



Sweep

In Zaha Hadid's Landesgartenschau building a new expression of sweeping organic form presents intriguing and ambiguous references to the contemporary world

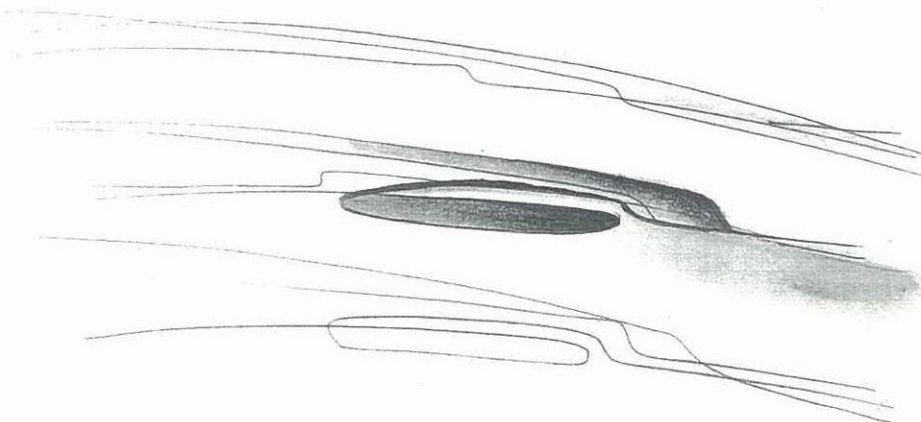
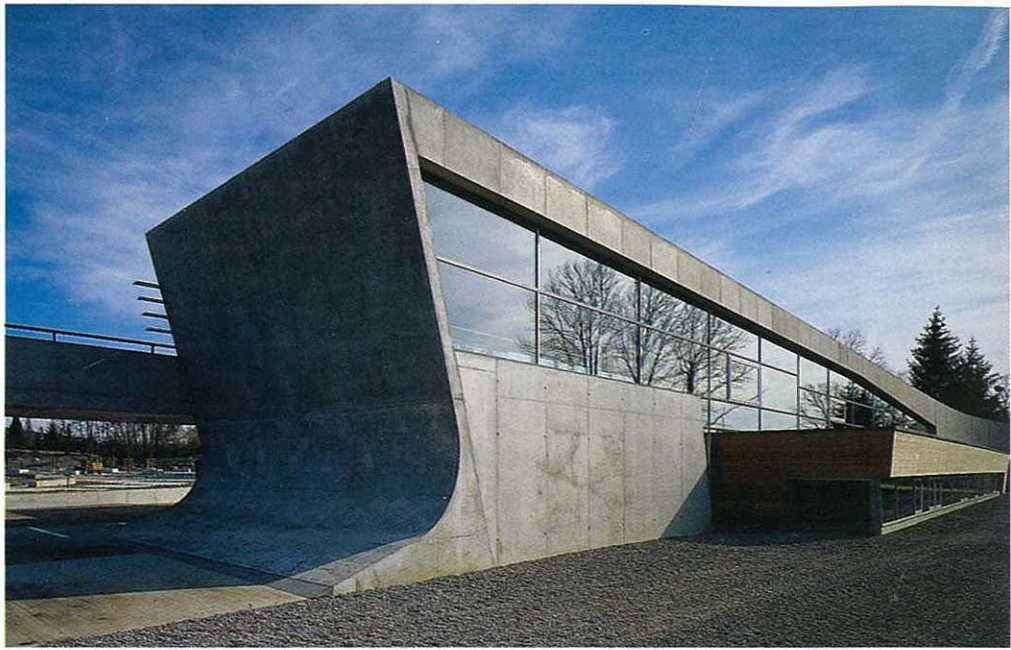
Landesgartenschau Event and Exhibition Space / Weil-am-Rhein, Germany

Architect / Zaha Hadid

Review by Stephen Varady

Photography by Christian Richters

*facing page: Night view, front elevation.
top right: Curved concrete wall at the
western end of the building.
below right: Rear elevation.*





top left and right: From the ground floor level the third pathway skirts diagonally up and across the exhibition hall to the upper level. *bottom left:* Detail of the environmental research centre dissected by a ground floor exterior wall. *bottom right:* Sloping geometries in the interior.



