

# **Why do Japanese tourists go to Vaduz by the busload? Untill recently, this was one of the mysteries of the tourist industry, but now the answer is clear : they go to see the new Liechtenstein Art Museum designed by the architects Morger Degelo Kerez**

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**Why do Japanese tourists go to Vaduz by the busload? Until recently, this was one of the mysteries of the tourist industry, but now the answer is clear: they go to see the new Liechtenstein Art Museum designed by the architects Morger Degelo Kerez.**

What is Vaduz? No longer a village, but not a town either. A collection of houses huddled against the rock face surmounted by the symbol of the tiny principality. The castle, where the prince governs and resides, dominates the landscape. An artificial rock face is now below it, on the pedestrian precinct. An unidentifiable, unfamiliar object. The Liechtenstein Art Museum.

Cover

#### Court cases – or rushing things through

The story of how the art museum came into being has two main chapters: court cases and rushing things through. A competition for the design of an art museum was won in the early Seventies by the architect von Branca. Voters agreed to finance it with the sum of 48 million francs in the early Eighties, but the project was delayed so long by law suits related to objections to the design that the head of government at the time, Hans Brunhart, declared it as "no longer politically appropriate." The court cases led to nothing.

Ten years later, a group of art lovers and a few wealthy Liechtensteiners took the initiative and established the "Foundation for the Erection of an Art Museum". The members of the foundation were very determined, and put themselves under pressure: from the very beginning, the opening was planned for the year 2000. Anyone who wants to realise a project must work

quickly. The result is decisive power. Private individuals donated 30 million francs towards building the museum for the Principality of Liechtenstein, which in turn contributed the site and agreed to cover the running costs. Rushing things through resulted in an art museum.

#### No objections

The competition, which was open to all the architects in the Principality of Liechtenstein, was decided in January 1998. Fifteen European architecture offices were also directly invited to participate. Isa Stürm and Urs Wolf from Zurich won the competition according to SIA rules. These stipulated that it must be possible to adapt the concept so as to comply with regulations concerning the height of buildings. Anyone in a hurry does not want to have to deal with objections. The private donors declared they would withdraw their financial support if the high-speed schedule was not adhered to.

The second prize was won by Meinrad Morger, Heinrich Degelo and Christian Kerez from Basle/Zurich, the third by Heinz Tesar from Vienna.

Because the foundation and Stürm+Wolf no longer got on with each other, the foundation withdrew its application for planning permission in May 1998. Now the winners of the second prize, whose concept had no regulatory hurdles to overcome, had their chance. "It was a 10,000-metre sprint", is how Meinrad Morger describes the planning and building phase. Twenty-six months later, on August 11, 2000, the foundation presented the finished building to the Principality of Liechtenstein. After completion of the project the foundation will be dissolved. It has fulfilled its purpose – building the museum.

#### General contractor

The site is in the centre of Vaduz, on a horizontal axis between the pedestrian precinct and the main street. It is part of the "Städtle" project. There is an underground car park under the museum. The rules of the competition also stipulated that entrants consider the space to the right and left of the construction: neighbouring buildings were constructed by other architects.

The art museum project was the first on which Morger Degelo Kerez had worked together. Morger and Degelo wanted to do something out of the ordinary, to "have to explain their decisions more than once." A general contractor was entrusted with the construction of the museum; he took over the existing contract between the foundation and the architects. The project was managed by a building commission consisting of representatives of the foundation, the general contractor, the museum director and the architects. The board of the foundation assumed the role of arbitrator when disagreements arose. The general con-

Address	Städtle 32, FL-3490 Vaduz
Client	Foundation for the Erection of a Liechtenstein Art Museum
Architects	Morger, Degelo and Kerez, Basle/Zurich
Collaborators	Nicole Woog, Heike Buchmann, Benjamin Theiler, Dagmar Strasser, Raeto Studer
Competition	1997; decision January 1998
Turf	November 1998
Completion	August 2000
Opening	November 2000
General contractor	Karl Steiner AG, Zurich
Static equilibrium	ARGE Wenaweser + Partner AG, Schaan; Frey & Schwartz, Zug
Heating, plumbing, ventilation	Vogt AG, Vaduz; Waldhauser Haustechnik, Münchenstein
Electrical installations	Risch AG, Triesen
Safety	Hege AG, Zurich
Lighting	Ove Arup & Partner, London; EAG, Basle; Zumtobel, St. Gall
Construction physics	Kopitsis Bauphysik, Wohlen
Acoustics	Lienhard, Langenbruck
Graphic design	Robert & Durrer, Zurich
Exhibition space	1,750 m <sup>2</sup>
Cost	CHF 30 million



tractor submitted quotes based on the plans at a scale of 1:200, as well as comparable existing buildings (of the quality of the Beyeler Museum, for example). Financial dealings were openly discussed and unforeseen extra expenses accommodated by increasing the budget.

