

MUCHENSTEIN GYNASIUM
MÜCHENSTEIN, SWITZERLAND
2015

Münchenstein is a municipality in the Swiss canton of Basel. The current high school (or *Gymnasium*) building is an early 1970s Brutalist structure to be renovated and extended with an additional wing. The design of the proposed new wing aims to establish a clear urban relation with the existing building, yet granting it strong and autonomous character.

The extension is thought as a compact body with clear edges that establishes a hierarchy within the remaining spaces thereby creating another perceived 'face' to the educational complex with the new wing acting as a hinge. Instead of a 'front' and a 'back', the design establishes a tension between the main entrance in the existing building accessible from the Baselstrasse, on the West and the new wing's entrance accessible from Muttenzerstrasse on the East.

The Villa Ehinger Park envelops the resulting complex and the intermediate space, defined by the two back façades becomes a courtyard not unlike those within a city block. The building's polyhedral shape results from the cross between an ideal plan developed as three parallel bands along a NS axis and the urban constraints applicable to the plot. The resulting prism has its corners cut-off, which allows to decompress the space between the two buildings on one hand, and to better define the entrance from Muttenzerstrasse, on the other. This option to create an entrance towards the corner of Muttenzerstrasse and Hardstrasse is highlighted by the proposal of an arrival square that gives urban meaning to the eastern corner of the Park. This square, in turn, activates the role of the Muttenzerstrasse as an optimal arrival point for pedestrians and cyclists. Overall, the building presence within the urban fabric helps to create meaningful interstitial spaces between the built masses, while adhering to the principles set in the formal strategy for Villa Ehinger park.

The canteen is located at the ground floor level and opened towards the East. The kitchen and lager are accessible through an alley along the south edge of the plot, along with the loading docks and lift to the basement technical areas. The large group room is placed in the North side, facing the existing Park. The main hall, which splits in a half-floor to connect with the existing building is the binding element of these spaces and is sufficiently wide and flexible for exhibitions, or as an expansion of the confining spaces. This versatility is made possible by the amount of natural light which is injected into the core, from above. The Vorplatz Sport, in the basement is accessible from the main hall, to which it is directly connected by a flight of stairs. There, it benefits from a split-level to create a higher space that extends to the gym. Other spaces, like the locker rooms and the technical areas are compressed and reduced to a minimum clearance. The sports areas open directly towards the courtyard between the existing building and the new wing, therefore allowing for an autonomous use. The first and second floors are accessible through a dual core of vertical circulation placed in opposite corners of the main hall. Teaching rooms as well as their subsidiary spaces, are located there; organized around a central bay, wide enough to allow a great deal of flexibility for the use of this central space, whose practical use is once again made possible thanks to the natural light admitted from above.

Location: Baselstrasse 33, Münchenstein, Switzerland

Client: Munchenstein Municipality

Architects-of-record: Stähelin Architekten (Basel) AG

Scope of services: Architecture

Project brief: High school extension building

Gross built area: 4,110 sq. m

Project status: 2015 (competition, 2nd-tier)