● **Zaha Hadid has built a new building;** the first new permanent structure to be constructed since the completion of the Vitra Fire Station in 1994. Like the Fire Station, this new building is located in Weil-am-Rhein, although this time not for Vitra, but for the city itself – for ‘Landesgartenschau 1999’, an annual international landscape gardening show. This new building is located in a broad landscaped park and will be used as an event and exhibition space.

Since the building, with the inclusion of a small environmental research centre, was to be of a more permanent nature, Hadid has seized the opportunity to engage with the landscape and designed a solid, sinuous composition of curved forms, slipping and sliding in and around and through the site and itself.

It is described by the architect as ‘LF one’ – one of a series of ‘space-bundle’ projects attempting to “elicit new fluid spatialities from the study of natural landscape formations”.

Hadid explains, “the most important general characteristics we look for in landscape spaces, in distinction to traditional urban and architectural spaces, are the multitude and subtleties of territorial definitions as well as the smoothness of transitions between spaces... Realms interpenetrate, distinctions are vague and latent, rather than definitive and frozen... Whereas architecture generally channels, segments and closes, landscape opens, offers and suggests. This does not mean that we abandon architecture and surrender to brute nature. The point here is to seek out potentially productive analogies to inspire the invention of new artificial scapes, landforms, pertinent to our contemporary complex, multiple and transient life processes.”

Rather than being an object set on the landscape, this design truly merges with its landscape. The architect alludes to natural metaphors as if the building might be seen as a series of shifted geological forms, but there is an intriguing ambiguity to the allusions here.

The building sits in a newly landscaped park that was once a gravel quarry in close proximity to the freeways and the railways that pass through Weil and Basel. Overpasses and cuttings abound, overlapping the natural and artificial landscapes, and leading one to think of other, more potent analogies contiguous with a connection to the contemporary world. The dexterity of Hadid’s intervention in the site, together with the deceptively simple spatial intersections, has led to an intriguing representation of humans in nature.

This formal expression is one borne out of an ‘organic’ exploration, while having little or nothing to do with previous organic architectural expression. It presents perhaps a new formal expression between architecture and landscape.

The visitor arrives at one end of the building where it rises from the earth. The walls become embankments and the path becomes the overpass as it snakes over the building to the other side, past a wall that will be a hit with the local skateboarders and rollerbladers. There is in fact a network of three intertwined paths – of the other two, one skirts along the southern perimeter, while the third curves along the northern side to the main entrance, then in and diagonally up, across and through the upper level. The interweaving of these paths creates the ‘space bundles’ between.

The entry space leads to the exhibition hall that steps down to the café. Both of

these run along the length of the ground floor, opening to the southern outdoor terrace. The kitchen, bathrooms and services are contained within the ‘root’ of the building, while the environmental research centre is suitably half-buried in the ground to the north, allowing a part of its roof to become a mezzanine for the exhibition space. The internal path thus connects to the raised public path outside via this space.

The design approach used in Weil appears to be a more fluid exploration of space than many previous projects by Hadid. While her work has always investigated non-orthogonal geometries, the majority of forms we have become familiar with through her projects have been more jagged and angular – such as in the Vitra building and the 42nd Street Hotel project.

Curved elements have been a minor rather than major component of the compositions – the Dusseldorf Art + Media Centre, the Peak Competition scheme, or the Cardiff Bay Opera House Competition winning entry. The Kurfurstendamm 70 project of 1986, was an exciting exploration of curved space, but an exploration that appeared to go into hiatus while other spatial ideas were being further tested during the intervening years through the multitude of projects we have seen published. Then in 1991 the Hague ‘spiral’ villa truly expressed the untapped potentiality of a different type of curved space where “residual spaces and gaps between the interstices of the exterior and internal spiral afford surprising views and channels of communication and interaction.”

It was a great shame that this project was never built, for it would have become one of the great houses of the late 20th century. Instead, through subsequent experimentation and exploration, and with a very different and very public program, those ideas have resulted in this Landesgartenschau building – a building that expresses a culmination of those years in the studio exploring sophisticated ideas coupled with formal and graphic experimentation.

