
INSPIRED BY MODERNIST EXHIBITION PAVILIONS

How architecture plays a role in creating optimal working conditions and why the new building embodies the spirit of the IWC brand: Architect Christoph Grainger-Herr, CEO of IWC Schaffhausen, personally helped design the new Manufakturzentrum.

WHAT WAS IT ABOUT ARCHITECTURE THAT FASCINATED YOU AS A YOUNG STUDENT?

Christoph Grainger-Herr: Architecture is about much more than just designing a utilitarian building. A building is a living space – an environment that directly affects the way people live or work. I see this in the Manufakturzentrum too, a building that over 230 employees call their professional "home". The building's architecture influences their day-to-day activities and their social relationships. An architect therefore needs to understand how people behave and how they interact with one another. This holistic approach has always fascinated me.

WHAT REQUIREMENTS DID YOU HAVE AS AN ARCHITECT FOR THE MANUFAKTURZENTRUM?

The building obviously needed to offer optimal conditions for production and excellent working conditions for our employees. It was also very important to us to provide visitors with a unique experience. But we didn't just want to build a functional factory – we wanted a building that was not only aesthetically pleasing, but also perfectly encapsulated the spirit of our brand. For this reason, we invested a great deal of time and thought into how we might be able to capture the essence of IWC in architectural form for our employees and visitors, in the same way as we would for our shops, for trade fairs and so on.

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE IN ALL THIS?

Once we had decided on what volume we needed in order to best accommodate the needs of production, I helped draw up the initial concepts for the design of the building exterior and set the architectural tone. In the next phase of the design process and during the construction process, I represented IWC in architectural matters and made decisions regarding the building's aesthetics and the materials to be used.

WHAT WAS YOUR INSPIRATION FOR THE DESIGN?

I had modernist exhibition pavilions in mind at the time. These pavilions have allowed countries to showcase their greatest achievements in terms of technology, trade and art. This blend of gallery, workshop and engineering trade fair seemed to me to be a fitting architectural foundation on which to base the design, and the classical modernist style is an excellent match for our brand. We are a manufacturer with a 150-year history, but we are also a manufacturer that looks to the future. This is perfectly encapsulated in modernist architecture. Rather than backwards-looking neoclassicism, it is a classical interpretation with a nod to the future.

HOW CAN ARCHITECTURE FOSTER GOOD WORKING CONDITIONS?

Many production plants are designed as glass cubes. But this is not well suited to use as a production space because temperatures inside it can soar and it offers little shade from the sun. Furthermore, it is not easy to divide up a space like this because there is glass everywhere. We therefore wanted to avoid using all glass, but instead opted for panes of glass supported on a base and flat roofs that extend beyond the façade, so that the occupants could also benefit from the architectural sunshade effect that these provide. In conjunction with the automatic sunshade system and the mathematically calculated projection of the flat roofs, a flexible space has been created that can be easily divided as required and benefits from ample daylight but without any unpleasant glare from the sun.

WHAT OTHER ROLE DOES THE ARCHITECTURE HAVE TO PLAY HERE?

When you first set foot in the new Manufakturzentrum, you immediately get a sense of what IWC is all about, as well as a sense of the pride that our employees take in their work. If production is divided up over multiple storeys or buildings, you don't get that sense. To foster effective teamwork, we have set up special shop floor areas, for example. In these areas, teams can discuss objectives, quality requirements and current issues in the department itself. In this way, the architecture facilitates faster communication flows and improved processes. We also made use of various architectural tricks to create a rather special atmosphere – for instance, the projecting flat roofs are covered with wooden planks. This makes the new building feel a little like a house with a generously proportioned veranda, and creates a cosy ambience.

HOW ARE IWC'S BRAND VALUES REFLECTED IN THE BUILDING?

The glass surfaces with their detailed black frames stand in stark contrast to the brilliant white projecting flat roofs – this echoes the kind of contrasts that feature on many of our watch dials. The building's wooden core and the warm stone flooring convey a certain warmth and a sense of luxury. The production plant's warm heart is enveloped by the cooler, almost laboratory-like atmosphere in the production areas. This juxtaposition of luxury lifestyle and precision engineering perfectly encapsulates the spirit of the IWC brand.

IWC SCHAFFHAUSEN

With a clear focus on technology and development, the Swiss watch manufacturer IWC Schaffhausen has been producing timepieces of lasting value since 1868. The company has gained an international reputation based on a passion for innovative solutions and technical ingenuity. One of the world's leading brands in the luxury watch segment, IWC crafts masterpieces of Haute Horlogerie at their finest, combining supreme precision with exclusive design. As an ecologically and socially responsible company, IWC is committed to sustainable production, supports institutions around the globe in their work with children and young people, and maintains partnerships with organisations dedicated to environmental protection.

DOWNLOADS

Photos of the official opening of the new Manufakturzentrum can be obtained free of charge at press.iwc.com

MORE INFORMATION

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