



WORLD WIDE WEAVE

## **The changing face of an elite university**

**Black stainless steel mesh allows colours to shine**

**A glorious view of the Alps and the Lake Geneva make the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) technical university in Switzerland a truly charming proposition. The talent factory draws top students of engineering and architecture from across the globe, thereby making the campus situated to the west of Lausanne in Ecublens among the fastest-growing in the world. Constant expansion is the answer to a continuous shortage of space and also represents an attempt to give the campus a contemporary and meaningful look. French architect Dominique Perrault was awarded the contract for three new construction and refurbishment projects for the EPFL. He designed the now refurbished former university library, which today functions as a central administration and service building, as a colourful postulate on reclaiming public space. Large, movable solar protection elements made of black-coated stainless steel mesh from the internationally leading technical weaving mill GKD – GEBR. KUFFERATH AG play a key part in unleashing the full effect of the bright facade.**

The future is built on the campus of the EPFL. One of the most well-known objects here is the Rolex Learning Center. Directly opposite this building complex designed completely in white, Dominique Perrault marked a stark contrast with the refurbishment of the former central library building. The location of the BI building on the central square of the campus was interpreted by Perrault as the focal point of a visionary urban planning concept. The university estimates that, within just a few years, up to a third of the EPFL's approximately 9,000 students will not only study, but also live



here. Perrault therefore planned the new administration and service centre as an initial milestone of an urban development plan with cafeteria, post office and two inner courtyards. On the 4,500 square metres of usable floor space, he planned offices for around 180 people – from the university management, through financial and HR, right up to teaching staff. Although the original size of the building was unaltered, he scaled it back to its steel skeleton. With a fascinating "structural glazing" facade design, he underlined the future spirit of open cooperation. Moreover, thanks to his selection of energy-efficient glass and natural ventilation, the former library now meets the specifications of the low-energy house standard.

### **Striped dress with black seams**

In his first project for the EPFL, Perrault impressively rebuts the idea that all theory is dull and grey. Glass panels spanning the entire height of the building in lucid yellow, orange, red, blue and green alternate with dark-tinted windows to divide the glass facade into vertical columns of equal width. Each colour appears twice in adjacently positioned stripes, lending it additional impact. What's more, the colourful elements highlighted by the dark window stripes are a strong statement of creative independence. The bright design of the refurbished building inspired the students to nickname it *Bâtiment iPod* (iPod fortress). The linear arrangement of the coloured stripes spanning the entire building lends it a puristic strictness in spite of its expressive vividness. On its long side the ground floor is designed as a black, glazed wedge protruding from the building's width, thereby giving Perrault's central theme of the architecture of disappearance a completely new interpretation. The black base takes a subordinate role to the striking appearance of the striped building made up of three parts arranged at an offset, giving them a floating appearance. The base obtains meaning through the cafeteria housed within, making it the central meeting point for people on campus.



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### **Newly defined perspectives**

In order to ensure a lively exchange between the indoor and outdoor environments as well as to provide effective protection from the sun and damage, Perrault once again placed his trust in the material he has used in many of his successful projects to solve the design quandary between subtle aesthetics and maximum functionality. The textile structure of metallic mesh from GKD has fascinated him for more than 20 years. He has long utilised the reflective power of silver or gold wires as a means of dialogue with the environment – always driven by the vision of redefining, but not dominating, the urban context with built form. With black-coated Escale 7 x 1 stainless steel mesh, he gave the idea a new face when refurbishing the former library. In a continuous process, the highly formable flat wire of this mesh type is coated with a permanently bright UV varnish and a weather-resistant varnish as well as an additional semi-gloss special varnish. 37 horizontal, manually adjustable solar protection elements made of this spiral mesh were coated black for the first time and direct mild daylight into the cafeteria of the EPFL while granting an unobstructed view of the outside surroundings. The large elements – each measuring 1.2 or 2.4 metres wide and 3.6 metres high – were tensioned horizontally and vertically using eyebolts in black steel frames. The adjustable solar protection elements thus give the black area a dynamic appearance without compromising their harmonious overall impact. Alongside their role in regulating the room climate, they also provide a functional and reliable form of protection against break-ins and vandalism. Once again, Perrault has succeeded in delivering an aesthetically and technically pioneering solution of a meta-building, which rejects conventional perceptions and opens up new paths in the dialogue with life.

*5,702 characters incl. spaces*



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### **GKD – GEBR. KUFFERATH AG**

The owner-run technical weaving enterprise GKD – GEBR. KUFFERATH AG is the global market leader for metal and plastic woven solutions. Under the umbrella of GKD – WORLD WIDE WEAVE, the company bundles four independent business divisions: SOLID WEAVE (industrial mesh), WEAVE IN MOTION (process belt mesh), CREATIVE WEAVE (architectural mesh) and COMPACT FILTRATION (compact filtration systems). With its seven plants – including the headquarters in Germany and other facilities in the US, Great Britain, South Africa, China, India and Chile – as well as its branches in France, Spain, Dubai, Qatar and worldwide representatives, GKD is never far from its customers.

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