Intelligent interior

A high-tech conference and event space can be effortlessly transformed into multiple configurations using futuristic automated technology

Scheduled to open in May 2014, the Swiss Tech Convention Center is situated on the campus of the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) in Ecublens, Switzerland. Primarily dedicated to hosting scientific and academic events (conventions, seminars and conferences, etc), it has a total capacity of 3,000, which comprises a 2,205-seat conference room with a 795-seat balcony.

Equipped with the latest in venue reconfiguration technology, the Swiss Tech Convention Center is a truly flexible venue. The auditorium can be automatically reconfigured from a full conference room to exhibition hall or banquet room (flat floor configuration) in just 15 minutes. Each seat is also fitted with a keypad system. Fifteen fully modular meeting rooms also feature on the lower garden level.

CHF225m (£156m/US$242.7m) was raised for this impressive project through a public-private partnership made up of Credit Suisse Real Estate Fund Living Plus, Credit Suisse Real Estate Fund Hospitality, and HRS Real Estate.

"We are proud to contribute to the development of a futuristic EPFL campus and strengthen Switzerland as a place of training and research," Lucas Meier, fund manager for Credit Suisse Real Estate, told the *Tribune de Genève* in September 2011.

The project is generally credited to have been kickstarted in large part by Patrick Aebischer, president of EPFL, with a call for design submissions in 2006. By 2009, the firm Richter·Dahl Rocha & Associates was selected and the design and planning stages started in earnest. The main design challenge was to create a versatile auditorium that could fit up to 3,000 people at full capacity and could also function as several independent smaller gathering spaces. Since it was expected the main auditorium would not be used at full capacity at all times, it was essential to have a way to automatically adapt the space to fit the needs of concurrent small gatherings, as well as large conferences.

Design innovations
From the exterior, the Swiss Tech Convention Center appears as a simple and elegant structure that maximises the available space in an innovative manner. The Richter·Dahl Rocha design features a very large triangular metal structure cantilevered

The Swiss Tech Convention Center is set against stunning scenery in the heart of the Lake Geneva region

off two reinforced concrete supports in the centre and to the north of the building. This design enables plenty of natural light to enter the building with floor-to-ceiling glass façades on each end, which can be completely obscured when needed. Construction is being managed by HRS Real Estate with the assistance of the civil engineering firm Ingeni.

Within the interior of the building, emphasis was placed on creating flexible space. The project team agreed that the main auditorium had to have the capability to be quickly subdivided into smaller rooms to accommodate a variety of events. Skyfold vertical partitions were therefore installed to enable acoustic separation for the balcony seating. A fully automated high-tech approach to this challenge was central and soon became a key selling point of the project.

After evaluating a number of competing technologies, the Gala Venue technology provided by Gala Systems was chosen as being best suited to the needs of the project. This technology enables seats to be deployed via an automated platform and seat rotation system, which can move seats to an inverted position for storage under the floor when they are not
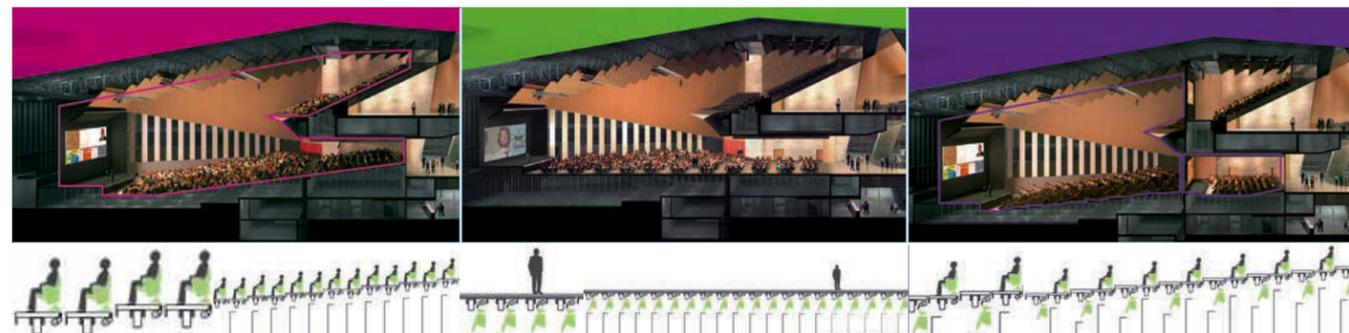
The main lobby leads into a fully modular space that can be converted from an auditorium to a conference room, to an exhibition hall, to a banquet and reception space

required. This guarantees a perfectly flat floor without any visible cracks or variations in height. Modular walls are deployed, where necessary, to subdivide the space into several independent rooms. The 20-tonne wall situated within the main auditorium can be raised 4m high using Gala's Spiralift technology and provides a complete acoustical and visual separation, enabling concurrent events to be hosted. "The Spiralift technology made all the difference here," says Kenneth Ross, project architect. "It's very reliable – it works every time."

The stage is set

When it opens in May 2014, it is anticipated that the Swiss Tech Convention Center will become a very popular conference and event venue, with its futuristic design making it a truly unique and flexible building, capable of accommodating all types of seminars, conferences, and business conventions. In close proximity to Lausanne, hotels, shops, and other infrastructures, it looks set to be the ideal platform for exchanges between delegates from around the world. ∎

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CONVENTION CONFIGURATION
Overlooking the 2,205-seat auditorium is a 795-seat mezzanine, giving a total capacity of 3,000 seats:
- Total surface area: 2,700m²;
- Auditorium: 1,950m²;
- Stage: 190m²;
- Backstage: 100m²;
- Mezzanine: 620m².

BANQUET & RECEPTION CONFIGURATION
- Auditorium: 2,000m²;
- Main lobby: 1,316m²;
- Maximum banquet capacity: 1,000 people;
- Maximum reception capacity: 2,100 people.

CONFERENCE CONFIGURATION
Using modular walls, the mezzanine can be transformed into a separate auditorium with its own foyer, so can hold several events at the same time.
- Mezzanine foyer: 500m²;
- Enclosed mezzanine conference room: 420m² (456 seats).

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