



← The public central passageway

## (Bank headquarters, Vilnius)

between the two tall volumes is filled with platforms containing meeting rooms; wooden boxes serving the same purpose are suspended along the glazed passageway, intersecting the whole complex. Regrettably, this functional solution undermines the overall architectural concept: seen from the outside, the atrium has lost its transparency, so that the vertical part of the building appears as one thick volume.

The upper part of the building is dedicated to offices, while the base is a multi-functional public space. Its curved roof, clad in wood in-laid with islets of greenery, should become a vibrant public place. Apart from the informal character, created by irregular surfaces and natural materials, the space is especially attractive because of the unexpectedly relaxed ambience: as the horizontal administrative volume on the north side screens the terrace from bustling Konstitucijos Avenue, the only distractions are kite-flying children on the riverbank and breathtaking panoramas of the centre Vilnius.

The terrace and the other public areas beneath it can be freely accessed at any time. The double-height public space, lit by natural light entering through the glazed wall and

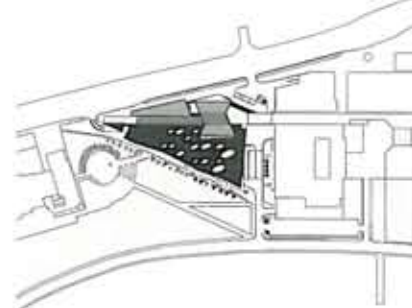
oval skylights, is reached by stairs leading down from the central passageway. Two free-standing wooden polygonal volumes house a conference hall and a small library. The rest of the space is dedicated to a restaurant overlooking the river.

According to the architects, the idea was to create a restrained architectural design, that would not stand out too much from its urban context, yet would still have a distinctive character. There is nothing modest about this building, however. While the base merges with the landscape, the razor-edged silhouette of the vertical volume dominates the skyline. Three different and visually showy facade materials – shiny glass, gleaming steel and lustrous brown wood – make the building seem somewhat opulent without, however, detracting from its quality. Well thought-out details, a different vistas round every corner, turn an ordinary visit to the bank into an architectural as well as a financial experience. ←

## BANK HEADQUARTERS, 2005–2009

Architects: Audrius Ambrasas architects (Audrius Ambrasas, Vilma Adomonyte, Tomas Eidukevicius, Donatas Malinauskas)  
Client: UAB "Sveikata" valdė  
Address: Konstitucijos Ave. 20, Vilnius  
Info: www.ambrasas.lt

↓ Section



# Home for the elderly, Zurich

*A curious 1970s building – a municipal aged care facility – has been opened up in the course of a renovation by Gümamm Lüdi von der Ropp Architekten.*

SWITZERLAND — TEXT: AXEL SIMON, PHOTOGRAPHY: HEINRICH HELFENSTEIN

The massive concrete block of flats towers above the neighbouring three-storey brick middle-class homes. Consisting of a ring of seniors' flats around a multi-storey car park of which only the windowless north side is visible, it was topped by a two-storey baby nursery that was converted into an aged care facility back in the 1980s. The original building (André E. Bosshard, 1972) is undoubtedly based on the same, now obsolete concept of the city that the architect had applied on a grander scale a decade earlier, when he proposed to plant a gigantic island of high-rises in the Zürichsee (Lake Zurich): the city as a machine.

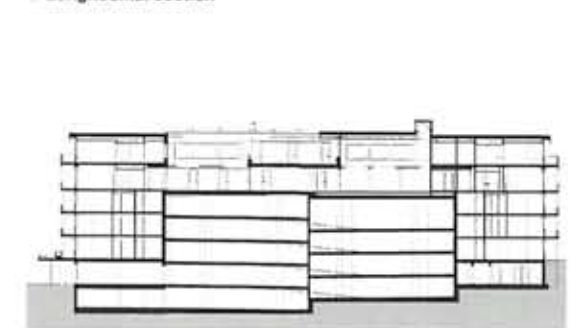
It is not only the world view behind this housing machine that is passé; the building itself was also showing the signs of time, both technically and functionally. With just 43 units, the aged care facility on the upper storeys was too small to meet the high demand in Seefeld, one of Zurich's most popular residential neighbourhoods, or to be economically profitable. The renovation integrated the retirement flats on the lower three floors with the aged care centre. This expansion to 70 flats required structural adjustments to facilities, building services and fire prevention system as well as to access, with two new lifts and a larger entrance area for the new 'address'. The main

intervention, however, is invisible from the outside: the core of both upper storeys was completely gutted. Here cheerful communal rooms invest the cool architecture with a warm inner life.

