

WHEN THE SUN KISSES THE ARCHITECT

The Rolf Disch Story



Rolf Disch in Wyhl, 1970

The natives of Baden are a peaceful lot. But push them too far and you'd better look out! That's how it was in 1848, when Baden became a revolutionary state, founding democracy despite Grand Duke Karl Friedrich's rule. So was the case again in the 1970s as a small idyllic village in Baden, Wyhl, took resistance against the influential nuclear lobby – and the building of a nuclear power plant was prevented. Behind this first opposition was a big bushy beard like out of a storybook. His name was Rolf Disch.

In the meantime Rolf Disch has not only become the most famous solar pioneer in Germany, but he is also internationally one of the most consulted architects for sustainable building. How it came to that, one could tell a variety of stories.

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"Nein!" said the Badenese to atomic energy. However that was not enough for Disch, just saying 'No', anyone can do that. But to completely reconstruct energy supply, now that's something different. And because we here in the Black Forest can do more than just build cuckoo clocks, he built, for example, the world's first solar filling station. And indeed shortly corresponding with 'Disch Design' solar automobiles. With his home-made 'Lichtblick I' Disch became the world champion in solar motoring in 1987 and with the 'Lichtblick II' he traversed across Australia in the World Solar Challenge.

Yet above all, Rolf Disch builds homes. And of course with the sun. Now close your eyes and forget everything you know about houses. It is morning. You are sitting eating breakfast, sun shines directly on the breakfast table and you look out across the vineyard to the East and the Black Forest. Slowly the home begins to rotate itself. It becomes evening and you are sitting together at dinner. Gradually the landscape passes by the window and in the end you have the most beautiful vista to the West, where the sun is sinking behind the Rhein.

Do you want an invitation into the 'Heliotrope', the first PlusEnergy building worldwide? Disch does not simply live in a house that rotates itself, but rather which is a power plant at the same time: the Heliotrope produces four times as much energy as it consumes. Or would you rather visit our soccer stadium? The large solar installation on the stadium roof of Freiburg's German Soccer League team was initiated by Disch in 1993. Since then SC Freiburg is the league's only solar powered team.



Rolf Disch - "Tour de Sol" solar automobile World Champion, 1987



Rolf Disch - Solar Architect, 2010

The financing for the project came from engaged townspeople and fans. First and foremost, precious money! The sentence that Disch has listened to the absolute most frequently is: "That doesn't add up." For example such thought all the German banks, when Disch planned an entire housing community of 60 PlusEnergy homes, and all the developers, who also thought the same. Then he proved them all wrong, 60-fold, when he simply built the 'Solar Settlement' with the founding of his own development company.

And for that he convinced hundreds of investors to invest their money in an ecological and lucrative project. Because who really knows what banks and funds will do with your capital, but here you can be sure. 'Redirecting money' into green projects, such is the creed of Rolf Disch. And for that he was promptly nominated for national 'Eco-Manager of the year'.

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40 years after founding his own architecture firm, you can see Disch daily pedalling with his Brompton fold-up bicycle from his Heliotrope home to his near-by office in the Solar Settlement – straight through a built piece of the future. He does not look back, but rather starts from scratch, again and again. Like last year, when all 11,000 mayors in Germany received a letter from his office: Where new housing estates and communities are being planned, one should absolutely and immediately build sustainably.

Or he founds, like this year, a trade association, in order to organize a new revolution in Baden, scilicet to be a 100% renewable energy powered region.