



# The perfect blend of old and new

**Zurich-based architectural practice Pfister Schiess Tropeano & Partner Architekten AG impeccably masters the art of combining beautiful old buildings with forward-thinking installations necessary for the security of the future.**

TEXT: SONJA IRANI | PHOTOS: PFISTER SCHIESS TROPEANO & PARTNER ARCHITEKTEN AG

In today's crisis-ridden architectural industry, it's not always easy to establish an architectural practice and then stay afloat over the years. Talent and qualifications are needed, of course, as is the ability to adapt.

The architects that really stand out nowadays are the ones who are not afraid to embark on a project with a particular idea in mind and then totally discard this first idea because the circumstances have changed.

Another important factor that sets one architectural practice apart from another is a varied portfolio too. In Switzerland, celebrated architect's office Pfister Schiess Tropeano & Partner Architekten AG is clearly a company that embraces a challenge and can present an impressive portfolio including many distinctive projects and prizes. "In job interviews with new applicants we always hear that it is our versatility that makes our architectural practice so different from





Left & above:  
Villa Patumbah. Photos: Pfister Schiess Tropeano  
Bottom right: Jumbo Arbon. Visualisation: Vis-Steffen-3d

others," says Rita Schiess, one of the main architects at Pfister Schiess Tropeano & Partner Architekten. "We work on entirely new constructions as well as on old buildings, investment buildings and cultural landmarks. And we do both the planning and the realization of these projects." Within the German-speaking Swiss architecture market, it has become particularly important to set one's company apart from the competition as Rita Schiess recounts: "The market is small and has clear boundaries. The fact that the same players encounter each other in different constellations again and again is this market's strength as well as its

weakness. Something we've noticed is that the competition is getting increasingly fierce, as many architects become better experts in their field. At the same time, traditionally craft-oriented architecture faces new challenges due to the fact that the financial crisis has made property an attractive investment object once again."

#### Flexibility is key

Given the competitive nature of the market, it is crucial for any architectural practice to act with flexibility, so that plans can be changed quickly if an unforeseen factor suddenly arises. Luckily, flexibility is a core strength of

Pfister Schiess Tropeano & Partner Architekten. Their highly qualified masterminds often have to think outside the box as every building task is different. The main question the architects have to ask themselves every time is whether or not an already existing building can continue to 'live'. That's why they simply cannot use the same procedure for every project. "Instead, a rational and architectural design analysis determines our approach to a particular project," explains Schiess. "The complexity of building tasks has grown a lot. New constructions usually require conversions and the other way round, the boundaries between pure new construction and pure conversion increasingly combine and disappear." This is precisely why Pfister Schiess Tropeano & Partner Architekten's website

simply says that the architecture designed by their team is precise, persistent, economical, quick and always exciting. This sentence captures the fundamental difficulty of an architectural plan. "In particular, that's pursuing the most different design sketches under pressure and over the duration of several years," adds Schiess. "What really helps us to do this is the variety of our building tasks and the internal discussions in our office."

#### Villa Patumbah

One example of how Pfister Schiess Tropeano & Partner Architekten have solved the numerous challenges of a complex historical building restoration is embodied in the Villa Patumbah in Zurich – a project conducted between 2010 and 2013. Originally built between 1883 and 1885 by Swiss merchant Karl Fürchtegott Grob, who had made his fortune on tobacco plantations in Sumatra, the villa combines the historical architecture of the time with its owner's exotic vision. Elements of Gothic, Baroque,



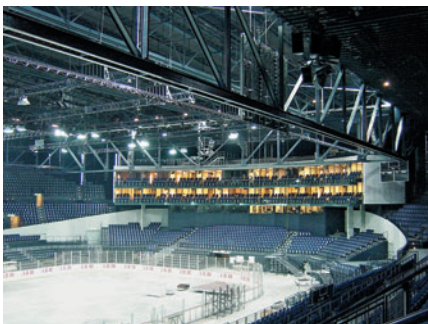




Renaissance, East Asia, Art Nouveau, Swiss Domestic Revival and the Industrial Age can all be found within the beautiful building, which nowadays also serves as the head office of the Swiss Heritage Society. Because the technical equipment installed in the 19th century was long out of date and various conversions had damaged installations and paintings, the project

proved a highly tricky one for the architects. They had to find ways to renovate the façade, the roof and the terraces. They also had to start a long quest for the ideal solution of how to integrate modern technology in a manner that would be invisible and cause no damage. Finally they had to unite all the rooms, including the adjoining rooms, into the all-encompassing design

concept. Due to the many artistic connections that were only discovered when the work had already begun, many measures had to be rethought several times. This required the architects to adopt a way of thinking, which instead of having a reliable, valid project in mind was navigated by an internal compass. In the end, this led to an impressive result.





Left & below: Hotel Paxmontana, Flüeli-Ranft Obwalden.  
Photos: Francesca Giovanelli



### Winning ideas for a better future

On other occasions, Pfister Schiess Tropeano & Partner Architekten has even helped to resolve a conflict. In Arbon, Switzerland, the Swiss Heritage Society objected to the construction of a new DIY superstore by project owner Jumbo. The reason behind this was the existence of halls designed by acclaimed architect Georges-

Pierre Dubois right behind the head-end building. Jumbo was planning to demolish these historically important halls because this was seen as the only way to make room for its newer, much bigger product range. But Pfister Schiess Tropeano & Partner Architekten then conducted a feasibility study, which showed that thanks to a different driveway onto the premises, the halls could be fully integrated into the new construction site. The Swiss Heritage Society has since given up its resistance and both parties are on the right track to come to an agreement.

Similar tact and sensitivity were displayed

when Pfister Schiess Tropeano & Partner Architekten renovated, extended and converted the 100-year-old, six-storey wooden building of Hotel Paxmontana in central Switzerland between 2006 and 2011. "As a matter of course we used a wooden construction to make the building earthquake-resistant. That was quite a challenge," says Schiess. "In January 2015 we will submit our

application for the prize of earthquake-resistant construction in the historic monuments category. If we win this prize, we will naturally be very proud."

Meanwhile, the architects have enjoyed success beyond Switzerland. One example was the commission to convert a Grade II listed late Georgian/early Victorian Nash type house in the conservation area of Little Venice, London where their precise planning style "à la Swiss" really stood out. "Our proposal to integrate the technical equipment in a similar way as in the Villa Patumbah was seen as very innovative in England," recalls Schiess.

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Above:

House in Little Venice, London. Photo: Edmund Sumner

Bottom, from left to right:

Hallenstadion, Zürich. Photo: Giorgio Hoch

Hallenstadion, Zürich. Photo: Onorato & Krebs

Central station, Schaffhausen.

Photo: Pfister Schiess Tropeano

Hamel, Arbon. Visualisation: Raumgleiter GmbH

Residential project, Rapperswil-Jona.

Visualisation: 3D Kraftwerk GmbH

