

Zurich in Pictures: From the Traffic Hub to the Economic and Cultural Metropolis

By Calista Fischer, © MoneyMuseum

Zurich – a picture-book town? Shure. Travellers and locals alike enthuse about Zurich's picturesque spots, green spaces and especially its blue lake with the snow-covered peaks in the background. Some famous personalities have also stayed in Zurich or been native of this city. You will find out more in the course of this illustrated trip through present-day Zurich. Each picture represents at least one of Zurich's four main features: Zurich as the traffic hub, as a historical venue, as financial and cultural metropolis of Switzerland. (Photos by René Perret, Kindhausen, CH)

Zurich from a birds perspective



Like a precious emerald, Zurich, that beautiful city on the Limmat River, nestles around the northern end of Lake Zurich. When a warm southerly wind blows and the majestic snowy peaks of the Alps stand out clearly, the scene reminds one even more of jewelry. One thinks of emeralds, sapphires and diamonds: the green of the city with its many parks, the blue of the lake water, the sparkling white of the snow-covered mountain peaks.

Our picture shows the St. Peter's Church with the largest church clock face of Europe – the proud landmark of the city of Zurich.

Roman gravestone on the Lindenhof



Strolling with open eyes through Zurich, following age-old paths is a rewarding experience. This Roman gravestone, for example, can be seen on the way up to the Lindenhof. It is an eloquent witness to the fact that Zurich was an important trading center as early as 200 AD: the stone was raised by a Roman customs official called Unio and his wife Aelia Secundina in honor of their dead baby son.

The gravestone also tells us that in Roman times Zurich was called Turicum. But Zurich was not a Roman foundation – the name "Turicum" proves this, coming as it does from the Celtic word "turos" meaning "strong." It was the High German sound change in the 5th to 8th centuries AD that changed then the T into a Z – "Turicum" became first "Zuricum," and finally "Zurich."

View from the Lindenhof over the Old Town



Here, on and around the present-day Lindenhof, is where the history of Zurich began already in Celtic times as finds of coins prove. Because of these coins and the favorable location for both strategic reasons and for trade the place was suspected to be a trading center already at those times.

In 15 BC the Romans established a military base on the Lindenhof that later on expanded to a civil settlement with a military and a customs post. Even thermal baths were at the Romans disposal. The Romans called the open settlement Turicum and inhabited it until the beginning of the 5th century AD. Then the citadel fell in the hands of the Alemanni and later became the palatinate or royal palace of the German emperors. The palatinate was enlarged by Henry III who thus became responsible for making Zurich "the most beautiful town of Swabia."

When the Zähringers died out Zurich was freed of the empire in 1218. The palatinate on the Lindenhof fell to ruin and had to be used as quarry stone to build the Rennweg and the fortification walls. Traffic problems arose: the town could only be accessed via four main gates. Horse-drawn vehicles heading from the right-hand lakeshore towards Baden had to squeeze their way through the Oberdorf gate, down the Kirchgasse past the Grossmünster ("great minster") to the lower bridge. From there they had to pass through the sinuous Strehlgasse and the Rennweg before reaching the stretch leading to Baden after the Rennweg gate.

Hedwig von Burghalden



Visitors to the Lindenhof would be well advised to keep their eyes open and enjoy another delight from Zurich's varied past. On this fountain a little warrior sits enthroned, proudly bearing the city banner of Zurich. But do not be deceived by the coat of chain mail and the two-handed sword!

This warrior is a lady, her name Hedwig von Burghalden. But do not be ashamed if you were taken in; in 1293 the army of the Hapsburgs was likewise taken in by Hedwig and the courageous women of Zurich, who saved the city from the advancing Austrians by a trick.

How did it happen that the women of Zurich had to put on armour and barricade the city gates? Well, they owed that doubtful pleasure to their menfolks' lust for conquest. Their menfolk wanted to conquer the town of Winterthur, held by the Hapsburgs, but were forced to give up after suffering heavy losses. Back home again, they first of all nursed their wounds. But the Hapsburgs made good use of that opportunity. They drummed up an army and marched on the weakened city of Zurich. And arrived in front of the city gates! What could be done? The city could not be defended without men able to bear arms! But Hedwig had a brainwave: shut the gates and put on the men's armour! Making as much noise as possible, the woman assembled at the Lindenhof, performed loud military exercises, paraded with their weapons – and the Hapsburgs departed, deceived by the sight of the fresh, aggressive fighters at the Lindenhof. Zurich was saved – saved by female cunning and presence of mind.

