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Autor: [s.n.]
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THE SHARED TOWNHOUSE

More and more urban citizens aspire to live in the city centre, so the opportunity to convert an existing commercial building into a residential, working and living environment for families was a godsend. The City of Zurich offered the property at the corner of Selnaustrasse and Gerechtigkeitsgasse, a building previously occupied by offices of the municipal administration, on the condition that new housing was created there. Two groups of owners took charge of the project, joined by five co-owners, who identified with the project but had no decisive influence over it.

Dating from 1861, the stone building with a wooden staircase was topped with a lightweight two-storey wooden construction with a concrete staircase. The additional storeys follow the shape and window placement of the existing structure, while the new interior walls are congruent with the existing walls in the original building. The project was planned in close cooperation with the city's monument preservation office. The two additional storeys increase the floor space by around one third on the same area of land. The ground floor and first floor were repainted, the cellar was insulated and the building is heated with gas. As a whole, the building meets the Minergie standard, although there is no controlled ventilation. It now comprises seven flats and a small guest apartment for use by all tenants. In the first year alone, some 100 overnight stays were booked in the guest apartment. There is also a communal roof terrace on the top floor.

The post-compaction strengthens and "updates" the volumetry and corner location of the building, while the colour design of the façade also highlights the unconventional nature of this urban renewal project. Yet the building has a consistent overall appearance, with no visible rupture between the old and new. The urban development approach can also be seen in the flats: the obvious thing would have been to turn the attractive rooms away from the street and towards the inner courtyard. However, the old Botanical Garden in the immediate vicinity behind the Schanzengraben canal is an attraction, so the orientation towards the street is not necessarily a disadvantage. Ventilation from the rear also makes it possible to align the flats with the neighbouring Botanical Garden.

In a certain sense, the project embodies the "recapture" of communal housing. The residents knew each other from the start and shared the aim of enhancing the building in keeping with the users' wishes. Whilst there was great external pressure to put the property to commercial use, the co-ownership structure adopted from cooperative models meant that this could be absorbed. It remains to be seen how this model will develop and whether it will prove sustainable. In any case, the project at Selnaustrasse is clearly groundbreaking in nature.

The residential and commercial building in Selnaustrasse, Zurich, is distinguished by the precision of the urban development analysis, holistically transformed into a financing model and a planning process that delivered surprising and persuasive building solutions down to the detail.

AWARD

RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL
BUILDING, SELNAUSTRASSE, ZURICH

Location

Gerechtigkeitsgasse 2, Zurich

Client

Einfache Gesellschaft Selnaustrasse, Zurich

Team

Architecture: PARK Architekten, Zurich
Site supervision: Atelier Urbane, Zurich
Civil engineers – solid building: Aerni + Aerni
Ingenieure, Zurich
Timber construction engineers:
Makiol + Wiederkehr, Beinwil am See
Building installations: HL-Technik, Zurich
Building physics, acoustics: Raumanzug, Zurich
Monument preservation: Amt für Städtebau,
Denkmalpflege, Stefan Gasser

Planning and execution

2006–2009

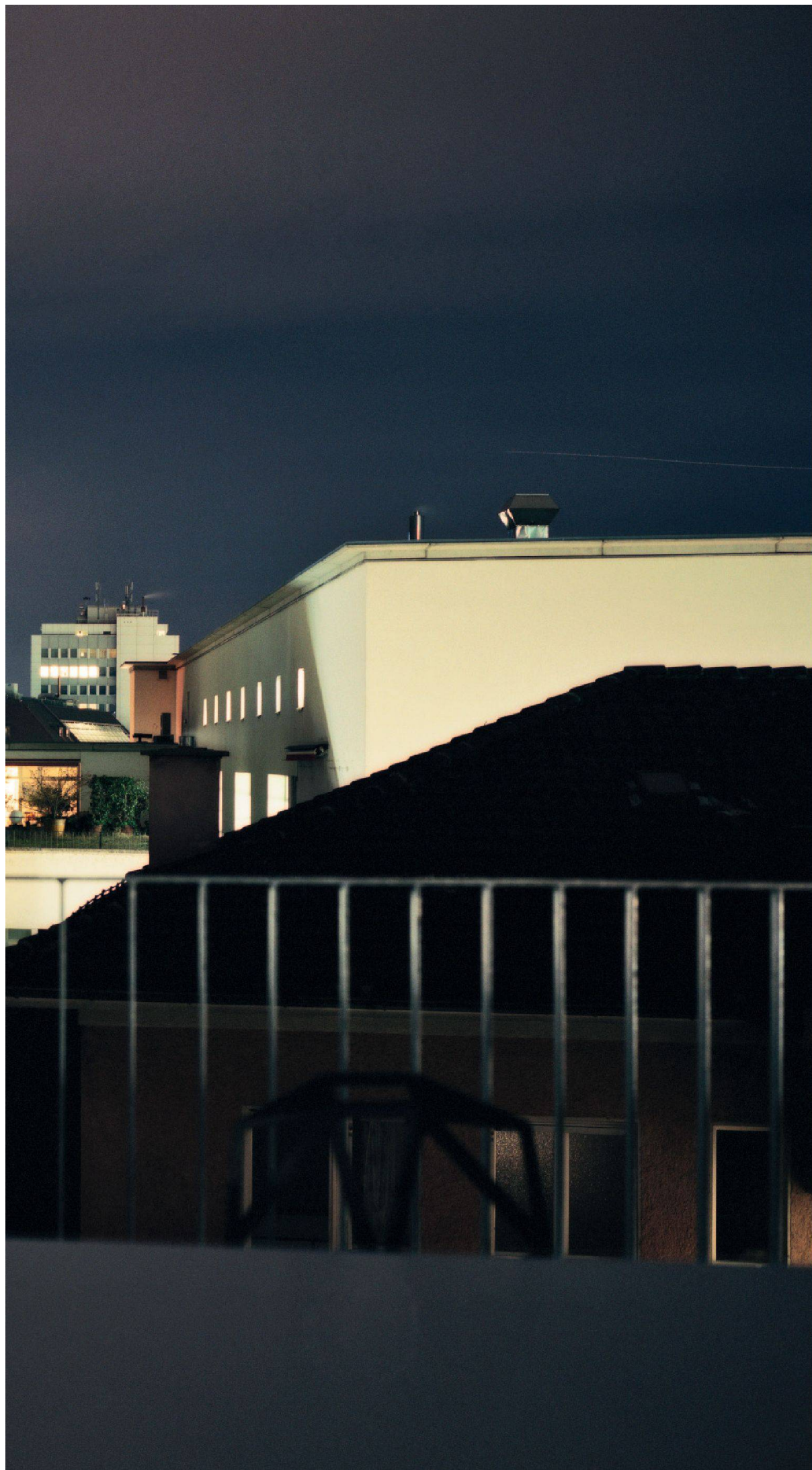


01 Residential and commercial building, Selnastrasse, Zurich (corner house) (photo: Dominique Marc Wehrli)



02 Production hall lecture building, University of Bern (photo: Karin Gauch, Fabien Schwartz)





03 Residential and commercial building,
Selnastrasse, Zurich
(photo: Jules Spinatsch)