

Architecture & Patents (Zurich, 18–20 Jun 25)

ETH Zurich, Switzerland, Jun 18–20, 2025

Sarah M. Schlachetzki

At the dawn of the 19th century, the invention of new materials, structures, and machinery gradually began to transform the relationship between architecture and architectural tradition, a time coinciding with the establishment of national patent systems. Although it is hard to imagine the innovative, technical, and creative aspects of architecture without patents, it is only in recent years that they have received increased academic attention in the history of architecture and construction. The ongoing research project “Architecture & Patents” at the Professorship Construction Heritage and Preservation of Prof. Dr. Silke Langenberg, ETH Zurich, investigates the role of patents within the extensive building stock of the ETH Domain from 1855 to the present day. The international conference “Architecture & Patents”—opening June 18, 2025—will provide an academic platform for exchanging on the topic in a wider context. It covers the 19th through the 21st centuries and deals with legal, historical, and architectural questions; materials and processes; construction heritage and newest developments in digital fabrication.

PROGRAM (preliminary)

ETH Zurich, Main Building, Semper Auditorium (HG G 60)

(Registration necessary, see below)

Wednesday: June 18, 2025

12:45 Registration

13:30 Welcome and Introduction

Opening Remarks and Introduction

Silke Langenberg and Robin Rehm (ETH Zurich)

“The patent as a collective obsession” – Thoughts on Patent Research

Sarah M. Schlachetzki (ETH Zurich)

14:40 IP and Law (Moderation: Andreas Putz, Technical University of Munich)

From Form to Function: A Patent Attorney’s Perspective of Architecture

Zacharias Stelzer (E. Blum & Co. Ltd.)

Architects’ Patents and the Profession in 19th Century Britain

Marta Iljadica (University of Glasgow)

15:50 Coffee Break

16:20 Perspectives on Recent Patents (Moderation: Andreas Putz)

US-D827154-S: Steve Jobs Theatre and the Rise of a New Patentism
Georgios Eftaxiopoulos (University of California, Berkeley)

Why Patent?

Andrei Koshelev (ETH Zurich)

17:30 Break

18:00 Keynote

Better Living Through Chemistry?: BASF, 3M, and DuPont's Chemical Patents for the Building Industry in Critical Perspective
Peter H. Christensen (University of Rochester)

19:00 Apéro

Thursday: June 19, 2025

09:00 (Trans-)National Perspectives (Moderation: Robin Rehm, ETH Zurich)

A Nexus of Design Innovation: Patents, Exhibitions, and Knowledge Sharing in 19th-Century South Kensington
Simona Valeriani (V&A Research Institute, Victoria and Albert Museum)

Patents and Patterns: Moving methods through the Gilardoni and Marseille roof tiles (1841–)
Asha Sumra (Aarhus School of Architecture)

Patents – Hiding Social History

Nigel Isaacs (Victoria University of Wellington)

10:45 Coffee Break

11:15 Innovating Wood Constructions (Moderation: Robin Rehm)

Otto Hetzer's Patents and Their Role in Industrial Timber Construction
Alexander von Kienlin (Technical University of Munich)

Patents and Standards – Assessing Innovation in 20th-Century Timber Construction
Jonatan Anders (Bauhaus-Universität Weimar)

12:25 Lunch Break

14:00 Inventions in Metal Façades (Moderation: Kirsten Angermann, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar)

Patents in Practice: Ernst Koller and the Standardization of Swiss Metal Façades 1925–1960
Nina Irmert (ETH Zurich)

Competition and Collaboration: Intellectual Property of Swiss Façade Producers, 1960–1975

Tiago Matthes (ETH Zurich)

15:10 Coffee Break

15:40 Patents in Cultural History (Moderation: Kirsten Angermann)

Constructive Form and Graphic Design – Building Systems between Trademark and Patent
Rouven Grom and Andreas Putz (Technical University of Munich)

Architecture and Intellectual Maternity by Patents. Frances Gabe's Self-Cleaning House and the
Legacy of Non-Pedigreed Architects
Laura Mucciolo (Sapienza University of Rome)

Reading Patents Against the Grain
Laurent Stalder (ETH Zurich)

17:30 End of Conference Day 2

Friday, June 20, 2025

09:00 Towards Digital Architecture (Moderation: Silke Langenberg)

From Material to Market: How Materiality Drives Innovation Transfer in Architectural Technologies
Tizian Rein, Marcel Studer, and Dominik Reisach (ETH Zurich)

[title tbd]

Benjamin Dillenburger (ETH Zurich) and Matthias Leschok (SAEKI Robotics AG)

10:10 Coffee Break

10:30 Patents as Construction Heritage (Moderation: Silke Langenberg)

Camus-Dietsch Panel Tectonics' Past and Present
Carsten Diez (baubar urbanlaboratorium, Saarbrücken) and Volker Ziegler (École nationale
supérieure d'architecture, Strasbourg)

The Tangible and Intangible Heritage of Proto-Design for the Disassembly in Post-War Italy: An
Industrial Patent-Based Perspective
Alberto Bologna (Sapienza University of Rome) and Ilaria Giannetti (University of Rome Tor Verga-
ta)

Precast Concrete Roof Shells in East and West Germany – Patents, Application and Reception
Tanja Scheffler (Dresden University of Technology)

Closing Remarks
Silke Langenberg (ETH Zurich)

12:30 End of the Conference

ArtHist.net

Registration necessary.

Register here: www.idb.arch.ethz.ch/en/events/Architectureandpatents

Contact: patents@arch.ethz.ch

The conference is kindly sponsored by the Ernst and Herta Koller-Ritter Foundation, H. Lüdi + Co. AG and Mero TSK. The research project "Architecture & Patents. The Buildings of the ETH Domain" is financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

Reference:

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