



VELUX®

A PERFECT COUPLE

Countryside House in Steinberg, Austria



THE PLACE

At the beginning there was a place – a tiny old house, at the end of the road, standing on top of a vineyard with a broad view over the green foothills of the Alps. It used to be a wine cellar, refurbished to become a holiday house of Ruth Grünberger, the homeowner, family living in the nearby Graz. She has spent her childhood there – and recalls that she has always planned to live in Steinberg .

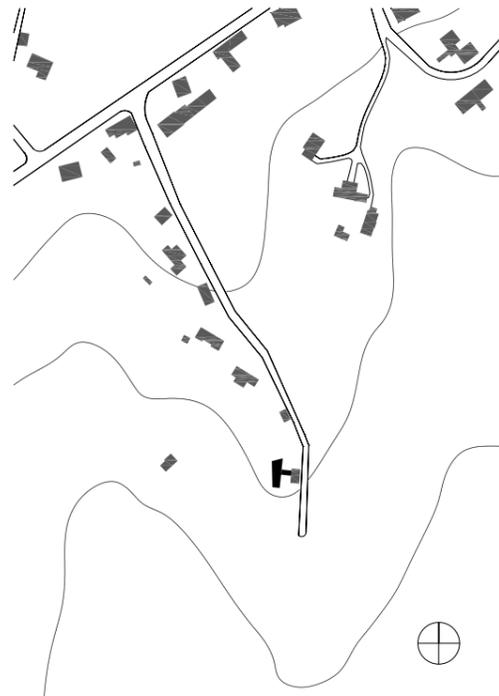
"A childhood friend reminded me recently how I was telling everyone in kindergarten about planning to spend all my life here, with this view."

Ruth Birner – Grünberger, house owner

Ruth Birner – Grünberger academic career led her to study and work abroad for some years. Upon returning, she took over from her parents the tiny old house – which turned out to be too small, when her partner moved in.

The couple did wish not only more space but also a new way of living, full of light, as opposed to the protective walls of the wine cellar building: additional storage room, a bathroom and sauna with windows summed up their needs.

In search for an architect, she contacted Clemens Luser, her primary school colleague, whom she rediscovered as an architect thanks to her father, a structural engineer, collaboration with Hope of Glory. Hope of Glory architecture office consists of three partners, Martin Emmerer, Clemens Luser and his father Hansjörg Luser, and as well as of four to six employees. The unusual, optimistic name was inspired by a shop nearby the office – when after a won competition in 2006 a formal structure under a new name had to be founded within days.



The old house stands in the middle of a protected zone, so the possibilities of an extension were limited not only by the steep site, but first of all by local regulations. It was not allowed for the extension to have a larger footprint and overwhelm the existing building; it had to have a steep roof with a defined angle and materials specified by the building code.

A research on the types of farmhouses in the area led the architects to a so-called "Paarhof" – "couple" typology consisting of two adjacent buildings.

The newbuild extension is connected to the wine cellar building with a glazed structure conveying a feeling of being outdoors. An old exterior wall, untouched, became part of the interior. Fine black sun blinds form a delicate filter, separating the house and garden from the paved forecourt: the only part of the landscape which has been altered – as wished by the designers and house owners.



“Paarhof” are two houses standing together, one for habitation, and another one for animals and hay. They are like twins: very close, yet two independent beings. It matched the site, furthermore allowed us to keep the house owner favourite sunny spot under a pergola overgrown with vine.”

Clemens Luser, architect
at Hope of Glory





RESHAPING THE USUAL

As the planned extension was meant to be dedicated to living with a view, the position of the living room, the most important area of the house, was set.

