

## VENUE

# Concert Hall, Blaibach

A daring project in a Bavarian village aims to revive the economy and build interest in classical music

**IF IT WEREN'T** for the Konzerthaus, designed by Munich-based architect Peter Haimerl, Blaibach would not be an exceptional place. A small village of 2,000 souls at the edge of the Bavarian Forest, it hardly warranted a second look by anyone but the most ardent lovers of the German countryside. And like most villages, Blaibach had been slowly losing its population, services and public and commercial amenities, slipping into slumber while its increasingly empty spaces crumbled into ruin.

To counter the rural decline, the non-profit Kulturwald foundation was set up eight years ago. Its aim is to organise and facilitate a series of events – mostly classical-music performances – throughout the region in an attempt to reinvigorate the local economy and bring culture closer to the inhabitants.

"I have known Peter Haimerl for several years and I always appreciated his work," says Uta Hielscher, a pianist and one of the co-founders of Kulturwald. "He showed us Blaibach, the village centre of which was earmarked for regeneration by the Bavarian government." The result is a small cluster of buildings that includes an extended and reconstructed town hall and an artist's residence, but it is the 200-seat performance space that is the crowning jewel of the scheme.

Positioned within a typically loose rural ensemble, the rock-clad concert hall – a tilted, monolithic block – projects out dramatically, opening up a chasm into which visitors descend to enter a subterranean foyer. But, despite its singularity, the structure is not wholly alien to its context. The scale and the ►



NAARO STUDIO

**ABOVE** The entrance to the subterranean concert hall is marked by a tilted, granite-clad block









angularity mimic the sloped roofs of its surroundings, and the outer walls, with their granite covering, recall the paving of the village's streets. The building looks quite indigenous, though slightly unnerving and not at all rustic.

Under the dramatic cantilever, the audience is guided to the entrance: the concrete interior of the foyer is stark, yet fully befitting the underground nature of the space. The ceilings of circulation spaces are clad with wood, while the concert-hall interior is full-on concrete, with expressive folds and ribs that improve acoustics and incorporate the necessary LED lighting. Not even the seating – made of individual, transparent wire-mesh shells – interrupts the totality of the space or the audience's focus on the performers.

The impact was immediate. "The number of overnight stays in the village and the surrounding area rose by 15 per cent in the first quarter of the concert hall's existence," says Hielscher. "The effect is not only seen in Blaibach: every study shows that cultural institutions can offer a double or even triple return on the initial investment." The successful marriage of architecture and cultural programme means that all of the 50 or so Kulturwald events that take place in the concert hall every year sell out.

"Naturally, concert halls and other temples of culture cannot emerge anywhere," Peter Hailmerl explains, "but if architecture and living are understood as a cultural task, a region



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** The entrance mimics the granite paving; The concert hall is clad in raw concrete; LEDs are secreted behind concrete folds; Timber panelling softens the foyer

can only change for the better."

Perhaps the future of the European countryside rests in projects like this; uniquely tailored institutions that play on the region's strengths and whose ambition is to complement rather than compete with larger, more established and better-funded metropolitan offerings. Culture can thrive in unlikely places – it just needs a bit of work. ♦ [kulturwald.de](http://kulturwald.de)  
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