

Great architecture in Grand Paris

A10 correspondent Emiel Lamers has selected 25 mostly small-scale and colourful new projects worth visiting in the Parisian metropolis.

FRANCE — TEXT: EMIEL LAMERS, ILLUSTRATION: HARMEN VAN DER HORST

Ile-de-France (12,012 m²), the administrative region that takes in the Paris metropolitan area, is one of the most densely populated regions in Europe, with almost 12 million inhabitants. 'Only' 2.2 million of these actually live within the municipal boundaries of Paris, which means that the vast majority of 'Greater Parisians' do not live in the city itself but in one of the satellite towns of the commuter belt. Owing to riots in a few of these suburbs, where close to 10,000 cars went up in flames in 2005, the entire Parisian outer suburban ring has acquired a negative international image, and is now viewed as a place you are better off not visiting if you don't need to. But alongside those 'cités en difficultés', which do indeed have big social problems, Paris is surrounded by numerous districts that people really enjoy living and working in – leafy suburbs with better maintained and cleaner streets than in the centre of Paris.

Grand Paris (Greater Paris) is high on the French political agenda. In 2007, with much fanfare, an international competition was launched in which ten internationally renowned architectural practices were invited to think about the future of the Parisian metropolis. There are to be major investments in new infrastructure such as express bus and tram lines, not just to and from the centre of Paris, but more especially between the sub-

urbs themselves. The aim is to build 70,000 new dwellings every year in the region, although whether this number will be achieved is highly debatable, given the universal economic crisis that arose after the plans were drawn up.

In recent years, thanks to France's efficient system of open competitions, a number of architecturally interesting new structures have been realized in the Paris region: day care centres and schools, police stations, fire stations and other municipal buildings. At the same time, a growing number of private clients have battled local building regulations in order to build innovative houses. A small portion of the huge volume of new construction has been selected for this tour guide. Although the easiest way to do the tour is by car, it is equally possible to visit the buildings by public transport and/or bicycle (a number of the suburbs now have Velib rent-a-bike stations). *Bonne visite!*

The trip begins just outside the Boulevard Périphérique (ring road) in the southwestern suburb of Issy-les-Moulineaux, where Bouygues Immobilier has turned a former industrial site into a new business district known as Seine Ouest. On a triangular plot stands the area's showpiece, the **headquarters of Bouygues Immobilier (1)**, a curved 'flat iron' building with a double facade of white glass scales, by **Christian de Port-**

zamparc. The brown facade of the adjoining office building (part of the same ensemble) is finished with exactly the same precast concrete panels Portzamparc used for the Citadel shopping centre in Almere (NL).

On the busy Quai de Stalingrad, two stops to the south on the T2 tram line, stands a **school complex (2)** designed by **Bernard Ropa**. This prize-winning design, realized in 2008, comprises a day care centre, kindergarten, primary school and sports hall. The facade facing the busy four-lane highway is entirely clad with corrugated, highly polished stainless steel sheeting which gives it a hard, formal appearance. By contrast, the rear elevation facing the tram and rapid transit lines is composed of several bright red volumes topped by partially covered play areas, thereby making optimal use of the limited space.

Staying in the Hauts-de-Seine department (92)* we now head for the hilly Clamart district where **RH+ architectes** designed a black timber house (3) that would be less conspicuous in a Scandinavian country than here in suburban Paris. The house was built in 2008 on the rear section of what was originally a single plot. As a result, the new house is only partially visible from the side street. With a bit of luck, the hospitable clients will be happy to show you around their spacious and virtually door-less home, whose highlight is a taut white staircase in the middle of the living room.

