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example of this is the large folding wall on the ground floor of the Maison Latapie between the solid living room and the greenhouse extension. When it is open, the living room expands out of the solid building into the greenhouse and thereby triples in size. The clients immediately made use of his continuity by furnishing the space as a living room and thus transformed it into a kind of séjour d'hiver, which very quickly became the main living room in the house.

In the Maison à Coutras the living area is only separated from the winter garden by sliding glass doors, so that here too life can shift imperceptibly from the solid house into the winter garden. Unlike in the Maison Latapie, the floor of the winter garden is not solid, but made of the same soil you find outside. The clients use it as a real garden "housed" in a greenhouse; they have planted flowers and vegetables and even dug a well, but the winter garden is also used for hanging out washing, as a storeroom and as a breakfast terrace – a kind of *séjour sur l'herbe*. And of course the greenhouse can be opened up to the outside in both houses, so that when the weather is fine you can live the house into the territory.

**wbw:** And yet its façade still forms a boundary that has to be passed through. The logical conclusion to living in this way would be a greenhouse that performs this transition from interior to intermediate to exterior space by entirely

disappearing itself.

**Vassal:** That is precisely the direction that greenhouse architecture is moving in at present. For example, the corrugated polycarbonate which has been used so far used as a primary façade material is increasingly being replaced by thin but stable plastic foil consisting of two superimposed layers which can be pumped up like an airbed. The cushion of air is about 30 cm thick and gives the "façade" very good heat insulation, retaining the warmth partially even after the sun has set, when normal greenhouses get cold. The disappearance of the greenhouse is also reflected in the price: from 50 FF/m<sup>2</sup> (polycarbonate) down to 5 FF/m<sup>2</sup>. The plastic foil actually only lasts for about two years, but because it's so cheap and easy to fit you just replace it by a new one whenever necessary.

"Open Sky", the most recent greenhouse from Filclair (the world's leading greenhouse manufacturer) dematerializes the façade completely. It can roll up its foil like a shirt-sleeve within three minutes, and all that's left is the bare metal structure. This means that the greenhouse only exists when you need it, in other words above all in winter. In fine summer weather you can roll up the foil and only need to let it down again in heavy rain or hail.

So far, you can't use this product in architecture because it doesn't meet the fire regulations (it doesn't actually catch fire, but it does

melt very quickly, and therefore does not transfer the fire to the metal structure). We regret this, because in a way it represents our ideal notion of architecture: to add to nature not more than it lacks to perfection.

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## Ein Leben lang lernen...

Für Schulungs-, Seminar- und Konferenzräume lässt unser Angebot keine Wünsche offen. Ihre Vorgaben führen zur individuellen Lösung.

**Wo man sich wohlfühlt, werden Gedanken frei für kreative Ideen.**



Jacques Herzog, architect, Basel  
 Marcel Meili, architect, Zurich  
 Andreas Ruby: interviewer, wbw  
 (pages 42–47)  
 English translation: Michael Robinson

## Update to the present

Studio Basel: Research in Switzerland

**wbw:** What motivated you to found Studio Basel as an architectural research institution, given the fact that national architectural culture does not really have such research tradition?

**Marcel Meili:** We all date from the time of the Rossi school at the ETH, where a theoretical grasp of the city was fundamentally important. This is an interest that has never left us. For us, architecture was never just a form relating to itself alone, adopting this or that shape according to a subjective mood. It was always something that has to be developed in a more general urban context. This frame of reference has taken on increasingly general social characteristics as our work has progressed, and the ideas of urban order behind them have become increasingly blurred and uncertain as a result of the concrete design work. Clearly the instruments that the typology and morphology of the 70s placed at our disposal are no longer adequate for understanding the

real processes that shape the built world around us today. Against this background, Studio Basel is an attempt to develop the intellectual models that are essential if we are to understand such current urban structures on a larger scale.

