

## The Vitra Campus

**The Vitra Campus in Weil am Rhein near Basel is a unique ensemble of contemporary architecture. Design enthusiasts and connoisseurs of architecture are invited to take a tour of the Campus and discover buildings by some of the world's most renowned architects, to view the current exhibition at the Vitra Design Museum, to visit the Lounge Chair Atelier and observe the handcrafted fabrication of this classic design by Charles and Ray Eames, and to find inspirational ideas for their own home at the VitraHaus, Vitra's flagship store.**

The Vitra Campus brings together the commercial and cultural aspects of the Swiss furniture manufacturer Vitra, which was founded by Willi Fehlbaum as a shopfitting business in 1934. Production was relocated from Birsfelden (Switzerland) to Weil am Rhein (Germany) in 1950. After a major fire destroyed a large part of the manufacturing facilities in 1981, the second-generation owners of the family-run company embraced the opportunity to rebuild the premises in collaboration with leading architects.

### **Factory Buildings**

Completion: 1981/1983

Architect: Nicholas Grimshaw (\*1939)

After the fire in 1981, the British high-tech architect Nicholas Grimshaw developed a master plan that included the potential for expansion within the framework of a unified corporate identity. Only six months later, production resumed in the new aluminium-clad factory building designed by Grimshaw. It was his first architectural work on the continent and originally conceived as a model for future structures on the Campus. Another modular building of this type was erected in 1983. To keep the interior spaces as open as possible, utility areas such as stairs and toilets were located in external cube-shaped service towers.

### **Balancing Tools**

Completion: 1984

Artists: Claes Oldenburg (\*1929), Coosje van Bruggen (1942–2009)

Together with his wife Coosje van Bruggen, Claes Oldenburg is considered an important figure in American Pop Art and is best known for his monumental sculptures, one of which is found on the Vitra Campus. A hammer, a screwdriver and pliers – three important tools used in chair-making – have

been greatly enlarged and joined together to form a gate-like structure. This sculpture, given to Willi Fehlbaum by his children on the occasion of his 70th birthday, was the very first object on the property in front of the Vitra production facilities. Today it stands between Tadao Ando's 'architecture of silence' and the sculptural volumes of the Vitra Design Museum.

### **Vitra Design Museum, Factory Building, Gate, Gallery**

Completion: 1989

Architect: Frank Gehry (\*1929)

The California-based architect Frank Gehry first became known for his furniture made of corrugated cardboard and later for his deconstructivist buildings. The sculptural architecture of the museum captures the eye with its towers and ramps, while the gatehouse and the production facility to the rear echo its forms. A large expanse of lawn creates the stage for Gehry's first building in Europe. The museum's interior is equally extraordinary, featuring interpenetrating spaces and remarkable lighting. The Vitra Design Museum Gallery was built in 2003 as an annex to the front gate. The gallery is used for smaller exhibitions and experimental projects held parallel to the larger temporary exhibitions in the main building. In 1989, the year in which the museum building was completed, Gehry was awarded the Pritzker Prize.

### **Fire Station**

Completion: 1993

Architect: Zaha Hadid (1950–2016)

After the major fire in 1981, Vitra founded a company fire brigade and commissioned Iraqi-born architect Zaha Hadid to design the Fire Station, which was completed in 1993. As the first built structure by Hadid, it quickly became an architectural icon and marked a pivotal point in her career. Its expressive forms convey dynamic movement. The striking colour concept and the unusual spatial experience, which results from the avoidance of right angles and perpendicular walls, are further extraordinary features. Eleven years after completing the Fire Station, Hadid was distinguished with the Pritzker Prize.

### **Conference Pavilion**

Completion: 1993

Architect: Tadao Ando (\*1941)

A meditation path leads to the Conference Pavilion, Tadao Ando's first work outside of Japan. To achieve a perfect harmony between the building and the existing cherry orchard, the later Pritzker

Prize winner designed a sunken courtyard that allows natural light to illuminate the hidden lower storey. By restricting colours to just a few tones, renouncing decorative details and having the windows face out onto a natural landscape, Ando created an atmosphere highly conducive to concentration. The shape of a rectangle measuring 90 x 180 cm – derived from the human proportions of the tatami mat – visibly serve as a basic module for the cubic structure.

