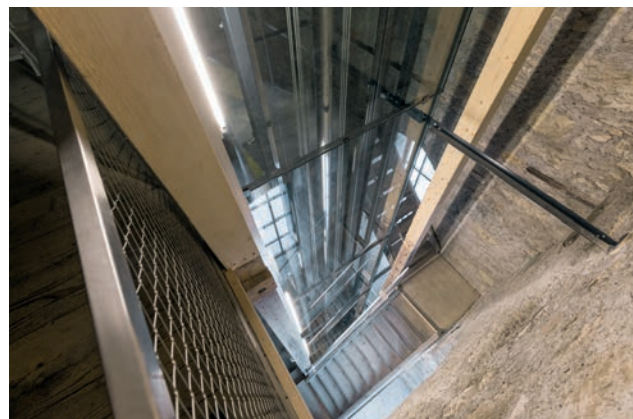




A new lift is concealed in the north tower of Bellelay Abbey Church.



The architect sought to achieve maximum transparency when integrating the lift into the wooden stairwell.



As you climb the tower, a variety of vistas can be seen beyond the lift.

## Ascension

It is said that Siginand, Provost of Moutier Grand val, once got lost in nearby woods whilst out hunting wild boar. What use was the belle laie, the beautiful wild sow he had just killed? His only wish was to find his way out of the woods! Therefore, he made a pledge. If he managed to escape, he would build a chapel on the site of hunting success and name it after the animal.

The legend may well be beautiful, but it is only partially true. Nowadays people know that belle laie referred not to a wild sow but to a beautiful wooded area, in Latin bella lagia. However, Siginand really did exist and was the founder of the abbey, first mentioned in 1141. The abbey's glory days began at the turn of the 18th century and its buildings were destroyed by fire many times. Under Abbot Jean Georges Voirol's supervision in 1714, Vorarlberg architect, Franz Beer drew up plans for the abbey church. Twenty years later, the whole abbey had been rebuilt.

At the end of 1797, French troops occupied the abbey. It was then dissolved, the church disestablished and the buildings were taken over by various owners. The abbey church served as a brewery, glassworks, barn, stable and storehouse. The Canton of Berne bought the complete complex in 1891 and turned the former abbey into a mental asylum, which has since developed into the Biel Seeland Berner Jura Psychiatric Service. The abbey church was completely refurbished in 1960. Various cultural events have been held in the church over the years: an annual summer exhibition is staged to highlight its beauty. To mark the church's 300th anniversary, the Fondation de l'Abbatiale de Bellelay carried out conversion work to make the space more practical. The heart of the project can be found in the north tower: a lift, connecting several levels and making the abbey church accessible for the disabled, has been installed in the existing wooden stairwell. As the tower is unheated, the lift must be able to withstand different temperatures. The lift shaft comprises a minimalist glass and steel structure, which aims to detract as little as possible from the tower's spatial impact. The steel profiles are finely sculpted and the design details meticulous. Werner Huber, Photos: Mike Niederhauser

### Hydraulic lift, 2014

Abbatiale du Domaine de Bellelay, Bellelay (BE)

Client: Fondation de l'Abbatiale

de Bellelay

Architecture: Henri Mollet, Biel

Total conversion costs: 650 000 Swiss francs

Lift and shaft construction: EMCH Elevators Ltd., Bern