The Zurich skyline with the tower of St. Peter



The Schipfe (a mooring place for boats and ships), the Weinplatz ("Wine Place") and the adjoining Rennweg quarter belonged to the oldest settlements in Zurich. The St. Peter's Church had already been built in the 9th century and is one of the most beautiful churches on the Zurich skyline. Moreover, it stands in the place of one of the pre-Christian shrines.

Already in the Middle Ages, the tower of St. Peter was used for secular purposes. This is where the fire watch was stationed. One of the major problems in the Middle Ages were the huge fires that could sweep through all the wooden structures when the wind arose. In this way, considerable parts of old Zurich were destroyed by fire. In order to ensure that the fire watchman did not fall asleep in the course of his duty he was also made the town trumpeter who had to blow the hours of the clock on his trumpet.

After the Reformation the large town clock was installed on the tower for all to observe from far and near.

The tower of St. Peter



The Fraumünster, the Wasserkirche and the Grossmünster: the history of these three churches has always been intimately interwoven. But this picture shows Zurich's oldest church: St. Peter. The origins of its tower go back to Roman times. Anyone who does not mind climbing stairs need only give their name to the verger, climb up the tower and feast their eyes on the panorama of the Old Town. As late as 1911, the tower of St. Peter served as the lookout point for the Zurich fire watch. The little watchman's room with its humble bed can still be seen in the little tower museum.

View over the Limmat River: the Grossmünster and the Wasserkirche



For quite a while, this little church has contested mighty St. Peter's claim to be the oldest church in Zurich – the Wasserkirche ("Water Church"). Excavations have convinced archaeologists that a Roman temple stood on the former island in the Limmat River. According to legend, the martyrs Felix and Regula were tortured and beheaded by henchmen of the Romans for their Christian beliefs around 300 AD. They did not, however, simply sink down dead at the place where they were beheaded. No, they are said to have picked up their severed heads and carried them across the bridge and up the hill. Only then did they expire.

It is hardly surprising that after that miraculous event a regular cult developed around Felix and Regula, and that a church was built straight away on the place of their execution. Pilgrims came from far and wide to Zurich to offer up pious prayers at that holy place. Even German kings and emperors became devoted adherents of the two saints.

Both Charlemagne and his nephew Ludwig the German were so devoted to Felix and Regula that they wanted to raise a permanent visible monument to their devotion. Ludwig caused his daughter to found the Fraumünster convent, and legend attributes the building of the Grossmünster to Charlemagne.

The Fraumünster with its famous Chagall windows



According to legend, it was here, where the Fraumünster now stands, that a red deer stood and told the two princesses Hildegard and Bertha the place where the church was to be built.

For almost 700 years, the abbesses of the Fraumünster abbey, as rulers of Zurich and major landowners, held the reins of political and economic power in the city. The wealth of the abbey, which was dissolved at the Reformation, is almost impossible to imagine today: the whole of the forest from Zurich to Horgen, plus today's canton of Uri, with all its buildings, once belonged to the Fraumünster convent. In addition to that, there were properties and buildings in Zurich itself, plus the income from the St. Peter's Church. That permitted the nuns of the convent to maintain an appropriately high standard of living – after all, they were all noble ladies of aristocratic birth.

But since 1970, tourists have visited the Fraumünster less for its fascinating history than for its famous windows designed by Marc Chagall, which you see here.

The headquarters of Credit Suisse at Paradeplatz



Hub of finance, banking metropolis – those are only two of Zurich's attributes. And indeed, the city's banks seem like palaces and temples of the modern age. One can hardly avoid this impression if one studies their architecture, for example in this picture.

The headquarters of Credit Suisse, the Swiss credit institute, was built in 1876 by the architect Johann Jakob Wanner. Wanner let his imagination run riot, playing with Renaissance and Baroque elements, and one is almost tempted to ask if perhaps the handling of money is in need of legitimation through architecture.

