Atelier Peter Zumthor to present the Fondation Beyeler’s extension project –
A new public park will be created in the heart of Riehen

On Thursday, May 4, 2017, the Swiss architect Peter Zumthor is presenting the project for the extension to the Fondation Beyeler in Riehen/Basel. The extension will be constructed on the previously private land of the Iselin-Weber Park, which adjoins the Fondation Beyeler. A new public park will thus be created in the heart of Riehen. The Fondation Beyeler will thereby create a group of museum buildings that satisfies the needs of a visitor-friendly museum. The size of the parks will be doubled.

In the 21st century, a museum is a place for human beings and no longer just for objects. It is a social space in which visitors can have experiences on their own or together with others. People come to a museum for education, entertainment, recreation, encounters and interaction. Together with general exhibition activities, the organization of cultural events and art education are some of the core functions of a visitor-friendly museum today. Renzo Piano’s museum building does not, however, contain any suitable rooms for such events, so they have had to be held in the museum’s galleries. That has involved a considerable organizational and technical effort, as well as considerable restrictions and extra costs. This is a key reason for the planned extension. A second reason is the lack of galleries where, in addition to the active exhibition program, the constantly growing collection of modern and contemporary art can be permanently presented. There is insufficient space to exhibit donations and works permanently loaned by artists, from artists’ estates and from private collections. The planned extension is therefore essential for the Fondation Beyeler’s successful development.

A unique opportunity for extension has now arisen with the acquisition of the neighboring Iselin-Weber Park. That park adjoins the Fondation Beyeler’s park to the south, beside the museum restaurant, being separated only by the Bachtelenweg. The extension will be constructed along the Bachtelenweg, thereby permitting the connection of the two parks. The previously private Iselin-Weber Park with its mature trees and a water lily pond will thus be made accessible to the public. Through the extension, a new recreational area will be created for the general public in the heart of Riehen. The link between the Fondation Beyeler and the centre of the village will be strengthened. As in the past, the Bachtelenweg will remain accessible for neighboring residents, farmers, bikers and walkers going to the Langen Erlen.

At the end of a design study involving eleven renowned architectural firms from all over the world, a body of international experts unanimously selected the Atelier Peter Zumthor to realize the extension project for the Fondation Beyeler.

Peter Zumthor’s design distributes the various functions between three relatively small buildings and is consequently a project that is adapted to Riehen’s village-like character and that blends harmoniously into the natural environment. Zumthor plans a simple service building for administration and deliveries, a transparent pavilion for events and a House for Art. Together, they create a subtle link between the two parks, which were designed by the same landscape architect, Jean-François Caillat, in the early 19th century.

With the extension project of the Atelier Peter Zumthor, Renzo Piano’s existing modern museum building and the historic buildings from the 18th century, the Fondation Beyeler is creating a unique architectural ensemble. The size of the park, which is already greatly appreciated by visitors, will be
doubled. The unique experience of art, architecture and nature, a distinguishing characteristic of the Fondation Beyeler, will be further reinforced.

The extension project (acquisition of the land and existing buildings, funding of the new building, and operating and maintenance costs for the first ten years) is being privately financed. An amount of CHF 50 million has already been firmly committed. Generous donations from the Wyss Foundation and the Daros Collection of the Stephan Schmidheiny family provide the cornerstone for the project’s realization. Overall, the extension building and its launch are expected to cost CHF 100 million.

On Friday, May 5, in the context of an Open Day, the new park will be accessible to all the inhabitants of Riehen and admission to the museum will be free of charge. The Atelier Peter Zumthor’s project with plans, models and visualizations will be presented on the underground floor of the Fondation Beyeler from Friday, May 5 to Sunday, May 7. From Wednesday, May 10 to Tuesday, May 23, the plans and models will be exhibited for two weeks in the Town Hall of Riehen, Wettsteinstrasse 1, 4125 Riehen. The opening hours are as follows: Monday to Friday from 8-12 a.m. and 2 to 4.30 p.m.

“The extension project is an important step in the development of the Fondation Beyeler and will increase the facilities available to visitors. Above all, it is a major gift for Riehen”, is the enthusiastic comment of Hansjörg Wyss, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Beyeler-Stiftung and the President of the Assessment Board, as well as the project’s initiator.

“Peter Zumthor brings great experience to the construction of cultural buildings and has the necessary sensitivity to build a museum of outstanding quality in this very special spot in the heart of Riehen. The interaction between human beings, nature, art and architecture that has always characterized the Fondation Beyeler will be as successfully achieved as it was twenty years ago by Renzo Piano”, states Sam Keller, the Director of the Fondation Beyeler.

“I want to create buildings that are loved” says Peter Zumthor, adding “Having the chance to do so in Basel, the city of my youth, is a particular honor for me.”

“Peter Zumthor’s project was unanimously selected by the Assessment Board because it is the ideal solution for the Fondation Beyeler’s extension”, notes Roger Diener, architect and member of the Assessment Board.

