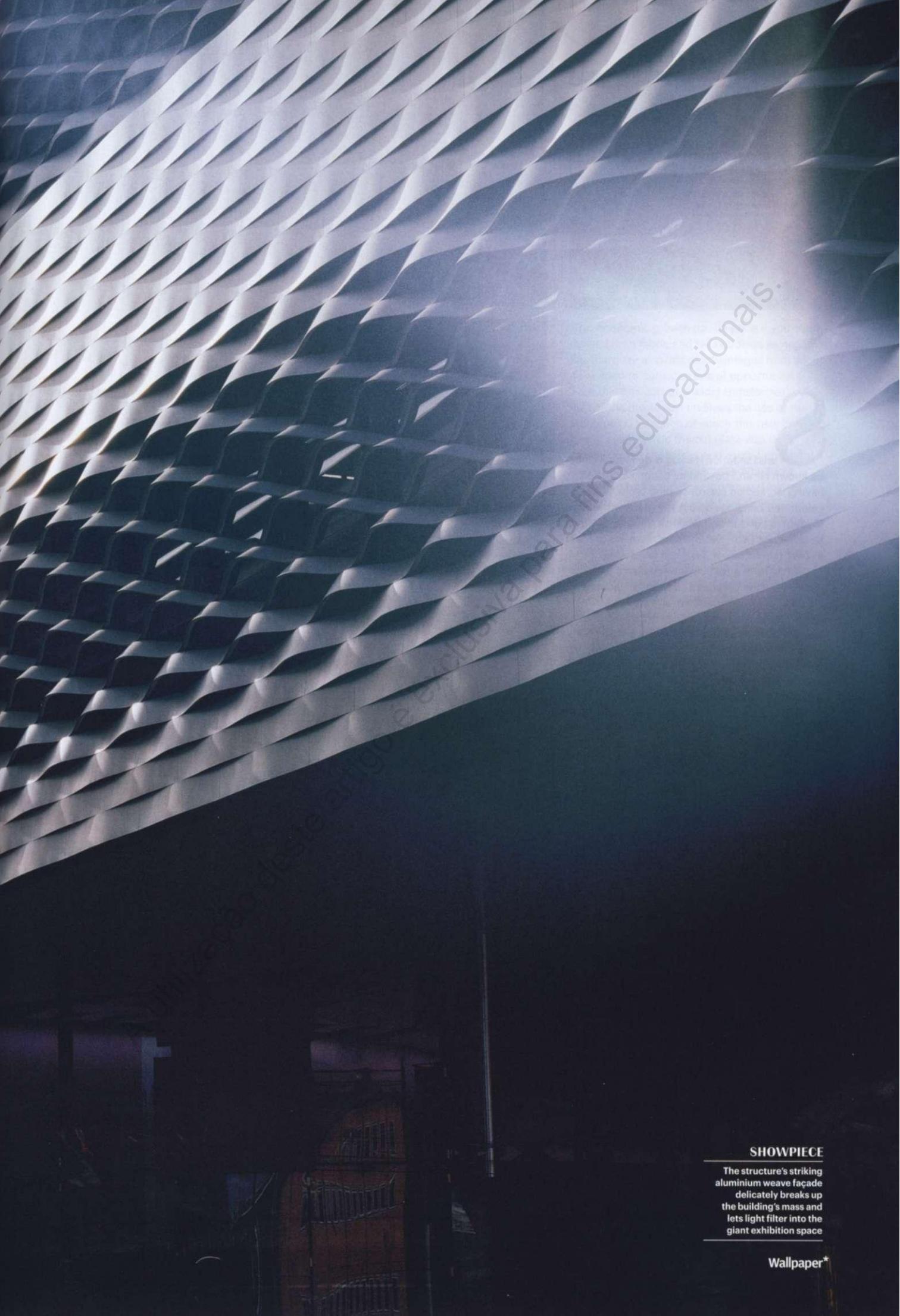


# Fair play

Baselworld 2013 has a brand new venue thanks to the city's own local architects, Herzog & de Meuron

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**SHOWPIECE**

The structure's striking aluminium weave façade delicately breaks up the building's mass and lets light filter into the giant exhibition space

## CENTRE POINT

Right, Herzog & de Meuron's shimmering exhibition hall is part of a comprehensive plan to regenerate Basel's Messe complex and the surrounding Kleinbasel district. Below, the interior of the hall, which has space for 2,500 visitors. Opposite, the large round opening at the centre of the hall

Swiss practice Herzog & de Meuron may be known far and beyond its country's borders, having worked on award-winning projects and celebrated buildings across the globe - the Tate Modern in London and Beijing's National Stadium to name just two - yet the idea of an assignment in their hometown of Basel still fascinates.

'We do have a particular relationship with Basel,' says the practice's co-founder Jacques Herzog. 'It is our hometown, and we have used it to develop and test our urbanistic and architectural ideas and visions. It is a very good model, because it sits in the heart of Europe. It is Swiss, but with its borders onto France and Germany, it is on the way to becoming a tri-national metropolis.'

