

FRAGMENTED SITE

*collecting the situation, history and
resulting contradictions*

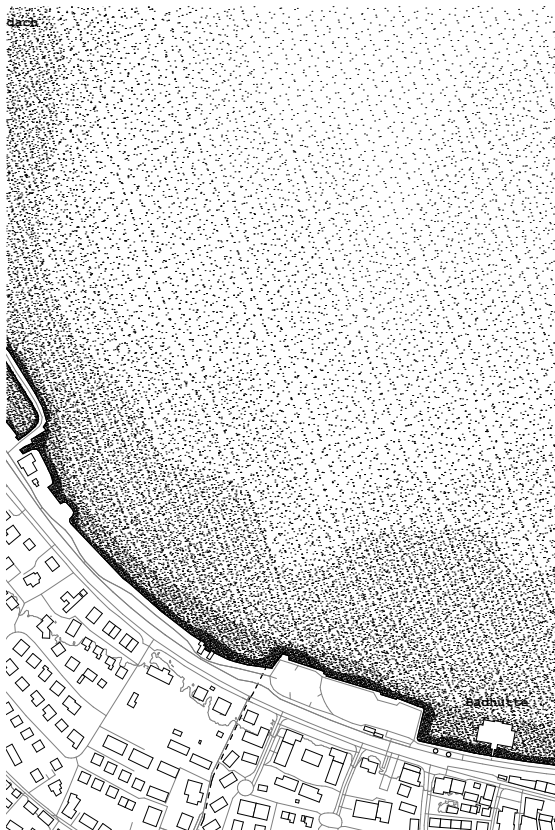
Location and Typology

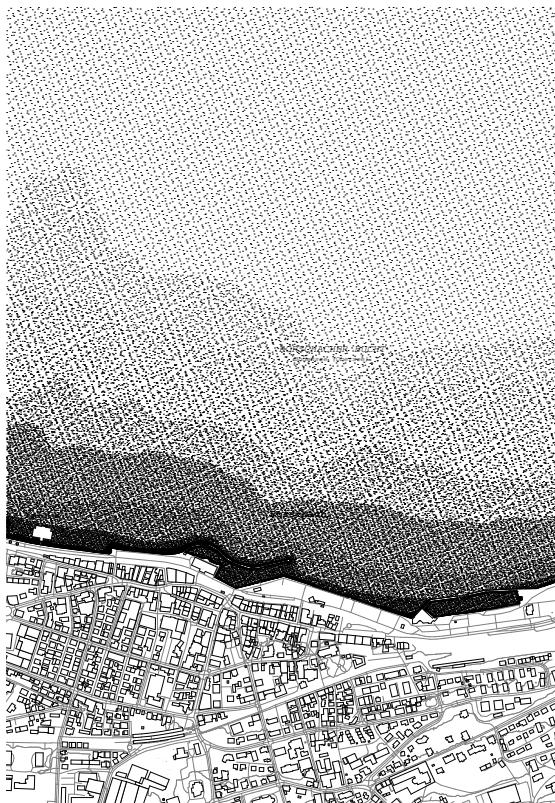
On the shores of Lake Constance, Rorschach's Badhütte stood as a solitary structure, a rare threshold between the town and the water. Accessible only via a single bridge, it was the last remaining example of a Kastenbad on lake constance in Switzerland.