“The Municipal Council is delighted about the planned extension to the Fondation Beyeler and particularly about the fact that the Iselin-Weber Park will be made accessible to the public” says Daniel Albietz, Riehen Municipal Council.

Peter Zumthor

Winner of the Pritzker Prize, the Praemium Imperiale and many other awards, Peter Zumthor was born in Basel in 1943 and trained as a cabinetmaker in his father’s workshop and also as a designer and architect at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Basel and the Pratt Institute in New York. In 1978 he established his own architecture practice in Haldenstein in the Grisons/Graubünden in Switzerland. From 1996 to 2008 he was a professor at the Academy of Architecture, Università della Svizzera italiana in Mendrisio.

Peter Zumthor brings with him great experience in the design of museum buildings, including the Kunsthaus Bregenz, the Kolumba Museum of the Archbishopric of Cologne and currently LACMA (Los
Angeles County Museum of Art). Zumthor became known to a wider public through the Therme Vals spa complex and the Swiss pavilion at Expo 2000 in Hanover. As a native of Basel, he is particularly happy to have the opportunity to construct the Fondation Beyeler’s extension in the recently acquired adjacent Iselin-Weber Park.


The Fondation Beyeler

The Fondation Beyeler in Riehen/ Basel is an international success story, having established itself as the most-visited art museum in Switzerland. Over 6.5 million people from all continents have visited it since its inauguration in 1997. Designed by the Italian architect Renzo Piano and the recipient of a number of awards, the museum in the idyllic Berower Park is considered one of the most beautiful spaces dedicated to art that is to be found anywhere in the world.

The famous collection of modern and contemporary art has doubled in size since the museum was created by Ernst and Hildy Beyeler, having expanded through valuable donations and permanent loans from private art collections and renowned artists. As a result of a partnership with the Daros Collection, works from that prestigious collection are also regularly displayed at the Fondation Beyeler. At first, the Fondation Beyeler presented two exhibitions a year but it now organizes three to four major exhibitions annually as well as other projects and joint initiatives. In addition, it offers a comprehensive art education and events programme, for which there have in the past been no purpose-built rooms in the museum. Combining the Berower Park with the adjacent Iselin-Weber Park will result in a more extensive public garden that will be ideally suited for sculptures, cultural events and recreation in a natural setting.

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Peter Zumthor
On the design of the new Museum

The long-stretching grounds of the Beyeler Museum in Riehen that owes much of its character to the outline of the Baroque Berowergut, is to be extended to the south into the existing Iselin-Weber Park. This historic park with its stock of mature trees, which has remained private until now, is a discovery. As part of the new grounds of the Museum it will be opened and become accessible to the public.

Sitting between these two historic Parks is the Bachtelenweg, an old existing route that leads from the village of Riehen down to Langen Erlen. It is there that three new buildings are situated as part of our design for the extension of the Fondation Beyeler. Just as the impressive museum by Renzo Piano responds to the length of the site to the north with its linearity, so the three additions in the south; the new “House for Art”, the Service Building and the Pavilion, are arranged more freely, intertwining with the historical buildings at the outer rim of the village.

At the entrance of Iselin-Weber Park, the biggest of the three buildings, is exclusively dedicated to art. Its rooms are all naturally lit and provide views into the surrounding park and the landscape beyond.

By the Bachtelenweg, the smaller Service Building houses technical and administrative functions for the running of the museum – the delivery of art, storage and offices. It forms a new gateway into the museum complex, covering a party wall of an existing building to the east. It has an underground connection to the new “House for Art”.

With only one story, the third building, designed for events, assumes the character of a garden pavilion. It lies in the middle of the extended site creating a relationship between the new “House for Art”, the existing historical buildings and the Renzo piano building. It is a place for artist talks, film screenings, concerts, lectures and vernissages etc., but also a place to relax, talk and read. A light timber roof grows from the back of the existing Berower Park garden wall, sheltering the interior. The facade facing the park is glazed and can be slid open. It is protected from the sun and rain with a generous overhang - an invitation to relax in the open air.

The new “House for Art” appears monolithic and has a sculptural form, as if hewn from a massive block – one can readily appreciate it as a response to the impressive mature trees surrounding it. It is made of rammed concrete that comes to life with the irregular stratification of layer upon layer of naturally settling concrete, notable in the entire façade. Its structure is open porous. The gravel and sand used in this type of rammed concrete are quarried from Jura chalk and give the overall building a warm and light color.

The interior of the new “House for Art” offers approximately 1,500 square meters of exhibition space over three floors that vary in height. The floor plan shows three intertwined wings and a central core
with elevator and ancillary rooms around which the enclosure finds a fulcrum. Moving from room to room and climbing the stairs, the sequence of the bright chalk-colored spaces evolve from the entrance at the Bachtelenweg to a large double height hall with an impressively large window allowing direct views of the trees in front of the northwest façade. Through the leaves and branches it is possible to see Tüllinger Hill in the distance. The building has the character of a spacious villa for the viewing and contemplation of art, tailor-made for this specific place.

