RESEARCH
Architect: Peter Zumthor
Construction: 1985-1986
Main Materials: Timber-Lamella, Steel

The building itself is used as a protective shelter for the Roman ruins found from 15 BCE in Chur, Switzerland. There are three individual buildings; each housing one of the ancient Roman buildings. The walls and the foundation are all that is left of the ruins themselves. A black sheet was placed behind the Roman walls to form a more solid backdrop against the new building. The Zumthor buildings also act as a collective museum with exhibits on the history of the ruins and models of what they potentially looked like at their peak. The setting of the buildings is unique in the sense that they are surrounded by industrial factories, residences, office complexes, and mountains.

Zumthor has a knack for creating forms that seem to transcend the time in which they are built. He is able to to the same with the Shelter, which looks more like the architectural style of today than it does of the 1980s. The unique requirements of the space caused an interesting design to be created. In order for Zumthor’s building not to overpower or compete with the Roman ruins, it was made into a very modern and geometric style. The building itself was planned as an abstraction of the Roman ruins being sheltered. Zumthor recreated the volume of the Roman ruins for his own building and then used timber-lamella, which emulated the porous stone, for the exterior walls. The interior of the building is very minimal; the only architectural elements are the suspended bridge and floating staircase. So as not to disturb the foundation and also to completely separate the present from the past, people enter the chamber on a suspended bridge and walk down a set of stairs that seem not to touch the ground at any point.

The Shelter seems to have a sense of humility when compared to its surroundings. Nestled in the midst of an industrial complex and residential area, the buildings do not draw any attention to themselves. “The simplicity of the wooden louvred boxes instantly conveys a sense of welcoming without being ostentatious, as well as an acknowledgment of not being the main attraction of the archaeological site.” (Swisher). The timber-lamella of the exterior walls is a major feature that draws much of the public attention, both from inside and outside. From the exterior (in the daylight), the material allows almost nothing from the outside to be seen. In contrast, the interior is practically “glowing” from the light washing through material. Since the walls allow light and air to enter the space so easily, they also create the feeling of being in a sort of time machine: being inside the historical ruins while listening to the cityscape in the background. Another key feature of the buildings is the exposed steel structuring. “The structure frames the space gently, strong and graceful” (Swisher).
"Architecture is not about form, it is about many other things," he said. "The light and the use, and the structure, and the shadow, the smell and so on. I think form is the easiest to control, it can be done at the end."

Based on Peter Zumthor’s own quote about architecture, we have come to our own conclusions on the Shelter for Roman Ruins. Using the ruins’ form, Zumthor explores not how the buildings can recreate the past, but instead how they can incite feelings of warmth, tranquility, and humility. The transmission of light, the warmth of the materials, and the vulnerability of the interior all serve to encourage introspection. Zumthor’s buildings are personal in the sense they cause people to think (to and about themselves).

Bibliography:
STRUCTURAL DESIGN: transparent timber-lamella and Roman ruins, suspended bridge, steel framework

EXTERIOR WALL STUDY: filtration of light through timber-lamella

ROMAN RUINS: porosity of rocks similar to porosity of timber-lamella

SITE STUDY: the Roman ruins lie on the outskirts of town surrounded on three sides by an industrial area, a residential area, and a mountain

SUSPENDED BRIDGE: interior vs exterior spaces; walkways feel more interior than the actual inside of the buildings

LIGHT STUDY: using the skylights to see how they allow direct light as opposed to the wash of light from the timber-lamella walls which are a sanded plastic in the model
**TRUE ELEVATION:** shows the angle the buildings lie on when viewed from the front

**PERSPECTIVE ELEVATION:** all three buildings sit at an angle away from each other making a true elevation difficult to read
**Section from Axon View:** shows the interior of the first building without any obstructions

**Axon without Timber-Lalema:** shows all structural elements other than the lamela to show the relationship of the ruins to their shelter
Axon with Interior View: scaled figures used to show the Roman ruins are approximately four feet high at the shorter end; transparency of the timber-lamela is also evident.
The most important features of the Shelter include the timber-lamella walls, the suspended bridge, the skylights, and the roman ruins.

The three buildings descend in importance due to size and proximity to the entrance.
Strong primary axis for the modern building based on the suspended bridge that traverses all three buildings.

Secondary axes come into play when considering the entrances utilized during the Roman times.
MOVEMENT

Two types of movement represented in the space:

Modern movement is more dense on the suspended bridge axis and circulates close to the roman ruins.

Ancient movement is less structured; it appears as a jumble in the interior of the roman ruins.
The Roman ruins lie on the outskirts of town, which is a contrast to the height of the Roman empire, when the buildings were at the city center.
The material of the walls allows the sounds from the city surrounding the building to filter through but not at full volume.
The material used for the exterior walls of the shelter allows air to flow through more easily than most buildings.

The timber-lamella of the walls emulates the rocks used for the walls of the Roman ruins, which also allow some amount of air through.
**Light Diagram**: contrast between the direct light from the skylights and the wash of color allowed by the timber-lamela.

**Wall Section**: similar amount of light, wind, and sound allowed through the timber-lamela versus the Roman ruins.
The timber-lamella used on the walls of the Zumthor building incite an open, airy feeling, very different from what one expects when entering an enclosed space.

On the other hand, when moving between the buildings, the connecting bridge-pathways are completely solid and allow no light through. Although technically on the exterior of the building, the bridges feel more like the interior.
**Final Model:** scaled model of the largest building; used to study light, relationship to Roman ruins, structural elements

**Final Site Model:** shows the context of the buildings in relation to the rest of the city; three different types of buildings including residences, factories, and office buildings are represented along with the foot of the mountain behind the ruins; no roads were shown in order to allow Roman past to show through into the Swiss future