

Press Release. Werkraum Bregenzerwald

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 85 craftspeople

The close, productive interplay between architecture and craftsmanship enjoys a long tradition in the Bregenzerwald. Many of the architects come from families of craftsmen, or are themselves trained craftsmen. This has a stimulating effect on the cooperation. Joiners, carpenters, smiths, stove fitters and painters are not simply the “skivvies” – they are specialised partners in the development of the best solution. And so, parallel to the new architecture, an independent, design-orientated craftsmanship culture has developed in the Bregenzerwald, whose works are popular both at home and abroad.

Around 85 of the most innovative craftsmen – from the joiner through to the textile designer – have joined forces in the Bregenzerwald Werkraum. As a joint platform, the Werkraum organises exhibitions, competitions, lectures, and is dedicated to research and development. The famous Swiss architect Peter Zumthor is currently planning a building especially for the Werkraum group in Andelsbuch. Peter Zumthor is an apprenticed carpenter himself and his cooperation with the craftspeople of the Bregenzerwald goes back to one of his best known projects the Kunsthhaus Bregenz (1996), the Columba in Köln and further more. The first event took place around the exhibition of Handwerk+Form 2012 – in the shell of the new building, the group will move in in 2013.

Handwerk+Form 2012

Since 1991 Handwerk+Form has succeeded in showing the achievements of the best Bregenzerwald craftsmanship. One of the secrets of Handwerk+Form is its special presentation in a historical environment, that sets the movement clearly apart from international conventional exhibition events.

The large-scale exhibition and design show Handwerk+Form (craft+form) is hosted in the small village of Andelsbuch. In its 6th edition 110 pieces have been submitted, all of them created by Bregenzerwald craftsmen. The guidelines call for a craftsperson and a designer to team up in producing a prototype of highest standard both in craftsmanship and formal design. Prizes have been awarded to the best pieces in the competition which is held in the run-up to the show. With this triennial competition the Werkraum provides support for a vivid crafts scene whilst giving it a publicity platform and stimulating further developments in design and crafts. In the new Werkraum House selected works will be put on view all year long.

Werkraum House

Showcase and meeting point for craftsmanship

On 20 February 2012, after 3 and a half years of intensive planning, the craftspeople of „Werkraum Bregenzerwald“ celebrated the start of the construction of their new house in Andelsbuch. The architect, Peter Zumthor, inaugurated a sample setting on the construction site by presenting up to date models in different sizes. The bare brickwork was the location of the prize ceremony of the sixth edition of the design competition „Handwerk+Form“ in autumn 2012. The finishing of the werkraum house is scheduled for Spring 2013. The expected costs of the building are 3.2 million euro.

The Werkraum House project in detail

Design	In August 2008 a contract to design a house for the „Werkraum Bregenzerwald“ is awarded to the Swiss architect Peter Zumthor. Zumthor is not only an architect of international reputation but is also strongly dedicated to craftsmanship. His concept for the Werkraum House is based on two founding principles: the house as a meeting point and the house as a showcase. A big wooden roof represents the idea of the house being a meeting point in the valley. The glass front serves as the showcase for the crafts created by members of the Werkraum.
Location	The house is located in Andelsbuch, right next to the old railway station and the tracks of the former „Bregenzerwald Bahn“. Its 700 square meters will serve as location for exhibitions, seminars and presentations as well as open space for social interaction.
Construction	The basement will be a solid construction. The stairways are also made of concrete. On the ground floor 14 wooden, pin-ended columns shape a wreath and, together with 3 concrete towers, they provide for a zoning of the hall. The front is made of triple insulating glass. The flat roof is a girder grid construction made of wood.
Mock up	1:1 models of parts of the house were displayed on the construction site. Building full-scale and detailed so-called „mock-ups“ forms part of Peter Zumthor’s painstaking process of design.
Basic data	building area : 1500 m ² Andelsbuch, Hof 800, Bregenzerwald Basement : 780 m ² First Floor : 760 m ² Length of the building : 55,5 m Width of the building : 14,1 m Height of the building : 8,04 m Roof area : 72,6 x 20,8 m
Construction sum	€ 3.200.000

Further informations :

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November 2012