Two Houses in Zurich

Building upon the steep, former garden with compact volumes follows the pattern of the neighbouring detached houses and apartment buildings from the first half of the 20th century. An access ramp as wide as the house, forming a forecourt and space for parking, connects each respective building with the street above. The houses are not specifically tailored to the current owners; rather, they are buildings universal in nature that could also just as easily operate for other living conditions and inhabitants. They can be separated into two duplex apartments of nearly equal size, or they allow - within the current spatial order – the use of a separate small apartment. Further space divisions or the installation of an elevator are also possible.

In the interior, it is a case of raw structure throughout. The walls and ceilings are covered with a skim-coated white plaster, though left unpainted. The “floorings” are made of sealed gypsum subflooring (anhydrite). Wide sliding doors made from wooden panels allow variations in the spatial relationships.

The load-bearing construction consists of concrete floor slabs, masonry, and concrete walls below grade. The exterior stucco, applied to the mineral based insulation, is simply a base screed layer of lime cement. The way of applying the stucco with a broom – indeed, with the structure of a base layer - underlines the sense of rough construction and, in addition, is able to give expression to the “textile-like” character of the facade’s construction.

Large windows with black metal frames are set into the facade like grand “optical instruments”. Towards the west, where one has a view of the city, they are placed in a dense row, while they appear solitarily on the remaining facades. The recessed roof level opens up to the terraces with large window fronts in aluminium. In contrast to the complex, dark, lime cement colour tones of the stucco, the protective coating on the wooden surfaces of the doors and gates is kept in clear, glowing spectral colours.

Like the former allotment gardens, the garden remains planted with fruit and nut trees. Field grasses are seeded inbetween. In the steeper, western part of the parcel, hazelnut and blackberry bushes continue the moderate wilderness in a nearly unchanged form.

G/G May 2011
Credits

Project: Two Houses in Zurich, Switzerland
Spatial Programme: Two detached houses, each with a secondary annex
Commissioned Study: April 1995
Client: Private
Architecture: Annette Gigon / Mike Guyer, Architects, Zurich
Collaborators: Michael Widrig (Project Manager), Michael Bucher
Construction Management: Annette Gigon / Mike Guyer, Architects, Zurich
Collaborator: Michael Widrig
Gross Floor Area (SIA 416): 476 m² House A
473 m² House B
Landscape Architecture: Dieter Kienast, Thomas Steinmann, Zurich
Structural Engineer: Aerni + Aerni Ingenieure AG, Zurich
Colours: Harald F. Müller, Öhningen, Germany
Photography: Heinrich Helfenstein, Zurich