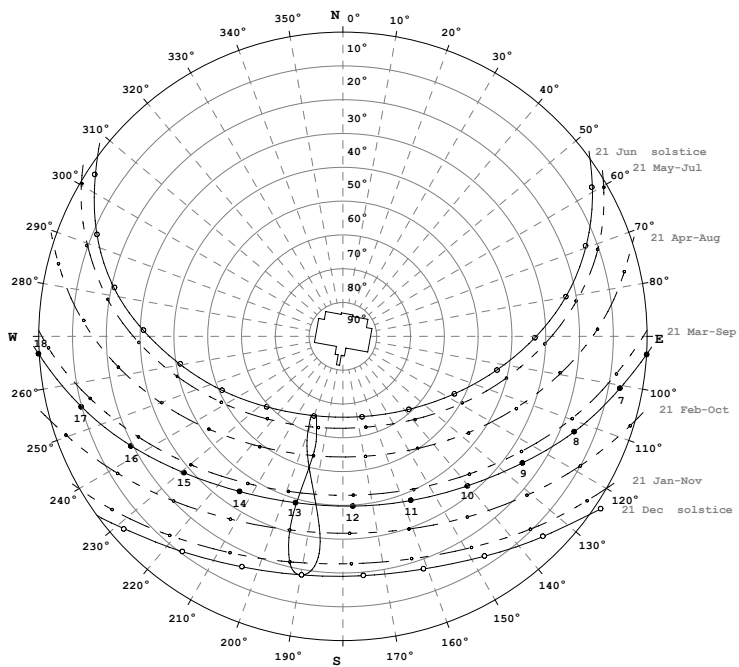
Its very name is revealing: it is not a Badehaus but a Badhütte. A house would suggest a civic institution, open, public, neutral. A hut, by contrast, signals intimacy, enclosure, and nostalgia. The Badhütte invited bathers into a parallel world: sheltered, wooden, inward-looking, where everyday life was left at the shore.

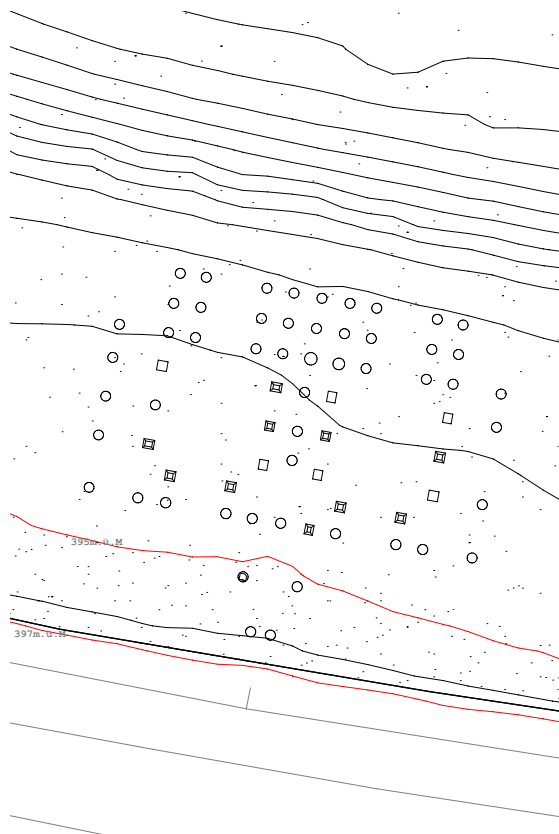
For many long-established residents, this hut became continuity — a way to hold onto the atmosphere of "old Rorschach" or generally to the slower paced life. Yet the same hut also drew a boundary it seems, those who belonged inside and those who remained outside.

It is a space of collective memory and comfort, but also of exclusion and nostalgia.









Foundations with min. and max. water levels









Trade and Harbour City

Rorschach's identity is deeply marked by its history as a Handelsstadt. Already in 947, Otto the I. granted the abbot of St. Gallen the right to hold markets, mint coins, and levy tolls in Rorschach. These privileges turned the small settlement into a node of regional trade.

The Kornhaus, built in the 18th century, became the monumental symbol of this role. Grain merchants from Southern Germany and, later, from Hungary traded here, filling the harbour with countless sacks. With the arrival of the railway in 1856, commerce accelerated: goods could travel faster, linking the town more directly to St. Gallen and to Europe.

The harbour of Rorschach was connecting the local with the continental.



Origins and Early Bathing Facilities

Rorschach was already a popular bathing and Kurort in the 1860s. At that time, three wooden Seebadeanstalten were constructed on piles in the lake. They soon became outdated: lacking large basins with adjustable grids (Roste) that could rise with the seasonal water levels, which is in summer about 2m higher than in winter, they were unsafe for swimmers and non-swimmers alike. After sixty years of use, the structures were decayed, and a competition was launched to create a new, more durable bathing facility.



