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# Built on empathy

## A chocolate maker's legacy reborn through sustainable Swiss architecture

**ZÜRICH-BASED FIRM** TOWNSET GmbH took on the task of developing multi-storey residential buildings on the site of chocolate manufacturer, Felchlin. Led by architect and urban planner, Ihab Morgan, this project commenced in 2018 in the Swiss canton capital of Schwyz. The challenge was to combine the traces of a once grand industrial past with the demands of contemporary living.

In Central Switzerland, chocolate has long been produced on an industrial scale. Traditional company Felchlin is renowned not only for its pralines and couvertures but also for its distinctive, representative architecture.

For more than a century, Felchlin has had its headquarters in Schwyz. Like many industrial families, the Felchlins built a villa with a park which, for decades, housed company offices.

**FROM TOP:** Ihab Morgan, architect and urban planner of the Liebwylen Project; Townset's multi-storey buildings

Following an internal restructuring, the firm moved to a new headquarters, leaving behind a space ripe for residential development.

### WHAT IS LIEBWYLEN?

Morgan was commissioned directly by investors and planning for the 44-million-Swiss-franc project began. By the end of 2023, more than 7,600 square metres of usable space were completed. The Liebwylen Project received the "Architecture and Urban Planning" award at the German Design Council in 2021 and, last summer, it was nominated as a finalist for the World Architecture Festival 2024 in Singapore.

### WHO IS IHAB MORGAN?

Despite having worked on large-scale developments, Morgan chose the comparatively modest Liebwylen





**FROM TOP:**  
Incorporating  
natural  
textures into  
the buildings;  
laser-cut stair  
railings inside  
the premises

## “If you compromise too much, the quality eventually crumbles”

project because he was fascinated by its setting, the historic Villa and the concept of high-quality living.

Morgan also valued the creative freedom he was granted. “In any construction project, no matter the aspect, you must always keep the overall impression in view,” says Morgan. “If you compromise too much, the quality eventually crumbles.”

For him, proactively engaging with authorities and neighbours was a given. His empathetic approach proved to be a masterstroke – he was able to identify and defuse potential conflicts before they escalated.

For instance, neighbours protested against the demolition of Felchlin Villa. Morgan agreed. He supported its conservation against the original plans and adapted his architecture to the resulting framework.

### WHO WAS IT BUILT FOR?

Five multi-storey residential buildings were constructed in a circle around

the existing villa. With 60% of the allowable building density utilised, the development still feels spacious and open. The 32 apartments – 18 of them maisonettes – range from 29 to 131 square metres.

### LIVING WITH A VIEW

Morgan positioned the buildings to celebrate views of the mountains, the park and the historic villa. Morgan designed an L-shaped base typology, inspired by the scale and floor plan of the Felchlin Villa, rotating it according to its placement on the site.

He also adapted each structure individually to the slope, varying the number of stories. “It would have been a shame to build ordinary apartment blocks beside the villa, in such a magnificent park and hillside setting,” Morgan explains. These floor plans generate unusual spatial experiences that encourage residents to design their living spaces minimally and consciously.

### THE VISION



*The original plans for the famed Liebwylen Project were drafted by TOWNSET founder, Ihab Morgan. Beyond that, he also acted as architect and urban planner of the entire project. With impressive international experience gained from major projects across Switzerland, Canada, the United States, and Germany, Morgan provides creative, solution-oriented thinking. In addition to his extensive practical experience and two academic degrees, he also holds a doctorate from ETH Zurich.*

### WHAT ABOUT THE ROOF?

The roofscape draws inspiration from the existing villa and the surrounding mountain silhouette, with construction tailored to withstand the alpine climate. The roofs are clad in standing-seam sheet metal, installed over a cross-laminated timber substructure.

The façades are crafted from simple yet exquisitely executed timber with sprayed cladding and clearly defined fire breaks. In harmony with the honey-toned façades, Morgan chose steel balcony and stair railings laser-cut with a pattern reminiscent of tree shadows.

Every construction detail – from materials and colours to the 45 circular skylights – was carefully modelled in 3D and coordinated with the client.

Morgan drew on his network of highly skilled planners, contractors and suppliers. What makes the difference? “For high-quality architecture,” he explains, “it’s crucial that all the companies involved work toward a shared goal and consistently assign their best-qualified people to the site.”

### AND TOWNSET?

“Small core, big network,” says Morgan, describing his company TOWNSET GmbH. The firm offers services in project development, architecture and urban planning, as well as consulting in sustainability, smart cities and heritage conservation. TOWNSET operates with a strong project-based focus, activating specialist planners as needed. “We don’t do everything ourselves – that just wouldn’t be exciting enough.”

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