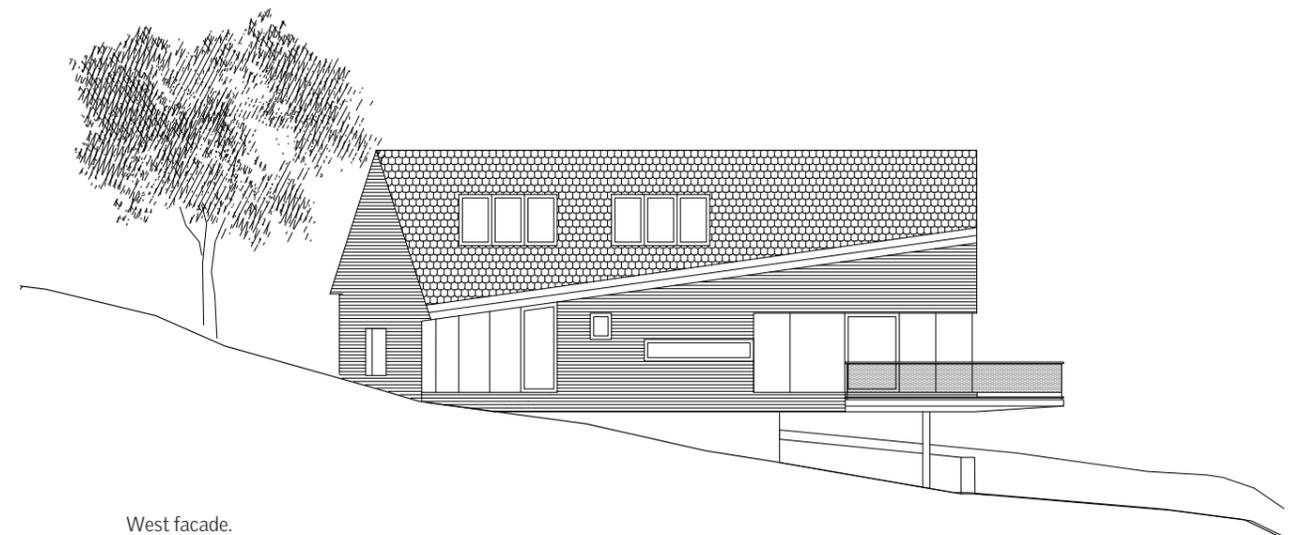
To achieve the necessary width for the living room, opening to all sides, the backside of the house had to become broader. A trapezoid floorplan matched the maximum area regulations as well as the space demand. A bedroom, spacious bathroom and toilet are tucked in under the mezzanine on the northern side.

The trapezoid outline resulted in an original, asymmetrical roof with an inclined eave, reaching a maximum of permitted height and still revealing the historical wine cellar building.

Living room is hovering above the landscape, seemingly without border to the outside: a large terrace extends the space beyond the glazing. The cantilevered volume picks up another theme from the vernacular architecture, the plinth, altering its appearance from massive to transparent.

"The attic relies on roof windows only; without them, we could not have made any rooms. The openings in the ceiling of the living are bring in light from east and west, lightening the space up, making it come alive with changing the colour and appearance throughout the day. The VELUX windows are also necessary for an efficient natural ventilation, that's why they are located at the top of the roof, where the heat accumulates."

