

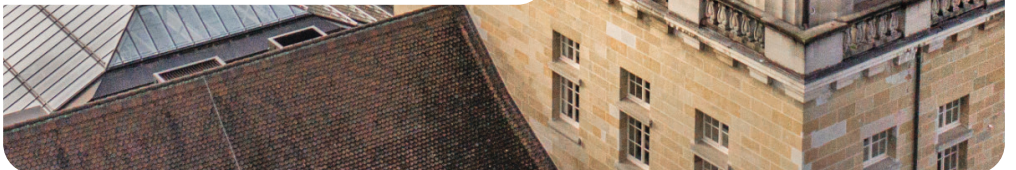


University of  
Zurich <sup>UZH</sup>



## Sights

in the main building of the  
University of Zurich



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# 1

## History of the main building

Floor E | Entrance hall



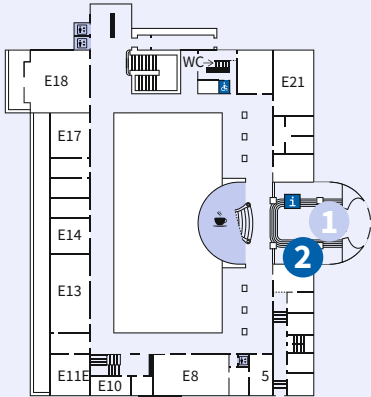
**T**he University of Zurich (UZH) was founded in 1833. At the time, 161 students studied in a building on today's Bahnhofstrasse. As the number of students steadily increased, so did the need for additional space. Eventually, the construction of a new main building became necessary.

The building here at Rämistrasse 71 was designed by Swiss architect Karl Moser and inaugurated in 1914. Since then, it has remained virtually unchanged. Moser was known for his modern architectural style and attention to detail. Because of the uneven terrain, he deliberately avoided the usual symmetrical building style. Instead, he divided his building into two parts, offset and connected by a tower. This design enabled him to tuck the main building into the hillside while creating a unique structure that still stands out from comparable buildings today.

## 2

# Doctoral certificate of Albert Einstein

In the entrance hall, on the left from the main entrance, you will find Albert Einstein's doctoral certificate.



## Floor E | Entrance hall

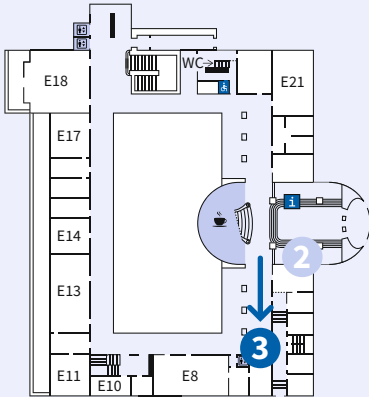


**A**lbert Einstein, the most famous physicist of the 20th century, received his doctorate from the University of Zurich. He submitted his dissertation “Eine neue Bestimmung der Moleküldimensionen” (A New Determination of Molecular Dimensions) in 1905 and worked at UZH as a lecturer in theoretical physics from 1909 to 1911. In the following years, he formulated the general theory of relativity and was awarded the Nobel Prize around ten years later for his services to theoretical physics, and especially for his discovery of the law of the photoelectric effect.

His doctoral certificate was in private possession in unknown locations for a long time but resurfaced in New York in 2022. A few months later, the original certificate was returned to the University of Zurich and can now be viewed in the display case.

### 3 Door to the former president's office

From the entrance hall, turn left and follow the corridor straight ahead. After a few steps, you will be in front of the room KOL-E-5.



Floor E | Room KOL-E-5

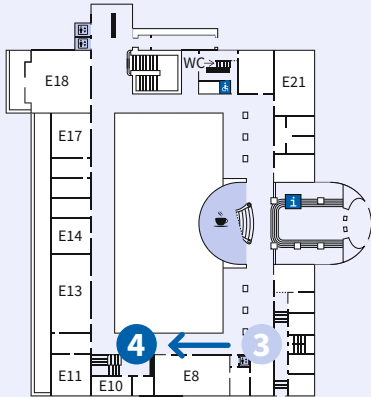


The architect Karl Moser was also involved in the interior design of the main building. He attached great importance to ensuring that the three arts of architecture, sculpture and painting worked together and formed a cohesive whole. You will therefore find decorations and small details everywhere in the building.

