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The Remodelling of Salzwellen Salzburg

by the next ENTERprise Architects

Press Dossier October 2021

Salzwelten Salzburg

The complete remodelling by the next ENTERprise Architects of probably the first salt mine in the world to open its tunnels to the public creates a new and contemporary experience for visitors.

Starting point

Salzwelten Salzburg, a popular cultural attraction that has been open to the public since 1568 and welcomes more than 200,000 visitors a year, was ready for a redesign and reorganisation. The small-scale additions and modifications to the ensemble of buildings that had been carried out over decades had resulted in confusing logistics and poor visitor circulation. As a result of a dialogue process, the renowned Vienna architectural office the next ENTERprise Architects was selected to develop a new and comprehensive overall concept. The project for the reinterpretation of Salzwelten Salzburg was submitted in March 2020 and, over the course of the following months, realised according to schedule, despite the disruptions in the design and construction process caused by the pandemic. Hence, a holistic project that consists of extensive renovation work, a series of conversions and additions and a completely new visitor circulation system was completed within just 18 months of the signing of the contract. The redesign and reinterpretation of Salzwelten Salzburg was realised by the next ENTERprise Architects together with Sabine Dreher / Liquid Frontiers and Matthias Hosp / ARTFABRIK.

A new overall ensemble

Remodelling work "Ober Tage" (above ground) focussed on natural orientation, the implementation of state-of-the-art services and the optimisation of flows, all with the objective of increasing visitor traffic and reinforcing the atmospheric qualities. The incorporation of new displays invites visitors with time on their hands to wander around the complex at their leisure. Connecting elements, including a new, uniform canopy with signage and generous openings and extensions, sensitively combined the existing buildings into a coherent whole. The characteristic heterogeneity of Salzwelten Salzburg, which has developed over many years, was enhanced by contemporary elements and woven together into a convincing and impressive overall ensemble.

The individual sections of the tour as a "series of islands"

Welcomed by the covered info terminal next to the car park, visitors enter the new multi-functional visitor centre through the funnel-shaped entrance, which can be seen from far and wide and draws on the industrial character of the mine. The historic existing building was liberated from later additions, small openings were made in the façade and the impressive timber structure was laid bare, right up to the roof. The interior, which is now generous and airy, contains the centrally located infodesk, with its ticketing, lounge and infrastructure, and a series of display cases, info walls and a huge 3D model of the Bad Dürrenberg salt mine, which offers visitors an atmospheric introduction to their tour below ground. Equipped with a ticket and some information one then steps out onto the new outdoor plaza, which has a canopy of coloured glass and acts as both a meeting point and distributing element. From here, one can head in two directions: to the building that forms the entrance to the mine, with its tour-start, bistro and shop or to the open-air museum, the Celtic Mountain, with its associated Salt Manufactory and children's playground.

The Celtic Village can already be seen from the new plaza and floor markings indicate the barrier-free access route. A second route crosses a bridge and enters the so-called historic mine entrance building, with its new bistro and distant views. This is where visitors gather to start their booked tour.

The tour starts "Ober Tage" with an introductory film in a specially designed and built preview room. After putting on the necessary protective clothing in the cloakroom, with its lockers and comfortable seating, guests are ready for the tour of the show mine "Unter-Tage" (below ground). Following the tour and the return of the protective clothing, the visitors leave via the newly adapted and enlarged shop, fortify themselves in the comfortable bistro with its splendid views or continue further to the Celtic Mountain with its playground. Conceived as a "series of islands", these separate, new sections of Salzwelten Salzburg not only improve the visitor experience and orientation, but also offer a broad range of information, cuisine and opportunities to relax.

Crystalline and orange-coloured highlights

In formal terms, the remodelling draws on the engineering architecture of the mining industry. For example, the funnel-shaped entrance to the visitor centre is inspired by the method used for building shafts, while the limed timber beams lend the existing building a sense of elegant solidity and lightness. The choice of materials and colours is based on the crystalline and orange-coloured character of the blocks of salt as well as the galleries and industrial buildings of the mine, with their steel structures and wooden planks. This palette continues throughout the visitor areas, creating an inspiring atmosphere for the guests before they enter the galleries.

