Housing Development Neumünsterallee Residence, Zurich, Switzerland

The building turns a corner at the intersection of Neumünsterallee and Signaustrasse, creating a sunny garden area between its two wings that faces southeast. In addition, portions cut out of the overall volume form small courtyards on three sides, resulting in a meandering shape that links outside and inside spaces. One of the cutouts faces the morning sun and the garden, another the noonday sun and the avenue of plane trees, and the third the evening sun and the gardens of the villas opposite. Bridge-like balconies frame the courtyards, emphasizing the main volume of the building and, at the same time, offering views into its depths. Thanks to these ‘balcony bridges,’ the courtyards, which measure approximately 7.5 by 8.5 meters, receive daylight not only from above but from the side as well.

The apartments angle around the courtyards, thereby substantially enlarging the sense of space therein. The three main stories accommodate two 5.5-room units facing the East and West Courts and two 4.5-room units facing the South Court; the top floor holds one 4-room unit facing the East Court, one 2.5-room unit facing the West Court, and a 7-room unit facing the South Court.

The courtyards allow optimal use to be made of the building’s considerable depth, because they ensure that the living spaces as well as the kitchens and the large bathrooms can all be supplied with natural daylight. The heart of each flat is a spacious hallway. Laterally illuminated from the courtyard, it is a link between the private bedrooms and the living room. Its use is not defined, but it can function, for example, as a dining room or study, or provide space for children to play. The living room opens onto the lateral terrace and the outside and has direct access to the kitchen, which also faces the courtyard.

The ground floor is lowered slightly below street level so that a half flight of stairs and a ramp lead down to the large lobby of the building, which is illuminated from the central courtyard and provides access to the two circulation cores. There are also studios that can be accessed directly from the lobby and rented as office space or for recreational activities.

The load-bearing structure of the building consists of concrete walls and slabs. Wood/metal windows, 20-centimeter-thick thermal insulation, and plaster skim on rear-ventilated cladding slabs form the shell of the building, which meets the Minergie® (energy-saving) standard.

In collaboration with the artist Adrian Schiess, the walls in the courtyards were coated with silvery paint to ‘guide the light,’ while the outside façades are painted a darker gray. The lobby is rendered in a luminous copper color, and the spectrum of iridescent ‘light-suffused’ shades continues inside the flats, where the doors of the built-in wardrobes have been given a high-gloss, mother-of-pearl finish.

A pool of water in the central courtyard reflects the light from the sky and forms the focal point of the entrance area. The other courtyards are planted with tall, delicately leaved ash trees. The slightly staggered levels of the garden each have their own vegetation. Ground-covering evergreen shrubs and grouped bushes form together with the preserved garden wall and wrought-iron fence the traditional front garden area. The area to the southeast, designated both for adults and for children at play, consists of a grassy lawn with groups of trees.

G/G, December 2011
Credits

Project: Housing Development Neumünsterallee, Zurich
Address: Signaustrasse 10
8032 Zurich, Switzerland
Spatial Programme: Housing Complex as angled building volume with atriums
framed by bridge-like balconies; 15 apartments, 2 studios, and
underground parking.

Competition: Spring 2003, 1st Prize

Client: Personalvorsorgestiftung der SV Group, Dübendorf
Client's Representative: Daniel Nyfeler

Architecture: Annette Gigon / Mike Guyer, Architects, Zurich

Collaborators:
Competition: Markus Lüscher
Planning/Construction: Kim Sneyders (Project Manager from
2005), Markus Lüscher (Project Manager until end 2004),
Lorenzo Igual, Markus Seiler

General Contractor: Karl Steiner AG, Zurich
Form of Contract: Traditional (Generalunternehmung)

Gross Floor Area (SIA 416): 4'799 m2

Landscape Architecture: Schweingruber Zulauf Landschaftsarchitekten, Zurich

Structural Engineer: Dr. Lüchinger + Meyer Bauingenieure AG, Zurich

Electrical Engineer: Elkom Partner AG, Chur

Building Services Engineer: 3-Plan Haustechnik AG, Winterthur

Building Physics Engineer: Bakus Bauphysik und Akustik GmbH, Zurich

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

Graphic Design: Trix Wetter, Zurich

Photography: Lucas Peters, Zurich