### **Factory Building**

Completion: 1994

Architect: Álvaro Siza (\*1933)

With his modern buildings that are subtly integrated into the natural landscape, the Portuguese Pritzker Prize winner Álvaro Siza is admired as a proponent of critical regionalism. His building in Weil exudes an air of calm and, with its brick façade, makes reference to the old factory buildings that burned down in 1981. The brick wall facing the street is slightly set back to allow an unobstructed view of Hadid's Fire Station, which is framed and accentuated by an arched, bridge-like roof. When it rains, the arched segment lowers automatically to provide a sheltered passage between the production facilities.

### **Dome**

Design: c. 1975, installation in Weil: 2000

After Richard Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983)

Dating back to the 1940s and his work on geodesic domes, American architect Richard Buckminster Fuller established himself as a leading representative of biomorphic architecture, alongside such figures as Frei Otto and Santiago Calatrava. In 1954, he received a patent for the engineering principle used in the fabrication of spherical structures from triangular elements. The dome-shaped tent construction in Weil was originally created in 1975 together with Thomas C. Howard at Charter Industries and subsequently served as a showroom in Detroit (USA). It was purchased at auction in 2000 and installed on the Vitra Campus. Thanks to its triangular framework, a highly stable structure with a wide span was achieved with a minimal amount of materials.

### **Petrol Station**

Design: 1953, installation in Weil: 2003

Architect: Jean Prouvé (1901–1984)

With his industrially prefabricated demountable architecture, the French *constructeur* Jean Prouvé set important precedents for the future. Together with his brother Henry, he designed this petrol station in

1953 as part of series for Mobiloil Socony-Vacuum. Six stations were built in total. After Vitra's purchase of the structure in 2003 from a site in Haute-Loire (France), it was restored and reassembled in Weil. Typical features are the coherence of material and form and the colour-coded designation of structural parts (white: load-bearing frame; red: wall panels; green: base/roof). In 2001, Vitra acquired the worldwide rights to manufacture Prouvé's furniture designs.

### **Bus Stop**

Completion: 2006

Architect: Jasper Morrison (\*1959)

The British designer Jasper Morrison is known for his elegant one-off objects with simple forms in polished steel. He had already created several pieces of furniture for Vitra before he was commissioned in 2006 to design a bus stop at the entrance to the Campus in Weil. Solar cells hidden in the roof provide illumination at night, while glazed rear walls allow views of the vineyards and village of Ötlingen and the Vitra Design Museum. Fittingly, the twin bus shelters on either side of the street feature Wire Chairs designed by Charles and Ray Eames and manufactured by Vitra.

### **VitraHaus**

Completion: 2010

Architects: Herzog & de Meuron (Jacques Herzog \*1950, Pierre de Meuron \*1950)

The VitraHaus is Vitra's flagship store. It showcases the Vitra Home Collection and also serves as a gateway for visitors to the Vitra Campus. Basing their design on the archetypical house with a gable roof – a residential building type used for homes worldwide – Herzog & de Meuron elongated this basic form and stacked twelve house elements at intersecting angles. This created interior settings with a domestic scale and character, while the interpenetration of architectural volumes resulted in dramatically skewed spaces and bold visual perspectives. The path of visitors through the VitraHaus holds many surprises, allowing them to experience furniture arrangements in a variety of styles – pairing the great Vitra classics with the latest pieces by contemporary designers. The iconic building also contains a shop, the Lounge Chair Atelier and the VitraHaus Café.

**Logistics and production Hall**

Completion: 2012

Architects: SANAA (Kazuyo Sejima \*1956, Ryue Nishizawa \*1966)

This production facility, designed by the Japanese architects SANAA, has been a part of the Vitra Campus since 2010, although the façade was not completed until 2012. The building has a freely drawn, nearly circular footprint and consists of two adjoining semi-circular concrete shells. This roughly oval shape optimises logistical operations by providing adequate space for the circulation of lorries. The defining feature of the production facility is its façade, which functions like a curtain to mask the building's dimensions. The development of the façade was highly innovative not only in terms of design, but also with regard to technology.

**Diogene**

Completion: 2013

Architect: Renzo Piano (\*1937)

Diogene is a living unit developed by Renzo Piano and his office, the Renzo Piano Building Workshop, that unites all the basic functions of a temporary dwelling under one roof in a modest space of six square metres. As the modern interpretation of an archaic cabin, Diogene is Vitra's largest product, but also the smallest structure of the architectural ensemble in Weil am Rhein. The building is named after the ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes of Sinope ('Diogene di Sinope' in Italian) who is said to have lived in a barrel because he considered worldly luxuries to be superfluous. Although the exterior of Diogene resembles that of a simple house, it is actually a highly complex technical construction, satisfying the highest demands of sustainability and energy efficiency with respect to operation and maintenance as well as production and disposal.

