

## Radical Archaeology

### Roman settlement excavation center Augusta Raurica, Augst, Switzerland



#### Main authors

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#### Project data

Project group: Architecture, building and civil engineering  
 Client: Canton of Basel-Landschaft, Building Department  
 Project background: Public commission  
 Planned start: August 2018

#### Summary and appraisal of the project by the jury

Part workspace, part archive, part exhibition, the archaeological excavation center presents the first headquarters for a significant yet financially challenged cultural institution safeguarding the largest Roman site in Switzerland. Offices, restoration labs, workshops, and storage, previously dispersed in various buildings, are united within a robust and economical spatial system that emphasizes visual transparency and a common identity. Equally pragmatic as it is expressive, the lightweight steel structure balanced on top of ancient ruins provides a continuous and flexible field condition that anticipates future change and growth. Low tech solutions are favored over high-tech construction.

The building hovers in the landscape, an abstract archaic form that is as familiar as it is foreign. A handsome, flexible structure succeeds – through a few clever tweaks – to appropriately house many uses. Doing so brings together disparate parts of the archaeological process, fostering coordination and collegiality. The jury was impressed by the structural system that allows the building to adapt to new functions as the Center's needs change – a sustainability through adaptability.

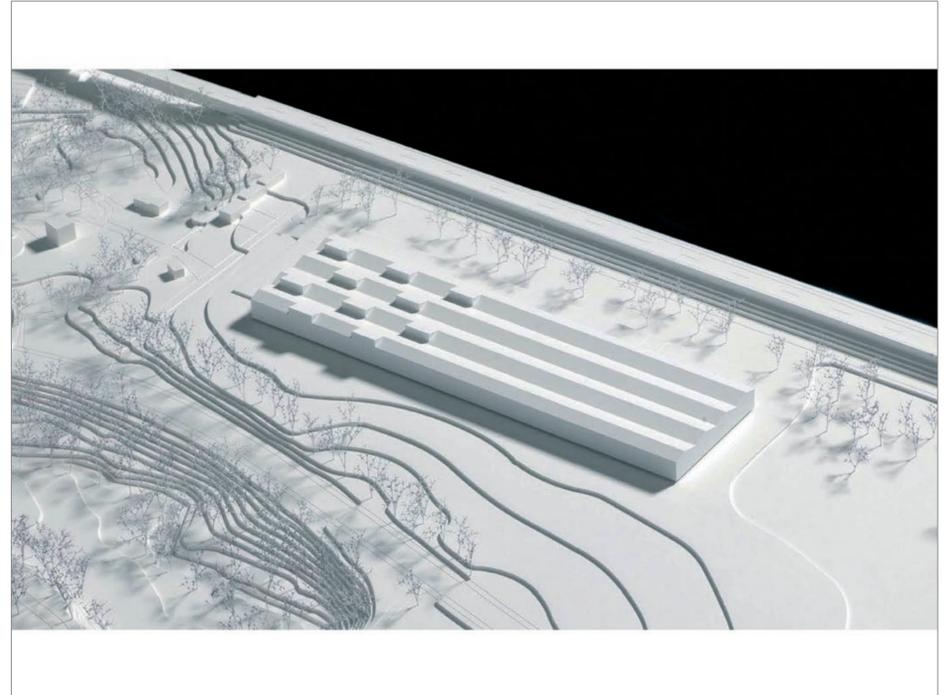


Image 1: Pragmatic yet expressive, the building offers flexibility and a clear identity to a growing cultural institution that serves as a caretaker of Swiss heritage. A long, horizontal form floats above the ancient ruins, a single economical spatial system that allows for change and differentiation, while distributing weight evenly over a transfer plate. The linearity allows for ease of expansion and the assurance that at any given moment the building will appear complete.

#### Statements on the sustainability of the project by the authors

##### Flexibility and evolution

The ability of the building to adapt with the changing needs of the future is central to the concept of the project. The collection of artifacts, currently at 1.7 million, grows daily. At the same time, the nature of the different departments, from archaeology and conservation, to research and marketing, have also evolved and will continue to do so as new technologies and working methods become available. An organizational system of alternating structural bands allows individual rooms to expand or contract while ensuring clear circulation for people, artifacts, and technical services. At the same time, the linearity of the system allows the construction to be easily phased and extended over time while always appearing complete at any given moment.

