

STATION BREAK

Along Zaha Hadid's new Nordpark cable railway in Innsbruck, Austria, biomorphic glass-clad structures serve as stations. The 1.8-kilometre track links tourists and locals from the city centre to the ski slopes that peak 1905 metres above sea level. Photographer **Peter Bennetts** and architect **Rowena Hockin** brought these impressions back from their trip.

January 4 is mid-winter in the Austrian Alps, and at their heart are Innsbruck and the Tyrol region. Between high mountains, the city is dark and cold by 5pm. At 6pm, it's darker and colder. It seems there's not much between you and outer space, however I think inner space to be the dwelling for these stations. Creatures from the deep ocean aglow with bioluminescence in the inky blackness, their forms subjected and adapted to extreme pleasure. They're krakens – giant squid.

I photograph architecture with an ALPA, one of the world's most beautiful mechanical objects, its simplicity deceptive. Using it, I'm struck by its nuances. Photographing in the freezing conditions of Innsbruck, I develop an appreciation of its wooden handgrips. Below 0°C and your skin adheres to most metals, except gold – the ALPA's shutter releases are gold-plated.

By day, all is clear. Zaha Hadid determines that glass, like solid water, can exist in an amorphous state without crystalline structure. Congress Station – one of four on the line – appears to be the clearing between the trees. Breathtakingly beautiful, I imagine it is jewellery – a moonstone just lifted from its box. A cloud over Loewenhaus Station, and it is the station. The Inn River flows swiftly by, and it is the station too.

Alpenzoo Station's canopy reaches for space between the trees. It's the one form in this project closest to Hadid's Bergisel Ski Jump, which it looks out to across the valley – conversation evident. Frozen puddles and hoarfrost on the promenade reflect Hungerburg Station, itself reflecting the Nordkette Mountains beyond. Hungerburg could be a glacier with a crevasse cleaving it in two. PB

Cable-stayed suspension bridge

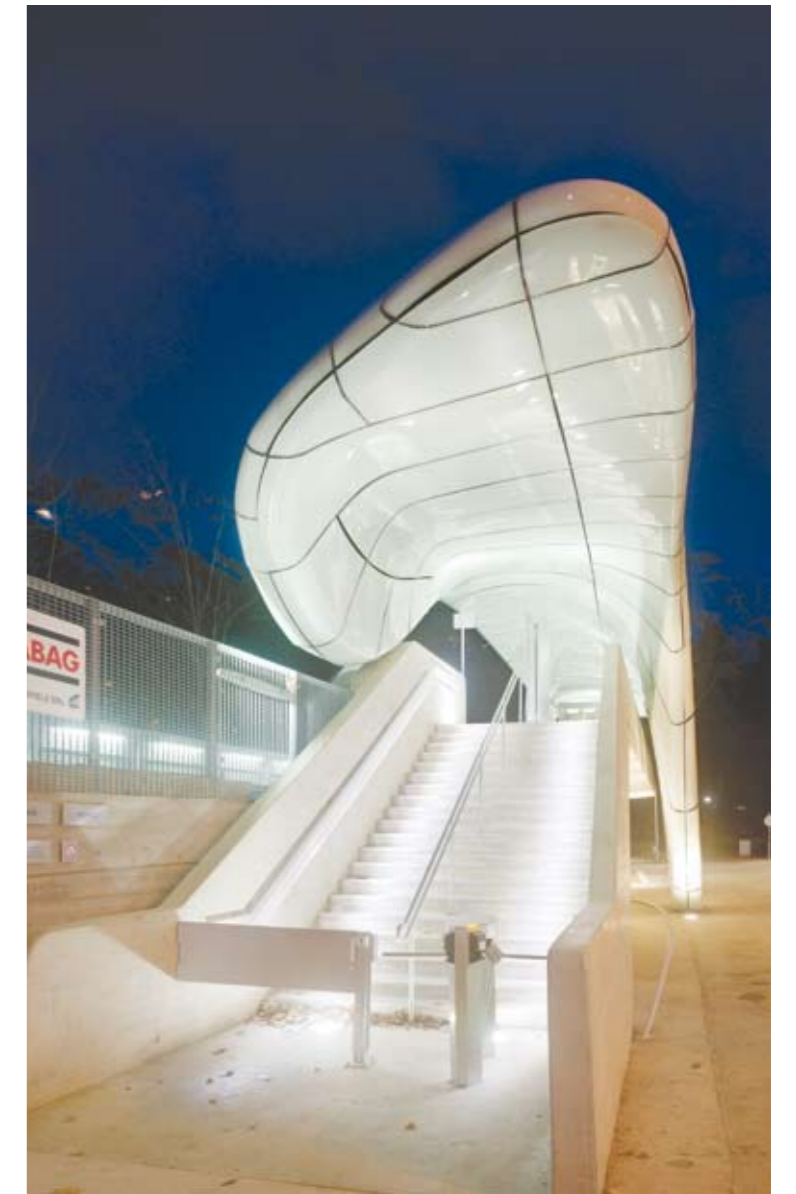
Angled across the Inn River, the Nordpark suspension bridge forms the central element of the funicular railway, linking the two stations on the south of the river with the two on the north. The suspension cables thread through two off-form concrete towers, mirroring each other through a rotational translation as the bridge slices between them. A single steel beam runs below, supporting the tracks, while a perforated metal surround dissolves the form of the enclosure around the tracks >>