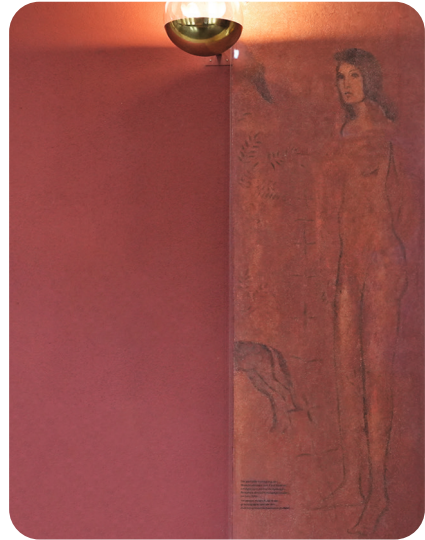
He also wanted to promote new artistic styles and worked with young and unknown artists – as in the case of the door to KOL-E-5. The design of this door is particularly elaborate because the president's office used to be here. The Greek goddess of wisdom (Athena) can be seen at the top, while the faculties of the time are depicted on either side. Left from top to bottom: Mathematics & Natural Sciences, Philosophy, Veterinary Medicine. On the right: Political Sciences, Theology, Human Medicine. The president's office is no longer located in the main building. However, the room is still used as an office, which is why it is not possible for visitors to enter.

## 4 Wall paintings by Paul Bodmer

Continue along the corridor. Just after the Kanzlei (KOL-E-8), you will find Swiss painter Paul Bodmer's wall paintings on the left pillar.



Floor E | Next to KOL-E-8

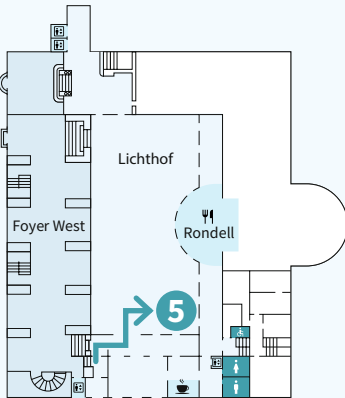


Not all of the young artists' works were received positively – on the contrary: even before the inauguration of the main building, an art scandal rocked the university. Zurich native Paul Bodmer had painted about 20 naked young women and men in a primitive style along the corridor from the former president's office to the staircase in the corner. This caused an uproar, and Bodmer had to paint a second and third version. Since the newer versions weren't met with approval either, his wall paintings were painted over two years after the opening of the main building.

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the main building, two areas were uncovered again in 2014: a woman is standing on the pillar and two women with two cats are sitting above the passage to the staircase. Parts of the first and second version can be seen at the same time today, because the individual layers could not be clearly separated from each other during the uncovering.

## 5 Chaise longue

Go down the stairs one floor to get to the chaise longue in the Lichthof (atrium).



### Floor D | Lichthof



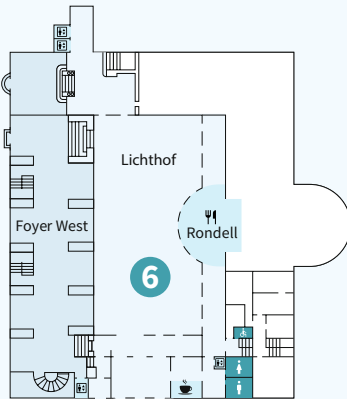
**T**he giant chaise longue with its blue upholstery was placed in the Lichthof in 2008 to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the University of Zurich. It is dedicated to Emilie Kempin-Spyri, who was the first female lawyer in Switzerland to receive a doctorate and habilitation and the first female privatdozent (private lecturer) at the University of Zurich in 1891.

As a symbolic acknowledgement of Kempin-Spyri's achievements, the chaise longue represents a place where you can rest and gather the energy to continue building on the spirit of her pioneering work. The sheer size of the structure may also make you feel small – perhaps reflecting how Kempin-Spyri may have felt in her struggle for women's rights.

## 6

## Lichthof (atrium)

If you now look around you, you will see the heart of the University of Zurich: the Lichthof.



## Floor D | Lichthof



The grand centerpiece of the main building is a five-story high atrium with a glass roof. To enhance the effect of the Lichthof, Moser deliberately designed the surrounding corridors to be somewhat darker. An architectural progression through time can also be observed in the Lichthof: the lowest floor (D) is built with antique-style columns. One floor higher (E) is a medieval cloister. The upper two floors (F and G) are characterized by an open and round design – typical of early modern times. The roof finishes in the style of modernism.

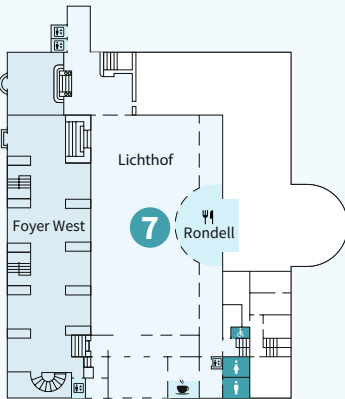
The arrangement of the rooms also used to follow a chronological order. At the bottom were the earthbound and older disciplines (e.g. archaeology), followed above by newer disciplines (e.g. mathematics). At the top were the most modern and intellectual disciplines (e.g. philosophy).