The Badhütte of 1924

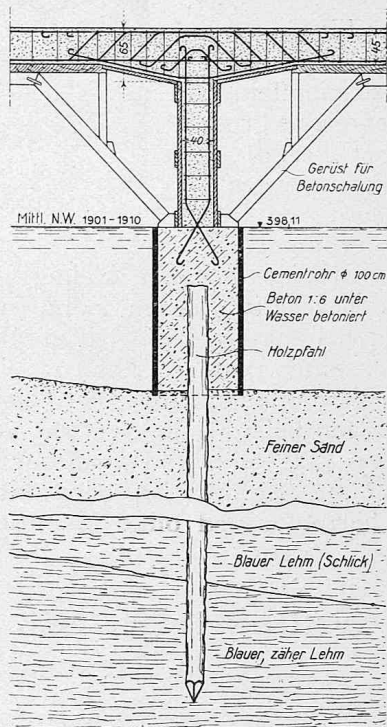
The winning project of 1924 produced a structure that reacted on the needs of the time. Timber piles were rammed deep into the clay underground, reaching down to the low-water level. On this foundation, reinforced concrete columns and beams carried a wooden structure above. Its program reflected the bathing culture of its time: not leisure but hygiene. Men and women were strictly separated, and historic newspapers describe around forty individual bathing cells for swimmers – a form of compartmentalized privacy whose exact spatial arrangement remains unclear today.





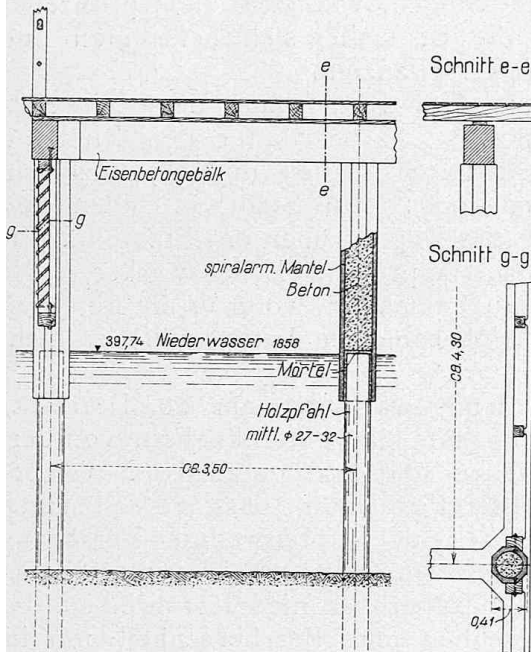






Unterbau-Konstruktion. — 1 : 100.

Wettb



Unterbau-Konstruktion (1 : 100) von *Locher & Cie.*

Transformation Through Time

Over the following century, the Badhütte shifted from a hygienic institution to a social meeting place. The strict segregation of men and women dissolved into collective enjoyment. In 1968, additions such as a terrace carried on massive steel beams and new railings were introduced, rather insensitively. The building nevertheless grew into a place for sunbathing, swimming, coffee drinking, and yoga at dawn – an everyday stage for encounters, leisure, and community.





The Fire of 2024

In December 2024, the Badhütte burned down completely. Only the platform and concrete columns remained above the lake. For the people of Rorschach, the loss was a shock. Local voices compared it to the burning of Notre Dame or the Kapellbrücke in Lucerne. It was not simply a building that was lost, but a piece of local identity, a soziales Gehäuse – a social shell, a remain of the old Rorschach.



