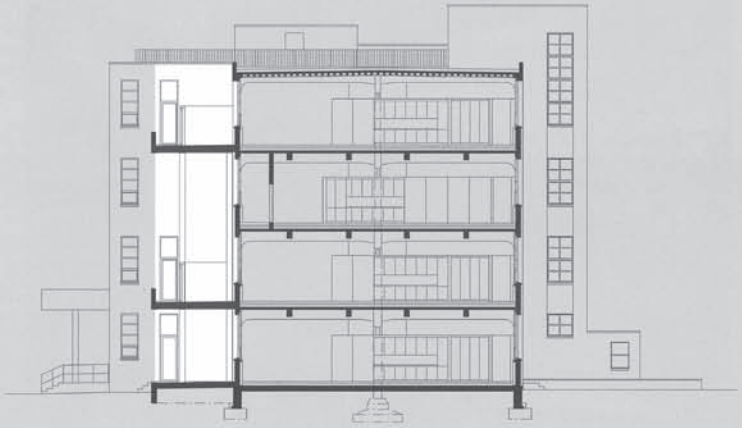
Add or

Transforming an old factory building into a residential complex necessitates an increase in the number of access routes. These can be connected to the outside of the building or cut out of the existing volume. The former Hug factory in Dulliken, converted by Adrian Streich Architects, is an example of the first option. Diederendirrix adopted the second strategy in its makeover of a former Philips factory in Eindhoven.



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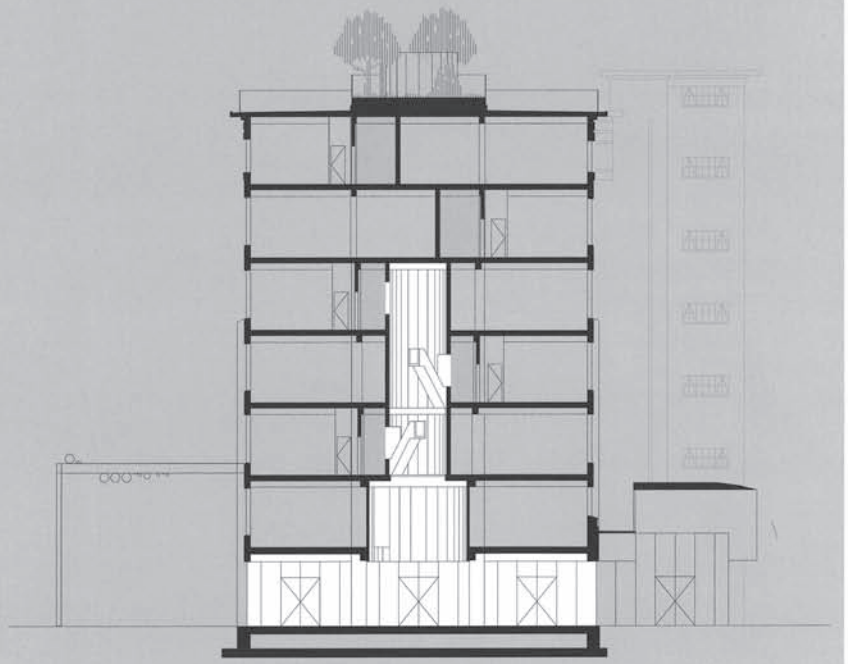
Long Section

Subtract



Housing

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Big Shoes to Fill

Adrian Streich Architects converted an industrial monument built during the heyday of modernism into an apartment complex.

Long Section → Adrian Streich Architects

'Like Sleeping Beauty's prince, we woke this building with a kiss,' says project manager Roman Brantschen. He's referring to Hug, a shoe factory that lay vacant for 30 years in Dulliken, a small Swiss municipality about halfway between Basel and Zurich. Three years ago, when Adrian Streich Architects was asked to convert the factory, the building and its surroundings were in a sorry state. The grounds were overgrown with brambles, birch trees and various grasses. And because both the interior and the exterior of the building had been exposed to the elements for quite some time, the concrete skeleton had suffered considerable damage. 'A major challenge lay in finding a way to preserve this supporting structure,' says Brantschen.