The simple sweeps of the curves in plan and section belie the true spatial wonder of this relatively compact building. The main northern entry is understated yet it possesses a grandeur beyond its size and materials. The inter-relationship of spaces is complex yet sophisticatedly simple, through the intertwining of planes and volumes that maintains a clarity of use and purpose throughout the interior. On the lower level the volume of the interior is firmly contained to the north with a filtering to the southern courtyard through a series of solid/transparent panels. The upper level walkway/exhibition spaces have been left more open drawing the light down beautifully into the spaces while connecting to the immediate landscape that will contain the garden show and to the distant views beyond.

Perhaps this is a new branch of exploration for the office of Zaha Hadid. Seeing the other projects in the studio – the Cincinnati Contemporary Art Centre, or the Mind Zone for London’s Millennium Dome – I doubt if Hadid will limit herself only to this branch of exploration. Although the first prize in a competition for the Centre of Contemporary Arts in Rome in February this year, attests to the fact that it is an architectural exploration that, in the mind of Zaha Hadid, still has unlimited spatial potential.

Stephen Varady is a Sydney-based architect, writer and educator.

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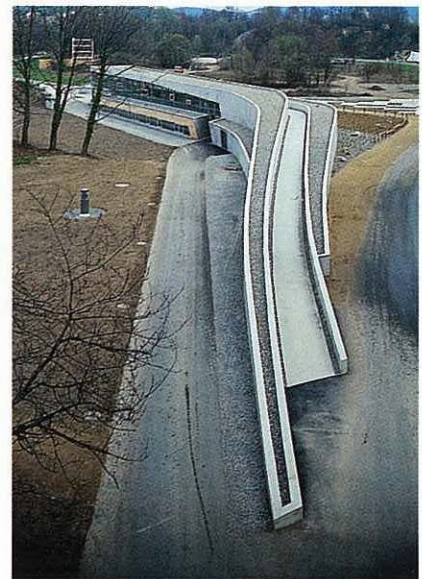
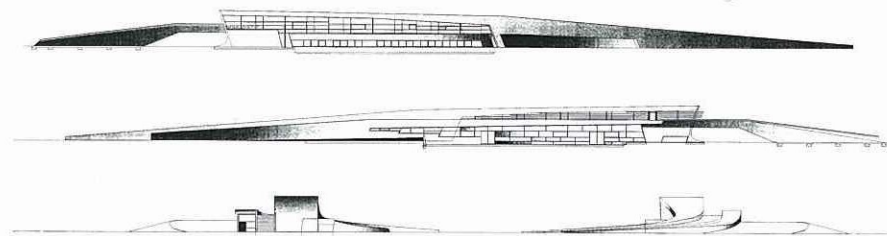
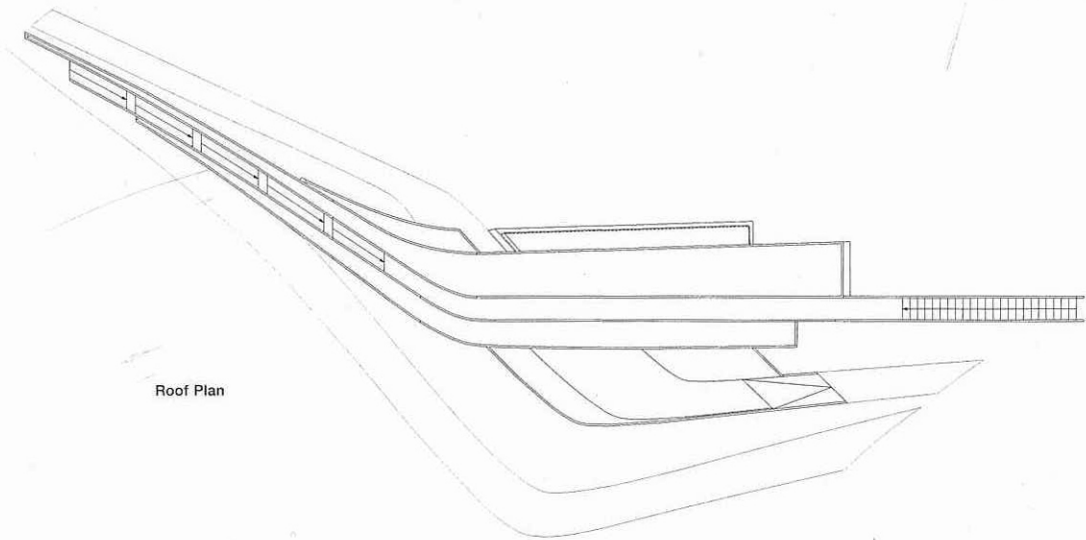


