



A glazed storefront reveals much of the interior (opposite). ARTEC plays luminous translucency against reflectivity, especially near the central courtyard (this page).

## ARTEC lends a theatrical flair to the ZUM LÖWEN VON ASPERN pharmacy on the fringes of Vienna



By Liane Lefaivre

**T**heatrical pharmaceuticals may sound like an oxymoron, but the idea is not so farfetched for Vienna—a place rife with musicals, parades, balls, cabarets, jazz clubs, operas, concerts, and variety shows. On the city's eastern outskirts, near the Löwen von Aspern (a sculpture of a lion commemorating the decisive battle here between Hapsburg and Napoleonic forces), the roar of drama reverberates even in the design of a small drugstore.

Apotheke zum Löwen von Aspern stands on Vienna's tattered fringe, along a service road leading to the Lower Austrian countryside. Nothing in the site's drab, low-rise surroundings would have earmarked it for an aesthetically remarkable pharmacy. Quite the contrary.

But the apothecary's owner, Wilhelm Schlagintweit, was a man with a mission. After partnering with Phoenix, a wholesale pharmaceutical company focused on "wellness," he set out to transcend the usual drugstore offerings. Catering to the influx of suburban yuppies who populate the hip, new single-family houses just a short drive or bike ride from his site, Schlagintweit envisioned a store that would provide coaching in wellness, homeopathic and herbal medicines, and nutrition, along with general advice on Phoenix cosmetics.

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To set the stage for this new venture, the owner turned to ARTEC, a relatively young architecture firm from Graz, Austria—known, perhaps not surprisingly, for residential and commercial designs attuned to hip tastes. Founded in the late 1990s by Bettina Götz and Richard Manahl, the practice was among the first of its generation to embrace a stark Minimalist aesthetic, breaking with the Deconstructivism of the so-called "Graz School."

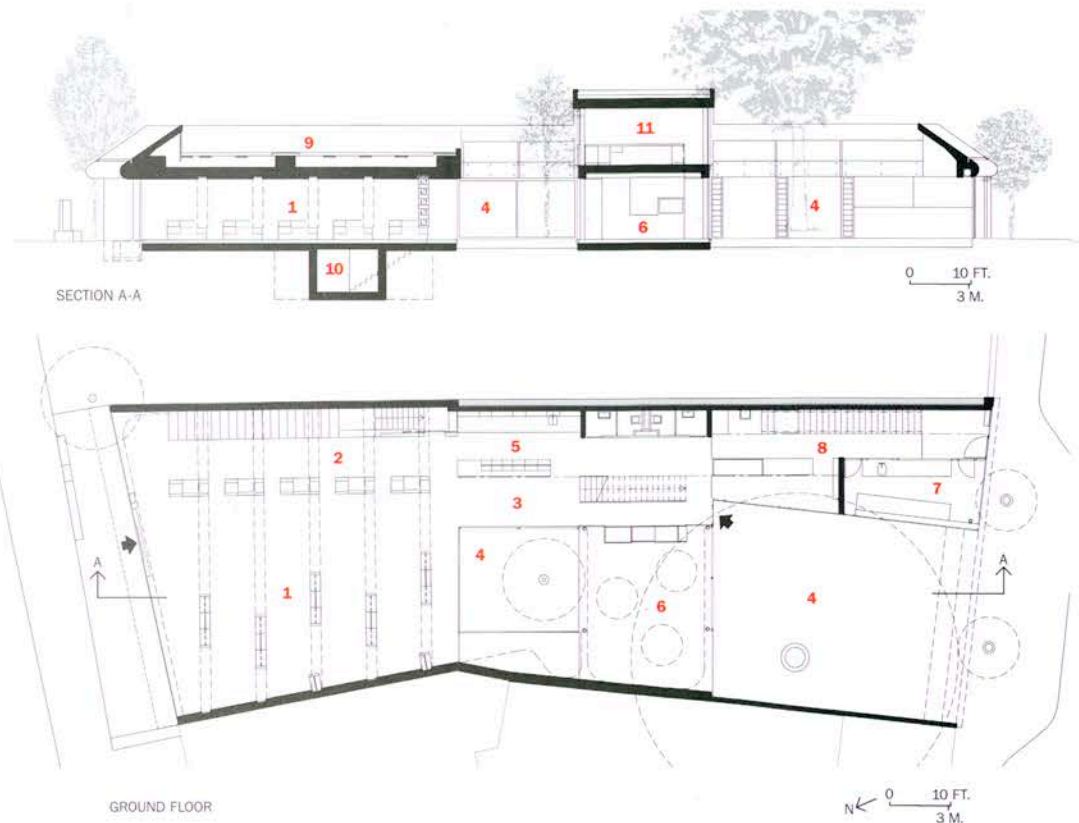
Always seeking what Götz terms "the simple form of the complex," ARTEC responded to Schlagintweit by creating a modest building with a striking interior, distinguished by its spare and dramatic edge. A quiet, 50-foot-wide glazed facade invites views into the 1,350-square-foot space, revealing walls of exposed concrete and floors of polished Confalt (a mixture of asphalt and green-tinted cement that is like terrazzo, but not as hard).