Clemens Luser, architect at Hope of Glory

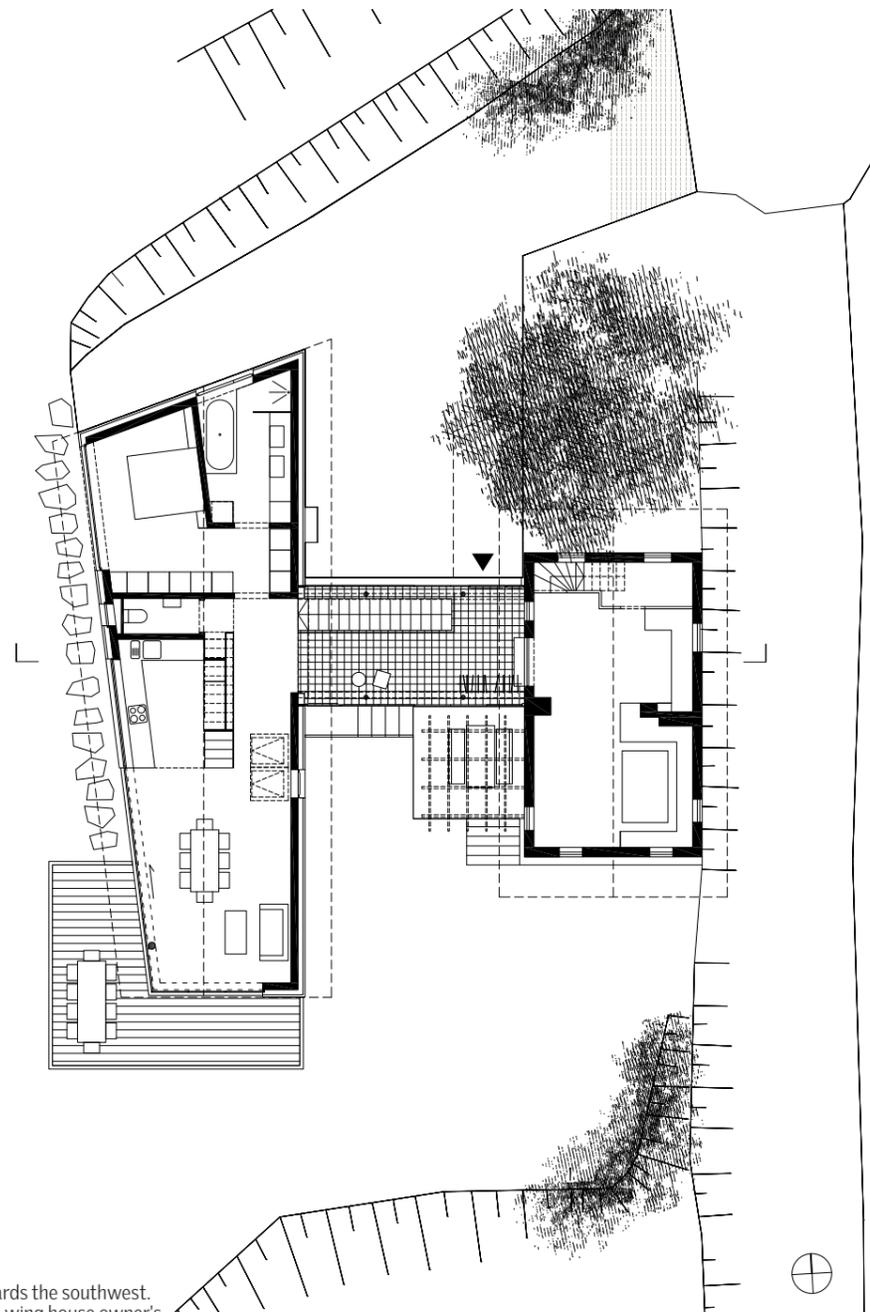


West facade.
The volume morphs from traditional towards asymmetrical, from immersed in the ground towards floating above the hill.



"We are keen to capture various kinds of daylight in the rooms. There is light from the roof windows, brightening up the space, and direct sunlight, creating an ever-changing play of shadows in the room. In the wintertime, the low-standing sun reaches deep into the room, contrasting the blueish light from above."

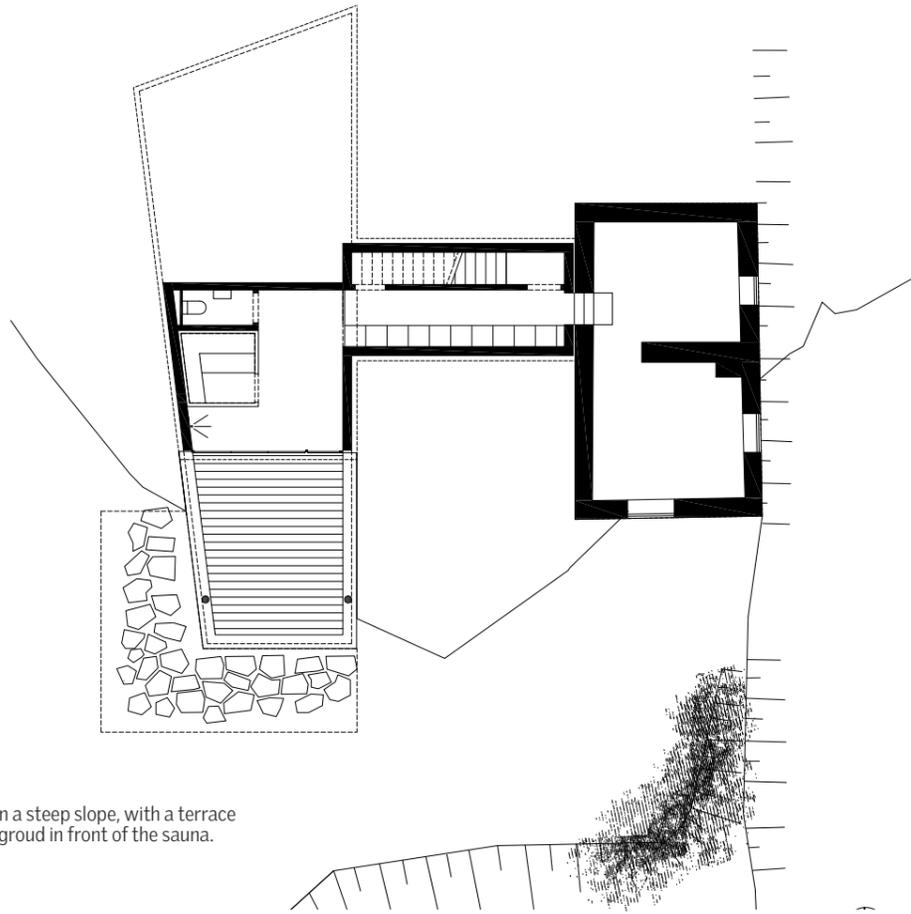
Clemens Luser, architect at Hope of Glory



