

## Water features in an hotel foyer near Neuchâtel

Spring water from the hillside trickles over a block of natural stone. It seeps through planted pools before flowing into the hotel foyer.



Here you can hear water – a musical fountain enlivens the foyer of an hotel in the Swiss Jura.



Cups are mounted off centre striking the long bronze rods as they are filled and tip over. This produces ground tones with harmonic series, and the bass notes are reinforced by resonating plates set on fine bearings.



The musical fountain with trickling water forms the central focus of the hotel complex foyer.



Water runs through metal channels and down to thin metal chains where it collects in small cups. These then tip over when they are full.

Water is scarce in karstic areas. And this is also the case in Montézillon, a small town above Neuchâtel in the Swiss Jura. This is where the L'Aubier hotel and restaurant and its adjacent farmland and sales outlet are to be found, with a panoramic view over central Switzerland as far as the Alps. The old auberge and the buildings in the courtyard were rebuilt from the foundations a few years ago and have been run on modern environmental technology ever since – this extends from solar hay drying and an integrated combined heat and power plant to using rainwater for all the toilets and washing and cleaning facilities.

The whole of the immediate vicinity was redesigned along with the buildings. A new garden in which the typical Jura landscape is presented on a small scale was created between the hotel-restaurant, which was brought up to date and extended by a new wing on one side, and the working farmstead with its more functionally designed buildings and land on the other. In addition to this, a new feature of this ensemble of landscape and buildings was water – which is a rarity in this karstic region, and thus seems all the more valuable.

The first step towards creating the water features is that drainage and spring water is collected on the upper part of the sloping site. It then gushes visibly out of a large block of natural stone whose surface has been polished to mirror smoothness. Following the meandering structure of the veins in the stone, which were sand-blasted and deepened for this purpose, the water trickles into geometrical pools containing aquatic plants. The pools are part of a staircase that is the main access point to the new foyer between the hotel and the restaurant. From here the water flows via an open channel in the paving and an opening in the glass wall (submerged wall) into the two-storey

foyer. There it flows via two channels built into the floor covering of the main floor that lead to the foyer parapet and jut out beyond it a little. The lower level of the foyer is a good three metres below; the fall from this height via a sound-producing system in which the water becomes a musician in its own right is the creative climax of the water-course.

To produce this effect, the water slips down fine chains and runs into cups that are suspended so that they can move; once they are full, they tip over. As they empty, cup and chain start to move like a pendulum and strike against twelve long bronze rods that stand freely in the space like a sculpture. Different rods are struck apparently at random. The hardened bronze rods, which are up to six metres long, start to vibrate, thus producing floating ground-notes across the full range of the harmonic series. Heavy metal sheets mounted on the floor so that they can vibrate reinforce the resonance of the deep notes and combine with the sound of the bubbling, dripping water to form sound patterns reminiscent of the music of the spheres. The water collects in a pool and slides from there via channels into another planted pool and then finally leaves the building again via a second submerged wall.

Numerous models were needed, as well as sketches, in the planning and construction phases of this water feature. The musical fountain alone called for a large number of experiments with water on a scale of 1:1; the composer Heiner Ruhland also helped with the tuning. But visitors and residents scarcely take any notice of that or of the many fiddly technical details: they are simply fascinated by the sound, the light effects and the originality of the whole feature, which extends over three storeys and constantly offers new aspects from different points of view.