

Zeitschrift: Hochparterre : Zeitschrift für Architektur und Design
Herausgeber: Hochparterre
Band: 22 (2009)
Heft: [4]: The essence of architecture : Röthlisberger: swiss quality woodwork

Artikel: Executive interiors : Andreas Ramseier puts the class into high class
Autor: Ernst, Meret
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-123773>

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EXECUTIVE INTERIORS

Andreas Ramseier meets the highest customer requests when creating and designing interiors for supervisory boards and bank customers.

Author: Meret Ernst, photos: Ramseier + Associates Ltd.

He could have become a jazz musician. When asked about his instrument, Andreas Ramseier replies, "trumpet". He has played since his youth and is so passionate about it that for a long time it was not clear whether or not he would make it his career. Instead of going to the conservatoire, he trained to be an architectural draughtsman specialising in structural engineering. Later on he had the option of attending a technical school or the Zurich School of Applied Arts. He chose Zurich: "Life was an altogether livelier and brighter affair there." At that time the budding interior designers and designers were being taught and influenced by Willy Guhl. At the age of 23, Andreas Ramseier was a student in Willy Guhl's last diploma class, and he remembers his calm, sensitivity and attention to details. But what could you do with the diploma? Go back to music after all? He went to Boston, studied film music composition at Berkeley College of Music and discovered that it was not the right career for him. Andreas Ramseier stayed in the USA and found work as a design architect in LA with Thomas Wells, a former member of Marcel Breuer's staff. The projects dealing with hotels, high-rise buildings, a villa in Hawaii, and housing developments in Miami also helped him to evolve. In retrospect he judges this period as: "The most important time in my life."

THE AMERICAN LESSON Was music just a digression? "No. I still profit from the discipline and team spirit which musicians playing in a group require." He always tries to ascertain the musicality of his applicants at the interview. If they can read music, they understand something about rhythm, composition, harmony, then he knows he can communicate better with them. "That makes working together easier." The applicants' school is of secondary importance, since it is the person that counts. And he does not distinguish between design, interior design and architecture. "I am very open in my approach to tasks, much more open than the architects from the Federal Institute of Technology who learn how to build semester for semester. Winning the competition for a partial refurbishment of the "Atlantis Sheraton" Hotel in 1980 led to self-employment and the return to Zurich from America, the land where he learned to love design. "We take on about two-thirds of the architectural activities, draw up the implementation planning and have overall control of the design. We pass the rest on to a general contractor, the way the Americans usually do it." His office is located at one of the best addresses in Zurich, and he heads a staff of 12 to 15 employees. Zurich is the European city which is best suited to his keen cosmopolitan spirit, and he cultivates his list of international customers accordingly.

IN THE CENTRE OF POWER "Does it look rich enough?" was his clients' anxious question when Andreas Ramseier and his team were planning the executive boardroom for their international insurance company with them. How prestigious does a board room have to look, and are highly polished antiques obligatory fittings? These are cultural questions and the response differs depending on whether the board is American, English or continental European. When the 160-square-metre room was completed, the question was not raised a second time. Andreas Ramseier focuses on modern classics. Instead of pompous, flamboyant materials, he concentrates on careful finishing, a fitting parallel to the image of the group whose headquarters are located in Switzerland. The floor is dark oak, the wall cladding annealed green glass and there is a perforated aluminium suspended ceiling.

Board rooms must ensure confidentiality and provide cutting-edge media technology. As far as temperature regulation and acoustics are concerned, they offer every possible comfort and are equipped with sophisticated lighting scenarios which can be simply switched on. A board room should have a minimum life-span of ten years, including the inevitable media retrofit. This also means it should not lose its appeal during that period.

The focal point is the table where the board makes their decisions. A table reflects hierarchy and can promote or hinder discussions. The CEO, dissatisfied with his place at the head of a long row, sketched his ideas and mentioned the room where the World Security Council meets. An oval table was requested, where everyone can see each other and where hierarchy is not an issue. The design is a direct response to the proposals.

The oval form of the table opens out on the long side, facing the 18 square-metre media screen. Large format panels by the Zurich artist, Mayo Bucher conceal the screen which is revealed by means of remote control. In accordance with Andreas Ramseier's sketches, the table top is only supported by a slanted front, which projects directly out of the floor. The support-free construction was a major challenge for the technicians as Röthlisberger Head Engineer, Roland Keller explains. The segmented metal skeleton is anchored in the underlying screed and backed with MDF panels, the oval edges of the black nappa leather table top are formed like a protruding roll. The supports are faced with matt glass on the interior. The glass panels are bowed – like a car windscreen – due to the angle they are at and the basic oval shape of the table.

The technicians also faced a challenge when designing the fitted buffet. The upper part of the wall tilts upwards, like at a kiosk, to reveal the integrated buffet where the kitchen, situated on the other side of the wall, can serve the meals. One of the major challenges was ensuring that it was soundproofed against eavesdroppers.

CORPORATE ARCHITECTURE After winning the architecture competition, Andreas Ramseier and his team created a made-to-measure "boardroom". Working for the CEO of a global company is not always easy. Decisions need to be taken when the CEO has time. "But I function well in this environment." If he wants to convince his clients of the design, thorough preparation is required. His clients' proposals are the basis of his design since they expect bespoke interiors. His credo: "The client should participate." Andreas Ramseier's design starting point is the individual using the room, in many cases the client him or herself. And, as his portfolio already features a great number of companies, he is interested in how the identity of a company can be reflected in an interior. His model is American architecture, which he believes is seriously underrated, and its exemplary interaction with typeface. His aim: to constantly redefine how much a building or a room ought to communicate the company's image.

BOARDROOM, 2006

- > Architecture: Andreas Ramseier + Associates Ltd., Zurich, Christine Brandt, Christoph Schieber, Andreas Schiessl, Peter Steinmann, Roger Stucki, Mischa Wüthrich (project members)
- > Interior design procedure: Invited competition (college)
- > Interior fit out procedure: Invited competition
- > Art: Mayo Bucher, Zurich





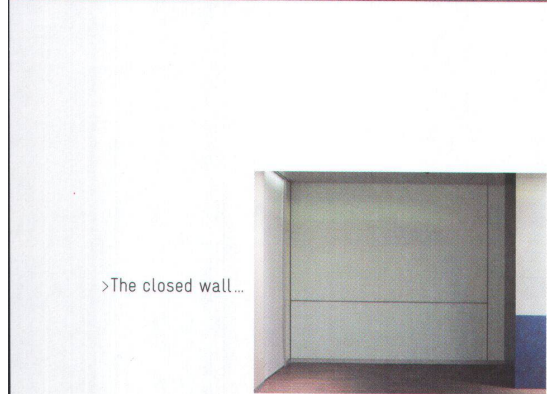
<The shape of the table is echoed by the LED lighting. A multi-media screen is concealed behind the large format panels by Mayo Bucher.



<Dominant in the room, the table is only supported by an angled front.



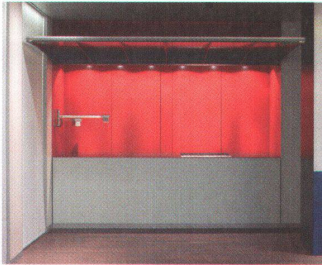
^Smooth transition between ceiling, floor and walls.



>The closed wall...



^...tilts upwards like a kiosk when required...



^...and reveals the sideboard.