Zeitschrift: gta papers
Herausgeber: gta Verlag
Band: 8 (2024)

Artikel: Table talk
Autor: Pennati, Lucia
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1075932

Nutzungsbedingungen
Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Mehr erfahren

Conditions d'utilisation
L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. En savoir plus

Terms of use
The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. Find out more

Download PDF: 19.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, https://www.e-periodica.ch

Table Talk
Lucia Pennati

Lucia Pennati is a doctoral candidate at the Università della Svizzera italiana.

From an unmarked box in the bequest of architect Dolf Schnebli (1928—2009) in the gta Archive at ETH Zurich, I found, among other scattered images, a contact print of a strip of photographs documenting a convivial occasion. **fig.1** They were taken by an unknown participant during an office excursion organized by the architectural firm Dolf Schnebli, Tobias Ammann, and Partners that took place in November 1990 through Switzerland, Austria, and Germany. The party included longtime partners such as Ernst Engeler, Isidor Ryser, and Tobias Ammann, and younger architects such as Claudia Lüthi, Paolo Kölliker, and Andreas Galli, as well as friends such as lighting designer Charles Keller, the artist Sybille Häusser, and former collaborators Stefan Häuselmann, Peter Quarella, and Jörg Quarella, who were assistants in Schnebli's

fig.1 The office of Dolf Schnebli (Ernst Engeler, Isidor Ryser, Tobias Ammann, Claudia Lüthi, Paolo Kölliker, Andreas Galli) eating at a restaurant in St. Gallen with lighting designer Charles Keller, artist Sybille Häusser, and former collaborators Stefan Häuselmann, Peter Quarella, and Jörg Quarella. gta Archive / ETH Zurich, Dolf Schnebli

design chair. Schnebli was a professor of architecture and design from 1971 to 1994 at ETH Zurich and had a profound impact on Swiss architecture, first and foremost through his teaching. His chair was an incubator for Swiss-German architects who would later garner national and international fame, not least Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron.

The contact print, and its preservation, provides a clue to Schnebli's much admired but little understood way of teaching, even though the setting is not at first glance educational. In particular, the gathering around the table carries a twofold significance, a that and a how. On the one hand, the plurality of personalities testifies to the network of people who orbited

Schnebli, people he had the ability to select and who proved to have the skills to take their first independent steps in the world of architecture. The strip also testifies to how this network was cultivated and nurtured over the years through relationships that Schnebli counted on and was eager to continue, especially in his later years. Schnebli used to regularly invite his assistants to dinner and allegedly worried that his students would have enough to eat. Likewise, his first home and office in Agno, Ticino, were open to friends, colleagues, and architects. Many remember the table where they would gather on Saturdays to discuss and talk, not necessarily about architecture. A dining table changes the meaning of the phrase "table crit." The everyday ritual of sharing a meal broke down hierarchical barriers between teachers, assistants, and students. This conviviality can be traced back to Schnebli's way of educating, which aimed for a freethinking school where architectural concepts were taught but architectural doctrines were forbidden. Schnebli trained a way of looking at reality free from dogma, encouraging his students to develop a personal style.

The design potential of eating together has been extensively studied with regard to the *convivium* [1] around architect Flora Ruchat-Roncati, the first woman professor at ETH Zurich and a close friend of Schnebli, who joined the firm Schnebli, Ammann as a partner in 1991. But unlike Ruchat-Roncati's *convivium*, which unavoidably recalls the social role prescribed for women as hostesses and its instrumentalization for "getting things done," Schnebli's *convivium* was a banquet of different ideas, a place where everyone brings something. Schnebli's *convivium* prioritized eating and drinking well, for its own sake, something for which he is remembered by his closest associates. This passion is also found in his anecdotes, used to teach theory through simple, figurative phrases.

"I would like to briefly explain my concept of quality in architecture using the example of food in a restaurant. ... Good food starts with the quality of the raw material and its processing. Good raw material and a good cook guarantee good food. Good food in a pleasant restaurant is good. I prefer to eat well even if the place does not satisfy me aesthetically. But good food and a pleasant restaurant are better." [2]

Perhaps he might have added, without overburdening the tale with too much complexity: good food in a pleasant location with good company is even better.

1 The concept of *convivium* has been developed in the framework of the project "Flora Ruchat-Roncati at ETH Zurich 1985–2002: Professor, Planner, Theoretician," funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

2 "Qualität in der Architektur. Ich möchte kurz meinen Qualitätsbegriff anhand vom Essen im Restaurant erklären. ... Gutes Essen beginnt bei der Qualität des Rohmaterials und dessen Verarbeitung. Gutes Rohmaterial und ein guter Koch oder Köchin garantieren gutes Essen. Gutes Essen in einem angenehmen Lokal ist gut. Ich ziehe es vor, gut zu essen, wenn auch das Lokal mich ästhetisch nicht befriedigt. Doch besser ist gutes Essen und ein angenehmes Lokal." Dolf Schnebli, "Qualität in der Architektur," unpub. ms., n.d., gta Archive / ETH Zurich, Dolf Schnebli, 210-2-1.

EG Grundriss
Nordwestzeile
1:100
MEZZANIN Grundriss
Nordwestzeile
1:100
EG Grundriss
Südostzeile
1:100