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Expo 1964 (Swiss National Exhibition)

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by Alberto Camenzind, Head Architect of the Exhibition

The discussion concerning a national exhibition for the year 1964 was from the outset dominated, fortunately or unfortunately, by the idea of building a new city to serve first as an exhibition. This idea was set forth in a book entitled: "Attention: Switzerland". This aim can only be received with all due interest and warm sympathy. The error, however, lies with those who believed that an evolving city could be used as an exhibition. If any contrary evidence were required, the Berlin Interbau put an end to this belief.

The Expo 1964 will be conducted as a genuine exhibition, which will be torn down again at the end. This fact emerges from the very choice of site. The Head Architect was confronted by the question: "Is the exhibition as an instrument of communication in fact outmoded?" The exhibition as an instrument of communication has had to be equipped with new means. It must be understandable to all, but rich enough for more demanding visitors who seek additional information. It must be eclectic if it is to provide pleasure and diversion, but must at the same time maintain a certain standard and preserve a definite unity. The question implicit in it is always "why?". Not merely "how?". Its aim is to come to grips with all aspects of life in our nation, posing always the question "why?" To this extent the National Exhibition is not a trade fair but rather a political undertaking.

The General Division

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Architects: Architects of the Exhibition

The general division—"The Swiss Look"—is conceived as the axis of the exhibition. It runs as a continuation of the way from the railway station to the entrance through the middle of the exhibition and forms the central route along which the visitor is intended to realize the problems of the past, present and future that confront Switzerland.

In the central section of the general division (partie générale), which is concerned with the present, there is located the section "A day in Switzerland". Here, half in earnest, half in jest, the mentality and the way of life of the Swiss are subjected to a close examination. As he passes through this area, the visitor is aided by having the chance to join in a question-and-answer game; when he is finished he turns over his questionnaire to an electronic computer, which gives him his picture and at the same time stacks his answers and evaluates them statistically.

Division 2a "The Joy of Living"

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Division Architect: Tita Carloni FAS/SIA, Lugano

From this large division we are publishing in particular the section "The Human Community", in which the themes: church, social work, family, civic activities and development aid, are taken up. This complex of themes is assembled in a building creating an effect of transparency, the structure constituting the transition from the large paved court sloping to the south in the centre of the division and the open lakeside landscape. In the case of most of these themes, there is no actual material that can be displayed; the exhibition can only draw attention to abstract values involved in human society, and that by means of artistic devices.

Division 4 "Industry and Trade"

56

Division architects: Frédéric Brugger FAS/SIA, Alin Décoppet SIA, Benedikt Huber FAS/SIA, René Vittone SIA

At the Swiss National Exhibition of 1939 individual pavilions were allotted to the different sectors of trade and industry, where they could display their products. In 1964, on the other hand, by concentrating industry and trade as a whole in one unified, if multicellular complex, the organizers came perilously close to the exhibition palaces of the 19th century. The Industry section is distinguished from such a palace so far as its material is thematically conceived.

The themes treated yielded in the first place a spiral arrangement which could be viewed on radial or concentric passageways. After further study, it opened out into a fan, in which the individual sections assume the shape of wedge-like slices of cake, with two passageways intersecting all sections: the panorama giving a general survey of the material on the technological plane and the area devoted to general economic and planning aspects in the courtyard of the complex.

Our Issue lays special stress on two sections: 402 "The Chemical Industries" and 408 "Textile Industries and Machinery".

Division 5 "Exchange"

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Architects: "Les échanges" Team, Basle

In the "Les échanges" section the problems of export, commerce, banking and insurance are displayed. The following principles were adhered to for the exhibition: exhibiting means selecting. Only one aspect of each theme is represented, wherever possible that aspect that most directly appeals to the majority of viewers. Each of these selected aspects is brought home to the viewer in three phases: the viewer is confronted with the material, one single problem is seized upon and discussed, and finally the viewer is invited to be a participant, to experiment for himself. Material, problem and action are our three phases in a truly effective display technique.

"Insurance" Section

The visitor is familiarized with the core of every insurance activity, the calculation of probability on the basis of the law of high numbers. Then the timely question facing insurance in Switzerland is isolated: the relationship between public and private insurance. Finally the visitor is invited to act for himself: he obtains from a computer specific information on his personal risk.

The Expo Station

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Architect: Pierre Zoelly SIA, Zurich

The assignment was the designing of a waiting-lounge with pre-allocation of passengers for four extratrains simultaneously, with a low-cost rain canopy sheltering 6,000 people, plus two platform roofs, each 300 meters long. The main idea was to economize, and the outcome was the idea of a complete suspension structure with a thin roof skin of corrugated asbestos cement. Resting on the concrete foundation are the pylons consisting of four water tubes; the cables are anchored in the embankment and, on the lake side, in artificial hills.

Nestlé Children's Wonderland

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*(Nursery), Architect: Michel Magnin SIA, Lausanne
Engineer: Conrad Zschokke Enterprise, Geneva*

The Children's Wonderland is situated in the lower part of the Flon Valley, on the north-south axis of the exhibition, to the north of the Giratoire de la maladière (a traffic round-about). It is made up principally of two concrete constructions: "Le cratère" (the crater) "La grande voile" (the large sail). There is expected on ordinary days an average of from 600 to 700 children, on peak days up to 1700. An organization clearly elaborated along psychological lines will guarantee both surveillance and discipline as well as the entertainment of the children. Mention can be made of the brightly coloured aprons handed out to the children, these garments constituting the sole chromatic decoration in this part of the Exhibition.

Division 6 "Agriculture and Forestry"

70

Architect: Jakob Zweifel FAS/SIA, Zurich and Glarus

From this far-ranging division we have selected:

"The forest". Architects: Heidi & Peter Wenger FAS/SIA, Brig.

The function of the forest in the landscape belongs in the National Planning Section. The Industry and Trade Section shows the application of wood products. What remains for exhibition are agriculture, forestry, the forester and his function. What is displayed, then, is the forest as a piece of nature farmed by man. The chief medium of presentation is the photograph. The more rapid sequences of work in the forests is shown in films, the slower rhythms of natural growth and geological changes are caught in still shots.