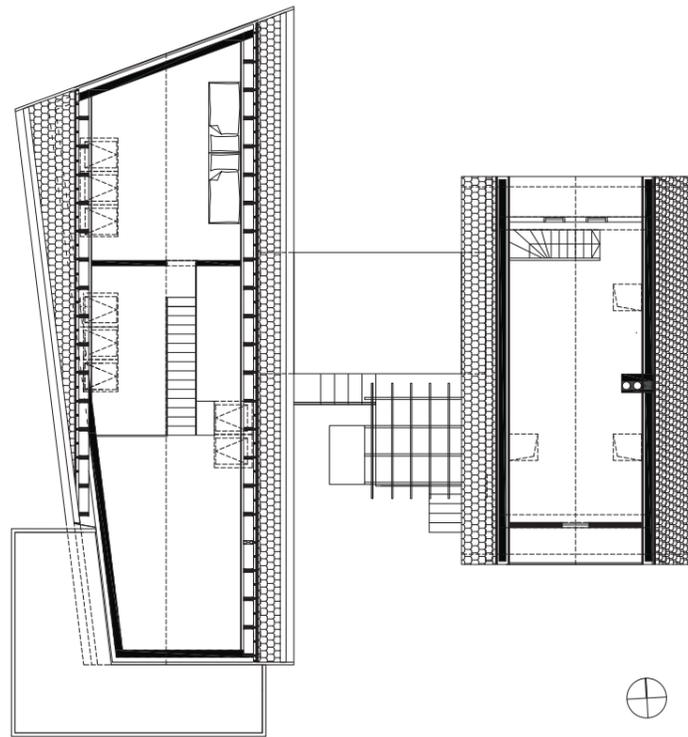
Main floor.
The new house opens towards the southwest.
South from the connecting wing house owner's
favourite pergola.







Ground floor.
The house stands on a steep slope, with a terrace emerging from the ground in front of the sauna.



Attic with the view over the double-height space.







MAXIMAL IMPACT WITH MINIMAL MEASURES

"What I like about projects in historical or landscape protected areas or refurbishments that so many things are set: the materials, shapes and typologies. I study them to introduce playful modern interpretations. And so new ideas emerge out of old ones."

Clemens Luser, architect at Hope of Glory

The building not only fits into the surroundings with a well-proportioned volume. Also, the chosen materials mirror the local tradition. Only the cantilevered part is cast in concrete, the building above it is executed in timber-frame construction, clad with black painted boards. A red-tiled roof follows the local regulations, though it stays modern thanks to precise detailing: the gutter is hidden within the construction, allowing a sharp roof edge. The VELUX windows are positioned in a row, resulting from the grid of the roof construction.

The corner detail of the black wooden boards of the façade cladding refers to log construction, which used to be popular in the area.

Finishing materials of the interior were chosen in a similar down-to-earth manner: there are stone tiles and wood on the floors, walls are plastered and painted white. The precise and straightforward design leaves space for personal decorations and traces of everyday life, without losing its clarity.

Simplicity of the construction does not exclude modern technologies: a heat pump and solar panels ensure an environmentally friendly energy gain.



Cross section showing the new house, glazed connecting wing and the old wine cellar building. What is an underground level on the northern edge, is emerging from the hill on the opposite side of the building. At the southern facade, just next to sanitary facilities there is sauna, opening towards a little terrace.



"VELUX invited me to a daylight symposium in Berlin after the House on Steinberg was constructed. There I dug deeper into the theory for the first time – listening to lectures, learning about the influence of daylight on the perception of the rooms. It was interesting to see so many views on the importance of daylight come together."

Clemens Luser, architect at Hope of Glory





"We love being here, doing work around the house or hanging out in the bright living room. It feels like holidays in everyday life: we are surrounded by unspoilt nature, yet twenty minutes by car from the centre of Graz. My work requires commuting to Vienna for another couple of years; still, we both could not imagine moving anywhere else."

Ruth Birner – Grünberger, house owner







PROJECT DATA

Year: 2012
Location: Steinberg, Austria
Client: private
Architects: HoG Architektur ZT GmbH, Graz, Austria
Photos: Kasia Jackowska



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