As a sort of guardian angel, estate agent Markus Ehrat had bought the factory, an important example of modernism, and saved it from further decline. 'I have a deep affinity for old factory buildings,' says Ehrat, a man responsible for having had two similar Swiss businesses converted into housing complexes. When purchasing an old building, one should keep two things in mind: the quality of the skeleton and any requirements imposed by legislation governing historic buildings.

Designed by engineer Robert Schild and realized in 1932, the 'Hugi' – a term of affection bestowed on the building by the local population – was touted at the time as 'a factory based on the latest insights into construction, with every conceivable type of ventilation and lighting equipment for good hygiene'. Large windows composed of a classic arrangement of rectangular panes fill the main façade of the 100-m-long factory. Conforming to the style of the existing fenestration, Adrian Streich Architects installed new, small, wooden window frames with triple glazing, while managing to maintain the quality of the elegant building volume, with its slender window profiles.

Production halls, which make up the lion's share of the premises, are 4 m in height. 'That generous dimension,' says Ehrat, 'gives a new feel to domestic life.' Thanks to the 15-m span of each level, daylight enters the apartments from two sides. In organizing the factory into housing units, the architects took the monolithic reinforced-concrete skeleton (an example of the so-called Hennebique System) as their point of departure. They allowed the building's handsome octagonal columns, which support tapered beams, to remain visible in the interior even after the conversion.

An extension on the south side contains the main stairwell. The familiar owl that was once the logo of the Swiss shoe brand adorns the exterior wall of this extension. The lime-green façade also refers to an early example of 'corporate identity' and the industrial history of Switzerland. Owing to the preservation of these elements, well known in this area, the building remains a point of reference for railway passengers travelling on the busy line between Zurich and Olten.

To limit noise pollution caused by trains, a new single-level building divided into business units was erected parallel to the former factory. Together, the two buildings delineate a pleasant green 'courtyard' with paths and small benches. On the north side, a covered car park borders the complex.

At first glance, new additions to the north side of the listed building are not recognizable as such. Running the entire length of the former factory are two galleries that project some distance from the wall. Columns supporting these walkways have the same rhythm as those inside the factory building, but, like a sort of scaffolding, the new columns are detached from the façade. 'The galleries are an extension of the existing concrete skeleton,' says Brantschen. 'They allowed us to keep the appearance of the south façade on the railway side virtually intact.' At ground level, the lower walkway provides a roof for a spacious terrace, which doubles as an entrance to the apartments here. Galleries on the first and third floors include outdoor areas that are separated by screens.

On the second floor, the corridor that lends access to the apartments is integrated into the existing volume. Slender window profiles visible from this corridor give a good impression of the former industrial architecture. A new glazed wall separates the apartments from the corridor, allows daylight to enter the residences, and opens their interiors to a view of the north. But the main orientation of the apartments is to the south, where the listed status of the building prohibits the addition of balconies.

Thanks to high ceilings and large windows, natural light penetrates deep into the apartments. It is all but impossible for tenants to view the outdoor surroundings from inside, however, without standing up; from a sitting position, all they can see is the balustrade. 'Not only did Hug's employees need as much light as possible,' says Brantschen, 'but by placing windows above their heads, the architect made sure they would not be distracted from their work.'

The spatial character of the former factory halls is almost tangible in the new apartments. On the basis of the existing grid, the architects developed three types of apartments, in addition to those units that occupy the east end of the building. Apartments vary in size from a 76-m² two-room unit to a 146-m² unit with two to four rooms. The use of lightweight building elements enabled flexible layouts. Ehrat explains that tenants 'can determine the number of rooms and the arrangement of their apartments'. A compact plywood volume clad in synthetic panelling contains kitchen, bathroom and built-in cupboards; it serves as a partition between the living and sleeping areas (each unit has at least one lockable bedroom). This large piece of 'furniture' is considerably lower than the 4-m-high ceiling. Panes of glass have been inserted into the upper section of the bathroom walls.

