

DIE DEN GLETSCHER BEWOHNEN

ST.GALLEN (CH)

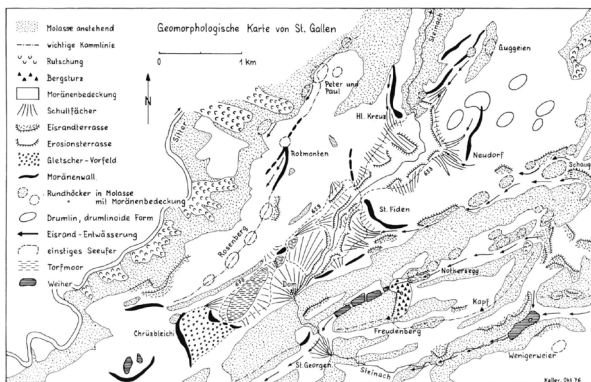


GEOLOGY - THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF ST. GALLEN

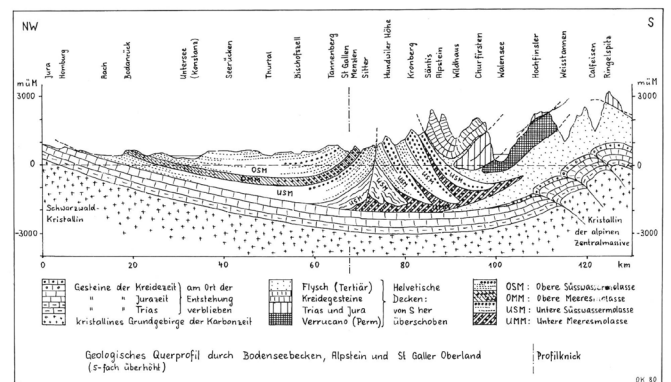
The present-day urban area of St. Gallen was shaped by a long glacial formation process. Glaciers sculpted the high valley and left behind traces that still influence the citylandscape and construction practices today.

A prominent moraine ridge between Kreuzbleiche and Ruckhalde marks the former edge of the glacier tongues. These geological structures play a crucial role in determining where building, reinforcement, or drainage is possible – geology sets the framework for architecture.

A geological cross-section reveals the sequence of layers: from the crystalline depths of the Black Forest, through the molasse deposits, to the moraine cover left by the last ice age. Our project site lies precisely at the threshold between molasse and moraine. Architecture reacts here – to shifting ground, forgotten watercourses, and sedimented time. The glaciers are gone – but they are still building with us.



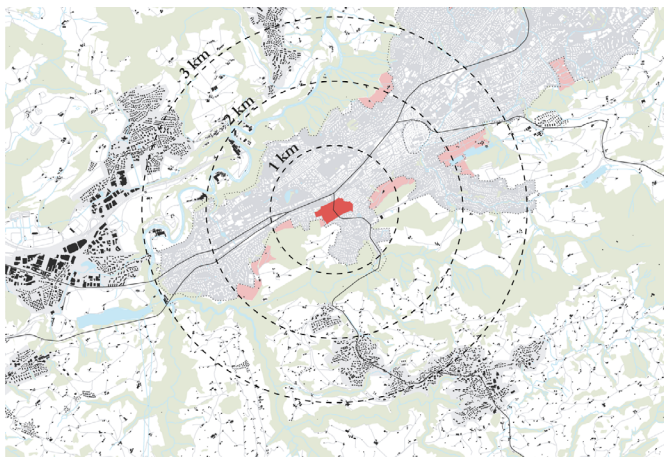
Die Geomorphologische Karte von St. Gallen
(Zur Glazialmorphologie der Region St. Gallen, S. 64, Oskar Keller, 1973-1981)



Geologisches Querprofil durch Bodenseebecken, Alpstein und St. Galler Oberland
(Zur Glazialmorphologie der Region St. Gallen, S. 35, Oskar Keller, 1973-1981)

IS THIS URBAN OR RURAL ? MAYBE BOTH

If the geology beneath St. Gallen speaks of deep, slow time, the architecture above must respond with openness and adaptability. Building today is no longer about fixed forms or singular functions. Instead, it creates a layered, flexible structure—a spatial and material infrastructure that can adjust to social, ecological, or economic change. Some parts may remain raw or unfinished, with exposed frameworks that invite temporary use, collective appropriation, or delayed completion. The ground itself becomes a platform of ongoing negotiation—between permanence and possibility, between settlement and movement.