## 7

## Nike of Samothrace

In the Lichthof, you will find the statue of Nike of Samothrace in the center.



## Floor D | Lichthof



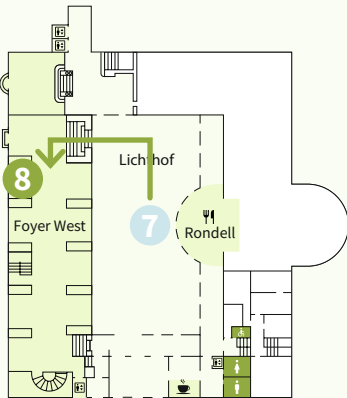
In the middle of the Lichthof stands an imposing plaster cast of a statue of the Greek goddess of victory, Nike of Samothrace. The original was probably created around 190 BC and is now on display in the Louvre in Paris. Other representations of gods can be found throughout the D floor. This is no coincidence, as this area used to be a museum of archaeology. In addition to the Nike of Samothrace, there used to be many other statues in the Lichthof, which is why it was referred to as the “garden of the gods”.

However, as the number of students increased, the Lichthof was used more and more as a place to linger and meet. When the Archaeological Institute moved to another building in 1956, most of the statues were also relocated. Today, the Lichthof is a popular place for people to meet and mingle, and exhibitions and events are held here regularly.

## 8

## West Foyer/KOH-B-10

Continue to the end of the Licht-hof and take the stairs on the left down to the West Foyer and the entrance to lecture hall KOH-B-10.



## Floor B | West Foyer



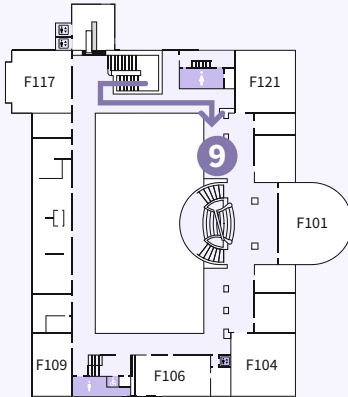
The West Foyer was also part of the Museum of Archaeology. Exhibits from Greek, Roman and Egyptian ancient times were displayed here. Today, only the Kouros of Samos, about five meters high, reminds us of the foyer's past use. Where exhibits were once on display, there are now study spaces and the entrance to the largest lecture hall on the UZH City Campus.

The underground lecture hall KOH-B-10 was built in 2002 and has 463 seats. The construction also led to a new color concept in the West Foyer. The walls are painted a soft shade of green, and the stairs leading to the lecture hall are red. The colors become more intense as you walk down the stairs. The lecture hall itself is dominated by bold colors: shades of pink and blue on the walls, as well as green furniture. Because of its eye-catching design, students refer to the lecture hall as the „gummy bear lecture hall“. The lecture hall is open to visitors when no event is taking place.

## 9

## Extension model of the main building

Ascend the stairs back into the Lichthof and turn left. Go up the large staircase to floor F. Turn left and follow the corridor. Just before the main staircase, you will find the extension model of the main building.



### Floor F

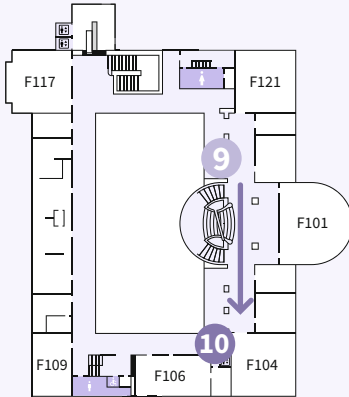


At the inauguration of the main building, Moser believed that the building was finished and that its asymmetrical design was deliberate. However, just three years later, he presented an extension project that was based on the exact opposite idea: he proposed to mirror the existing building on the south side. This would double the building's size, including the Lichthof and the tower, and turn it into a classical, symmetrical building.

It is possible that Moser's surprising proposal was a reaction to other plans to expand the larger university district. For example, it was proposed to make the ETH Zurich (UZH's neighboring institution) the center of the university quarter and to arrange UZH to the left and right of the ETH. However, all expansion plans were too extensive and were not implemented.

## 10 Giacometti fountain

Continue along the corridor and past the main staircase. Where the corridor turns right, you will find the Giacometti fountain on the left.



Floor F | Next to KOL-F-104

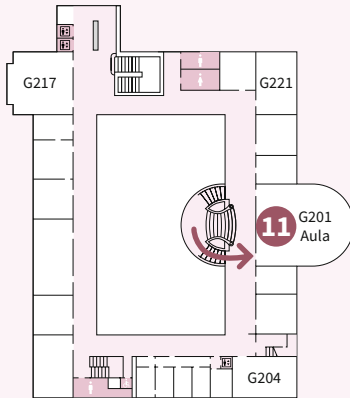


Hidden in a niche is a wall fountain with a mosaic by Augusto Giacometti, one of the most famous Swiss artists of his time. The mosaic shows two women watering a plant. The depiction of water as a source of life is found in various places in the main building and can also be understood as a symbol of education.