In a spirit akin to the stark stage designs of such dramatists as Robert Wilson, special lighting effects set the mood here. Wide bands of incandescent light stretch up the walls and across the ceiling, wrapping the perimeters of the display cases that hang from above as if suspended weightlessly on glowing wings of light. Abstractly, these aluminum cabinets allude to the mythological phoenix from which the pharmaceutical company takes its name. Other cabinets project from the wall, also without touching the floor. Hung from the reinforced-concrete structure in a staggered arrangement, the wall and ceiling units appear kinetic—as if the lit bands were tracks on which the shelving cases could slide. But the

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Ribbons of incandescent light run along the sides of suspended cabinets and across the ceiling. A circular motif also edges parts of these aluminum cases (opposite). Some of the shelving units hang from the ceiling, others from the wall (below). White-faced steel cabinets rest on the floor (right and below), storing the employee-supervised products for sale.



- 1. Self-serve sales area
- 2. Non-self-serve area
- 3. Tea display
- 4. Courtyard
- 5. Dispensary
- 6. Seminar/multipurpose
- 7. Laboratory
- 8. Storage
- 9. Herb garden
- 10. Cellar
- 11. Recreation





prospect of movement remains illusory. Merely sources of illumination, the flush incandescent fixtures actually have an intensity great enough to glow through daylight, even with such an open and transparent facade. At once a spectacle and a stunning feat of subliminal advertising, the interior almost begs for a round of applause.

The pharmacy also features two charismatic dramatis personae: a ginkgo tree, symbolizing vitality and wellness, in a glazed inner courtyard, and an ancient oak tree, apparently personifying strength and long

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life, taking center stage in an open-air court toward the back of the building. The facility includes a seminar room and library that can accommodate lectures, consultations, and gatherings.

The apothecary's basic yet elegant reinforced-precast-concrete structure features a post-and-beam system with columns concealed in the side walls, allowing for unimpeded spatial flow between the exterior and interior. Accentuating this effect, the architects glazed much of the non-bearing walls, using reflective surfaces to give the illusion of expansive space. This strategy recalls the work of Richard Neutra in another building for clients committed to wellness, the Lovell Health-House in Los Angeles.

Thanks to the pharmacy building's subtly concealed concrete

frame, this airy, transparent store has the brawn to support a roof garden, accessible by stairs from the interior. Modeled by engineer-turned-landscape designer Jacob Fina on the medieval garden of the cloister of St. Gallen, in Switzerland, this herbarium features some 450 varieties of medicinal plants. The staff encourages customers, especially parents with their children, to ascend to the garden for guided tours, which include explanations of the herbal properties. When the visitors return downstairs, they can sample teas prepared from the homegrown ingredients. So the drugstore, with its roof terrace, has become extremely popular with local families on outings.

When Apotheke zum Löwen von Aspern shuts down for the night, a heavy, white cotton curtain, front-lit by floodlights on the floor, falls across this stage, concealing the interior from the street. Only the illuminated top branches of the venerable oak tree and upstart ginkgo remain visible, as if bowing from within this little world of wellness—a final theatrical touch, delivering the closing line. ■

**Project:** Apotheke zum Löwen von Aspern, Vienna

**Architect:** ARTEC Architekten—Bettina Götz, Richard Manahl, principals; Ronald Mikolics, Irene Prieler, Ivan Zdenkovic, Wolfgang Beyer, Julia Beer, project team

**Engineers:** Oskar Graf (structural); Christian Koppensteiner (HVAC)

**Sources**

**Sliding glass doors:** Tormax

**Lighting:** Die Spanndecke; Sumetzberger

**Showerheads:** Grohe



The wall and ceiling units appear kinetic—as if the lit bands were tracks on which the shelving cases could slide (this page and opposite). But such movement remains illusory. Animating the interior, the parallel bands of light play against the repetition of glowing circles (opposite).