



The Jan Michalski Foundation for Writing and Literature is set on a remote hillside at the foot of the Jura Mountains, nestled in the stillness of the Swiss town of Montricher. It's a true haven for readers and writers, made all the more appealing by an architecturally astute new complex.

The foundation was set up by Vera Michalski-Hoffman in 2004, in memory of her husband and business partner. The pair's publishing house, Les Éditions Noir sur Blanc, was founded in Montricher in 1987, specialising in novels and personal accounts from Eastern Europe. It slowly became a cultural bridge between Eastern and Western Europe and a landmark on the literary landscape. 'The narrative behind the foundation is to foster literary creation and encourage the practice of reading,' explains Michalski-Hoffman. 'Later on came the idea to bring writers and the public together, in the same place.'

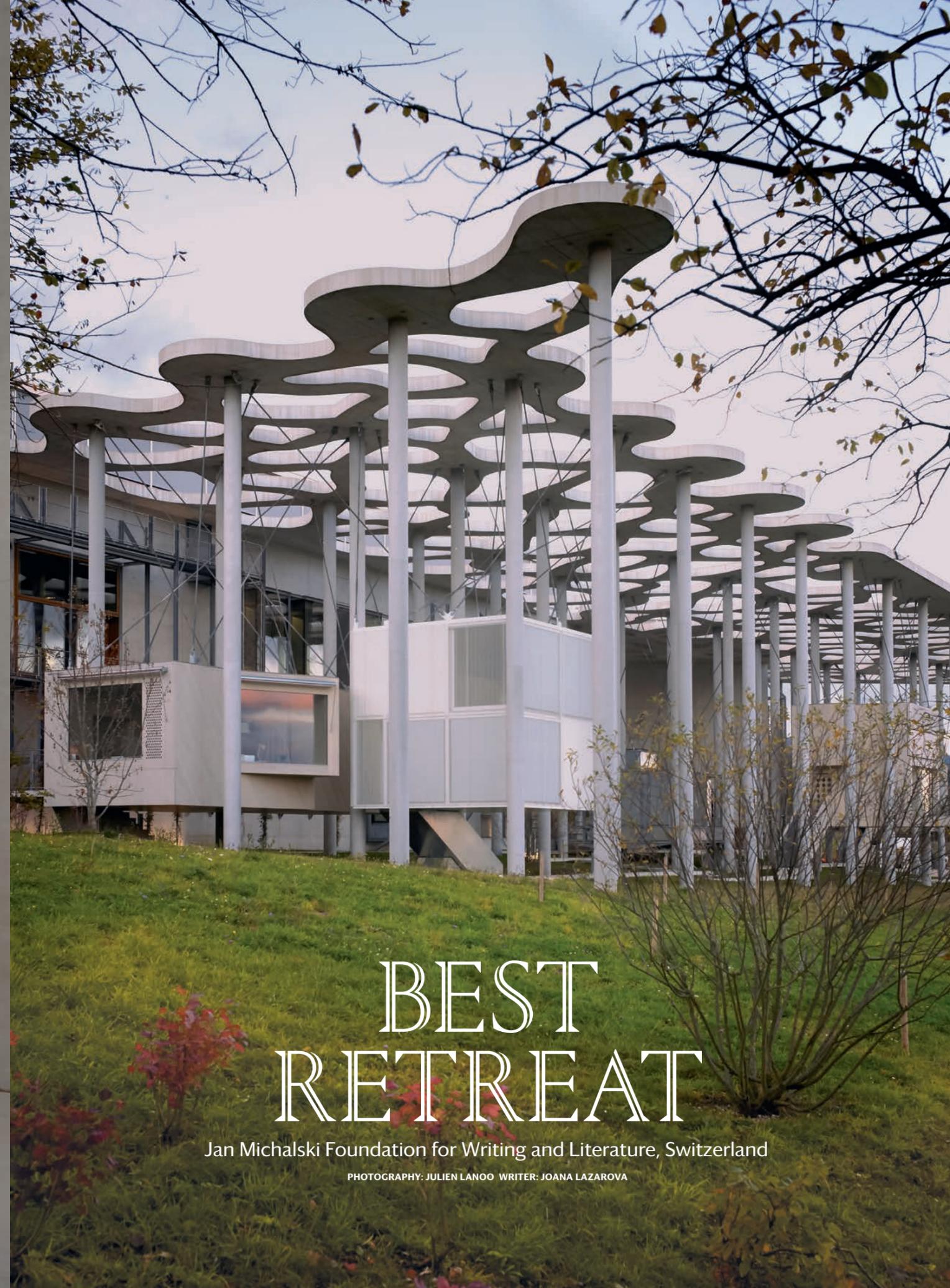
The complex's masterplan, designed by Nyon-based architects Mangeat-Wahlen on the site of a former children's summer camp, consists of two main concrete volumes: a library, and an auditorium with an exhibition hall. These are surrounded by 11 small 'cabins', designed by various architects and seemingly suspended mid-air, and everything is united beneath a grand sculptural canopy.

Four of the cabins – including metal-clad offerings by Mangeat-Wahlen, a wooden cabin by Kengo Kuma and a glass structure by Chilean architect Alejandro Aravena – house administrative and communal space. The other seven are writers' retreats, where emerging and established talents can apply for residence. These are by Switzerland's Jean-Gilles Décosterd, Atelier Bonnet, AFGH and Schaub Zwicky, Brazil's Studio MK27, and Norway's Rintala Eggertsson, as well as Mangeat-Wahlen. Most are located at the back of the complex, facing the Alps and Lake Geneva, and each comprises a kitchen, workspace, bedroom and bathroom.

The timber-clad library accommodates literary works in ten languages. Some levels offer private seating areas, which protrude from the volume like birds' nests, almost mirroring the elevated cabins outside. A spacious underground auditorium sits next to the library, with a flexible exhibition space on top. Its cleverly designed entrance features plenty of openings that flood the auditorium with natural light.

Mangeat-Wahlen has carefully orchestrated a confluence of past and present, natural context and the foundation's vision, weaving together all the architectural contributors' works to create a masterpiece in placemaking. ★ fondation-janmichalski.com; mangeat-wahlen.ch

THE CANOPY RESTS ON PILLARS UP TO 18M HIGH AND PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN THE WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN CABINS. SEEN ON THIS PAGE ARE WRITERS' RETREATS BY, FROM LEFT, AFGH AND MANGEAT-WAHLEN. OPPOSITE ARE THOSE BY SCHAUB ZWICKY (LEFT), ATELIER BONNET (CENTRE) AND AFCH (FAR RIGHT)



BEST RETREAT

Jan Michalski Foundation for Writing and Literature, Switzerland

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