



ARCHITECTURE TOWN DAVOS – LOVE AT SECOND GLANCE

Davos, Europe's highest city, is perceived as ugly by the superficial observer. For those who are interested and connoisseurs, the town with its more than 13,000 permanent residents offers architectural treasures from different eras. A closer look at the Alpine town makes you discover love at second glance.

The landscape around Davos is characterised by buildings of the Walser people who migrated from the upper Valais into the high valley of the River Landwasser in the 13th century. The Walser farms are split into a timber dwelling with foundations partly of masonry and in contrast, free-standing outbuildings on stilts. Such farmsteads are widely preserved in the surrounding districts of Glaris, Frauenkirch and Wiesen. Thanks to its varied past, Monstein is as impressive as any open-air museum and is one of the few Walser villages to have retained its original character.

In the city of Davos, in the 16th to 18th centuries, influential families or successful business people from abroad built representative town houses. Good examples are the «Grosse Jenatschhaus» (local museum) or the «Villa Vecchia» community centre in Davos Dorf.

Sanatorium architecture and classical modernity

The foundation stone for the highest-altitude town in the Alps was laid at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. With its rise to a world-renowned, high-altitude health resort, the quiet, scattered settlement experienced its first building boom.

Health resorts and sanatoriums, hotels and guesthouses sprang up. The treatment of tuberculosis patients with lots of sunshine and fresh air as well as new insights into hygiene in these facilities led to the sanatorium architecture. It was an important forerunner to the style of classical modernism that emerged in the twenties and thirties of the 20th century. The buildings had an ornamental, cubical form, a flat roof and integrated terraces facing south. The architecture of these sanatoriums is evidenced by the Hotel Schatzalp (built between 1899 and 1900), the House Semadeni on Promenade 52 or the medical centre of the former Thurgau Schaffhausen High Altitude Clinic.

Classical modernism also found its way into the high valley thanks to architect Rudolf Gaberel (1882 – 1963), who built public and private buildings in this style in Davos during the interwar period. The town hall in Davos Platz or Davos Platz railway station and the village car park (today Garage Heldstab) in Davos Dorf are still-existing examples of his work.

Architecture until the end of the 20th century

In the 1950s, the destroyed post-war Europe and above all the discovery of antibiotics brought the end of the international mountain resort. After a short period of crisis, the course was set for a tourism, sports and congress location in the following years. Mass tourism and the new legal possibility of acquiring ownership of property (not possible until 1965) left their mark: bulky buildings from the 1960s and 1970s, mostly painted in camouflage colours, also betray their purpose architecturally: fast money. The building sins of these boom years are still partially visible. The apartment blocks, which are insufficiently insulated and difficult to change due to condominium ownership, are relatively small holiday

apartments. Despite these building sins, Davos remained true to the tradition of progressive and pioneering architecture. In line with economic development, clinics and sanatoriums have been replaced by public authorities, the privately organized Davos Destinations-Organisation (formerly Kur- und Verkehrsverein and Davos Tourismus) and private foundations as well as companies.

In 1969, the municipality had the then congress house built by well-known Swiss architect Ernst Gysel (today House A). The extensions to the congress centre were carried out by local architect late Christian Meisser (1979), Ernst Gysel (1989) and Heinrich Degelo (2009/10). In the context of an energetic refurbishment in spring 2017, House A was adapted to the appearance of the other buildings and thus lost the original character of the Gysel building. The signature of this well-known Swiss architect can still be seen today at the 1965 indoor swimming pool part of the «Eau-là-là-là» wellness and adventure bath, located next to the congress centre.

The Rätia office building was built in 1972 by professor of architecture Justus Dahinden as one of the first shop-in-shop shopping centres in Switzerland. Within the scope of a complete refurbishment, the centre was modernised from 2015 to 2017 by architect Corinna Menn from Chur.

Internationally renowned Zurich architects Annette Gigon and Mike Guyer built the Kirchner Museum Davos in 1992. The buildings simple, uncomplicated and consistent construction method of glass, concrete, steel and wood has been considered to be a trailblazer for a new conception of museum architecture.

Building boom at the beginning of the 21st century

A new building law of 2001 was deliberately designed in a liberal manner and aimed at compact construction in the urban settlement area. This triggered a new construction boom: large apartment buildings shot up and, with a few exceptions, were largely sold as second homes under condominium ownership. Since the economic efficiency of the buildings was once again in the foreground, most of the results of the efforts of the contracted architects cannot be used as examples of modern architectural art. This renewed construction boom had a positive side effect: various poorly aged buildings from the construction boom of the 1970s were demolished and replaced by some attractive houses.

Examples of good examples include the new construction of the apartment building «Renaldo» (2009 – 2010), the newly constructed apartment buildings on Seewiese (2010) near Lake Davos or the new Raiffeisenbank Davos business location with residential development (2016). This also includes the «Horlauben» development in Davos Dorf. The architectural concept is based on the more than 100 years old building of the former hotel «Astoria», whose character and the Art Deco façade have been preserved. The goal of dense construction was achieved – not always to the delight of the inhabitants of different houses.

The «Golden Egg» and other large hotel buildings

The hotel buildings were also given architectural accents: the construction of the hotel «Intercontinental» (2011 – 2012) near Lake Davos was based on a concept by star architect Mateo Thun, who withdrew from the project during the planning phase. The 40-metre-high hotel building received its nickname «Golden Egg» because of its unusual oval shape and its metal façade cladding. Further examples of modern architecture are the conversions and extensions of the hotels Schweizerhof (2009) and Grischa (2010 – 2011), the new construction of the Hotel Hilton (2011 – 2013) or the «Symond-Park» complex with the Ameron Davos (2015).

Destination Davos Klosters

Davos Klosters is one of the most famous holiday resorts in the world and boasts the most comprehensive holiday, sports and meeting facilities in the mountains. Although the contrast between urban Davos and idyllic Klosters could not be greater, both villages, which lie only ten minutes drive from each other, have one thing in common: their fascinating and breathtaking mountain backdrop.

www.davos.ch | www.klosters.ch

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