Burning Badhütte, 20min/News-Scout











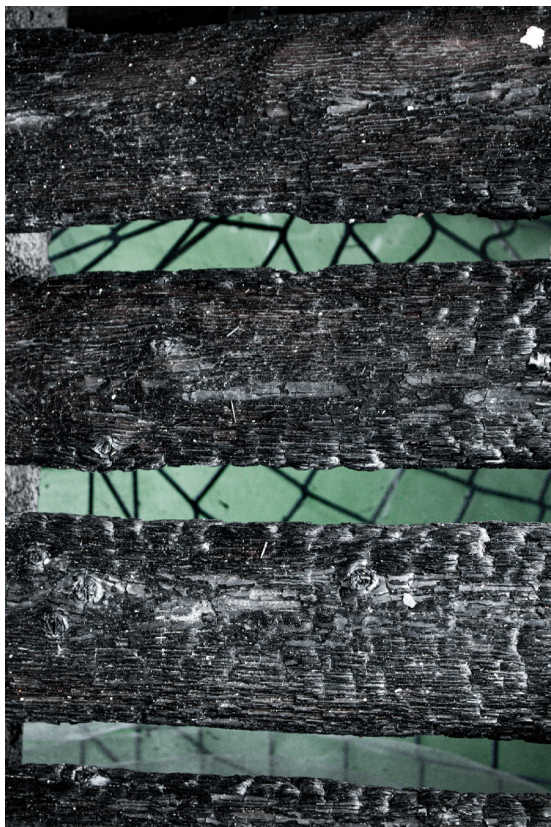


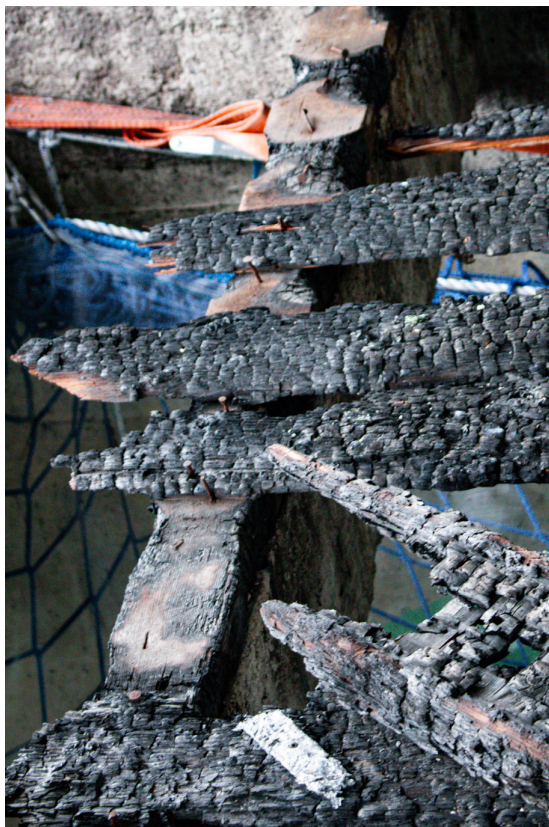












The Ruin and Its Ambiguities

The ruin that remains is both fragile and paradoxical. Structurally, the reinforced concrete columns – over a hundred years old – are no longer fit for reuse, a problem that had been known since the 1990s but ignored. Without the fire, failure would have come sooner or later. Today, even these columns must be replaced, closely analyzed by engineers. Only the underwater timber piles, rammed deep into clay, and their foundations on top of them can remain. Alongside them, the charred beams of the Kassenhaus will be dismantled and later integrated into the reconstruction. The terrace, itself a later addition, is to be rebuilt exactly as it was before the fire, not as it was historically. Yet safety standards require modifications, such as higher railings. The ruin stands as a reminder that change is inevitable, even when sameness is demanded.