Between a cabinet of curiosities, a mine train and an underground salt lake

The show mine "Unter Tage" was conceived by a team led by Sabine Dreher from the office Liquid Frontiers and newly presented in cooperation with the media producers ARTFABRIK. Taking into account the educational mission of the neighbouring Hallstatt UNESCO World Heritage Site, a concept was developed that tells the story of the world's oldest show mine with integrity and authenticity without losing sight of the need to entertain. Four periods of salt mining (the Present Day, Baroque, Middle Ages, Iron Age) are explained in the form of multimedia exhibition chambers. This journey through time involves a ride on a mine train, two slides and a raft trip across the underground salt lake. The reduced, modern aesthetic of the exhibition chambers, with their specially developed lighting concept and impressively presented salt sculptures, offers a state-of-the-art adventure for visitors and ensures that Salzwelten Salzburg provides a unique experience.

Salzweiten Salzburg

An interview with Ernst J. Fuchs (the next ENTERprise Architects)

Contemporary spatial culture and sensual lightness



Ernst J. Fuchs & Marie Therese Harnoncourt-Fuchs

What were the Salzweiten like before the remodelling? What was the starting point and how did the design process proceed?

EJ. Fuchs: Salzweiten Salzburg (previously Hallein) is an industrially shaped, heterogeneous ensemble that had developed over several decades and, before the reconstruction, suffered from inadequate logistics and poor visitor circulation. This is why one objective of the reinterpretation was to develop an optimised guidance system for visitors. The new concept, with its clear principles, emerged from an intense dialogue process that involved numerous workshops with the clients.

How did you achieve the spatial integration of the heterogeneous sections of the complex?

EJ. Fuchs: The aspect of connection was important for two reasons: Firstly, the circulation and orientation had to be upgraded in order to increase visitor traffic and, secondly, the general visitor experience, which had greatly suffered due to the previous inadequate orientation, also had to be improved. A sense of connection was created by, on the one hand, targeted constructional measures that included selective extensions, spatial openings and canopies and, on the other hand, an overarching colour and material concept (e.g. for the flooring). This enabled us to give the overall ensemble a clear sense of unity without losing the heterogeneous charm that had developed over the years.

Which design approach did you take to the architectural reinterpretation of Salzweiten Salzburg?

EJ. Fuchs: We attempted to make it possible for visitors to associatively experience the "saline surroundings" throughout their tour. For example, the colours of the blocks of salt and the way in which the salt almost sparkles as it is mined are formally taken up in the perforated profiled metal façades and the glistening, silvery-white steel structure with its panes of orange glass. In addition to this, the combination of limed wood with other materials, including white aluminium and the mineral platinum coating to the floor screed, provides an appropriately "saline" spatial atmosphere.

What appealed to you personally about the overall project? What impact, in your opinion, will the remodelling have on visitors?

EJ. Fuchs: The holistic approach to the entire ensemble and the way in which our continuation of its development enabled something completely new to emerge while reinforcing its former qualities were both the challenge and the appeal of this project. The fact that the confusing complex has been transformed into something new and autonomous represents considerable added value for Salzweiten Salzburg. The visitor will enjoy a sophisticated and richly-varied spatial experience. The remodelling has brought a contemporary spatial culture to the location that is not only highly functional but also enjoys an air of sensual lightness. The new covered plaza will attract the special attention of visitors – the view of the cloud formations in the sky through the colourful glass ceiling will remind many of the view through their ski goggles!

Salzweiten Salzburg

Three questions for Sabine Dreher (founding partner of Liquid Frontiers)



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Sabine Dreher

What was the motivation behind the reinterpretation of Salzweiten Salzburg?

S. Dreher: When visitor numbers exceed 200,000 per year one is forced to ask how, in 2021, one can reconcile a service-oriented visitor experience with an entertaining educational mission. For this reason it was important to us to focus on the authentic mine experience and to selectively enhance this with analogue and digital presentations.

What's special about this project in terms of the curatorial concept?

S. Dreher: The three show mines of Salinen Austria AG, at Altaussee, Hallstatt and Salzburg, are archaeological research sites with a clear educational and communication mission vis-à-vis the 7,000-year-history of salt mining in Austria. At the same time, the Salzweiten are profit-oriented leisure attractions, where entertainment is paramount. The challenge is to develop a contemporary exhibition and communication concept that coherently combines cultural heritage and mass tourism. In cooperation with scientists from research institutions in Hallein, Salzburg and Bochum we took great care to develop a communication solution which is both haptic and full of integrity. The authentic methods of moving through the network of galleries, such as the mine train, the slides down the miners' chutes and the boat trip across the salt lake, continue this focus on the experiential into these extraordinary surroundings. The real objects and analogue information are enhanced by media presentations that offer virtual insights into the history of salt mining. While the public is led through the network of galleries by knowledgeable experts, visitors above ground have the option of moving independently around the complex and discovering fascinating information with the help of an AR app specially developed by Artfabrik.

