

Herzog & de Meuron Unveil New Motorway Chapel for Switzerland

Written by Eric Baldwin

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Courtesy of Herzog & de Meuron

[Herzog & de Meuron](#) have designed a new motorway chapel for Andeer, [Switzerland](#). The new project is sited on A13, the road that connects the village with Chur to the north, and to Ticino and Italy to the south. The idea for the chapel in Andeer was inspired by the site alone and its location, from the road itself.





Courtesy of Herzog & de Meuron

As the design team explains, motorway chapels enjoy great popularity. Many existing chapels in Andeer were built centuries ago and lie embedded in the landscape. "Many of them are architectural and historical gems, from simple plastered walls to frescoes, painted ceilings, and wood carvings. They are places that encourage people to pray and worship—or simply to stop and rest and marvel for a moment." The team decided that they could not use the region's historic chapels as reference, that they couldn't use them as an analogous model for today's contemporary architecture. The team also choose not to work with explicit religious signs or symbols. Instead, the design aims to sharpen the perceptions of visitors as they experience the roadway and the natural environment.

Courtesy of Herzog & de Meuron

The chapel in Andeer had no specific spatial program, and the team worked on understanding the needs with representatives of the community and the local pastor. Because of the location next to a motorway, the team knew they would have to deal with noise. As a result, there is not just a single door separating inside and outside acoustically and spatially, but a sequence of spaces. These include different and distinct chambers, like the human ear. The team started out with a shape as abstract as possible, a kind of placeholder, a solid white cube, with a variety of zones defining its interiors. Inside, perception of the environment is heightened by the red of a room-height pane of tinted glass. The sun, setting in the evening, shines through the red glass into this last portion of the chapel, which leads directly to the landscape outside.

Courtesy of Herzog & de Meuron

[Herzog & de Meuron](#) wanted the architecture to reinforce perception. The last room with the red pane of glass opens up into a cave-like oval, reminiscent of early religious sites that archaeologists have discovered in the neighboring community of Zillis. Along the funnel-shaped earth space, visitors find two other small chapels: the first for readers, with even daylight coming into the round room from above and the second with a candle, a mat, reflecting wall, and a single skylight. This is the most personal place for visitors; here they are "confronted with themselves." The earth room is conceived as a sequence of chapels with a ground-level exit facing west as well as access from above via a flight of stairs. The did not want to define the space, but enclose it, like a garden or courtyard. They created four walls of equal height and at right angles, but not as part of the fixed walls of a room. The walls lean against each other; they lean and support at the same time.

News via [Herzog & de Meuron](#)

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