

Architecture as cultural export

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

Basel has become one of the capitals of contemporary architecture, whose architects have carried the name of the city around the world. Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, both born in Basel in 1950, founded their office in the city in 1978. They received the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 2001 and have designed the Tate Modern in London, the national stadium for the Beijing Olympics, the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg and the M+ museum in Hong Kong.¹ In Basel itself they have built the Schaulager, the extension of the Museum der Kulturen, the new hall of Messe Basel, the renovation of the Stadtcasino and the two Roche towers that now dominate the skyline.²

Other Basel offices have reinforced this reputation. Diener & Diener, founded by Marcus Diener and continued by his son Roger Diener, has built in Basel, Berlin, Amsterdam and elsewhere, while Christ & Gantenbein designed the extension of the Kunstmuseum and the extension of the Swiss National Museum in Zurich.³ The Novartis Campus, which Part G described, brought buildings by Frank Gehry, Álvaro Siza, SANAA, Tadao Ando, Rafael Moneo and others to the St. Johann quarter.⁴ The pharmaceutical groups have thus used architecture as a medium of corporate patronage, in which the building itself becomes the cultural gift and the advertisement at the same time.

Architecture differs from collections in one respect that matters for soft power. A museum attracts visitors to Basel, whereas an architect from Basel exports the city's culture to other places. When a Hong Kong museum or a Hamburg concert hall is associated with a Basel firm, the city gains a form of recognition that complements the reach of Art Basel in Hong Kong and Miami Beach. The two forms of export reinforce each other because both rest on the reputation of Basel as a place of discerning taste and long-term investment in quality.

1 Notes

1. On Herzog & de Meuron, founded in Basel in 1978, Pritzker Prize 2001, and their projects including Tate Modern (2000), the Beijing National Stadium (2008), the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg (2017) and M+ in Hong Kong (2021), see the publications of the firm. Dates to be verified. ↩
2. On the Roche towers Bau 1 and Bau 2 by Herzog & de Meuron, see Part G, Chapter I. To be verified. ↩
3. On Diener & Diener and on Christ & Gantenbein, including the extension of the Landesmuseum Zürich (2016), see the publications of the firms. To be verified. ↩
4. On the Novartis Campus and its architects, see Part G, Chapter I. To be verified. ↩

For general information only. This article does not constitute legal or tax advice, does not replace advice on an individual case and creates no lawyer-client relationship. It reflects the legal position as of September 2026.

Online version: helveticaregister.com/basel-architecture-as-cultural-export