

# Ruch & Partners Architects

*A Look Back by Hans-Jörg Ruch*

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I first met Filippo Simonetti in 1996, in the parking lot of Gro-no's new parish center. In his hands he was holding a black box with photos he had taken of the newly completed building. I found them touching, and ever since, he has accompanied our buildings, observing them through the lenses of his camera. He interprets them in his own way. Devotes time to them. Gets ever closer to them.

From that time on, we have also regularly devoted ourselves to the restoration and conversion of historical Engadin peasant and patrician houses. Patient investigation of building typologies and careful study of the application and workmanship of the materials used over the centuries has fertilized our work to a great extent. The materials of our region have become ever more important to us. We have explored their technical limits and intensively engaged with the possibilities of assemblage. I have the feeling that we are always welcome in these renovated houses. Perhaps because we did no unnecessary harm to them. Our encounters with these houses were always accompanied by encounters with people. We owe a great deal to these clients, all of them culturally engaged, who have trusted us even when we had to inform them that not all of their wishes could be fulfilled exactly as formulated, as would have been the case with a new building. It was also a great stroke of luck that over time we were able to work together with the same planners and craftsmen over and over again. It was a collaboration characterized by great mutual respect. The quality of craftsmanship in our mountain valley is traditionally exceedingly high.

Another important aspect of our work is the fact that we enjoyed the privilege of also being permitted to build outside the established zones of settlement, in an area where boundaries are nonexistent and where one is solely responsible to the mountains. This ultimately leads to a space that stands at the very top of our list in terms of value. It is the incomparable and distinctive landscape of the Upper Engadin. It presents itself like a bowl with irregular edges. Some water still remains on the surface: the Engadin lakes. This bowl contains all the energy of the painters, writers, philosophers, and musicians who have worked here. An incomparable light prevails here, and there are impressive changes in the weather that we cannot influence. The mountains observe our actions and show us the limits. As an architect working in this landscape, one inevitably starts by engaging with the earth's pristine crust and discerns with admiration the great contribution to this topic made in the 1980s by American Land Artists such as Michael Heizer and Robert Smithson. The field of possible solutions seems to open up as a result, but there is ultimately reassurance in the certainty that, despite the proverb to the contrary, no one will ever be able to move mountains.

9	Protestant Parish Center, Grono	195	Chesa Perini, S-chanf
17	Hotel Saratz, Pontresina	211	Single-family house, Sent
31	Substation Albanatscha, Silvaplana	223	Chesa Sclarida, S-chanf
49	Community and Documentation Library, St. Moritz	235	Chesa Plagnoula, Zuoz
59	Chesa Andrea, Madulain	249	Gasthaus Krone, La Punt
71	Segantini Museum, St. Moritz	259	Housing Complex Crusch, Samedan
81	Chesa Merleda, La Punt	269	Housing Complex Cascada Laret, Pontresina
95	Graubündner Kantonalbank, St. Moritz	277	Clavo, Lain
103	Chesa Madalena, Zuoz	293	Single-family house, Falera
117	Palace Galerie, St. Moritz	307	Chesa Büsin, Zuoz
125	Chamanna da Tschierva SAC, Bernina Range	321	Forum Paracelsus, St. Moritz
133	Tuor Sumvei, Salouf	335	Rifugio, Roticcio
145	Chesa Büsin, Silvaplana	353	Chesa Campanile, St. Moritz
157	Chesa Not, Tschlin	363	Single-family house, Soglio
167	Chesa Albertini, Zuoz	373	Farmhouse Eugst, Appenzell
181	Chesa Farrer, Celerina	393	Chesa Somvih, Zuoz