The Savoy Hotel Baur en Ville



Of course there were visionaries in Zurich long before Bürkli and Escher. In the less developed "no man's land," as it were, on the "rive gauche," a certain Johannes Baur opened a luxury hotel, the Baur en Ville (now the Savoy). Six years later, in 1844, Baur built his second hotel, the Baur au Lac, a kind of holiday annexe of the Baur en Ville.

For his work for tourism and the hotel industry, the energetic Austrian Baur was granted the freedom of the city of Zurich in 1859. A glance at Baur's original nationality is enough to solve the question of how the two luxury hotels should be pronounced – the German way as in "bower," or the French way as in "bore?" The German way, of course – Baur was from Vorarlberg in Austria.

The Sprüngli confectionery at Bahnhofstrasse



That Baur had a really good nose for business is proved by the fact that 30 years after the building of his two luxury hotels, the town ditch called the Fröschengraben (the "frog's moat") was filled up in the 1870s to make an approach road to the new station. Thus arose Zurich's luxury shopping street, the famous Bahnhofstrasse.

Zurich without the Bahnhofstrasse and the Bahnhofstrasse without Sprüngli at the Paradeplatz? Both equally inconceivable! It is thanks to Bürkli that we can window shop in front of the most exclusive shops, and that in the traditional Sprüngli café we can enjoy the legendary, often copied but never equalled, hot chocolate with cream on top.

Zurich's Bahnhofstrasse



"Zurich, c'est une grande ville dans un mouchoir" – indeed, Zurich is a large town in a pocket handkerchief. Those who know it love it. And anyone who has ever been here will return with pleasure – Zurich has something to suit all tastes.

The new stock exchange



With its 400,000 inhabitants, Zurich is a modest-sized city, seemingly light-years away from metropolises like New York, Paris and Tokyo. But here, in this modern stock-exchange building, Zurich is truly international and metropolitan. This is shown not only by its impressive architecture – in this building, vast sums of money change hands. Nothing expresses the pulsating economic life of Zurich better than the building here in our picture – the new stock exchange.

The flea market at Bürkliplatz



At the Saturday flea market at Bürkliplatz, with a bit of luck, one may perhaps find rarities dating back to the days of Zurich's heyday in the 19th century. Whether a rusty roof ornament from the newly renovated Villa Patumbah, or some dusty relic from the likewise newly renovated Hotel Baur au Lac will turn up there, only a personal visit will tell.

The Bürkliplatz Harbor



What day-trippers do today for pure pleasure, just to have a good time, was before the advent of the railways the most efficient means of getting around, for millennia! Old engravings show a proper tangle of barges in the lake basin. In the old days, most things sold in Zurich's markets arrived by water.

It is interesting to take a look at Zurich's development and economic prosperity in the light of its topography. It becomes clear straight away that Zurich's situation is ideal. The lake opens the way into the inland areas of the cantons of Glarus and Graubünden, while the Limmat River connects with the Aare River and thus to the great artery of the Rhine. Zurich's situation predestines it to be a center of communications. No wonder there were settlers here as early as 4000 BC, who built lakeside villages raised on stilts. And no wonder Zurich has always been prosperous – after all, trade and communications have always been intimately connected. And as everyone knows, trade is the mother of prosperity.

Zurich hip: the Street Parade



It began in 1992 with about 2,000 people. And in 2001 there were up to a million dancers and music fans taking part in the Zurich Street Parade. Just let anyone say Zurich is a prudish, uptight Protestant city! But the street scene in Zurich is vibrant even without the Street Parade. Every day, over 100,000 commuters stream into Zurich to work. Zurich is the economic motor not only of its own region, but of all Switzerland.

The Escher Villa in the Belvoir Park



A banker and millionaire, national councillor and municipal president of the canton of Zurich, Alfred Escher was undoubtedly the most powerful and influential Swiss personality of the 19th century. Together with his friend, Federal Councillor Welti, Escher, also called the "train king," was the father of the Gotthard railway.

Escher lived in his villa in the Belvoir Park with his wife and daughter. Personalities from cultural, political and economic circles frequented the villa where ideas were nurtured that led to Zurich's dynamic economic upswing.

The villa was also the venue of a huge scandal which even had an impact on the Federal Council. Escher's daughter, Lydia, married to the son of Federal Councillor Welti, inherited her father's fortune on his death. However, she did not have a happy marriage. Lydia fell in love with an artist and fled with him to Rome. The cheated husband who was by no means innocent himself, took revenge with the help of his father. Lydia was placed in a psychiatric clinic, her lover was set in prison; once freed, they sought salvation in death. Lydia Welti-Escher's entire fortune went to the Gottfried Keller Foundation.

