

The Grandes Combes Courchevel: A RESORT UNLIMITED IN FUNCTIONALITY

AUER+WEBER+ASSOZIIERTE GMBH, GERMANY

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The large-space program integrates into the surroundings so that the architecture becomes part of the landscape.

With offices in Munich and Stuttgart, Germany, Auer+Weber+Assoziierte GmbH has been increasingly involved in the design and realization of international projects. Their staff of about 130 people has designed administrative, cultural, educational, research, and residential buildings, hotels, and sports and transportation facilities. The firm also works in urban development and master planning.

The common characteristic of all these projects lies in the distinctive and coherent development of architecture, which emerges from each project's site conditions. "Auer+Weber's architecture draws its unique character from an exhaustive examination of a building's function, as well as from the conditions and potential offered by a site," says Philipp Auer, a principle at the firm. "The design process, therefore, encompasses finding appropriate means of formal expression with the collaboration of all parties involved in the conception and realization."

This process leads to individual and customized solutions that cannot be categorized into a defined style. As such, the range of architectural conception extends from sculpturally defined volumes to structurally open landscapes. The common denominator of the architecture generated is openness and accessibility for the mind and senses.

In other words, the clarity of the design provides orientation and enables various occupancy and interpretation possibilities for both the user and the observer.

Auer+Weber views its work as a social and cultural service of a highly artistic, functional, and technological standard, whose architectural quality and sustainability must be measured by how open and flexible it is for the diverse forms of living for which it creates a setting. One example of this open-concept approach is reflected in The Grandes Combes Courchevel in France, a recreational resort currently under construction and located prominently between two mountain peaks—close to where France, Switzerland, and Italy converge. Its main building, therefore, will function as both a connection and a gateway. A connecting bridge will tie together the two fringes of the accompanying building areas, allow pedestrians to walk around unaffected by entering traffic, and act as a gateway on the journey up to higher skiing areas. Inside the building, the soft, flowing design language of the exterior continues. Indoor spaces will be optimized to interact with the landscape and provide stunning views of the outdoors, all while meeting the space requirements of the overall project plan.



The facility's design features an aquatics center for 1,000 people.

Achieving the Design Requirements

When the project originated, the City of Courchevel tasked Auer+Weber to create a complementary range of options for tourism, so that in good weather, guests could choose to ski or climb. Similarly, multiple design options were needed to entertain guests when poor weather blew in, such as wellness activities, saunas, and indoor swimming, as well as attractions that would sustain business in both winter and summer months. The facility's design, therefore, features an aquatics center for 1,000 people, a sports center with various sports halls, a conference center, and a hotel—all of which complement the existing skiing attractions. Bringing these concepts together will be achieved through a unique feature of the resort—a square on the street level that widens the space, inviting passersby to linger in an urban center full of amenities. In addition, all amenities will be integrated into the countryside, so they look like they naturally belong.

"We set out to create a design that integrates into the landscape, partly fusing with it. We also wanted something that would exist on its own and radiate an architectural confidence with sharp edges while providing an open window to the main access road. The project evolved into a design with many facets."

— Philipp Auer, Principle, Auer+Weber+Assoziierte GmbH, Germany

To stay true to their design philosophy of creating a type of architecture that would be distinctive yet emerge from the site's conditions, designers needed to understand the terrain and how the resort would complement the landscape. On this site, the building's design is defined by a mountain stream in the west, and by the main access road to the three Courchevel altitudes in the north and east. In the south, the view of the valley is free. Because of these conditions, the main building will sit mostly in the mountains in a sloping terrain and be composed of materials and colors that mimic the surrounding landscape. Plus, a "fifth façade," made up of the landscape-like roofs and their integration into the surroundings, influences the overall appearance.

The structural engineering, building services, energy planning, and lighting design teams met these design goals by using the 3D design tools, commands, and capabilities found within Vectorworks® software. For example, intuitive layout options made it possible to create a sophisticated design and full schedules directly in the software without having to work in a separate program. This capability applied to integrating gradients and mosaics, as well as to adding and referencing raster images as a fill.



From concept to realization, Auer + Weber's 130-person staff collaborates to achieve winning designs.

Another tool that proved useful was the site model, which helped designers identify cut and fill volumes within those sections and ensure the building's complex shapes would integrate homogeneously into the topography. "This tool saved us from having to perform complex computing of the volume of this intricate terrain," says Tina Kierzek, a project architect at Auer+Weber. The team also relied on databases and data sheets within the software to help them manage the scope and scale of the project. "It would have been very time-consuming to create space lists and room door lists by hand," says Kierzek. "The automated reports within the Vectorworks program saved us a lot of time. Plus, the fast connectivity of the various wall assemblies, managed in the object library, proved to be another time-saving tool."

Auer+Weber's command over Vectorworks software is keeping the project on schedule. Excavation work on The Grandes Combes Courchevel has wrapped up, and the site laid quiet during the winter months. Sometime in 2013, structural work will begin, and the last part of the project, the aquatics center, should be completed in the summer of 2015. When it's all done, guests will readily enjoy a resort whose design clearly acknowledges the prominence and visibility of the site, which offers considerate treatment to the surrounding wilderness.

When they look back at what they're achieving with this unique project, designers at Auer+Weber are pleased. "Our biggest challenge was to manage the complexity of the task—all while integrating such a large-space program into its surroundings in a way such that the architecture became part of the landscape," said Kierzek. "The result is a resort that will offer a flowing and open access point to the outdoors, and create a space for guests to enjoy year-round that is unlimited in functionality—just as our design philosophy intended."

Acknowledgements

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