#### Mirror-black concrete

The Art Museum is free-standing, and yet still among other buildings. When you approach it, you only see the black concrete block at the last minute. Although it is large and characteristic, it is mysteriously discreet. A rock? An enormous shrine? A safe? Whatever it is, the building keeps it a secret. Eloquently silent, it says: I am important, I am valuable. [picture page 3](#)

The shining surfaces of the visible concrete are alien, alienating, disturbing. The rock does not explain itself; it does not tell a story. "Rock" ought to be translated by "artificial stone", or more precisely by "one stone", because walls and ceilings combine to create a static, inflexible monolith. [picture page 2](#)

The 40 cm thick exterior wall, made of on-site concrete, is a two-fold invention: both in the way it is mixed and the way it has been treated. First, the recipe: the black stones are basalt, milled from 8 to 64 mm, and resemble railway ballast. All stone comes from the same quarry, are broken and hence sharp-edged. The green, red and white flecks result from the river gravel mixed into the concrete. The dark colour of the cement is caused by an aggregate of 6 per cent soot and iron oxide. [picture page 9](#)

Now, the way the concrete is treated: it was mixed on the building site. It was imperative that the proportions of the mixture should remain constant and that they should not be allowed to segregate while the concrete was being poured. In view of the eight metre-high wall sections, this was no easy task. The concrete needed enough time to set, which meant keeping it moist. To finish, ten men took five months to grind the concrete surfaces to resemble vertical terrazzo stone. A layer of concrete 6 to 10 mm thick had to be removed in a process that involved several steps. The pores were smoothed over; the surface was then treated to prevent water penetration and impregnated with wax. The water-repellent impregnation serves to protect the concrete from corrosion and graffiti as well as giving it a certain sheen. It will have to be renewed about every eight years. "What you see is what you get", says Morger. But the appearance of what you get constantly changes. Depending on the light and the point from which you look at it, the block changes from a deep black to a glittering, reflective surface. Sometimes it is compact and sharp-edged, sometimes it dissolves into a piece of sky. From a distance, the museum looks like an unambiguous object, but at close quarters it is a reflector. What colour is the building? Mirror-black. [picture page 9 top right](#)

#### Seams, not frames

The architects created suspended glass ceilings in the exhibition spaces consisting of several panels with no visible joins. At

the Kunstmuseum Bern built twenty years ago by atelier 5, the lighting equipment dominates the space. In Gigon/Guyer's Kirchner Museum the dark edges of the frames are visible on the ceiling. In Zumthor's construction in Bregenz, the glass panels are held in place by little chrome squares at each corner. But Morger Degelo Kerez's ceiling has only thin seams. [picture page 6](#)

What looks like etched glass is in fact a layer of finely perforated plastic which serves to improve the acoustics of the room. Great precision was required to stretch these thin "skins" over their narrow frames. The final element to be mounted was manufactured to size to allow for building tolerance. Above the suspended ceiling are a glass ceiling that can be walked on, steel supports, movable slatted sun blinds and the glass roof. [detail p. 12](#)

The joins in the ceiling could hardly be more discreet. Another suspended ceiling would have to consist of a single sheet of glass. The museum's technical infrastructure meets the most demanding standards. Incoming air is pressed through the joins in the suspended ceiling, while vitiated air is sucked out through an opening between the wall and the floor. Only the initiated will notice the discreetly positioned video surveillance cameras and various temperature and humidity sensors.

#### Neutral, white and solemn

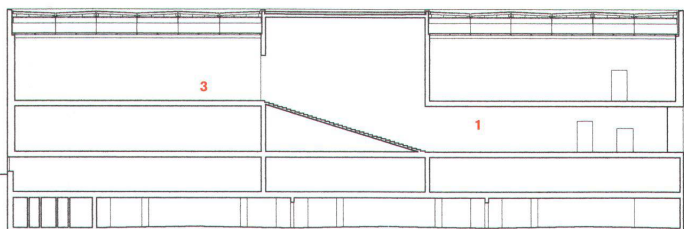
The rock is hollow. On the upper floor, the four shadow-free exhibition halls are bathed in overhead light. The atmosphere is cheerful and solemn, calm, subdued and motionless. Only the oak floorboards emphasise the longitudinal direction of the building. The walls are white, the space neutral. Depending on the exhibition, they can be put to different uses. The pattern of the suspended ceiling illustrates the various ways the exhibition halls can be divided. Here, architecture is reduced to its essence: space and light. The museum is an equal servant of art. It is subordinate, but asserts itself nonetheless. [pictures page 6, drawings page 12](#)

On the ground floor, the large window in the corner of the cafeteria invites the visitor to come in. You enter the museum through a glass passageway and stand in a generously proportioned reception space where low counters and oak furniture, built according to designs by Jean-Michel Franc, are exhibited. The first metropolitan space in Vaduz. [pictures page 3 and 9 top](#)

