



↑ Arcade area with entrance to courtyard and stairs to the rooftop terrace



↑ Restaurant on the western street corner ↑↑ Office space on the first floor

Commercial centre, Zurich

Pool Architects have re-established the connection between the Lochergut Centre and its urban context.

SWITZERLAND — TEXT: AXEL SIMON, PHOTOGRAPHY: THEODOR STALDER

The ensemble by architect Karl Flatz was already controversial when it opened in 1966. The series row of six high-rise apartment buildings plus a few lower buildings forms a veritable 'urban mountain range' right in the middle of Zurich. Nonetheless, the 350 or so cleverly laid-out, mostly subsidized, flats are still very popular. The combination of urban anonymity and breathtaking views proved particularly attractive to intellectuals – Max Frisch and Pipilotti Rist lived here. And there's no doubt that everyone appreciates the low rents.

Unlike the apartments, which were modernized in phases, the rest of the ensemble was much less well maintained. The dark shopping passageway ran parallel to two lively streets rather than connecting them. Passers-by avoided it, and some entrances to the rooftop terrace were partially cut off. The bank and post office eventually moved out; the supermarket closed its basement, as did the restaurant. The city, the building's owner, had trouble finding tenants for the shops. In 2002, having decided on a radical overhaul, it organized a three-way invited competition that was won by Pool Architects.

At the core of their project, which is based on the existing shell, is a programmatic switch: the big supermarket, with its inhospitably closed facades, has changed places with the light- and visibility-starved shops along the internal passage-

way. The street is now lined by ten new shops with big display windows and the welcoming entrance to the supermarket – a double-height courtyard which also contains a stair to the rooftop terrace. The terrace has acquired concrete paving and three islands of birch trees enclosed by wide wooden benches that invite office staff and local residents to sit or lie on them. A ramp leads down into the green courtyard. A continuous floor of offices replaces the restaurant superstructure and the front part of its pavement terrace. This space will be subdivided to suit future tenants.

The emphatically horizontal building mass contrasts with the verticality of the towers. It stretches the entire length of the block and thus, unlike its predecessor, beyond the eastern end of the high-rise ensemble. This makes it about a third longer than the latter so that it appears to hold out its hand to the district beyond the adjacent railway cutting. The two-storey structure is topped by a striking roof. Prefabricated slabs of pale concrete form its closed front faces and the roof-end fascia on either side. The facade below follows a logic of its own: on the office level it is glazed and bends outwards at both ends, while the freely organized street-level facade appears to be shaped by pedestrian routes. Layering the over one-hundred-metre-long slab in this way reduces its bulk and links it spatially with the street, distantly recalling a classical arcade. A separating hedge was removed, and the pre-existing row of trees and new tree clusters at the sides now stand in a more open space that also encompasses the forecourt of the high-rises.

The loadbearing structure of the office and retail centre is visible between the glass facade and the fascia of the roof. A novel type of concrete coffered ceiling resting on massive concrete beams lends character to the offices; the round recesses fulfil an acoustic function and some open up into skylights. The green roof is designed as a fifth facade with circles of white crushed glass around the skylights creating an abstract picture.

The concrete slabs used as roof-end fascias not only pay

homage to the building's modernist origins. A closer look reveals that the grooves in their surface are of different depths. On sunny days this produces a wavy effect, somewhat softening the impact of the facade. On the most important corner in terms of urban design, where several streets converge, the building mass has been eroded to make space for a small square and the new Lochergut Bistro. Gracing the roof line on this corner is the centre's new signage: a light installation by Berlin artist Olaf Nicolai, consisting of nine whitish cubes. At night they glow in a variety of constantly changing colours, every so often spelling the name Lochergut. ←



↑ First floor

LOCHERGUT CENTRE, 2005–2006

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