The question remains: How hard is it to find tenants for such apartments in a small town like Dulliken? 'One-third of the units are currently occupied,' says Brantschen. Obviously, it's going to take a bit of time and effort to fill the 'Hugi'. 'For a small municipality like Dulliken,' he adds, 'we've put a relatively large number of new housing units on the market in a short time, and the demand for loft apartments is not as great as it is in Zurich, for example.' By offering apartments of varying sizes, with flexible layouts, Ehrat hopes to attract a broad range of tenants: singles for the smaller units in most cases, and families for the larger apartments and the ground-floor units with gardens.

The wilderness that gradually took over the factory grounds during the decades of vacancy inspired the plans made by Schmid Landscape Architects of Zurich. Wild roses and brambles line the borders of entrances. Gravel paths cut through grassy lawns, and there are flowerbeds, solitary oaks, black pines, birch trees and aspens. The garden is an interpretation of history as 'organized chaos'. ←

adrianstreich.ch

↗ The larger apartments are 1.5 times wider than the smaller units.

→ A compact volume with built-in kitchen, bathroom and cupboards separates the living area from the bedrooms.

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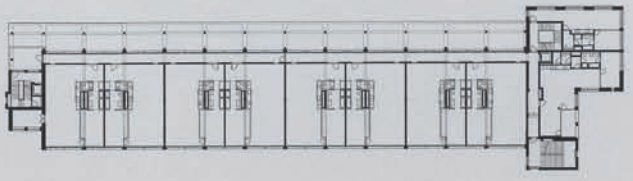

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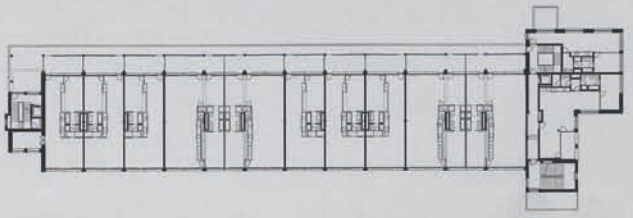

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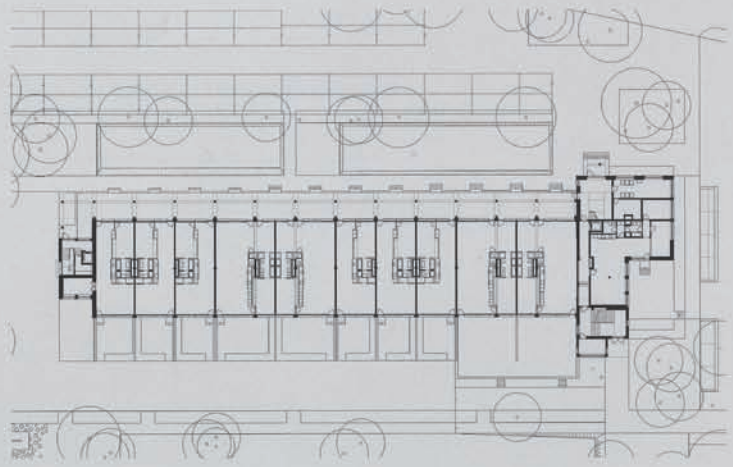

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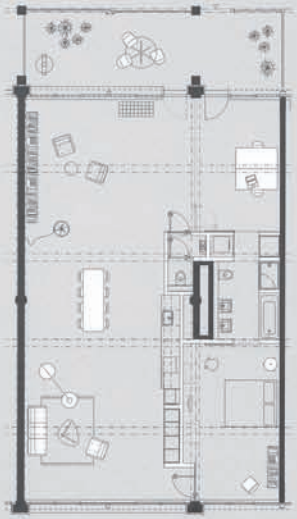
Long Section → Adrian Streich Architects

Cross Section

Plans



↑ Example of the floor plan of a smaller apartment.

↖ Example of the floor plan of a larger apartment.

Housing → Dulliken | Switzerland

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