fragile concrete



fragile concrete



fragile concrete









traces of shower tiles









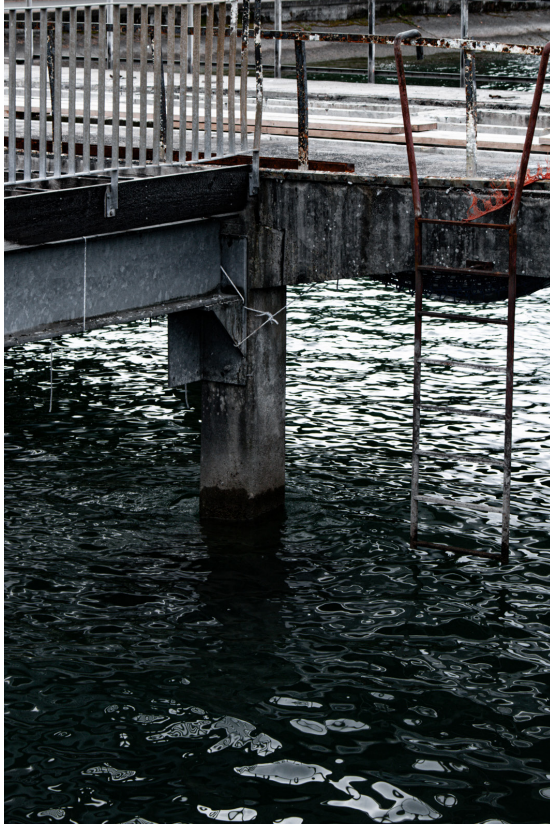
fragile concrete







60's steel beam



60's steel beam



60's steel beam



60's steel beam

Heritage, Concession and Programmatic

According to heritage regulations, if the Badhütte is not reconstructed exactly as it stood, its heritage concession will be lost. For this reason, even burnt beams must be reinstalled – an attempt to keep “authenticity” alive, though the structure itself is entirely new. Officially, the reconstruction is classified as a “renovation,” even though it is in reality a new build. The programmatic also raises questions: while today’s bathing culture is more collective and diverse, the reconstruction risks reproducing an outdated model, instead of asking what the Badhütte could mean for the present.



Burnt cashiers house



Burnt cashiers house



Burnt cashiers house



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Constraints and Systemic Conditions

Politics and funding add further complexity. They want to finance the reconstruction not by tax money but through the building insurance and a Stiftung, with additional private donors. The insurance, however, covers only the wooden superstructure, not the concrete columns and foundations. Now that even the columns must be replaced, costs exceed the available funds. At the same time, the city pushes for speed: the hut should stand again by 2027. To achieve this, the project was given directly to one office without a proper planner selection procedure, raising complaints from the BSA and SIA. What emerges is a paradoxical system: rigid in its demand for historical sameness, yet flexible when bypassing democratic or professional processes for efficiency's sake.

Communication Issues

Promises about costs and timelines are made without calculation or clarity. The city president publicly mentions random numbers, while the contractor has not prepared a cost study. This fuels frustration among residents, especially as the project manager on site assumes costs may be even lower. The president also promises completion by 2027, although comparable projects have taken decades. At the same time, he excludes the idea of a temporary solution, insisting that all resources must go into the final reconstruction – a stance that closes space for experimentation.

Rorschach kann sich die Badhütte nicht leisten: Kosten für einen Neubau steigen rasant

Die kalkulierten sechs Millionen Franken für den Wiederaufbau des Rorschacher Wahrzeichens werden nicht reichen, da die Betonkonstruktion nicht mehr tragfähig ist. Was die neue Badhütte kosten wird, wenn auch noch die Holzpfähle faul sind, darüber will oder kann die Stadtführung noch keine konkreten Angaben machen.

Rudolf Hirti

23.09.2025, 05:00 Uhr

 3 Kommentare



Merken



Drucken



Teilen

Cultural Meaning and Emotional Weight

*The Badhütte was atmosphere, rituals,
and encounters. People remember the
feel of warm planks under bare feet,
the half-sloped wooden surfaces for
lying in the sun, the sound of waves
breaking beneath. They remember yoga at
dawn, evening swims when the lake turned
golden, or teachers urging students
to write endlessly in the sun. The hut
embodied a sense of Urigkeit – rusticity
– that made it feel timeless, though
it was always changing.*



birds taking over the hut



birds taking over the hut



birds taking over the hut



birds taking over the hut



birds taking over the hut

PARADOXES

Nostalgia: The collective desire is to freeze the hut in time, even though it has always been changing. Its identity was never static, yet it is remembered as such, whilst the bathing facilities in whole Switzerland scream for change. Another thing, a feeling from my side, that it was used by some people really extensively, whilst other citizens have never visited once. The structure is intensely remembered by some, while simultaneously absent from many others.

Heritage: The heritage concession insists on sameness, yet accepts modifications for safety, and classifies a total rebuild as "renovation." Burnt beams must be preserved, while insensitive 1960s additions are unquestioned. Authenticity is bureaucratically defined, not materially lived.

Politics and Economy: The city accelerates the process to deliver quickly, bypassing planner selection rules, while reconstruction is made possible only by a complex mix of insurance, foundation, and private funds. Costs rise, numbers shift, but still no transparent calculation exists. In this rush, decisions risk being arbitrary, shaped by individual positions rather than collective negotiation, whilst many people valued the details and care for materiality in the old badhütte, which is in risk of getting lost in this fast-paced process. Also when looking at other examples of such sensitive context, time is a crucial element in planning things like this.