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Architecture | Creative curved construction



Swatch HQ an architectural marvel

Born in 1957 in Tokyo and winner of the 2014 Pritzker Prize, architect Shigeru Ban is known for his delicate structures and unconventional methods as well as his decisive contribution to innovation and humanity in architecture.

Swatch Group collaborated with the architect for the first time on the Nicolas G Hayek Center in Tokyo that opened in 2007. In 2011, his design won the Swatch Group's architectural competition for the construction of the new Swatch Headquarters, the new Omega Manufacture, and the Cité du Temps, particularly convincing with its original yet pragmatic concept as well as the ability to respect the brand-specific spirit for each of these buildings. Moreover, Shigeru Ban had taken the existing landscape and buildings into account and integrated them into the overall project.

After almost five years of construction, Swatch has inaugurated its Shigeru Ban designed headquarters in north western Switzerland. Located in the town of Biel, in canton Bern, the new HQ for the watch brand is contained within one of the world's largest timber structures. The scheme connects to the 'cité du temps' – a building also conceived by Ban, which contains a museum and a conference hall. The Japanese architect was also responsible for the design of the omega production building, an independent structure also located on site.

The curved silhouette of the new swatch building extends over a total length of 240 metres and a width of 35 metres. A timber grid shell construction forms the basic structure of the large-area facade, which, at its highest point, measures 27 metres. The vaulted facade rises gently towards the entrance before transitioning to the 'cité du temps'.

During the planning phase, Ban and his team used 3D

technology to help to define the exact shape and positioning of the approximately 4600 beams of the timber grid shell. Since the shell serves as a large office, it also had to meet various technical requirements. Consequently, a complex network of cables has been discreetly integrated while the wooden structure was still being erected, the installation of around 2800 honeycomb timber grid shell elements, which make up most of the facade began. Three basic types of honeycomb can be distinguished: opaque, translucent, and transparent elements.

Internally, 25,000 square meters of floor space is spread over five floors for all departments of Swatch International and Swatch Switzerland. The entirely glazed entrance lobby features generous dimensions as well as a sense of transparency, openness, and lightness. Two glass elevators take employees and visitors to the upper floors and to the glass pedestrian bridge on the third floor, which connects the swatch building to the 'cité du temps'.

The surface area of the four upper floors decreases successively from floor to floor, while galleries with glass balustrades provide views of the lower levels and in addition to the regular workplaces, various common areas are distributed throughout the building: a cafeteria on the ground floor and small rest areas at various intervals. For moments when privacy is necessary, separate 'alcove cabins' accommodate up to six employees for telephone calls or work requiring particular concentration.

From a sustainability standpoint, groundwater is used to heat and cool the building, while solar power is harvested from photovoltaic panels. Swatch shares the resources with neighbouring 'cité du temps' and the omega production building, which went into operation in 2017.

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