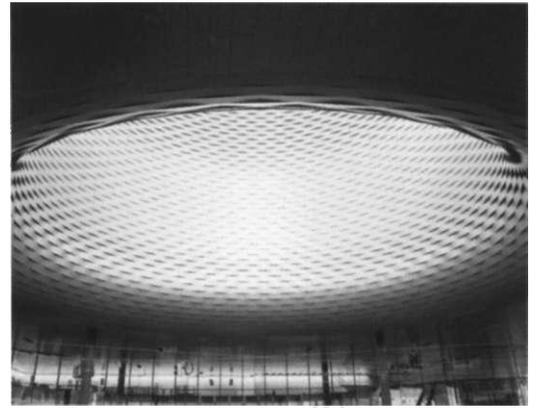
Herzog & de Meuron's latest local offering, and one that challenged both their design and urban planning skills, is a brand new hall for one of the city's major institutions, the Messe Basel exhibition halls. Called the City Lounge, the building is about to open with a meticulously engineered bang this spring, just in time for the Baselworld Watch & Jewellery Show.

While the new hall will be undoubtedly stealing the fair's architectural spotlight this April, it is actually just a part of a much bigger scheme that has been brewing in the heart of Basel for a while now. A few years ago Herzog and his business partner, Pierre de Meuron, were asked by the Messe to masterplan the entire exhibition site. 'It was a political decision that the fair would stay in the centre of the city where it is,' explains Herzog.

The architects duly accepted and ever since, the area's transformation has been ongoing. There are plans to replace an old garage next to the new hall, for example, but it doesn't stop there. 'The area is, in fact, an interesting example of urban regeneration in the centre of the city. There is the Messe of course, but also big companies such as Novartis, Roche and so on that are based there. All these companies are densifying their clusters,' points out Herzog. Conceived by the architects for this fast-developing part of town and given the stamp of approval via the Swiss public's democratic vote, the City Lounge build kicked off in 2010.

Centrally located in the Messe site, City Lounge is surrounded by other halls, as well





'This economic growth has its price if you count dense urban fabric and tall buildings as negative. But there are also lots of advantages from such a situation to consider, lots of opportunities. Here this was part of a wider transformation.' Part of the discussion involved the use of the Messeplatz, a section of which this new building had to claim. While the old plaza was used mostly during trade fairs and exhibitions, right from the start of the project the architects wanted to make sure that it got used just as much by the public outside the fair schedule as well. So, while the area's open space may actually be shrinking with the addition of the new hall, the ambition is for the City Lounge's ground level to turn into an enclosed square - a functional, welcoming space that is open year-round for the people of Basel.

The idiosyncratic topology of the trade fair building was another big challenge, as well as a draw for the architects. Hovering between an art gallery and a retail space, fairs offer definite scope for experimentation, but some general restrictions are also clear. The interior, for example, needs to be extremely adaptable. 'Fairs are very special,' says Herzog. 'When a fair takes place, the building becomes a dreamland, an artificial new world. They are essentially a temporary luxury city and this is the same anywhere in the world.'

The ground floor's large expanses of glass fittingly represent its public nature, but moving upwards towards the exhibition areas, the space is still planned to be generous and bright. Focusing on the hall's skin and volume, the architects left the exhibition areas simple and flexible. A large round opening near the centre of the structure brings plenty of natural light in from the top, while the facade's irregular aluminium weave (created with the help of parametric scripting) filters more light in and also allows views out from several parts of the building.

Designing for a fair complex as iconic as the home of Baselworld will undoubtedly flag up the Herzog & de Meuron practice for many similar projects all over the world - especially since the City Lounge is the first building of this type for the firm. 'We have designed many art galleries, but this is the first trade fair building we've designed, especially on this scale,' says Herzog, admitting that it is the permanent part of a campus that they would be more drawn to. 'As for designing a fair stand, perhaps we would under special circumstances. Temporary architecture has its fascination. It allows you to flex a different muscle.'\*

[www.messe.ch](http://www.messe.ch), [www.herzogdemeuron.com](http://www.herzogdemeuron.com)

as the complex's square, the Messeplatz. An existing hall (No 3) was taken down and the neighbouring Hall 1 was also partly demolished to make way for the new addition. City Lounge's three-level semi-perforated volume is enveloped in a skin made out of twisting and interweaving aluminium bands that delicately break up the building's mass with the impression of a gentle, yet dynamic movement.

The design team made it a priority to link the new hall with its urban context. Two floors of exhibition space at the very top will be open only during fairs and events, while the ground floor is accessible to the public, planned to fill up with bars, shops, restaurants and an underpass for pedestrians and trams which connect the street with the Messeplatz behind it. 'We had to make sure that our proposed

stack of volumes would fit into this delicate city fabric,' says Herzog. 'We consciously designed each hall to be a separate space, which can be read from the outside. This design strategy helps by introducing scale and proportion.'

The city's increasing density was a key point of public debate during the design process, which the team was very aware of. 'It is an issue that a growing city is facing,' says the architect.

**'We had to make sure our design would fit into the delicate city fabric'**