The Sechseläuten procession



History is everywhere in Zurich. But it is not always easy to tell new from old. The procession of the city guilds on the occasion of Sechseläuten is no older than 1818. But Sechseläuten itself, the ritual driving-out of winter, is much older in Zurich than that – its mysterious roots lie somewhere in pre-Christian beliefs.

The Zurich Opera House



Zurich has something to suit all tastes, not only those of financiers. The culture minded find much to interest them here, be it in the Zurich Opera House or in one of the many small theaters.

The Patumbah Villa



The creator of this villa most certainly appreciated the new railway station and the Gotthard tunnel. Without the railway Karl Fürchtegott Grob from Riesbach would undoubtedly have had difficulties transporting his Italian marble works to Zurich in 1883. Grob, a likeable visionary, was typical for all those coming from a modest background, who were laughed at by many and left Zurich to return after making their fortune elsewhere.

Grob made his fortune from growing tobacco in Sumatra. When he returned eleven years later, he built the Patumbah Villa which symbolized the "country of his dreams." Asian and European artisan work merge in Grob's Villa to form a unique experience. Given some time, the visitor to the magnificent park can stroll around and dream of the "country of one's dreams."

Fashion from Christa de Carouge



As an old textile-producing city, Zurich is of course a major fashion center. The latest creations can be seen not only at Bahnhofstrasse, in the windows of the fashion houses, but also in the suburbs as in this case the Seefeld quarter, because there the exclusive Swiss fashion is created.

Alleys in the Old Town



Anyone who wants to discover Zurich would be well advised to avoid the streams of pedestrians and look around in the less frequented alleys of the Old Town. They contain many little shops full of character. And it is a good idea to look upwards from time to time – one is rewarded with the sight of fascinating things and signs that remind us of times long past. Even people born and bred in Zurich are often surprised at what they find here.

The Lenin house



Zurich is not only a city with its own local history; the threads of world history come together here, too. At 3:30 p.m. on the 9th of April 1917, a train left Zurich main station. On it was the Russian aristocrat and lawyer Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, who had lived in Switzerland from 1914 to 1917. His destination: St. Petersburg!

This house in Zurich is where Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov – better known as Lenin – lived. Six months later, Lenin could claim to have won the Russian Revolution for his Bolsheviks. And for the next 70 years, Russia had a Communist regime.

The guild house "zur Haue"



Nowadays wealthy people of Zurich are dreaming of a villa at the shores of Lake Zurich or a trendy loft in the former industrial area of the town. In old Zurich the venerable house "zur Haue" belonged to the most sought-after private houses. It is no wonder, because it is laying in direct neighborhood of the town hall which for centuries was not only the political but also economical center of the town.

The guild house "zur Haue" is a building complex going back to original three single houses two of which were proved by documents already in 1373. In 1442 it came into possession of the so-called Salzleute (the "salt people"). Their emblem, the hoe, later gave the house its name still true to this day.

