

Bregenzerwald, Vorarlberg

The Bregenzerwald is located in the very west of Austria, in the state of Vorarlberg. Close to Lake Constance, a neighbour of Germany, Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein.

Mountains, pastures, forests, 22 picturesque villages, 30,000 inhabitants and almost that many cows: that is Bregenzerwald at a cursory glance. The region holds a wealth of surprises for those who trouble to take a closer look at it and its inhabitants, however. Where one might expect to find a typical alpine down-to-earth mentality, new ideas are cheerfully springing up. Age-old knowledge and skills are proving to offer a solid foundation for innovation. It is not a desire for novelty that is inspiring new developments: new objects and approaches created in Bregenzerwald very often meet both high aesthetic and functional standards.

The successful, courageous blend of tradition and modernity is clearly presented by the architecture and craftsmanship. Both disciplines are closely interwoven, and are a symbol of that which the locals of the Bregenzerwald are experts in: appreciation of art, of beauty, the creation of pleasure, both sophisticated and practical. This interplay is both visible and perceptible in many places:

Architecture and craftsmanship

From the bus stop to the hotel, from the kindergarten to the residential building, Bregenzerwald's approach to building is surprisingly different. Lots of wood and yet strikingly modern. Sleekly elegant and energy efficient at the same time. The new buildings look great and help create an extremely pleasant residential ambience.

Contemporary architecture

Glass and wood are the building materials favoured by contemporary architects. Wood has always been used as a building material in the Bregenzerwald, since it grows in abundance in the forests. And so architects and craftsmen in the Bregenzerwald have acquired exceptional skills in dealing with wood. Then as now, they go to great lengths to ensure that the wood is cut at the right sign, and to leave it to dry out slowly in order to then process it in accordance with its true nature. The sun and the rain give the façades their colour over the years. The natural wooden appearance and soft wax bestow furniture with its very own character.

The new buildings are plain, occasionally even bordering on the provocative, with an amazing wealth of spatial and functional qualities. The high demands made on the aesthetics go hand-in-hand with those made on energy efficiency and sustainability. Renewable energy is used on a wide scale for heating and hot water: solar cells and photovoltaic equipment are visible on many houses. Geothermal heat and wood are also used for these purposes. The ecologically valuable and practical building materials as well as the conscious use of energy have a pleasant effect on the indoor climate, for example.

Since the new buildings are based on old building traditions, an exciting dialogue emerges. Private houses and hotels alike built according to modern construction principles abound in all towns.

Werkraum Bregenzerwald – a cooperation of 83 craftspeople

Werkraum Bregenzerwald is a craft and trade association established in 1999, uniting craftsmen of different guilds, promoting cooperation and exchange of ideas. Today, it consists of 83 members representing different crafts and trades such as carpentry, cabinet making, metal work, plumbing, electrical engineering, upholstery, construction, clothing, shoemaking, goldsmith and other service sectors. Most workshops are small enterprises with fewer than 10 employees. The association is run by a headquarter with a CEO and a board of 7 directors – all of them owner of crafts enterprises, representing the different branches and subregions.

As a joint platform, the Werkraum organises permanent and mobile exhibitions, trainee programs to make crafts attractive for young people and public relations. Since 2013 the Werkraum points the way forward for the culture of craft techniques in a new building – the Werkraum House, designed by the famous Swiss architect Peter Zumthor as a showcase and meeting point. Peter Zumthor is an apprenticed cabinet maker himself and his cooperation with the craftspeople of the Bregenzerwald goes back to one of his best known projects the Kunsthaus Bregenz (1996), the Columba in Köln and further more.

Handwerk+Form

Handwerk+Form is one of the most important activities of Werkraum Bregenzerwald. It is a competition uniting local craftsmen with international designers and architects. The competition originated in 1991, when the Craft and Trade Association of the community of Andelsbuch in Bregenzerwald celebrated its bicentennial anniversary. For this occasion, the Association wanted to present a contemporary image of the trade with foresight. A project group in cooperation with designer Harry Metzler came up with the idea of a competition bringing together craftsmen and designers. It was so successful that what was a single jubilee event became a triennial tradition since 2000 with Werkraum Bregenzerwald as organizer.

Handwerk+Form is held by the seventh time in 2015, with 115 submissions from 84 designers/planners including submissions from Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Finland in collaboration with 76 workshops from the region of Bregenzerwald. An international jury judged the submitted works based on the following criteria: aesthetic form, adequate use of material, functionality and suitability for daily use. Ten prizes and 25 recognitions were awarded.

The exhibition Handwerk+Form following the competition shows all submitted works in various locations within the community of Andelsbuch. Old workshops (a bakery, a blacksmith's foundry, a sawmill, a butcher's shop and barns) are adopted as exhibition spaces. The ambience of the old buildings adds an interesting light to the modern exhibition, reminding the visitors of a long craftsman's tradition in Bregenzerwald. Visitors can stroll from one location to another, with time for reflection and discussion. Works designed for outside use are exhibited along the way. Simultaneous to the exhibition a journal is published documenting all works.

Handwerk+Form not only serves to revitalize the local tradition and industry, but also has the potential of becoming an impetus for modern designers.

During the Exhibition of Handwerk+Form the Werkraum House serves as meeting and info point, with a shop and a child's construction site.

Opening Hours

Tu – Sa: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Su, Mo and public holidays closed

Admission

Adults: € 7,50

Reductions (Students, Apprentice, 15 People and more): € 5,00

guided tours

15 people and more

€ 7,00 + reduced admission per person

Reductions (Students, Apprentice): € 5,00 + reduced admission per person

groups with less than 15 people

€ 105,00 flat + reduced admission per person

Further information:

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