Northwest of Clamart, in Sèvres, are two interesting, recently completed villas. **Maison DDM (4)**, built in 2007 on a steep and narrow plot, was designed by **Hamonic + Masson**. From the outside the house appears as an imperforate aluminium box on top of a base encased in steel mesh. The graffiti on the facade are part of the design. Inside, the spacious, double-height living room opens up to a large timber deck with an unimpeded view of the leafy, built-up hills of Sèvres. On the south side of the same valley, not far from Avenue de l'Europe, stands **Maison R (5)** by **Colboc Franzen & Associés**. This house, also built in 2007, has a surface area of 270 m² and is made up of three loosely stacked, autonomous volumes. The ivy-covered ground-floor volume contains a double garage, guest room, laundry, office and entrance hall. Above this at right angles is a black aluminium box containing the parental bedroom on the street side and a spacious living room opening onto the garden. The topmost, pine-clad box contains

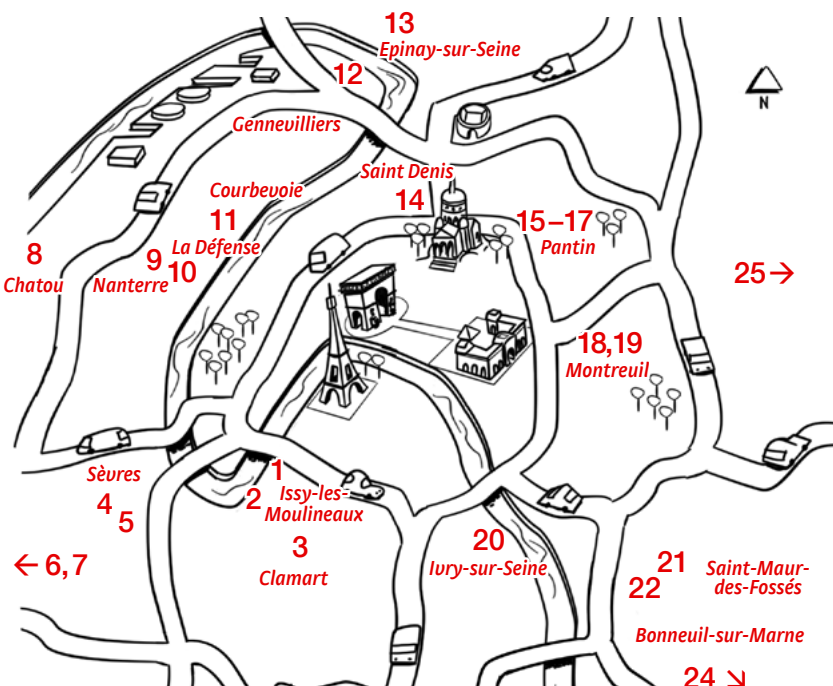
three children's bedrooms and a communal, multipurpose space.

From Sèvres we proceed to Versailles with the celebrated palace of the Sun King. On the edge of the courtyard of the Pierre Corneille primary school, is a **covered playground (6)** designed by **Dumont Legrand Architectes** together with timber engineer Jacques Anglade. Built entirely of certified Douglas Fir timber, the outdoor space enjoys a rather special play of light thanks to variously sized openings in the facade. Further on in Versailles is a **Protestant chapel (7)** designed for the Diaconesses de Reuilly order by **Rolinet & Associés** (2007). The building consists of a glass triangular prism that is partly underground. Above the glass roof, wooden louvres deflect the sun's heat. Inside the glazed volume is a cocoon-like chapel formed by curved timber slats. Natural light falls evenly through the narrow gaps between the timbers, imparting a numinous quality to the space. At night the effect is reversed as artificial light filters through the same gaps into the entrance area.

At the foot of the bridge over the Seine near Chatou, on the Île des Impressionistes, lies a **houseboat with studio (8)** by **Bouroullec/ Daversin & Finot**. The floating house, commissioned by the Chatou local authorities in 2006, is used as temporary accommodation and workspace for artists and writers. Floating downstream behind the boat is a square of (artificial) grass with a chair and painter's easel – a playful reference to painters like Monet and Renoir who fled the noisy capital to come and paint in the peace and quiet of this 'remote' island.

In the Nanterre district, near the intersection between the continuation of the Louvre-Arc de Triomphe-La Grande Arche axis and the A86 (the big ring road around Paris), stands a **fire station (9)** built in 2004. The design by **Ibos & Vitart** drew inspiration from the stainless steel helmet of the firemen; the entire base of the building is clad with corrugated stainless steel sheeting. Inside it are the garages and maintenance workshops. Above this base is a rust-brown block containing 30 apartments for the firemen and their families. The sculptural black concrete structure in the middle of the internal courtyard is used as a fire drill tower.