**Jacques Herzog:** Exploring the contemporary city is in fact a theme we constantly address at Herzog and de Meuron. We have been conducting urban studies ever since we finished at university, the best known of which was conducted together with Rémy Zaugg: “Basel – a city in the making”, and in it we actually discovered the city’s tri-nationality and launched it as a concept. But whenever we came to the point of taking a project like this further we had to accept that it

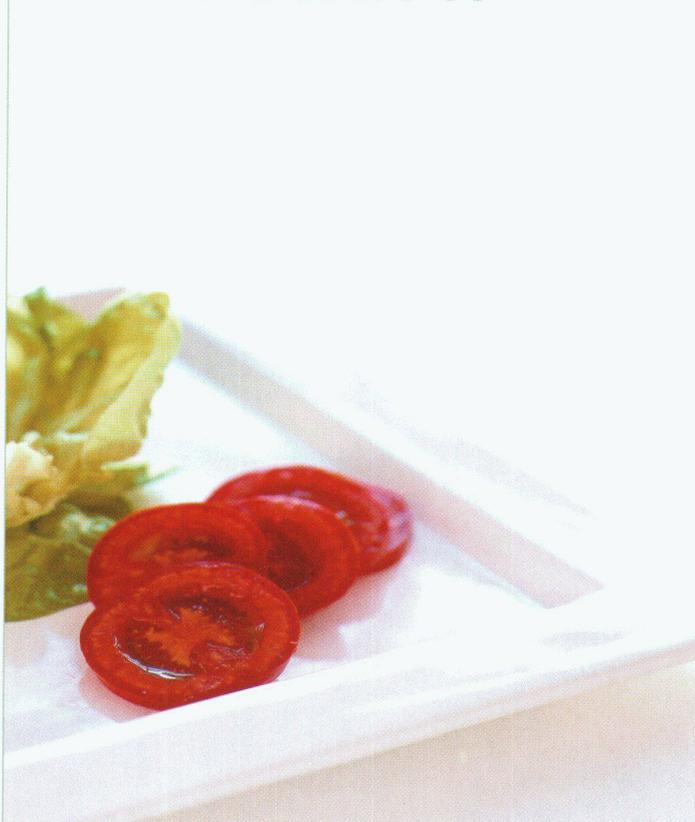
wasn’t really possible alongside the work we had to do in the practice. Against this background, the Studio Basel project opens up quite new scope for action by creating a permanent infrastructure for just this kind of research. Secondly, Studio Basel opened up possibilities that we simply didn’t have at ETH on the Hönggerberg in Zurich because of its sheer size, and resultant bureaucratic impenetrability of the way the school operated. Studio Basel gave us the chance to break up this structure from the inside and to develop a dynamic that ultimately stimulated the mother house as well. This is already visible in the imminent reorganization of the Institut für Orts-, Regional- und Landespla-

nung (ORL; Institute of Local and Regional Planning). This is a Modernist instrument that was founded in the 60s but was making little headway; it wasn’t in a position to make any up-to-date statements in its previous form. By placing Studio Basel in this structure almost as a garaging experiment we are reinterpreting what the institution can do and creating a potential that one would not previously have believed it capable of. And thirdly I liked the idea of not just teaching conventionally in Studio Basel, but conducting a joint examination of the contemporary city with fellow architects that will affect the architectural work done by everyone involved.

**wbw:** Interest in this feed-back effect has led other architects to change the entire structure of their practice. For example, MVRDV now has its own research department in the practice, and OMA has opened AMO in New York, a sister office exclusively for research purposes. The four Studio Basel architects could have set up a joint research office in the same way. Instead of this you chose an academic structure. Why?

**Meili:** One reason for that is the completely different way that Swiss architects work in comparison with their Dutch colleagues. In Europe, Switzerland offers an incomparably privileged working basis for the traditional architectural practice: architects here have a fairly high degree of control over the processes and are comparatively

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