

The Roche Towers

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If the Novartis Campus is the horizontal expression of pharmaceutical wealth in Basel, the Roche Towers are its vertical expression. The Roche site on the Grenzacherstrasse in the Wettstein quarter of Kleinbasel had been the company's headquarters since its foundation in 1896. In the 2000s Roche decided to concentrate its Basel workforce on the site and commissioned the Basel architects Herzog & de Meuron to design a series of towers. The first, known as Bau 1, was completed in 2015 with a height of about 178 metres and was then the tallest building in Switzerland.¹

The second tower, Bau 2, was completed in 2022 with a height of about 205 metres, overtaking its predecessor as the tallest building in the country. Together with a research centre and further buildings on the site, the investment in the Basel site amounted to several billion Swiss francs over a decade. Roche has announced further construction, including a third tower, with a time horizon reaching into the 2030s.² The towers dominate the skyline of Basel and are visible from Germany and France. To many residents they signal the economic power of the company and its commitment to the city, although some critics regard them as out of scale with the historic townscape.

For the canton, the towers have a fiscal and a symbolic dimension. The concentration of Roche's global management, its pharmaceutical research and several thousand jobs at a single site in the city binds the company to Basel more tightly than any tax regime could. The investment made at a time of international tax competition and of debates on the relocation of headquarters can be read as a statement of confidence in the location. The Basel-Stadt government has repeatedly referred to these investments in the political debate on corporate taxation, which Chapter III examines.

1 Notes

1. On the Roche Tower Bau 1 (Herzog & de Meuron, completed 2015, height about 178 m), see the Roche press releases and the architectural literature. Figures to be verified. ↩
2. On the Roche Tower Bau 2 (completed 2022, height about 205 m), the pRED research centre and the long-term development plan for the Roche site in Basel, see the Roche press releases and the cantonal Bebauungsplan for the Roche area. Figures and plans: Status to be verified. ↩

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