Project

Housing Development and Remodeling, Pflegi-Areal, Zurich, Switzerland

The quality of the building stock of the former hospital ‘Pflegerinnenschule Zürich’ indicated a clear allocation of the new functions – offices and housing – within the existing and newly constructed buildings. It was possible to retain the buildings to the southwest by Pfister Architects from 1933/34 and convert the former hospital wards into offices, while the heterogeneous hospital buildings to the northeast were replaced by housing.

Despite substantial interventions, the goal was to retain the spatial character of the large-scale facility. Akin to the former hospital building complex and the neighboring freestanding houses, the new buildings form a hybrid ensemble between a closed block development and individual building volumes.

Together with the existing buildings, the new housing complex demarcates and defines three large exterior spaces: the garden, the Samaritan Court, and the Carmen Court. The former patients’ garden, with its beautiful trees, was left almost untouched. The Samaritan Court serves as new access area for the underground parking garage and offers drop-off and parking space. The Carmen Court, in place of the former nurses’ garden and lying atop the new parking garage, now stretches across the entire length of the site. The ground here consists of fine gravel as well as large poured concrete slabs, which form a wide access path to the apartment entrances. Willows are planted in large baskets made of steel reinforcement bars and filled with stones and earth. Set atop the garage roof, these baskets form a nutrient-rich habitat as well as providing root space and acting as a counterweight for the trees.

Housing in the newly constructed buildings consists primarily of single-level apartments with generous floor plans. A total of forty-eight apartments with twenty-two different floor plan types offer 2.5 to 6.5 rooms. In addition, nine work studios were built at courtyard level. To cater to contemporary living/working constellations, some ground-level apartments are connected with the courtside studio spaces via internal stairs. Placing the ancillary and service spaces at the center of the apartments permits free circulation, while the load-bearing use of the service core allows for minimal, as well as conventional room divisions. Several apartments have exterior spaces in the form of terraces. Most of them, however, possess a kind of “fresh-air space”, also called a “seasonal room”. It transforms into an open loggia in good weather and can be used as a normal, heated interior space during the rest of the year.

Concrete is used for the basic construction as well as for the interior flooring. Gravel and sand, two ingredients of concrete, form the floor surfaces outside and on the roofs. The load-bearing cores and double-layered exterior walls form the support structure. Generous window openings provide the apartments with ample daylight and a sense of space. The highly perforated wall surfaces become skeleton-like structures and give the apartments – analogous to the existing buildings – a pragmatic, urban air.

Colors applied in the form of mineral-based, highly matt pigments contrast with the unpretentious, commonplace expression of the architectural language. The use of color was developed in collaboration with the artist Adrian Schiess as a means of defining the atmosphere of the outdoor spaces (Carmen Court, garden). Thus, only three of the long façades are painted, while the street front, the short façades, and the reveals were left unpainted. The colors chosen are yellow-green and white in the Carmen Court, and blue toward the garden. The yellow-green tone on the southwest façade of the Carmen Court colors the light and reflects its hue when the sun shines onto the opposite, white-painted façade, thereby “bathing” the entire courtyard space. The blue coat of paint on the garden side mingles with the green of the trees to transform the old garden into a blue-green “landscape space” – right in the middle of the city.

GG, December 2011
Credits

Project: Housing Development and Remodeling, Pflegi-Areal, Zurich

Address: Carmenstrasse 32, 34, 36, 38
Sonnhaldenstrasse 9, 11, 13, 15, 17
8032 Zurich, Switzerland

Spatial Programme: New construction with 48 apartments, 11 studios, 1 doctors surgery; underground parking with 112 parking spaces; remodelling of the existing building (former hospital) into office spaces.

Competition: September 1998 – February 1999, 1st Prize


Client: Stiftung Diakoniewerk Neumünster,
Schweizerische Pflegerinnenschule, Zurich

Architecture: Annette Gigon / Mike Guyer, Architects, Zurich

Collaborators:
Competition: Gaby Kägi, Pascal Müller
Planning/Construction:
New Buildings:
Christian Maggioni (Project Manager), Gaby Kägi, Philippe Vaucher, Ivo Lenherr, Arnault Biou
Existing Buildings:
Christian Maggioni (Project Manager), Eva Geering

Construction Manager
New Buildings: Ruoss Witzig Architects, Zurich

Construction Manager
Existing Buildings: Annette Gigon / Mike Guyer, Architects, Zurich

Collaborators:
Peter Steiner, Andrea Fiechter

Gross Floor Area (SIA 416): 15'199 m²

Landscape Architecture: Zulauf Seippel Schweingruber, Landschaftsarchitekten, Baden

Structural/ Building Services/
Building Physics Engineer: Basler & Hofmann AG, Zurich

Colours: Adrian Schiess, Zurich and Mouans-Sartoux, France

Photography: Heinrich Helfenstein, Zurich
Seraina Wirz, Zürich