**Vitra Slide Tower**

Completion: 2014

Artist: Carsten Höller (\*1961)

The 30.7-metre-high Vitra Slide Tower by the German artist Carsten Höller is a viewing tower, slide and art installation all in one. It consists of three diagonal steel columns that meet at the top, with a revolving clock mounted at their point of intersection measuring six metres in diameter. Access to the tower construction is provided by a switchback staircase with intermediate landings positioned between the slanted columns. A viewing platform at a height of 17 metres offers new perspectives of the Vitra Campus and the surrounding landscape. The platform is the starting point for the 38-metre-long corkscrew tube slide.

**Álvaro-Siza-Promenade**

Completion: 2014

Architect: Álvaro Siza (\*1933)

The 500-metre-long Álvaro Siza Promenade is a walkway flanked by hornbeam hedges that passes along the west side of Siza's factory building and connects the VitraHaus with the Fire Station by Zaha Hadid. It is conceived as a path with various stations: its sequential 'episodes' allow wide-ranging views of architecture and nature. These include an S-shaped common area framed by hedges, the Vitra Slide Tower by Carsten Höller and an archaic-looking double chamber with interpenetrating spaces defined by brick and granite walls.

**Bell, from: 24 Stops**

Completion: 2015

Artist: Tobias Rehberger (\*1966)

The bell is situated on the meadow in front of the VitraHaus, one of the two starting points of the Rehberger-Weg, which links the Vitra Campus with Fondation Beyeler in Riehen. It is one of the 24 waymarkers designed for the Rehberger-Weg by the German artist Tobias Rehberger.

Cast by a professional bell maker, the brass bell is mounted on a pole where it can be rung by hand. The other starting point of the Rehberger-Weg, located on the grounds of Fondation Beyeler, is marked by an identical bell.

**Vitra Schaudepot**

Completion: 2016

Architects: Herzog & de Meuron (Jacques Herzog \*1950, Pierre de Meuron \*1950)

The Vitra Schaudepot provides the Vitra Design Museum with a venue for presenting key objects from its extensive collection to the public, complemented by a new deli and a shop. The new structure combines the simple appearance of an industrial building or warehouse with the complex requirements of a walk-in museum repository. To the outside the building presents itself as a monolithic volume constructed from hand-broken bricks, characterized by a completely windowless façade and a simple gable roof. The bricks were split on site and give the building a lively texture. The interior of the building offers ideal conservational conditions for the preservation of the valuable pieces in the collection.

The Vitra Schaudepot is fronted by a raised, public forecourt that ties the building into the architectural ensemble on the Vitra Campus. The new building contrasts appealingly with the dynamic contours of the opposite Fire Station by Zaha Hadid while corresponding to the factory buildings by Álvaro Siza, which were also executed in brick.

### **Blockhaus**

Completion: 2018

Artist: Thomas Schütte (\*1954)

Blockhaus is a small structure by the German artist Thomas Schütte. Serving as a shelter with a watering place, it adheres to different principles than the buildings on the campus designed by architects, thereby presenting an ambiguous antipode. Set on a slightly irregular hexagonal footprint, the cabin is constructed from untreated Nordic pine which will take on a grey tone as it ages. The visually prominent roof is covered in titanium zinc shingles, whose gleaming metal creates a stark contrast to the archaic log structure.

An opening on one side invites visitors to enter. Two simple benches are mounted along the interior walls. The central area contains a trough fountain made of fired clay, offering fresh water to cool off or enjoy a drink. Blockhaus is an object derived from a 1:10-scale model exhibited by Thomas Schütte in 2016 at the Galerie Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf.

### **Ring & Ruisseau**

Completion: 2018

Designers: Ronan Bouroullec (\*1971) & Erwan Bouroullec (\*1976)

Two new projects by Ronan und Erwan Bouroullec invite visitors to prolong their visit to the Vitra Campus in Weil am Rhein: Ruisseau is a narrow channel carved in a marble base, filled with running water. Ring is a circular platform made of galvanised steel, which appears to float above the ground. Encircling a cherry tree, it serves as collective bench.

Both objects are installed in the public area of the northern Vitra Campus, along the Alvaro-Siza-Promenade.

Vitra Campus

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