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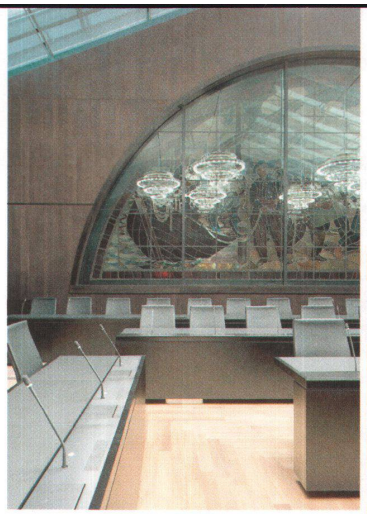
RESTORING PAST SPLENDOUR

Following two years of redevelopment, the Parliament building in Berne has been returned to its original splendour. Aeby & Vincent architects carefully removed the layers that had formed over decades and arranged for the surfaces and colours to be restored. They also added some 21st century ingredients: a visitors' centre on the ground floor and a conference room on the top floor. Some of the old, original furniture was reinstated but the designers also made a number of large, bespoke tables for conference rooms, just as Hans Wilhelm Auer had done one hundred years ago. There were two basic types of tables: for conference rooms, i. e. for committees and meetings, and rows of tables for the new hall on the third floor. All of these tables are members of one family: the father is a U-shaped table for 65 people. The architects designed contemporary versions of classic models with very few legs: modern tables with historic predecessors. The new tables have a solid wood frame and a exchangeable surface. In 1902, artificial Lapra leather was used, but in 2008 the architects opted for the real thing: finest genuine leather.

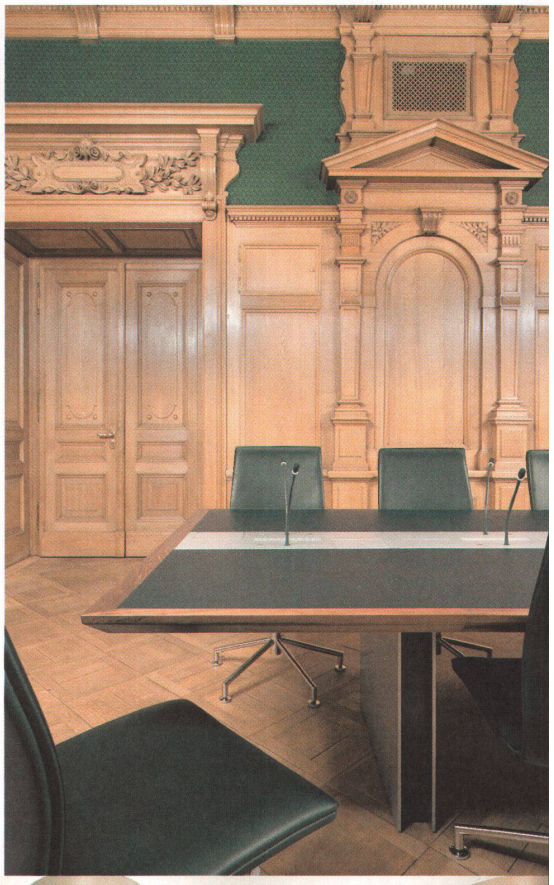
The media duct with microphones and computer links runs along the centre of the table while the head end of the table is equipped with master control board. The duct may be practical and elegant, but it presented a major engineering problem: the wood panel had to be cut in half at a place where the forces are strongest. To transfer the forces from the panels (which have to be able to bear a heavyweight MP), Röthlisberger constructed a U-shaped steel base with an invisible supporting construction incorporated in the panel. The architects and furniture makers came up with an separate but similar design for the conference tables on the third floor. Once again the wooden-framed tables are leather-covered and have media ducts, but they are more angular and stained black. The rows of tables are fixed to the floor. The architects made a 1:1 scale model as a basis for the work carried out at Röthlisberger. Many detailed plans had been passed to and fro before the designers' expectations and the technical feasibility found consensus. Author: Werner Huber, photos: Thomas Telley

REDEVELOPMENT OF PARLIAMENT BUILDING, 2008
› Address: Bundesplatz, Berne
› Client: Bundesamt für Bauten und Logistik, Berne
› Architecture: Aeby & Vincent Architects, Berne
› Interior fit out procedure: Public tender

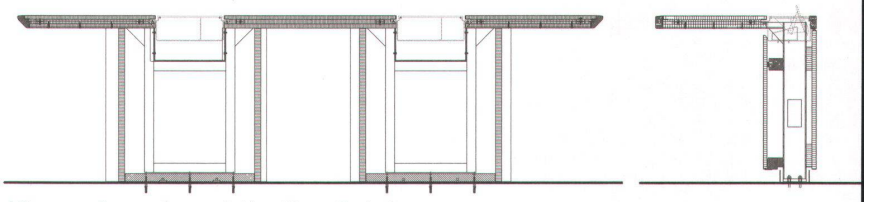


^The new hall on the 3rd floor with rows of tables.

⌄New tables in the historic parliament rooms.



⌄The media duct running along the centre of the table may be elegant but presented major engineering problems.



^Cross-section: conference table with media duct.