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Congress Station

>> With a spare program to accommodate, each station is largely formed by the context of its site. Set on a triangular corner site and dominated by the concrete mass of the Congress Innsbruck building, the platform and ticket office of Congress Station in the city's centre are sunk below street level. The glass canopy billows up from the concrete platform beneath the street. Folding over to shelter the station's opening, it creates elegant proboscises as it lifts and projects metres out over the two entries at apexes of the triangular plan form. Centred in this canopy, a clear glass skylight brings daylight and views of the sky and trees into the sunken platform



Loewenhaus Station

Each of the four stations along the Nordpark Cable Railway is composed of a concrete base comprising platforms and circulation paths, and a glass canopy roof form. Loewenhaus Station sits between a street and the river, and has a linear form. Its stairs and platform run parallel to both river and street, while the canopy slips over the top, swooping down to touch the footpath on the street side and bouncing off the concrete balustrades at either end of the platform on the river side. At this point, the funicular track rises above street level. This station enmeshes the canopy and base so the two overlap, with glass flowing over the concrete platform as it lifts above the footpath below >>





Alpenzoo Station

>> As the name suggests, Alpenzoo serves as an access point to Innsbruck's Alpine Zoo located in the hills to the north of the city. Sited on a steep slope, the station is dominated by the lift and stair tower that connects the platform to the road below. This links into a flexed form of concrete comprising the platform and circulation spaces. The platform in this instance is raked, with stairs connecting successive landings at which the train doors open. The roof form slips over the platform, skirting just above the balustrade on the west and making a single connection on the east side. From here, it rises up over the platform itself and sweeps out to form a canopy over the projecting balcony to the south, framing views over Innsbruck and, on the far side of the valley, Zaha Hadid's Bergisel Ski Jump.



“The glass canopies are something quite other – ballooning, swooping clouds of curving white glass, barely connecting to the concrete bases and ground planes. They constantly shift and change their form as the viewer moves around and within them.” ROWENA HOCKIN



Hungerburg Station

With sweeping views down into the valley and over the city, Hungerburg, the funicular railway's uphill terminus, is a popular sightseeing locale. A wide concrete promenade sweeps out in front of the station, over and above the funicular railway tracks, to form a balcony. The winged form of the canopy covers the descending sweep of the U-shaped plan and projects from the hillside ascending behind. One wing flies out over the entry stairs and the other over the platforms and tracks. A delicate central spine, where the concrete and glass forms touch briefly, runs between the two wings. The station buries itself into the rising hillside and the glass canopy slides politely underneath the front lawn of the house at 149 Höhenstrasse. At night the canopies are illuminated purely by reflected light. The glass refracts and shines, seemingly illuminated internally, which belies the actual opacity of the forms: no structure is ever visible behind the reflective curved planes. **M**