The renovation targets the interaction with the general public. Where the entrance to the car park and the apartments were previously located inappropriately side by side, a small pavilion containing the lobby and reception area now subdivides the park-like zone in front of the house into two areas. With its striking supports twining like the branches of one of the giant trees nearby, the pavilion adopts the exposed concrete of the facade, but the architects have shaped it into a playful element that breaks up the closed appearance of the building mass. Neither the facades nor the car park was the object of the renovation; they were merely cleaned and repainted. The refurbished café is off the lobby. With its elegant spatial impact and an outdoor section in the spruced-up garden, it is also meant to attract people living in the neighbourhood.

The former retirement flats on the first three storeys were not altered, but those on the top two floors are now slightly larger one-room apartments adapted for the needs of the disabled and with practical built-in furniture. The areas in front of the lifts are popular gathering places; they have been enlarged on all floors and are now illuminated by daylight and

↓ Longitudinal section

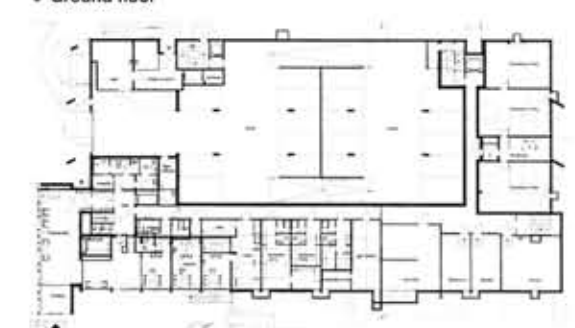


fitted with built-in benches. The corridors on the lower storeys run parallel to the back wall of the car park which was decorated with eye-catching murals by the artist Harry Buser in 1976–1980. These will be preserved as a relic of their era. Smooth, sky-blue flooring and new lighting brighten the atmosphere here.

The new heart of the house beats in the heavily modified upper storeys. In the centre of the deep building mass, the restaurant and the multi-purpose hall used to relate to the outdoor world only via skylight domes. The core of the new communal rooms is, on the one hand, a green courtyard with obliquely stepped levels, and, on the other, the double-height restaurant space which is lit by high windows. From one of the lower restaurant areas there is a view of the street; the other area, which can be partitioned off to serve as a multi-purpose hall, overlooks the courtyard. Besides the multiple vistas – horizontal and vertical, outside and inside – this brightly lit series of spaces now allows improved orientation and a variety of routes. Adjoining the main rooms are the kitchen and, on the top floor, the wellness zone, fitness room, hairdresser and activity rooms. Here is also a therapy centre for those needing care, which has a view of the nearby Botanical Gardens.

The walls of the restaurant, like those of the courtyard, are clad with solid cedar, which gives the rooms an unmistakable fragrance. There are doors made of oak, wallpaper with a

↓ Ground floor



greenish shimmer, and on the high ceiling of the restaurant a contemporary chandelier illuminating the hall in the evening. Attractive lamps also grace the ruby-red wallpaper of the café. The floors in all important public rooms are covered with attractively patterned limestone tiles. The spatial and material richness dispels the building's former rather morbid atmosphere and creates a variety of places that stimulate the senses without seeming opulent. An airy realm that radiates security and comfort has settled in on Wildbachstrasse, suggesting rather different values from those of the former housing machine. ←

## RENOVATION OF WILDBACH AGED CARE HOME, 2007–2009

Architect: Gümamm Lüdi von der Ropp Architekten SIA  
Client: City of Zurich, represented by Amt für Hochbauten  
Address: Wildbachstrasse 11, 8008 Zurich  
Info: www.glvdr.ch



↓ Fourth floor



→ Entrance, via a new pavilion with lobby and reception



↑↓ The new heart of the building is formed by the heavily modified restaurant-cum-multi-purpose hall. ↑ Café next to the lobby