The building is more than architecture—it is part of a social and metabolic process, where people, materials, and actions interact continuously. Architecture becomes an open system: alive, adaptable, and never fully complete. And about boundaries: is this still city? Already landscape? Maybe both.

The project resists a clear answer. It operates in a space of productive ambiguity, where urban and rural logics interweave. Planning here is not about drawing limits, but about opening conditions—for shifting populations, changing resource flows, and new ways of living and working. The future is not a form to be filled, but a field to be cultivated—layer by layer, with patience and precision.

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LEARNING FROM THE LOCAL - THE PLINTH AS AN INFRASTRUCTURE

The massive plinth draws on local agricultural references and forms the basis for a diverse infrastructure in the Ruckhalde area. It creates space for community, connects different levels as a social platform, strengthens togetherness, and sets new impulses.

COMBINATION OF HOUSING AND PRODUCTIVE SPACE

The mix of residential and productive spaces places mainly public uses in the plinth level, including parking, laundry facilities, studios, and communal areas that encourage interaction and exchange. The upper floors are dedicated to residential units, providing privacy and retreat.



*Photography of stable construction (Stallbau Alp Küis) in Krummenau, Canton of St. Gallen (1920-1950)
Source: Staatsarchiv St. Gallen*

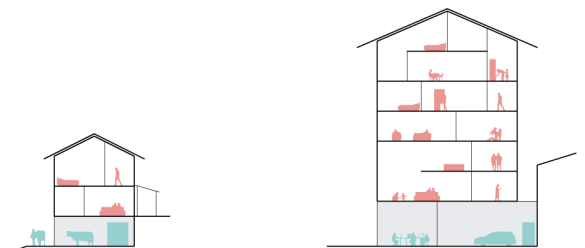


Typological comparison scheme between farms or stables in the mountains and proposed buildings.

PROPOSAL

MAIN CONCEPT

The urban design strategy follows the topography, integrating existing green spaces and waterways into an open, permeable structure. The green areas extend downhill through the new building volumes, running parallel to the river courses. It responds to the fine-grained surroundings with terraced houses, villas, and standalone buildings. The former cog railway track is reactivated as a public pedestrian and bicycle path, connecting the various neighborhoods. This creates a development that is both rooted in the landscape and open to future possibilities.