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1. The extension project of the Fondation Beyeler by Atelier Peter Zumthor
House for Art, View from the Iselin-Weber Park
Courtesy Atelier Peter Zumthor & Partner

2. The extension project of the Fondation Beyeler by Atelier Peter Zumthor
House for Art, Exhibition Space
Courtesy Atelier Peter Zumthor & Partner
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3. The extension project of the Fondation Beyeler by Atelier Peter Zumthor
House for Art and Pavilion (right-hand side), View from the Berower Park
Courtesy Atelier Peter Zumthor & Partner

4. The extension project of the Fondation Beyeler by Atelier Peter Zumthor
House for Art, View from the Iselin-Weber Park
Courtesy Atelier Peter Zumthor & Partner
The extension project of the Fondation Beyeler by Atelier Peter Zumthor
House for Art and Pavilion, View from the west along the Bachtelenweg in the direction of Baselstrasse
Courtesy Atelier Peter Zumthor & Partner

The Iselin-Weber Park
Photograph: Mark Niedermann

The extension project of the Fondation Beyeler by Atelier Peter Zumthor
House for Art, View from the Iselin-Weber Park
Courtesy Atelier Peter Zumthor & Partner

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Biography of Peter Zumthor

Born in Basel in 1943. Trained as a cabinetmaker in his father’s workshop and also as a designer and architect at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Basel and the Pratt Institute in New York. Since 1978, has his own architecture practice in Haldenstein in the Grisons/Graubünden, Switzerland. Guest professorships at the Southern California Institute of Architecture, SCI-ARC, Los Angeles, 1988, the Technical University Munich, 1989, and the Graduate School of Design, GSD, Harvard University, Boston, 1999. From 1996 to 2008 he was a professor at the Academy of Architecture, Università della Svizzera italiana in Mendrisio.

Most important buildings

Most important awards
Heinrich-Tessenow-Medaille, Technical University Hanover, 1989; Carlsberg Architectural Prize, Copenhagen, 1998; Bündner Culture Prize, Grisons/Graubünden, 1998; Mies van der Rohe Award for European Architecture, Barcelona, 1998; Meret Oppenheim Prize, Swiss Federal Office of Culture, 2006; Praemium Imperiale, Japan Art Association, 2008; DAM Prize for Architecture in Germany, 2008; Pritzker Architecture Prize, The Hyatt Foundation, 2009; RIBA Royal Gold Medal, Royal Institute of British Architects, 2013.
A new park for Riehen – the Fondation Beyeler and the Iselin-Weber Park

The Fondation Beyeler is situated in the idyllic English-style garden adjoining the Berower Villa. The park contains the modern museum building designed by Renzo Piano (with the contemporary extension of the gardens) and an ensemble of historic buildings dating from the 18th century. The Fondation Beyeler now has an opportunity to extend into the adjoining Iselin-Weber property, which also has an English-style garden designed by the same landscape architect.

Both pieces of land – the Berower property on which the present-day museum stands and the Iselin-Weber property, the site of the future extension – have their origins around the year 1600 as winegrowing estates with family mansions. Both properties have since been developed in several construction phases.

The park formerly belonging to the Berower property still today corresponds in its main features to the English gardens which were designed by Jean-François Caillat in 1823. The Berower Villa, built in the neo-Classical style by architects Melchior Berri and J. Stehlin, also dates from this time.

Shortly afterwards, Jean-François Caillat also designed the English landscape garden for the Iselin-Weber property. In view of its considerable stock of mature trees, it is considered one of the most magnificent landscape gardens of its type in the region. The buildings forming part of the original estate (Baselstrasse 61 and 65) consist of the service building (which was not converted into a residential property until 1948) and the mansion house. The splendid late Baroque exteriors of its two wings date from 1769. The architect is unknown. The former estate buildings are today under different ownership from the park and are not part of the extension project.

The two gardens today present strikingly different faces. The garden of the Berower property, on which the Fondation Beyeler museum stands, is clearly laid out and carefully maintained. In contrast, the landscape garden of the Iselin-Weber property appears less well-tamed and is more hidden away. In summary, it can be said that the Romantic, Dionysian character of the Iselin-Weber Park contrasts with the classical, Apollonian character of the Berower property.

When the extension is completed, the previously private Iselin-Weber Park will be made freely accessible to the public during the Fondation Beyeler’s opening hours. The historically significant park with its mature trees will be preserved in its present form and the new buildings will fit in with the historic plantings and paths. The three large plane trees in the north-west corner of the Iselin-Weber Park are protected and will be preserved, as must the large gingko tree and the redwood tree directly beside the construction area.

**The linking of the two parks through the planned extension**

The linking and interaction of the Berower and Iselin-Weber Parks and their historic and modern buildings are very important. The new buildings should be seen as a complement to the present museum and a link between the two parks. It should fit in with the historic urban development of Riehen while creating new emphases in terms of both architecture and landscape.

Linking the Berower Park and the neighboring Iselin-Weber Park will create an extended garden area ideally suited for sculptures, cultural events and recreation in nature.