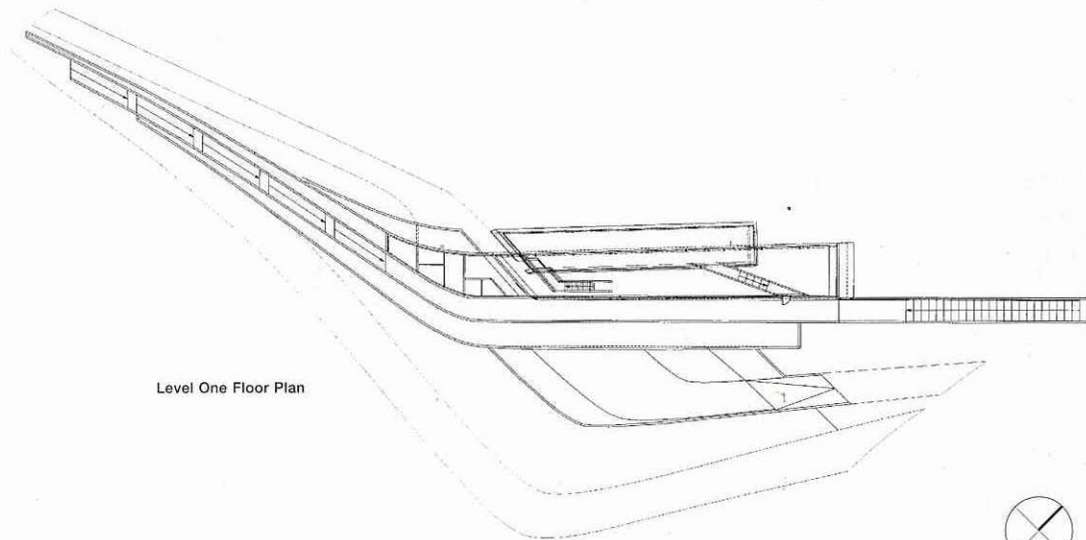
Photo / Helene Blinet

top: View towards the interior 'root' of the building containing services. bottom left: At the mezzanine level the internal path connects back onto the raised public path outside the building. bottom right: Aerial view of the sloping gradient of the roof form.

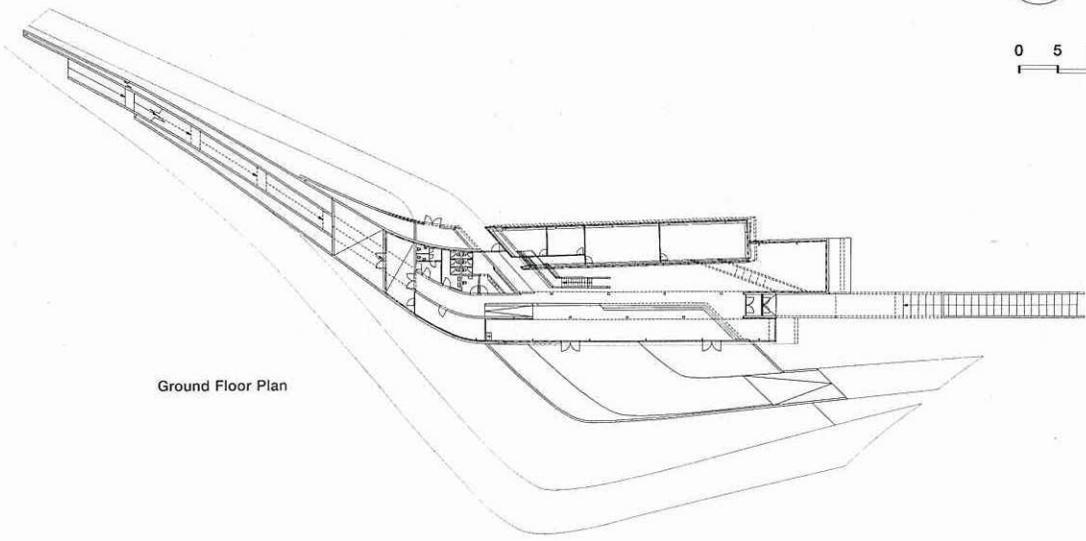




Roof Plan



Level One Floor Plan



Ground Floor Plan



0 5 10m

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