##### Economy of means

The robust industrial character, celebrating storage as display, gives the institution a clear identity despite their financial constraints. Ordinary, durable materials like corrugated steel are elevated into expressive surfaces. Inside, the lightweight steel structure and tectonic assembly provides spatial expression and allows for easy disassembly, adaptation, and recycling. In the two-storey office and research area, voids and clerestories bring light and fresh air into the deep floor plate, lowering the energy consumption. A combination of natural and passive ventilation of the offices

through a pressurized corridor, as well as discrete climate zones for the artifacts means a very compact and efficient mechanical system despite the depth of the building.

##### Heritage and society

Our history and culture define us as a people and institutions like this exist to give us common ground. Its impact is both local and national, providing public programs for schools and families that also help the local economy. Yet Augusta Raurica is currently facing severe budget limitations as politicians debate the necessity of funding "old rocks". Their present situation of departments dispersed in various substandard spaces across town limits their ability to function, putting the artifacts and the institution at risk. The project provides not only an internal identity for the institution, fostering formal and informal exchanges necessary for a common mission, but also a face to the outside, presenting it as a depository of cultural goods and an anchor for the local community.



Image 2: Visual transparency in the field condition promotes mutual awareness across the departments and builds a common identity for an institution that had been physically disaggregated for too long. The process from the discovery of an artifact to its eventual archiving in the collection becomes part of an exposed sequence of collaborations between departments that occupy this common grid.



Image 3: The lightweight structure unifies a differentiated set of programs with a clear spatial character.

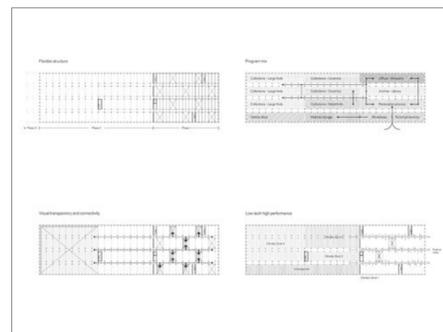


Image 4: The rationality of the spatial system provides a high degree of flexibility and performance.

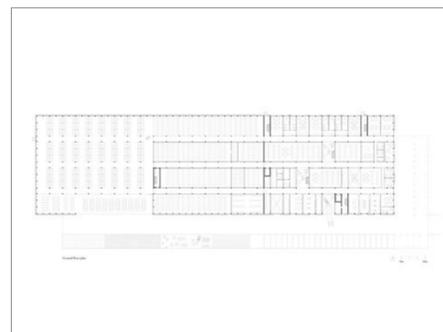


Image 5: Offices, workshops, small and large finds are distributed across a surface in a balancing of weight.

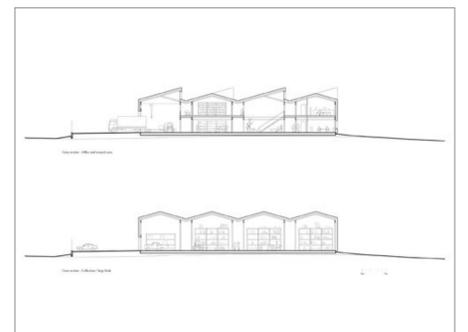


Image 6: A single basic system produces a grand hall at the same time as more intimate spaces.

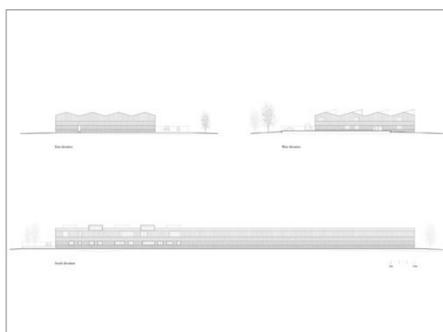


Image 7: The de-familiarization of the industrial form finds value and new expression in everyday materials.



Image 8: The horizontal layering of the façade is at once abstract and figurative.

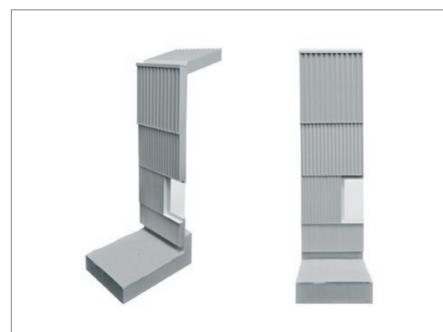


Image 9: Varying densities of corrugated metal present an almost archaic expression of sedimentation.



Image 10: Spatial specificity punctuates the field, offering functionality, transparency, and atmosphere.