

Press release

The Vitra Schaudepot

At the Vitra Schaudepot, which is designed by Herzog & de Meuron, the Vitra Design Museum presents key objects from its extensive collection, creating one of the largest permanent exhibitions and research sites on contemporary furniture design.

Today the collection of the Vitra Design Museum encompasses a total of around 20 000 objects, with some 7000 pieces of furniture, more than 1000 lighting objects and numerous archives, as well as the Collection of the Eames Office, or the estates of Verner Panton and Alexander Girard. Although the main museum building by Frank Gehry (1989) was originally conceived to house the collection, the museum utilises the space to stage major temporary exhibitions. The construction of the Schaudepot allows for a permanent presentation of the collection, while offering a diverse educational programme.

The cornerstone for the collection was laid by the museum's founder Rolf Fehlbaum. In the 1980s he assembled a collection of furniture, which he transferred to the Vitra Design Museum upon its founding in 1989. Ever since, the collection has been expanded by the museum's directors Alexander von Vegesack (1989 to 2010), followed by Mateo Kries and Marc Zehntner (since 2011) together with Rolf Fehlbaum and now numbers among the largest of its kind.

With the addition of the Schaudepot in 2016, the Vitra Design Museum has doubled its exhibition space. The museum building by Frank Gehry is used for large-scale temporary exhibitions, whereas the Vitra Design Museum Gallery shows smaller, experimental projects and the Schaudepot displays the permanent exhibition as well as alternating temporary exhibitions.

The presentation at the Vitra Schaudepot

The presentation at the Schaudepot is divided into three areas with a total of around 1600 sqm. The ground floor contains the main hall where the extensive permanent exhibition is shown. The central focus is a selection of more than 400 key pieces of modern furniture design from the 1800s until today, including early Bugholz furniture, iconic modernist pieces by Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto or Gerrit Rietveld, but also more recent examples of 3D-printed objects and lesser-known or anonymous objects, prototypes and experimental models. The permanent exhibition is complemented by smaller, temporary presentations focusing on items of the stored collection.

The selection reflects the main areas of emphasis and key pieces of the museum collection while simultaneously providing a comprehensive overview of the history of furniture design – from stylistic and technical innovations to the societal transformations reflected in the objects. Detailed information on the objects is communicated in a digital catalogue that visitors of the Schaudepot can access via their smartphones or guest tablets that can be borrowed from the reception.

While the permanent exhibition in the main hall of the Schaudepot is structured chronologically, the glimpses of the other collection holdings on the lower ground level present thematic focal points and offer a view behind the scenes of the museum where conservators and curators deal with objects from the collection on a daily basis. Other aspects of the Schaudepot also serve to make museum work more comprehensible and accessible to the public. From the café, guests can see into the museum offices and the library, which is open to researchers and students on request. The restoration workshop can also be visited as part of our guided campus tours. With these measures, the Vitra Design Museum raises awareness of the collection and its focus on furniture design and makes it more accessible for visitors and research. At the same time, it reacts towards recent developments that are characteristic for the contemporary design and museum world. Today, design is everywhere – hence a design museum in the 21st century cannot simply collect and exhibit objects, but needs to convey the underlying meaning of the design behind a specific item, by initiating discussions, by revealing societal correlations and by finding connections to architecture, art or technology.

The architecture of the Vitra Schaudepot

Following the VitraHaus (2010), the Schaudepot is the second building by Herzog & de Meuron on the Vitra Campus. The new structure combines the simple appearance of an industrial building or warehouse with the complex requirements of a walk-in museum repository.

To the outside, the Schaudepot presents itself as a monolithic volume constructed from hand-broken bricks, characterized by a completely windowless façade and a simple gable roof. The bricks were split on site and give the building a lively texture. With its simple and dignified appearance, the Schaudepot reflects the cultural worth of the objects stored within. The interior of the building offers ideal conservational conditions for the preservation of the valuable pieces in the collection. The main hall on the ground floor of the building is defined by a regular gridded arrangement of fluorescent tubes on the ceiling, which evenly illuminate the interior. This space houses the permanent exhibition as well as temporary exhibitions related to the collection, along with the entrance area and a shop.

A third section contains wardrobes, sanitary facilities and a café, and links the building to the restoration workshop, the library and the offices of the Vitra Design Museum. A large window connects the main hall to the lower ground floor, from which visitors can get a glimpse of the other repositories of the collection. This visual contact emphasizes the underlying concept of the building: it enables the museum's collection to outwardly grow and expand and gain a greater public presence with an above-ground display space. The existing repositories on the lower ground level will remain in operation, being further expanded and likewise becoming part of the overall presentation.

The Schaudepot is fronted by a raised, public forecourt that ties the building into the architectural ensemble on the Vitra Campus. The building contrasts appealingly with the dynamic contours of the opposite Fire Station by Zaha Hadid (1993) while corresponding to the factory buildings by Álvaro Siza (1994), which were also executed in brick.

The Schauderpot extends the Vitra Campus towards the south and provides a second entrance to the public area, which also includes the Fire station. The city centre in Weil am Rhein, as well as the tram station to Basel city are both within walking distance. The Álvaro Siza promenade connects the Schauderpot with the northern entrance to the Campus, where the VitraHaus and the museum building by Frank Gehry are located. Along the path, the Slide Tower by German artist Carsten Höller leads the way and offers an elevated view of the entire architectural scenario on the Campus, which includes constructions and artworks by SANAA, Tadao Ando, Álvaro Siza, Nicholas Grimshaw, Renzo Piano, Richard Buckminster Fuller, Claes Oldenburg, and Jean Prouvé. All exhibition spaces from the Vitra Design Museum are open daily from 10 am to 6 pm and the different exhibitions are complemented by a diverse programme, consisting of guided tours, talks, workshops and other events.

Featured Designers (selection)

Alvar Aalto, Ron Arad, Maarten Baas, Ronan und Erwan Bouroullec, Andrea Branzi, Marcel Breuer, Humberto und Fernando Campana, Achille Castiglioni, Luigi Colani, Charles und Ray Eames, Frank Gehry, Eileen Gray, Konstantin Grcic, Arne Jacobsen, Shiro Kuramata, Joris Laarman, Le Corbusier, Alessandro Mendini, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Minale Maeda, Jasper Morrison, George Nelson, Marc Newson, Isamu Noguchi, Verner Panton, Gaetano Pesce, Gio Ponti, Jean Prouvé, Tejo Remy, Eero Saarinen, Jerszy Seymour, Philippe Starck, Superstudio, Marcel Wanders, Hans J. Wegner, Tokujin Yoshioka and many more.

Facts

Vitra Schaudepot	Collection of the Vitra Design Museum, 1800 until today
Objects on permanent display:	approximately 400
Temporary exhibitions	Three to four exhibitions per year
Lower ground floor:	View into the collection (Scandinavian and Italian design, Collection of the Eames Office and collection of lighting)
Schaudepot Lab:	Material library with information on production procedures, development processes and approx. 350 material samples as well as 17 prototypes
Opening hours:	Daily 10 am – 6 pm
Head of Collection & Archive:	Susanne Graner
Curator of Collection:	Heng Zhi
Schaudepot Shop:	Assorted products and books including more than 300 professional publications curated by »Do you read me?!«, Berlin
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