

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 & Kurhaus”. 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. Following extensive renovations led by London architects Foster and Partners, the new Dolder Grand reopened in April 2008.

The “Dolder Grand Hotel & Kurhaus” 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 – great innovations at the time. From the beginning, the focus was on recreation and relaxation, active leisure activities and experiencing nature.

Over the decades, Jacques Gros’ original plan for a symmetrical building was gradually abandoned. The first major structural changes were made in the 1920s, when the Main Building was extended to include staff living quarters, and the main entrance was moved from the front to the back of the house. A semi-circular restaurant, the ‘Rotonde’, was built in place of the former entrance, with large windows and an outdoor terrace to capture the view. A modern extension with 60 additional rooms was added at the beginning of the 1960s.

Urs E. Schwarzenbach as majority shareholder

Many decades of success were followed by challenging times. By the end of the 1990s, the need for extensive investment had become urgent if the Hotel were to have a place in the top echelon of international luxury hotels. In 2001, entrepreneur Urs E. Schwarzenbach acquired the majority of the shares. This secured the financing and, from then on, Mr Schwarzenbach played a decisive role in shaping the hotel’s future as Chairman of the Board of Directors.

The architectural vision

Later in 2001, the internationally renowned British architect Lord Norman Foster, of Foster + Partners, was invited to Zurich to develop a concept for the Hotel’s redesign and reconstruction. Following intensive research in the Dolder Grand archives, he recommended removing all buildings constructed after 1899, restoring the historic Main Building and returning the facade to its original appearance. A key idea was to move the entrance to the front (south) side again, so that guests would enjoy an inspiring arrival with a panoramic view, as they had before the 1920s. To meet the need for restaurants with a view, the architects added a glazed garden level. To provide a similar number of rooms as before, but each with a larger floor plan, Foster + Partners returned to Jacques Gros’ original concept of symmetry, creating a curved wing on each side of the historic Main Building – known as the Spa Wing and Golf Wing.

The conversion

In 2004, the hotel was closed for the four years it would take to complete the work. In August 2004, after all the post-1899 annexes had been demolished, ground was broken for the reconstruction. In the six

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months that followed, to achieve the depth required for the new buildings, more than 110,000 cubic metres of earth were excavated around the historic Main Building. 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, halving energy consumption despite the doubling of floor space from 20,000 to 40,000 square metres.

Construction then began on the new buildings that would flank the historic Main Building. The entire Main Building was 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 keeping with the historic 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 originally was in 1899. The Steinhalle again acts as the symmetrical centre of the hotel with a corridor leading from the reception to the lobby and the bar in the East Wing. Straight ahead of the Steinhalle is the ballroom, and a curved, glass-walled corridor that crosses the garden and connects the three parts of the building – the Golf Wing, the Main Building and the Spa Wing. The gourmet restaurant The Restaurant (19 GaultMillau points, 2 Michelin stars) is located in the West Wing of the Main Building. Stairs connect the Steinhalle with the new, lower Steinhalle in the basement, from where guests have access to the Garden Restaurant and the banqueting facilities – the Garden Salons.

The 175 rooms and suites are divided almost equally between the three buildings. On the western side, the Spa Wing houses the Dolder Grand Spa, which spans 4,000 square metres on the two basement floors. The underground car park, with 240 spaces, can be reached from the ground floor of the Golf Wing. Goods delivery and waste disposal are located underground, so they are not visible to hotel guests. The design is completed with the architectural integration of the Dolderbahn station, next to the East (Golf) Wing.

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.