

THE DOLDER GRAND



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The City Resort of Zurich since 1899: its architectural history

The Dolder Grand opened in 1899 as the “Dolder Grand Hotel & Curhaus”. By the 1990s, the Dolder Grand Hotel was getting on in years after renovations in the 1920s and 1960s. Urs E. Schwarzenbach became the majority shareholder in 2001 and secured the financing for another major refurbishment three years later. After a major renovation led by London architects Foster and Partners, the new Dolder Grand reopened in April 2008.

The “Dolder Grand Hotel & Curhaus” opened in 1899. Restaurant entrepreneur Heinrich Hürlimann, who already ran the Dolder Waldhaus as a restaurant for day-trippers, commissioned Basel architect Jacques Gros to plan a grand hotel in the Swiss timber construction style popular at the time. It offered space for 220 guests and was equipped with a telephone, a telegraph and shared bathrooms on each floor. Even back then, the focus was on recreation and relaxation, active leisure activities and experiencing nature.

The hotel transitioned from seasonal to year-round business in the 1920s, which is when the first major structural changes were made. The Main Building was extended to include staff living quarters, and the main entrance was moved to the back of the house instead of the front as before. A semicircular **restaurant, the “Rotonde”, was built in its place, with large windows and an outdoor terrace. A modern extension with 60 additional rooms was added at the beginning of the 1960s. The original plan for a symmetrical building by Jacques Gros was thus abandoned.**

Urs E. Schwarzenbach as majority shareholder

After successful years came challenging times. By the end of the 1990s, extensive investments had become inevitable. These were necessary to secure the traditional establishment a place in the top class of the international luxury hotel industry. In 2001, entrepreneur Urs E. Schwarzenbach acquired the majority of the shares. With this move, he secured the financing and, from then on, played a decisive role in shaping this goal as Chairman of the Board of Directors.

The architectural vision

That same year, Lord Foster of Foster and Partners London was invited to Zurich. Following intensive research in the archives of the Dolder Grand, the internationally renowned architect suggested removing all buildings constructed after 1899, restoring the historic Main Building and completely returning the facade to its original 1899 appearance. As the main thrust of their first design, Foster + Partners again moved the entrance to the front on the south side of the complex. The idea behind it was that guests would again enjoy an exclusive arrival with a panoramic view, as in the past.

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The architects met the need for cuisine with a view by adding a glazed garden level. For a hotel operation with a similar number of rooms and larger floor plans, the architects created two curved wings around the historic Main Building, the Spa Wing and Golf Wing. In this way, the renowned London architects combined the historic 1899 Main Building of the Dolder Grand Hotel with modern architectural accoutrements.

The conversion

After the demolition of all annexes built after 1899, the first sod was turned in August 2004. The hotel was closed for the next four years. To achieve the necessary depth of the new buildings, more than 110,000 cubic metres of material were excavated around the historic Main Building within half a year. A steel frame provided elaborate support for the listed facade.

In spring 2005, the foundation stone was laid at the site of the future west wing. At the same time, 70 geothermal probes were sunk into the ground to a depth of 150 metres. This geothermal technology succeeded in reducing energy consumption by half, despite the doubling of floor space from 20,000 to 40,000 square metres.

After the foundation stone was laid, the new buildings were constructed around the historic Main Building. The entire Main Building was also re-supported and space was created for two additional basement floors. The topping-out ceremony in February 2006 marked the completion of the entire shell construction. The restoration took into account the listed status of various areas, including the Steinhalle in the Main Building and six listed rooms. These were all renovated in a manner that was historically in keeping with the original.

The Dolder Grand – a blend of tradition and modernity

The driveway to the hotel is on the south side of the Main Building, where it also was in 1899. The Steinhalle again acts as the symmetrical centre of the hotel with a corridor leading to the reception, the lobby and the Bar in the east wing of the building. Straight ahead is the ballroom and a curved corridor. It connects the three parts of the building – the Golf Wing, the Main Building and the Spa Wing – with each other. The gourmet restaurant The Restaurant (2 Michelin stars, 19 GaultMillau points) is located in the west wing of the Main Building. Stairs connect the Steinhalle with the new, lower Steinhalle in the basement.

From here, guests have access to the Garden Restaurant and the banqueting facilities, the Garden Salons. The 175 rooms and suites are almost equally divided between the three buildings. The Spa Wing houses the Dolder Grand Spa on the two basement floors with an area of 4,000 square metres. The existing underground car park with 240 parking spaces can be accessed on the ground floor of the Golf Wing. Goods delivery and waste disposal are in the underground location, which means they are not visible to the hotel guests. The conversion is completed with the architectural integration of the Dolderbahn station and a covered entrance to the hotel.

In January 2009, the Gallery was completed on the east side of the hotel. With a large glass front and 715 square metres of space, this provides a venue for conferences, seminars and exhibitions.