The La Défense business district (which spills over into neighbouring Courbevoie) has seen the construction of a lot of new towers in recent years. The 20th century's straight and angular towers have given way to the curved →





1 HEADQUARTERS OF BOUYGUES IMMOBILIER (2010)
 Architect: Christian de Portzamparc
 Address: 3 blvd Gallieni, Issy-les-Moulineaux (dep. 92)



2 SCHOOL COMPLEX (2008)
 Architect: Bernard Ropa
 Address: quai de Stalingrad, Issy-les-Moulineaux (dep. 92)



3 MAISON STM (2008)
 RH+ architectes
 Address: rue des Groux, Clamart (dep. 92)



4 MAISON DDM (2007)
 Architect: Hamonic + Masson
 Address: 9 rue de la Croix Bosset, Sèvres (dep. 92)



5 MAISON R (2009)
 Architect: Colboc Franzen & Associés
 Address: 21 rue Léon Cladel, Sèvres (dep. 92)



6 COVERED PLAYGROUND (2007)
 Architect: Dumont Legrand Architectes
 Address: 3 rue Pierre Corneille, Versailles (dep.78)



7 PROTESTANT CHAPEL (2007)
 Architect: Rolinet & Associés
 Address: rue de la Porte de Buc, Versailles (dep. 78)



8 HOUSEBOAT WITH STUDIO (2006)
 Architect: Bouroullec/Daversin & Finot
 Address: Île des Impressionnistes, Chatou (dep.78)



9 FIRE STATION (2004)
 Architect: Ibos & Vitart
 Address: av. de la République, Nanterre (dep. 92)



10 TOUR GRANITE (2008)
 Architect: Christian de Portzamparc
 Address: 2 boulevard des Bouvet, La Défense (dep. 92)



11 PRIMARY SCHOOL EXTENSIONS (2008)
 Architect: BP architectures
 Address: 70 rue A. Silvestre, Courbevoie (dep. 92)



12 A1 OFFICE BUILDING (2005)
 Architect: Dietman Feichtinger Architectes
 Address: 9 route du Bassin Nr 1, Gennevilliers (dep. 92)



13 STUDENT HOUSING COMPLEX (2008)
 Architect: ECDM architectes
 Address: 123 route de Saint-Leu, Epinay-sur-Seine



14 POLICE STATION (2006)
 Architect: X-TU architectes
 Address: 39 rue du Landy, La-Plaine-Saint-Denis (dep. 93)



15 GRANDS MOULINS DE PANTIN (2009)
 Architect: Reichen et Robert & Associés
 Address: 9 rue du Débarcadère, Pantin (dep. 93)



16 BANLIEUES BLEUES (2006)
 Architect: Périphériques
 Address: 9 rue Gabrielle Joffrand, Pantin (dep. 93)



17 HOUSING COMPLEX AND MEDICAL CENTRE (2008)
 Architect: Hamonic + Masson
 Address: 7 av. des Courtillières, Pantin (dep. 93)



18 MAISON TRAPÈZE (2009)
 Architect: Louis Paillard
 Address: 8 rue du 18 Août, Montreuil-sous-Bois (dep. 93)



19 MAISON ICONE (2001)
 Architect: Périphérique Architectes (Louis Paillard)
 Address: 60 rue de Rosny 60, Montreuil-sous-Bois (dep. 93)



20 PHARE ICAL (2006)
 Architect: TGT et associés
 Address: quai Jean Compagnon, Ivry-sur-Seine (dep. 94)



21 APPRENTICE TRAINING CENTRE (2009)
 Architect: Air-Architecture
 Address: 27 avenue Raspail, St-Maur-des-Fossés (dep. 94)



