. An

The lobby, furnished with circular sofas in white leather and illuminated with white suspended drop chandeliers, all custom made.



PEKING'S STADIUM

The National Stadium in Peking is the latest impressive work by Studio Herzog & de Meuron. The project was the winner of the international competition launched in 2002, thanks to the original solution they proposed, a futuristic “interlacing” architecture, inspired by the weave of bird’s nests. The works, begun in 2003, hosted the XXIX Olympics in Peking this year. The 91,000-seat stadium cost over 3.5 billion yuan (423 million US dollars), and the Chinese have already renamed it “the Bird’s Nest.” The decidedly futuristic project provides for a structure formed by elements that interlace and hold up one another, just like the twigs of a bird’s nest. The façades, stairways and roofs are integrated into this weaving. And just as birds fill in empty spaces with lightweight substances, the spaces between the concrete weave are filled with “inflatable cushions”. The structure is covered with two layers of translucent membranes: the external one covers up the holes to make the covering resistant to weather, the interior one functions as sound proofing. An integral part of the structure is the roof which can be opened and which forms a transparent shell reflecting beams of light on the outside.





important operation, already counted amongst the most celebrated in contemporary hotel planning. Surrounded by mountains and overlooking the Lake of the Four Cantons, Lucerne is the entryway to Central Switzerland. It's a city of squares and churches, famous for the Kapellbrücke, one of the oldest wooden bridges in Europe. But today, Lucerne is also known for its cutting-edge architecture and design, such as the KKL, the futuristic cultural and conference centre designed by French architect Jean Nouvel, who in this very city designed his famous The Hotel. The most recent significant example of the city's contemporary face is, in fact, the new Astoria Hotel. Set amongst the townhouses in the historical heart of Lucerne, the original building, eight stories high, was built in 1957.

Later, it was gradually expanded until it reached its current form of an impressive structure made up of four distinct volumes. The recent expansion is the new, highly modern wing planned by the two Swiss architects, in which the great, white hall located on the first floor acts as a horizontal connection between all of the buildings and gives access to the three main vertical connections; and arranged on the various floors are the 90 bedrooms, the Eastern cuisine restaurant "Thai Garden", the Italian restaurant "La Cucina", and the French

In the bedrooms:
hardwood floors, white
walls, essential
furnishings and a
colourful sofa.





Astoria Hotel Suppliers

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| Client | Urs Karli |
| Architectural Project | Architect Theo Hotz w |
| Restructuring and interior design | Studio Herzog & de Meuron Architekten |
| Furniture and decorative accessories | Selva |
| Bath accessories | Hansgrohe, Antonio Lupi Design |

restaurant “Latino”, as well as the Coffee Shop, the Pravda Dance Club, the various conference rooms and the wellness centre. Not to be left out is the popular panoramic bar “Penthouse”, located high up on the seventh and eighth floors. For over ten years it has been the hub of central Swiss nightlife; today, after the restyling it has also become a piano bar, and it boasts the largest terrace/lounge in Lucerne, with its breathtaking view over the city rooftops.

The architecture of Herzog and de Meuron, which gives great attention to materials and to the application of new construction solutions, enabled this project to become an opportunity for experimentation and research. Without doubt, this is a high-impact building, all glass and steel, with mirror facades reflecting the colours and shapes of the surrounding urban landscape, arousing that “immediate, visceral impact” in those who view it, the designers’ declared intent. One aspect of this impact is the reflection over the entire surface, which at night becomes even more fascinating with the lights of the city. The new space is connected to the others only on the first and seventh floors, which are home to the lobby and the conference centre, respectively.

The floors in between these host the bedrooms and common areas. Some have already called it the “ice cube” due to its compact volume and the rigorous geometry of the shining façades, but it’s also been called a “treasure-chest with a minimalist heart”, because of its essential, white interiors which contribute to its expression of belonging to modernity. “It’s completely exposed to a dialogue with the elements,” explains Jacques Herzog, “and it stands out in the skyline, almost becoming one with the weather conditions: with the rain that flows and quickly slides down the façades, the snow that settles on the glass panels of the large atrium, the wind that slips between the spaces”.

The interior is characterised by rigorous, minimalist tones, focusing on white and light to define sophisticated and impressive environments. An example is the lobby, a space expanded by the “total white” of the flooring, walls, and ceilings, and even the structural elements such as the weight-bearing pillars, which are also painted white.

The space is characterised by the soft, curving lines of the long reception desk, lit from behind; the white leather “atoll” sofas which seem to float on the floor; the intriguing suspension lamps which hang down from the ceiling like enormous dewdrops. Even the furnishings reflect the sense of consistency and formal purity which pervades each environment; in fact, they are all custom-designed by the architects. And in the rooms, too, the walls, furniture and finishing are all strictly white.

The only colourful elements are the cherry hardwood floors and the sofas, in neo-Baroque style, which become the protagonists of the environment with ruby-red upholstery in bold, brilliant tones. In keeping with the latest hotel trend, the bathrooms are not separate from bedroom but rather, in a fluid movement, turn into open spaces positioned at the back of the bed. These, too, are completely white.

