

# Christ & Gantenbein reverts to classical themes



Text Katharina Marchal  
Photo Roman Keller

'Our office and commercial building is the first important building block in urban plans for the area around Liestal's train station.' These are the words of Emanuel Christ of Christ & Gantenbein architects, who spoke at the opening of his firm's latest project. He used 'building block' to refer to the structure as a solid body but also to remind listeners that it is one of three projects planned for this urban quarter. Surrounded by streets and providing pedestrians with passage beneath the railway tracks, the anthracite-coloured volume occupies the triangular site like a stone, its air of severity emphasized by the reduced dimensions of its base.

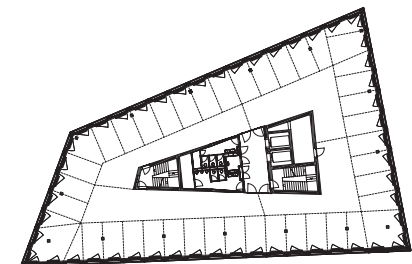
Christ explains that the composition – base, main floor and upper storeys – is a reflection of classical themes. Together with partner Christoph Gantenbein, he compiled *Pictures from Italy*, a recently published book in which images of their work are juxtaposed with those of buildings they photographed during a trip to Italy in 1999. The façade in Liestal, for instance, with its regular grid of fenestration and standard 2.65-m storey height, resembles that of a Florentine palace. The relief created by angularly

projecting window embrasures can be compared to the ashlar stonework of a palazzo. The way in which the base merges with the upper storeys makes the building appear sculptural and without scale.

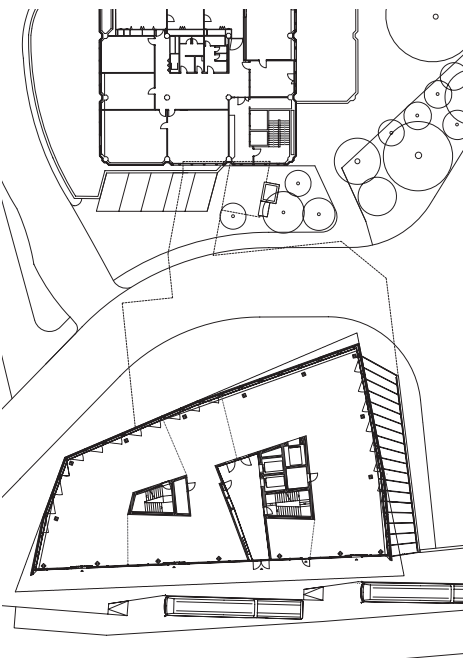
The interior of the building also reveals classical themes. The trapezium-shaped hall plays with perspective. Christ assures us that although the materials used here may appear to be expensive, they are a 'crossover of conventional materials', such as varnished spruce for walls and, on the ceiling, black trapezoidal sheet metal embedded with fluorescent lights, which he calls 'tar-paper classicism'. The circulation system enables the building to be divided into four (or fewer) office units.

The relationship of base to topography and function gives the building multiple faces. The main façade, orientated towards the station, allows for a maximum of shop windows. The overhang provides a sheltered zone for pedestrians and people waiting at the bus stop in front of the shops and office entrance. At the rear of the building the upper volume cantilevers and, according to Christ, 'takes to extreme the game played with the weight of the façade'.

[christgantenbein.com](http://christgantenbein.com)



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