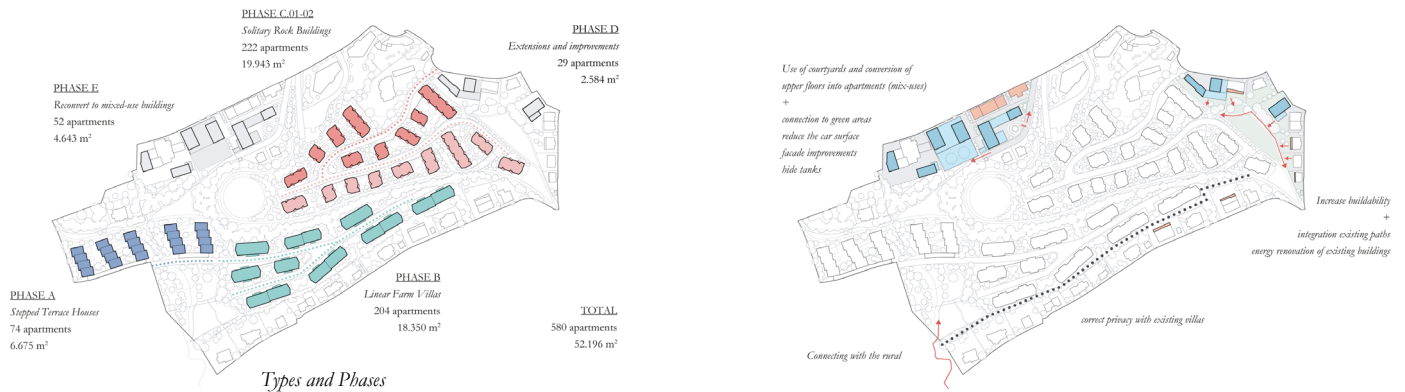


TYPES AND PHASES

Phase A introduces terraced hillside houses that follow the natural terrain and continue the typology of the western neighborhood, featuring green roof terraces and a strong connection to the landscape. Phase B adds linear buildings to the mid-slope, referencing the scale and structure of the villa-like buildings above and creating defined in-between spaces. Phase C places solitary, rock-like volumes along the moraine ridge—shaped by the terrain and referencing the geological character of the site through their materiality.

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URBAN ACUPUNCTURE

Phases D and E focus on the transformation of the existing fabric through rooftop additions, courtyard adaptations, and mixed uses. Conversions, façade improvements, and connections to green spaces enhance quality and increase potential without overwhelming the neighborhood. Existing structures are carefully densified and made adaptable for the future.

GROUND FLOOR: PUBLIC AND PARKING

The ground floor serves as a multifunctional level, currently used for parking but easily convertible into communal spaces like studios, a daycare, or a small supermarket. Parking is discreetly integrated and complemented by shared mobility options. Vehicular access is via Langweid and Treuacker streets, while green pathways ensure safe pedestrian and bicycle connections. This creates a resilient, adaptable base that combines parking, mobility, and social life, activating the neighborhood and making it vibrant.

URBAN SPACE: PATHS AND GARDENS

The new pathway network follows the former railway line and adapts to the topography, creating a clear, barrier-free route for pedestrians and cyclists. A footbridge connects the rail loop to Oberstraße. Family gardens are placed at the project's edges to ensure privacy. In a groundwater-sensitive area, a biological orchard will be established to support ecological sustainability and local supply. Public amenities like playgrounds, barbecue areas, and seating promote social interaction. The large neighborhood square at the rail loop serves as a lively center, strengthening community and identity.

NATURE: GEOLOGY, GREEN AND WATER

The geological conditions of the site form the basis for a sensitive and sustainable open space concept. Green corridors connect the neighborhood to the surrounding landscape and promote biodiversity by creating habitats for native plants and animals. Water plays a central role: natural retention basins and wetlands support groundwater and help regulate the microclimate. This interplay of geology, vegetation, and water is intentionally used to establish a healthy, resilient ecosystem that benefits both residents and nature.

BUILDING TYPES

The housing concept includes three types: Type A are terraced hillside houses with maisonette-style units arranged like townhouses. Type B consists of row buildings with compact student studios and larger work-living apartments. Type C features standalone buildings with small units for singles and larger apartments for various life stages. All units have private outdoor spaces and multiple orientations. Cooperative organization encourages community living and sustainable use.

THE CAR PARK AS A TRANSFORMABLE SPACE

With simple structural measures, parking spaces can be flexibly transformed in the future into multifunctional public areas. This allows the space to be quickly adapted for uses such as markets, play areas, or event spaces, turning it from a mere parking lot into a vibrant, versatile gathering place for the neighborhood.