However, the reliefs below the mosaic give the fountain another meaning and explain its somewhat hidden location. Depicted are Pan (the Greek god of shepherds) and a satyr (nature spirit), which are a reference to the erotic book *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. In the book, a “pleasure place” is described near a fountain, where an exposed woman is lustfully observed by a satyr. The wall fountain was donated by the wives of the professors (presumably without being aware of its sexual connotation).

## 11a Auditorium

Go back a few steps to the main staircase and up one floor to floor G. Once you reach the top, you will see the entrance to the auditorium.



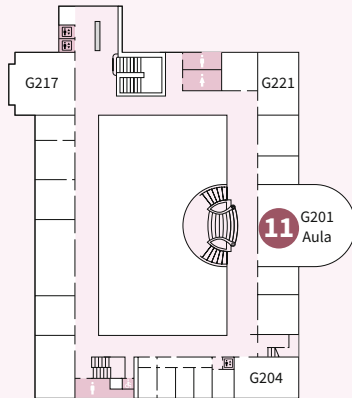
### Floor G | Room KOL-G-201



The auditorium is the jewel in the crown of UZH. The seven large round-arched windows, the ornate walls as well as the podium with its marble slabs make a striking impression. Between the windows are busts of significant figures, including one of Karl Moser. There are galleries on either side of the auditorium, one of which has an organ. The wall behind the podium was supposed to be painted by Ferdinand Hodler, one of the most famous Swiss painters. Unfortunately, he died before he could start the painting and the wall remained empty for about 20 years. Finally, for the 100th anniversary of the University of Zurich (1933), Paul Bodmer was commissioned to create the wall painting. Bodmer's style had changed from his earlier paintings below, and the women were now fully clothed. Naked men, however, still found their way into the painting.

## 11b Churchill memorial plaque

In the auditorium, you will see the Churchill memorial plaque directly to the right (as seen from the entrance).



Floor G | Room KOL-G-201

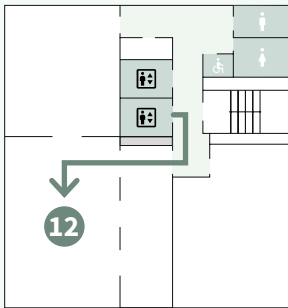


Various ceremonies and events regularly take place in the auditorium, for example graduation and doctorate ceremonies, inaugural and farewell lectures, honorary and public events. Many famous and influential personalities from the realms of science, politics, religion and business have spoken here. The talks given by Hillary Clinton and the Dalai Lama, for example, were particularly memorable.

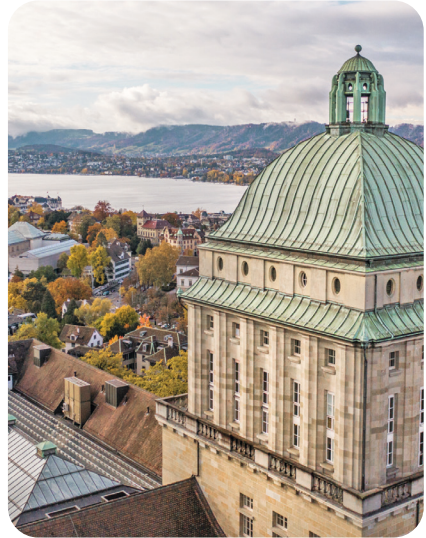
The most famous speech, however, was the one held by Sir Winston Churchill in 1946. Less than a year after the end of World War II, he spoke in the auditorium about the “tragedy of Europe” and called for the creation of “a kind of United States of Europe” so that Europe could live in peace, safety and freedom. He concluded his speech with the words, “Therefore I say to you: let Europe arise!”

## 12 University tower

Exit the auditorium and turn right. Follow the corridor to the hall with the stairs and take the elevator there to get to floor K.



### Floor K



Standing 65 meters tall and capped by a distinctive green dome, the tower of the main building is a landmark of the city of Zurich – even though it wasn't part of the original plans for the building. Originally, the tower was only supposed to have one floor. Moser subsequently produced numerous variations with different roof shapes and tower heights over a period of several years. It wasn't until the structural frame of the main building was already half completed that the final decision was made in 1912 to build the tower as it is known today. For a long time, the six floors of the tower didn't have a specific use. Today, they are home to a restaurant for employees, meeting rooms, study rooms, a relaxation room and a prayer/meditation room, among other things. Floor K, in particular, offers magnificent views of the city of Zurich.

The elevator will take you down to floors E or D, where you can exit the main building of the University of Zurich.



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8006 Zurich

If you have any questions or other inquiries, please contact the Welcome Desk in the entrance area of the main building (KOL).