



**opposite bottom (left):** Architect Ralph Germann reckons that one of the most impressive features of the house is the 35 metre long wall sculpture realised by the Swiss artist Thierry Kupferschmid and constructed in Corten steel. He says: 'It introduces poetry to the entrance alley'.

## ALPINE CONTEMPORARY

location: Swiss Alps - Fribourg province  
 architecture and interior design: Ralph Germann Architects SA  
 photography: Lionel Henriod

FRIBOURG IS A PASTORAL SWISS CANTON WHERE THE FAMOUS REGIONAL WHITE AND BLACK CATTLE GRAZE DURING THE SHORT SUMMER MONTHS. BEARING IN MIND THIS TRANQUIL RURAL LOCATION, THE BRIEF FROM CLIENT TO ARCHITECT WAS QUITE SIMPLE: TO CREATE A HOUSE WHERE THE SOBRIETY OF BOTH INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR LIVING WOULD MATCH THE SURROUNDING LANDSCAPE. ▷





*these pages:* Some furniture and all interior fixtures were custom-made for the project in Switzerland. These are sympathetically integrated into the architecture.

*opposite:* The five metre high fireplace mantel features eight millimetre thick plates of laminated steel.

Architect Ralph Germann was allocated a plot of 7 000 square metres of verdant pre-Alpine land on which to build a home with around 1 000 square metres of living accommodation. He divided this into a main living area – on two floors – of 450 square metres, below which is a basement of almost 600 square metres.

This new structure was designed for a couple who required a harmonious environment, but there was a prerequisite that it could comfortably handle gatherings of 20 guests. Says the architect: 'We approached this brief by visiting the surrounding area, absorbing the vernacular architecture of these pre-Alps. Our first considerations were that the fall of land was steep, plus there was a natural water source and potentially icy temperatures during the winter months. ▷





**above:** The entire basement incorporates a spa area and a 20 metre long lap pool. Fixtures and fittings here are exemplary.

**opposite:** The 12 metre long library shelves encompass a third of the 2nd floor outer wall and are divided by a narrow window of the same length.

'We wanted the house to be as ecologically acceptable as possible, insofar as its size and including the 20 metre swimming pool that was to be constructed in the basement.

'Accordingly, we looked for what we call in Switzerland, 'positive efficiency'; an example is the heating system that uses a wood pellet stove.

'Inspirations for the overall design evolved from the simplicity of forms and volumes of the local farmhouses, especially those located on the soft slopes of the lower peaks of the region. They are used during the summer by shepherds, who live there for a couple of months, along with their cattle. This R&D resulted in the selection of three key materials: Larch timber for cladding on the façades and for interior furniture and fixtures, plus concrete and lime for interior walls.'

The integration of indoor and outdoor living is facilitated by two patios; one on the ground floor, plus a 20 metre long loggia on the first floor above. These provide the owners the possibility to enjoy the autumn and spring sun, while being sheltered from the cooler mountain wind. ▸



**this page:** In the master bathroom, large charcoal grey porcelain tiles are a foil for custom-made cabinetry in local larch timber.



Ralph Germann summarises on his rationale behind this unique contemporary Swiss chalet: 'The aim was to build a comfortable and pleasant living space for two persons, despite the relatively compact dimensions of the house. The simplicity of the structure and the finishes of the spaces within offered the art-lover owners the possibility to place and hang pieces without damage caused to the interior finishes.'

'For me the project evolved as neutral architecture conceived with a great deal of humanity. The simplicity of a philosophy applied on an everyday basis; to paraphrase the famous Italian architect Carlo Scarpa: 'God is in the detail.' □