

Fortezza

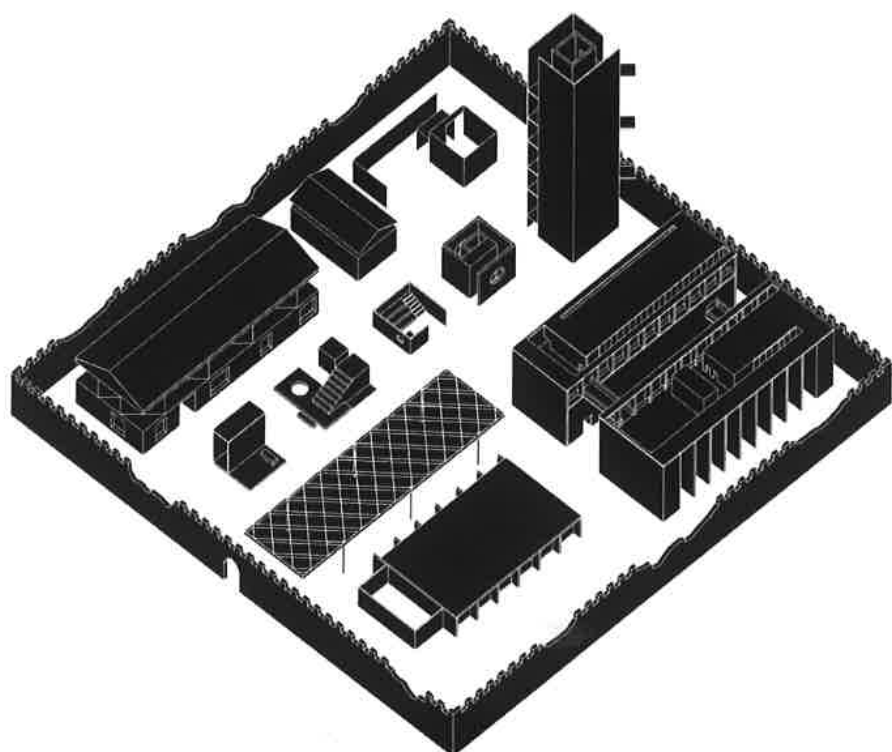


Markus Scherer, Walter Dietl. Forte di Fortezza 2008. Photo by René Riller.

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The Stone Perimeter Architectural Design within Defensive Walls

Andrea Crudeli



The restoration and adaptive reuse of the Fortress of Fortezza in northern Italy, led by architects Markus Scherer and Walter Dietl, constructs a rigorous and restrained dialogue between military monumentality and contemporary cultural function.

Built between 1833 and 1838 under Habsburg authority, the vast 20-hectare complex was conceived as a defensive barrier at the threshold of the Eisack Valley, though it never fulfilled its intended martial role. After decades of military occupation, its transition into civilian use began with its selection for Manifesta 7 in 2008 and the Landesausstellung in 2009.

The intervention is grounded in a strategy of minimal yet precise transformation. The original mass of granite and brick, with its severe geometry and atmospheric interior spaces, was preserved in its raw material state. Non-historic accretions were removed, roofs and masonry stabilized, and the fortress's tectonic logic allowed to re-emerge.

Contemporary insertions were introduced with calibrated distinction, never seeking formal continuity but rather material resonance. One of the most significant gestures is a 22-meter-deep vertical shaft, inserted into the existing structure and animated by a cast-in-place concrete stair. Its gold-finished handrail offers a subtle counterpoint, while the concrete itself bears the imprint of layered formwork, echoing the fortress's aged textures. Elsewhere, catwalks in steel, black-patinated bridges, and new platforms lightly trace the contours of the landscape and water basin below, enabling circulation without visual imposition. Within the interior, spatial interventions provide new accessibility and safety systems, while preserving the atmospheric density of vaulted ceilings, stone walls, and compressed volumes. Exhibition galleries are integrated without excess, respecting the spatial gravity of the original architecture.

The project refrains from aesthetic substitution and instead makes space for continuity. Fortezza is not remade but rearticulated, its defensive silence opened to cultural inhabitation. Through precise material gestures and a sustained respect for the site's temporal strata, the fortress becomes a living construct, where history and present use coexist not through resolution, but through layered and open dialogue.