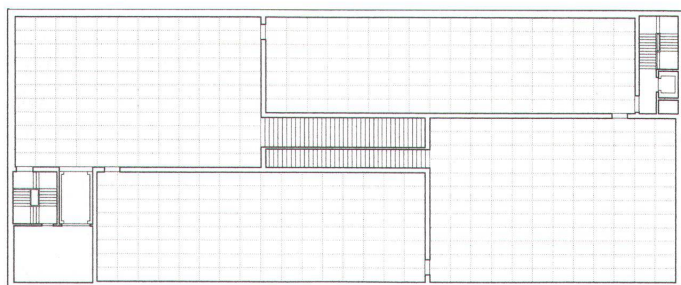
The straight staircase draws your attention upwards. The translucent rectangles of the suspended ceiling announce: up here! A double-height room opens up above the stairs; having passed through the exhibition spaces lit from above, you descend a staircase in the opposite direction to the artificially lit exhibition space below. The last exhibition space is a room lit by windows on one side – though the exhibition spaces can also be viewed in the opposite order. You can physically feel the difference between experiencing a space when you enter it from above or below. [cover and pictures page 8](#)

The Liechtenstein Art Museum is a modest construction, but incredibly ambitious. It sets standards.

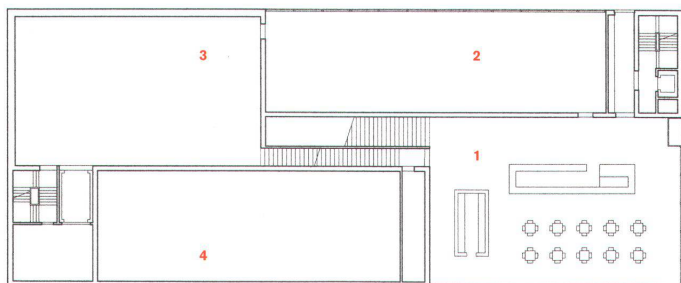




**Längsschnitt**  
longitudinal section

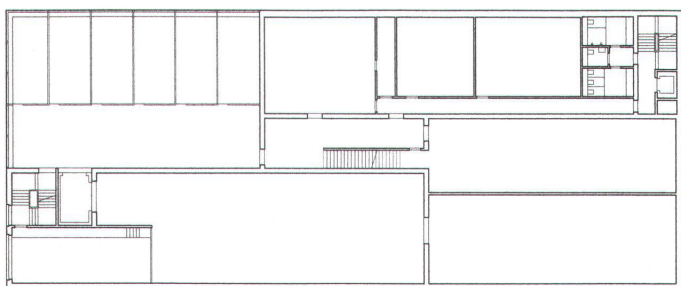


**Obergeschoss**  
upper floor

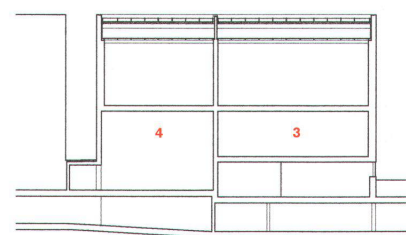
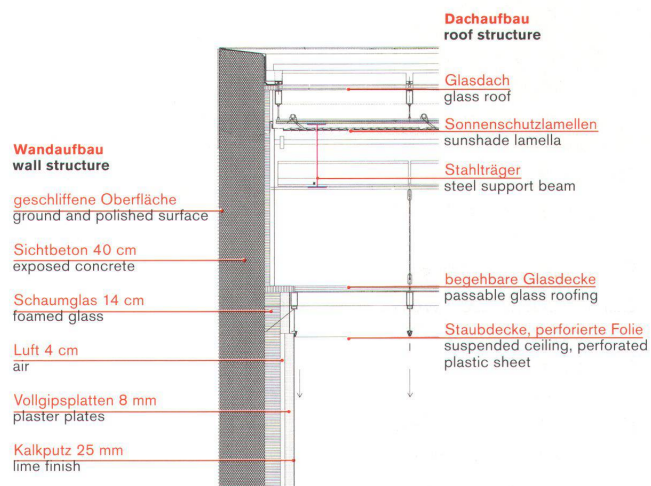


**Grundriss Erdgeschoss.**  
1 Cafeteria/Shop  
2 Seitenlichtsaal  
3 Kunstlichtsaal  
4 Depot

groundfloor  
cafeteria/shop  
hall with lateral light  
hall with artificial light  
depot



**Grundriss Untergeschoss.** Die Verwaltung befindet sich oben links  
basement. Above left the administration



**Querschnitt durch Kunstlichtsaal**  
cross section through hall with artificial light



**Situationsplan.** Schwarz das Kunstmuseum, oben das fürstliche Schloss  
general plan of location. The art museum in black, the Prince's castle at the top