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# LOOKS AND BRAINS

## Josefhof

Haideggerweg, Graz, Austria  
Dietger Wissounig Architekten (DWA)

Photography by Paul Ott, or as noted

This lean, almost ascetic project in Austria is nonetheless quite full of style. It is an ultra-modern healthcare facility set into a bucolic context adjacent to a group of older, neo-historical structures, and it takes full advantage of site, views, nature, and the idea of contrast to establish its potent presence. Created as a series of close-set parallel-bar buildings stepping up a gently sloped plot of grassy greenery, the volumes are clad largely in glass, with metal and wood as accents. The strident horizontality of the forms becomes the architectural essence of the project: a way to engage hard stuff with the softly verdant landscape of indigenous grasses, which are by the way introduced to the rooftops as well – a method of reducing the scale of the building forms and blending them somewhat into the natural context. Also, thanks to the diagram, large expanses of those rooftops are visible to the adjacent wings, so conceiving them as green terraces makes aesthetic sense. The buildings seem to want to retreat into the ground somewhat.

Not that Josefhof lacks presence. It offers strong character and multiple moments of small- and medium-scale verve. As one walks through the site, meandering between wings, through openings, onto terraces and so forth, the entire complex becomes a garden promenade. Gaps in the long rectangular blocks allow for breezeways and passage through minor courtyards and terraces. The horizontal bias ruling the railing designs, wood board cladding, even window mullions, is necessary to strengthen the 'reclining' formal emphasis. Nothing vertical is allowed to interrupt this essential decision.

The project utilised a highly rational set of standards and methods, allowing economies and efficiencies that do not impact negatively the overall whole. The interiors are nearly chic, with plentiful natural light, wide access ways, numerous opportunities to spill outdoors, and, for every guestroom, panoramic vistas. Those rooms were pre-constructed entirely offsite, as timber modules, then assembled here, yet they hardly smack of prefabrication banality; they are fit for high-end hospitality specifications. DWA has delivered a convincingly sensible piece of work. That its attractiveness is backed up with constant logic and pragmatism is only added confirmation of the talent involved.



Photography by pierer.net



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