22 TOY LIBRARY (2005)
 Architect: LAN Architecture
 Address: 14 rue Michel Goutier, Bonneuil-sur-Marne (dep. 94)



23 BUS CENTRE (2007)
 Architect: ECDM architectes
 Address: 12 rue du Bas Marin, Thiais (dep. 94)



24 DAY CARE CENTRE (2009)
 Architect: BP architectures
 Address: rue Alsace Lorraine, Epinay-sous-Sénart (dep. 91)



25 MARCHESINI FRANCE HEADQUARTERS
 Architect: LAN Architecture
 Address: 1 rue de la Garenne Blettée, Saint-Mesmes (dep. 77)

(Great architecture in Grand Paris)

and canted designs of the 21st century. While Morphosis's highly sculptural design for the 300-metre-high Tour Phare has been shelved because of the economic crisis, the 183-metre-high, bevelled **Tour Granite (10)** designed by **Christian de Portzamparc** to complement the local 'twin towers' of the Société Générale, was completed at the end of 2008.

Also in Courbevoie, north of the Île de la Grande Jatte, are two **primary school extensions (11)** in the same perimeter block. **BP architectures** made this competition-winning design in which two separate extensions have redefined the block. On a concrete base stands a box clad with aluminium slats. On the corner of the street, this box projects over a small public park which, thanks to the use of the same fencing, is integrated with the school complex.

In 2001, the Austrian firm of **Dietman Feichtinger Architectes** won a competition to design a new logistical centre with **office building (12)** in the middle of Paris's main river port in the Gennevilliers district. The facade was inspired by the logic and aesthetic of shipping containers, which surround the 2005 building. Hand-operated vertical glass louvres in various colours filter sunlight and provide the workspaces with a degree of protection. Two incisions in the building volume provide extra daylight and enliven the office floor plans.

From the port of Paris we cross to the other side of the river via Île Saint Denis, to Epinay-sur-Seine in the department of Seine-Saint-Denis (93), where **ECDM architectes** designed a **student housing complex (13)** with a distinctive 'quilted' concrete facade. In addition to 150 student flats, there are 19 flats for researchers or guest lecturers and a number of women's refuge apartments. In contrast to the abstract street elevations, the facades and paving on the inner side of the long blocks are respectively bright green, orange and blue.

Still in the same department, but in the district of Saint-Denis, stands a black concrete **police station (14)** designed by **X-TU architectes**. The station has segregated circulation routes: visitors enter the entirely white reception space from the street while staff enter the building from the closed courtyard at the rear

and so remain on the other side of the reception counter. At night the large expanses of glass turn the building into a neighbourhood beacon.

Close to the famous Parc de la Villette, beside the Canal de l'Ourcq just outside the Périphérique, stand the **Grands Moulins de Pantin (15)**. These former flour mills dating from 1884 have been converted into a large-scale office complex for BNP Paribas by **Reichen et Robert & Associés**, who supplemented the existing 22,000 m² with a further 28,000 m² of office space. The perforated end facade has been entirely replaced by a modern glass curtain wall, so that the building now opens up to the water. The former covered transporter bridge to the canal has been turned into a handsome board room. Also in the Pantin district, near the Quatre Chemin metro station (line 7), a former jute sack factory was converted into a jazz centre in 2006. **Banlieues Bleues (16)** was designed by **Périphériques**, who placed various free-standing volumes in and around the old industrial hall, putting rehearsal rooms on the ground floor and offices above. Behind the high-ceilinged, light-filled hall, they designed a prism-shaped, timber-clad auditorium.

Still in Pantin, but now north of the big cemetery, stands the famous but now also notorious Les Courtillères housing estate (1955, Emile Aillaud). A serpentine apartment building over a kilometre long encloses a massive four-hectare park. The building is in a very poor condition and parts of it are currently being renovated. Adjacent to the complex, on the site of a former sports hall, is a **housing complex and medical centre (17)** designed by **Hamonic + Masson** in 2008. The publicly accessible, white glass podium building contains medical and dental practices and a pharmacy. The interior, white with bright green accents, looks out onto two garden courtyards. Above the podium is a block containing 36 apartments. All the balconies have a big integrated, sunken planter in which the architects planted trees.

