

A10



#19

JAN/FEB 2008

€7.50

£ 5.50 / CHF 12.50 / DKK 65.00 / KRW 20,000

Start

- Environmental park, Santomera
- Bridge, Antwerp
- Art gallery, library and conference centre, Pécs
- Winery complex, Modra
- Distribution centre, Staffordshire

Ready

- Thermal spa, Bad Aibling
- Fire station, Den Helder
- Apartment building, Hveragerði
- Apartment building, Paris
- River aquarium, Mora
- Housing, Zagreb
- Villas, Pirogovo
- Library and community centre, Barcelona
- Cultural and sports centre, Dole
- House and studio, Scharans

&:

- Interview: Svatopluk Sládeček draws inspiration from the Czech periphery
- The architecture of Euro-Islam
- Pilgrim-photographer William Brumfield
- Architectural tour guide: Rome
- Profile: I/O
- Out of obscurity: observatory on Mount Śnieżka

Section: Flourishing facades

Clever
cantilever



Apartment building, Paris

Beckmann-N'Thépé bring concrete facades alive.

FRANCE — TEXT: XAVIER GONZALEZ, PHOTOGRAPHY: BRUNO FERT, CONTEXTES

begun in the 1980s, the Seine Rive Gauche district is located in the 13th arrondissement of Paris and is part of the city's new urban development area. This new axis reorients the expansion of the city towards the east, with the Seine riverbank creating new polarities around the Bibliothèque nationale de France, designed by Dominique Perrault.

The SNCF railway lines were scaled back and the remaining lines covered over, the Avenue de France was created, and this zone formerly occupied by railroad tracks and by the Grands Moulins de Paris industrial flour mills was given new urban and programmatic ambitions — housing, universities,

offices, cultural and educational facilities, government administration, etc. Four urban designers were selected for this very extensive area, in order to bring coherence as well as diversity to the whole.

Following a consultation round, the Masséna quarter was entrusted to Christian de Portzamparc, who used the opportunity to experiment, for the first time, with his idea of the 'city of the third age'. His proposal is based on a juxtaposition of blocks that are open, that is to say devoid of interiority, the silhouette of each of which he has defined. The volumes, the heights, the recesses or the projections of each plot have thus been defined according to principles of alignment or perspec-

tive that present an urban landscape formed by a succession of sculptural edifices. The building by Beckmann-N'Thépé is not an isolated act; it fits in completely with this logic of a collection of objects sought by de Portzamparc.

Rodin has said about his works: 'all I do is free the figure contained within the material'. There is something of Rodin in this architecture; the volumetric, even minimalist figure is somehow liberated from the material. There is also something of the Spanish sculptor Eduardo Chillida. For the block has been hollowed out, carved out, excavated, fractured, so that the sky shows through, as well as fragile transparencies, depths, gaps, terraces and cantilevers. The volume is fragmented in vertical sections to form a set of towers ranging through four, eight, ten and twelve storeys. Nothing remains of the original mass except the base which, taking up virtually the entire plot, still recalls the presence of the original monolithic block. But this sculpture is inhabited: it contains 48 government subsidized flats accessed from two lobbies separated by two vertical circulation cores. These are mainly two-, three- and four-room flats;

the five-room flats are generally treated as duplexes. Situated at an angle, each living room enjoys views on several sides. In order not to disrupt the smooth appearance of the facades, few flats feature overhanging balconies or recessed loggias. However, several large collective terraces planted with trees have been situated on the first and fifth floors, creating the impression that the vegetation is part of the architecture.

Seemingly positioned at random, sometimes on the exterior, sometimes on the interior bare surface of the facade, openings of varying shapes and sizes appear in the towers' walls, masking the scale of the buildings and blurring possible clues given by the apartment floors. The largest windows are composed of an upper and a lower part, sometimes separated from each other by a band of concrete. Apart from visual diversity from the outside, this variation in composition also offers occupants a certain freedom in their gaze. From inside, the surroundings are divided and framed into different views, oriented towards the horizon or the ground. The window frames are made of anodized champagne-coloured aluminium, a

material that reflects light and reinforces the feeling of luxury imparted by the 'golden' frame.

The building is also distinguished by the expressiveness of its material: dark, raw and matte, looking like Cor-Ten steel. 'Self-compacting' concrete was used for the facades. This technique ensures an excellent finish, particularly at corners and along edges, and avoids the traces left by multiple pouring phases. It also provides the solid mass effect intended for the walls, each of which seems to be made out of a single slab.

The concrete was tinted with powders and granulates producing colour nuances and unusual textures, lending depth to colours and changing the building's appearance from black to chocolate brown, depending on the viewing angle. A golden ribbon runs along the facades and the undersides of the floors, connecting all parts and volumes of the project. This strip, which gets its sheen from a concrete varnish, contrasts with the matte quality of the building. This opposition creates panels that sometimes absorb, sometimes reflect light: the facades come alive, changing with the light and the seasons. ←

SOCIAL HOUSING, 2003–2007

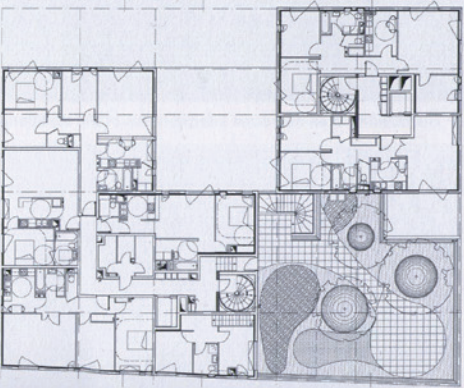
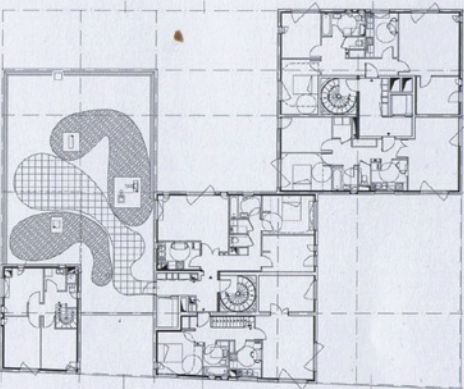
Architect: Beckmann-N'Thépé Agency
Client: SEMIDEP (Paris)
Address: Masséna Zac, Paris 75013
Info: www.b-n-t.biz



↓ Working as a sculptor, the architect has carved out the block into a base with four towers.



↓ Openings of various shapes and sizes mask the building's true scale.



↑ Second floor (bottom) and fourth floor