What can visitors to the new presentation "Unter Tage" expect?

S. Dreher: The leitmotiv "The essence of life" is the common thread that runs through the presentation, which informs the public about the importance of salt across the centuries, from the Iron Age to the present, from the boiled egg at breakfast to the high-tech battery. In line with the motto "knowledge & perception" we guide the visitors through exceptional spaces, allowing them to experience and literally grasp the story of salt. The hour-long guided tour is a multifaceted experience for a broad public aged four and upwards that affects each visitor differently according to their specific interests.

Salzweiten Salzburg

About the next ENTERprise Architects

the next ENTERprise Architects were founded by Marie-Therese Harnon-court-Fuchs and Ernst J. Fuchs in Vienna in 2000. Their projects stretch from concrete building projects (including museum and cultural buildings and private residential projects), installations, exhibition design and experimental interventions in the public realm to urban design concepts. tne believe that spaces only discover their function upon being used. This approach opens up a debate in which concepts and spatial strategies – related to not yet plannable future needs and developments – play an important role. They design both the programmatic and the spatial limits of their buildings and concepts with a knowing sense of transparency on the basis of the performative potential of architecture and the interaction between space, atmosphere, context and the user.

Their many prestigious projects include the Wolkenturm in the grounds of Schloss Grafenegg (AT) – one of the best known international open-air stages, the Seebad Kaltern / Lido di Caldaro (IT) – an adventure pool that becomes an event location by night, the Datenfeld/ Haus Zirl, the hybrid MOL7 urban building in Vienna (AT), the "Wolke 7" catering pavilion in Grafenegg (AT), which received the Client's Prize and AIT Award in November 2017, and the interactive installations "Noeklius_ informed sculpture", "silent conquest" and "Audio-lounge", which have been exhibited internationally at such events as the Biennale in Venice and Manifesta in Rovereto.

tne Architects are currently responsible for the construction of the Heidi Horten Museum in Vienna, which is scheduled to open in spring 2022.

Further information: <https://www.tne.space/>

About the Salzweiten

Salzweiten GmbH was founded in 2005 as a subsidiary of Salinen Austria AG. It is responsible for the operation and marketing of the visitor attractions in the salt mines. The three facilities in Hallstatt, Altaussee and Hallein welcome a total of over half a million visitors every year. In addition to the show mines, the Salzweiten operate a funicular railway and the "Welterbeblick" viewing platform in Hallstatt and a showcase saltworks in Hallein near Salzburg. With almost 100 employees during the summer season, Salzweiten GmbH generated turnover of around 13 million euros in 2019.

Further information: <https://www.salzweiten.at/de/salzburg>

Salzwelten Salzburg

Data sheet

5422 Bad Dürnborg, Ramsauerstraße 3

Client: Salinen Austria AG

Salzwelten GmbH / Managing Director Kurt Reiter, Site Manager Manfred Mader

Competition/Dialogue process / May 2019 – Nov 2019, 1st Prize

Commissioning as general planner Nov 2019

Design Nov 2019 – Oct 2020

Construction June 2020 – April 2021

Completion 30.04.2021

General planner above ground: the next ENTERprise architects

Content presentation + guidance system: Sabine Dreher / Liquid Frontiers

Media design + presentation: Matthias Hosp / ARTFABRIK

Structural design: Bollinger und Grohmann ZT GmbH

Building services design + fire protection design + building physics: Vasko + Partner

Landscape design: Land in Sicht

Lighting design: Christian Ploderer

Planning below ground:

Content presentation + guidance system: Sabine Dreher / Liquid Frontiers

Media design + presentation: Matthias Hosp / ARTFABRIK

Total client investment approx. 10 million euros net including own mining work

Visitor information:

Salzwelten Salzburg

Salzbergstraße 21

4830 Hallstatt

Austria

Opening times:

19.5.2021 - 1.11.2021: 09:00 - 17:00

2.11.2021 - 9.1.2022: 09:00-15:00

Further information: <https://www.salzwelten.at/de/salzburg>

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Salzwelten Salzburg

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