

# Brunner House

Architect: Luca Selva AG  
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Photo: Ruedi Walti  
Project: Brunner House  
City: Witterswill  
Country: Switzerland



This house in Switzerland has been through a thorough renovation project adding important qualities as an upper floor and a completely new look changing the texture of the house from dull concrete to shiny copper.

**DUMMY**  
Not suitable  
for hi-res  
printing

## – a phenomena of perception



### **Concept and function**

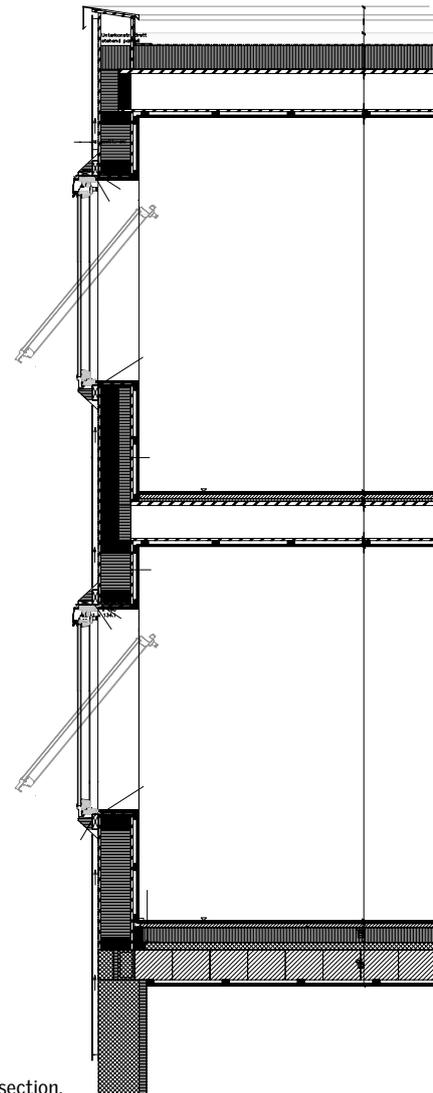
Renovation projects can be gentle, almost invisible for the viewer studying before and after pictures. But they can also be more dramatic improvements, changing the scenery completely, when a building has been freshen up not only with new surfaces and paint but also with a new and different look, style, use of materials or functions. Brunner House is an exciting example of the last version: A complete makeover from an ugly duckling to a beautiful swan. Adding the upper floor section together with a new exterior texture completely changes the use and look of

the house. Being used as a psychiatrist's clinic and office little attention has been paid on the architecture for years until a new owner and his architect took over. 'The existing house was a traditional low, one-storey bungalow, which was used by a doctor as his pavilion for therapy. The client – a family with three small children – bought the house in 2005 to transform it in their own residential house. The program we did for them basically consisted of an extension of the existing structure, meaning that we decided to develop the structure vertically and not horizontally in order to keep the existing and nice garden

area as untouched and unspoiled as possible. We didn't want to pronounce the perception of a new building in the existing garden. Not local traditions but phenomena's of perception were the guideline of the project', tells architect Luca Selva.

### **Site**

The house is situated in Witterwil, a village in the agglomeration of Basel about 15 min. from the centre of Basel by tramway. The site of the house is typical for its neighborhood with old trees in a residential area of the 1980ies.



Detail section.

### Materials and construction

By his approach the architect put huge efforts not to create a strictly didactical or spectacular transformation adding the new part in a dialectical position to the existing building, so the house in general couldn't be regarded as consisting of a new and an existing part. 'We were interested in creating an entire new house out of the existing. This meant that a new entity must be made. So we built a new wooden framework structure on the existing basement, which was about 1 meter above natural terrain level. Then we looked after a 'wrapping solution' for the body of the

house itself, which was able to embrace and subordinate an extension of a existing structure', adds architect Luca Selva. The semi-transparent copper façade with its dark-brown colour gives the building the look of something ancient or antique, which has been known for a long time. From the copper surface of the exterior, the VELUX roof windows – used as tilting façade windows – pops out like eager eyes of an observing reptile. In fact the whole transformation process of the building could be compared with a reptile or an insect changing skin. The window frame itself is clearly constructed as if the windows

have been added on the building body rather than cut out of it. Oppositely the sculptural terraces and veranda looks as cut out of the building volume.



### **Interior**

Entering the renovated Brunner House by a slim, triangular staircase made of concrete under a copper canopy is a completely different welcome compared with before.

The ground and upper floor plans show the research of a more functional division of spaces by a minimum of introducing of new means. The ground level shows a modern and very open space-way of living with the open kitchen and living space directly leading to the veranda – a platform reminding of being on the deck of a boat. A generous passage, filled with air and light, characterizes the first floor plan. This space is being used as children's space; space for playing and making homework, by the three children of the family. Their bedrooms are placed next to each other with bathroom facilities in middle, almost linked together as one entire en-suite living unit. A spacious basement in shape of the original house contains the traditional technical and service facilitating functions. Also a small corner office is placed in the basement with a small rectangular window band facing a part of the garden. The basement can be reached from outside by a separate staircase.



*– Frank Engelbrecht Jensen*