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EXTRACTING AND ACTIVATING THE SOIL AS A SPACE

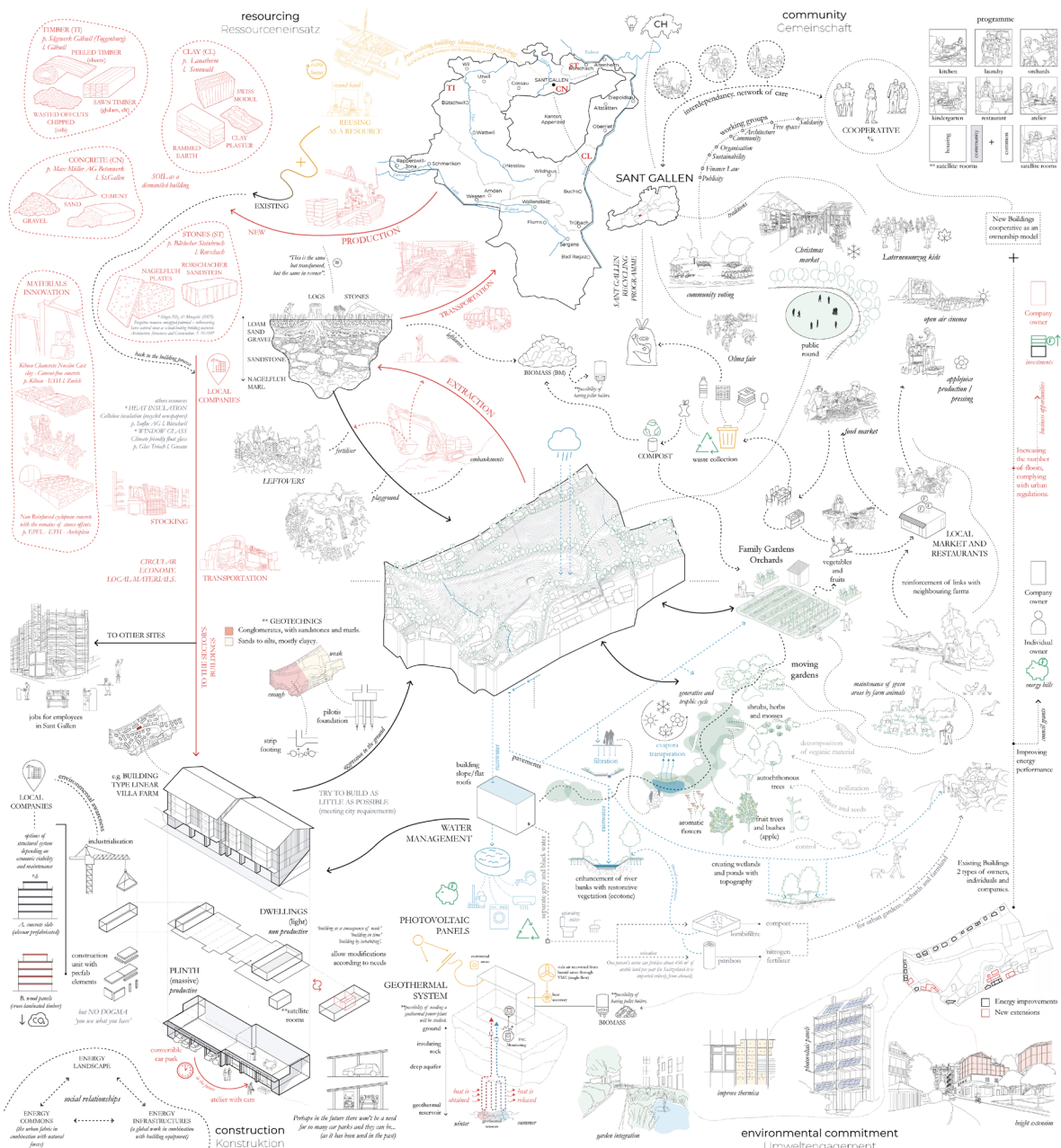
The ground is used as a versatile space promoting community and sustainability. Bird nests support biodiversity, an apple press enables local fruit processing, and a small animal farm offers nature experiences. Playgrounds provide space for children, while garden seating invites relaxation and social exchange. Thus, the ground connects ecological, social, and cultural functions.

as a conclusion

HOW WILL WE LIVE IN COMMUNITY?

Living in community means creating spaces that adapt to people and their environment. In this project, architecture does not impose—it responds: to the terrain, to water, to social change.

We propose an open, flexible structure that allows for different ways of living, working, and gathering. The plinth becomes a shared foundation for collective life: with services, productive spaces, and social exchange. More than a group of buildings, the project is a living infrastructure—designed to evolve, adapt, and sustain an active, resilient community over time.



Metabolism - It is not only Architecture. The building as a social process and as a metabolic process of people, materials and actions.