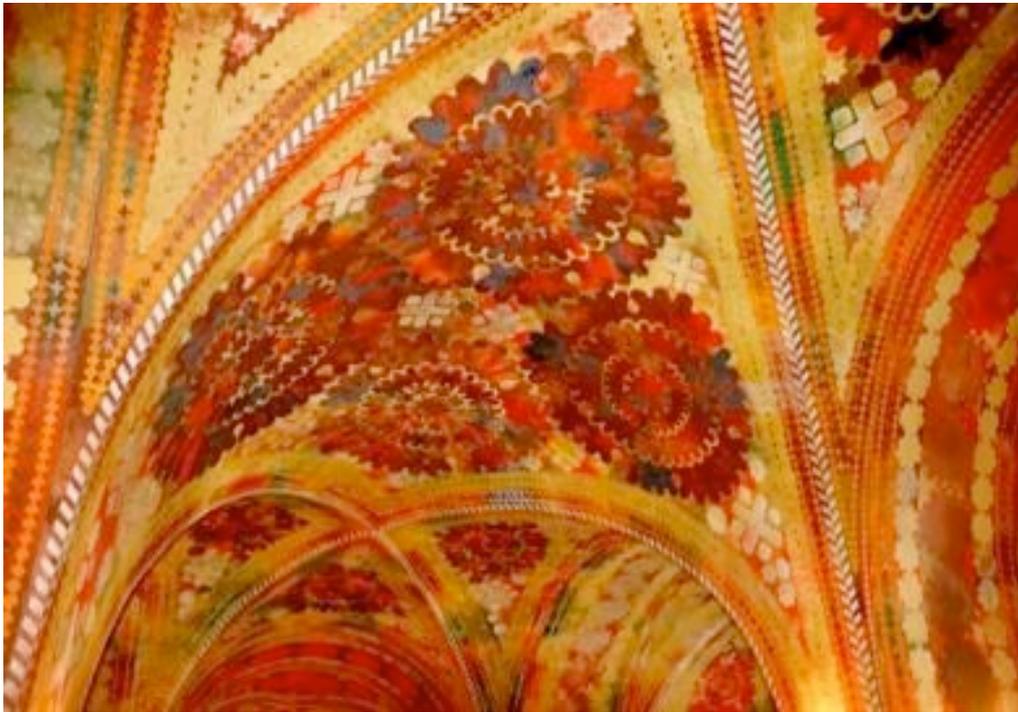
And what about the deer having its rest in majestic calmness on the crow-stepped gable? It is the emblem of the famous Hirzel family who's name derives from German "Hirsch" (deer) and from which with Salomon Hirzel junior in the 17th century a guild master and later mayor of Zurich came. Today the house is the property of the guild named "Gesellschaft zum Kämbel."

The university



Zurich is not only a city of fashion, culture and finances; it is a city of education, too. Everyday, thousands of young people stream to their alma mater to absorb new knowledge and equip themselves for the professional demands of our times – be it at the university, as shown in this picture, or at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, the ETH.

The headquarters of the city police: Giacometti in the waiting room



"Go to the city police" – that's the advice that should be given to all visitors to Zurich. Of course not to report someone, just to have a rather special cultural experience.

Augusto Giacometti, the uncle of the more famous Alberto, decorated the headquarters of the city police in warm red tones. Works by Giacometti can be seen elsewhere in Zurich, too: in the Fraumünster, the Grossmünster, the Wasserkirche and the Swiss National Museum in Zurich.

Zurich main station



Strolling through Zurich, one initially notices little of the pioneering spirits of the 19th century. But in fact on the left bank of the Limmat, the city is mostly a product of that era. A glance at a city map soon shows what bold, ambitious thinkers Alfred Escher and Arnold Bürkli were – with the building of their main station, they calmly altered the historic central axis of the city!

The Limmat River



The Limmat River is the trade and communications artery of old Zurich. Where today the trams and cars make their way through the perpetual traffic jams of the Limmat quayside, the waves of the Limmat rippled in earlier times. But it is a moot point whether progress was any quicker in those days, through all the myriads of boats.

The Platzspitz Park



Zurich is a good place to live, especially if one can relax in one of its green open spaces like the Platzspitz Park. In the 1980s the Platzspitz acquired a dubious worldwide reputation as "Needle Park" through its role in Zurich's drugs policy; now it is once more one of the most beautiful parks in the city. And Zurich is one of the world's safest cities to be in. For a city of its size, its crime rate is extraordinarily low.

Zurich's west side



For a really international feeling, it is a good idea to include districts 4 and 5 in any tour of Zurich. Beside the more exclusive Bahnhofstrasse, the Langstrasse can proudly claim to be Zurich's most international street. Here can be found Turkish, Thai and Moroccan shops, offering everything one's heart could possibly desire – and sometimes even more ...

The Schiffbau



Zurich is booming, and building land is in short supply. The solution is to "upgrade outlying districts," as the slogan runs. This means that the old district called Cheib (district 4) and the "Scherbenviertel" (the "quarter of broken glasses"), as district 5 is lovingly called by the local residents, are coming more and more to feel like part of the city center.

Today, "anybody who is anybody" will most likely live in a chic converted attic flat in district 5, the former working class district. And even the noble Zurich theater, the Schauspielhaus, normally associated with the upmarket areas of the Zurichberg and the so called Gold Coast, now possesses an annexe in the former industrial area, the building called the Schiffbau (the "shipbuilding").