From Pantin we head south to the one-time working-class district of Montreuil-sous-Bois. In the centre, in Rue du 18 Août, stands the **Maison Trapèze (18)**, which graced the cover of A10 #28. Architect Louis Paillard lives

on the ground and first floors. On the second floor he created a nine-metre-high space where his trapeze artist wife can practise her circus routines. The neighbouring brick apartment building with bright orange window frames is also by Paillard. A ten minute walk away on Rue de Rosny stands another of his works, the **Maison Icone (19)**, which he designed when he was still with **Périphérique Architectes**. All that is visible from the street is an 'archetypical' metal hangar, topped by a studio. The house itself lies further up the sloping plot and is now (as originally intended) almost entirely overgrown by ivy, including the roof.

In Ivry-sur-Seine, the left bank of the Seine, just before the river flows into Paris, is host to a striking object built in 2006. **Phare Ical (20)**, designed by **Stéphane Pourrier-TGTFP**, contains an electrical substation, a storage space and letterboxes for the nearby marina, designed by the same firm. The power and water connection points along the quay are designed as abstract totem poles.

The Vogueo, a public water bus, departs from the marina, but as yet it doesn't stop in Saint-Maur-des-Fossés, the location of our next project. However, the **apprentice training centre (21)** designed by **Air-Architecture** is easy to reach by bus or bicycle. It is an extension of the adjoining Val-de-Marne Chamber of Trades. Its defining feature is the integrally coloured ochre concrete of the facades on the internal courtyard. Since the yard itself and the canteen belonging to the old building are finished with the same material, there is a strong sense of coherence between old and new.

A short bus trip through the harbours along the River Marne brings us to the next project, a **toy library (22)** by **LAN Architecture** in Bonneuil-sur-Marne. The little building with its rough grey concrete facade is almost lost among the massive, 1960s public housing blocks that characterize this district. A series of metal panels with a zebra pattern, installed after completion, help to brighten up the abstract, bunker-like building. The interior, however, is surprisingly lofty and light. The building, where local children can come to borrow toys, contains several playrooms, a multipurpose room, offices and a staff room.

The trip by public transport to the next building is an interesting experience: first a local bus to the centre of Créteil, then change to the Trans-Val-de-Marne bus line, which runs along a dedicated bus lane that has greatly improved public transport between the suburbs. Close to the A86 ring road in Thiais, somewhat hidden behind a fence, is the new **bus centre (23)** of transit operator RATP. Already featured in A10 #20 and on the cover of A10's yearbook *New European Architecture 08/09*, this project by **ECDM architectes** is still worth a detour. The continuous ground-to-roof pre-cast concrete facade is very photogenic. The glass cut-outs in various primary colours, together with the circular relief on the concrete, lend the grey sculpture a playful, Lego-like appearance.

Even further southwest of Paris, in the department of l'Essonne (91), lies the town of Epinay-sous-Sénart, on the River Yerres. Here, in a typical 1970s district, **BP architectures** realized a colourful **day care centre (24)**. The programme is divided among three parallel volumes, with each roof line playfully reflecting the function of the space beneath. Between these volumes are various sheltered outdoor play areas.

The last and most distant project on our itinerary is the **Marchesini France headquarters (25)** in Saint-Mesmes, a peaceful village of some 600 inhabitants in the department of Seine-et-Marne (77). This striking new building for the packaging company is by the same architects as the toy library, **LAN Architecture**. On a gentle incline outside the village centre they built this black concrete building consisting of two boxy volumes separated by the entrance. On the low side of the landscape, the building appears to float. Inside, the exposed concrete walls contrast with the lively pattern of the parquet flooring.

This brings us to the end of this architectural tour of *Grand Paris*. For those who still haven't had enough of new architecture, a (free) visit to Paris's architecture centre, Pavillon de l'Arsenal, is always well worthwhile! ←

* France, including areas overseas, is divided into 100 departments (comparable to provinces), that have been numbered alphabetically. The city of Paris itself is also a department and has number 75.