



EXPLORING A WORLD ON THE MOVE

What role does the building really have in teaching students to be architects? To find out, we interviewed Frédéric Borel, the architect of the new national school of architecture in Paris-Val de Seine, France.

Frédéric Borel Architecture, a multi-sensory journey

How did you see the relationship between the architecture of the building and its educational purpose?

Frédéric Borel: The impact of architecture on learning is significant. I thus set out to create a welcoming, relaxing place that is conducive to using the imagination, a place where students feel comfortable and can give the best of them. The building is a flexible and changing tool which should not be fixed. It operates differently at different times: certain parts have set opening times while others are accessible day and night, particularly the workshops. I included active and open spaces, a cafeteria, an auditorium and exhibition rooms designed to welcome students as well as local residents.

Can the school's architecture be used as an architecture teaching aid?

F.B.: In my opinion, architecture should not convey rigid values so this building should not be used as an example in any way. It is meant to be educational and can be broken down according to teaching needs. The building draws attention to its structure, sometimes through the load-bearing walls and other times through the framework. It uses a wide range of materials and specific implementations.

How did this take concrete shape in your project?

F.B.: Paradoxically, a good building should be able to express itself in a few words at the same time as being indescribable. Here, there

is a platform housing the admin department and supporting the workshops, with the amphitheatres clinging on below. But there are also paths which offer an infinite number of contradictory views of the surroundings and of the building itself. The building lets people experience different sensations through the various ways of moving through the space, showing them contrasting effects or new colors. Several experiments were conducted to obtain the different textures of concrete. Molded, polished or waxed concrete was used to achieve rough and smooth surfaces. There is an infinite number of emotional and sensory experiences, ranging from contemplation to giddiness, from calm to excitement.

So architecture is changing... what about its teaching and workplaces?

F.B.: Teaching has changed. It is less focused on charismatic characters and professors with innate knowledge, and more about groups of teachers holding discussions with students. These new teaching methods are developing partly due to the increased use of IT, which is a real data bank and design tool. The screen has supplanted paper so the layout of the workshop has changed to accommodate these new uses and practices. The space must be comfortable, functional, well-equipped, well-lit and able to accommodate individual and group work, allowing people to move around and interact with one other.

“Architecture should not convey rigid values.”

The new *École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Paris-Val de Seine* (national school of architecture) is a new building in a former factory.



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FRÉDÉRIC BOREL

Frédéric Borel opened up an agency three years after obtaining a degree from the *École Spéciale d'Architecture* in 1982. He built several apartment buildings in Paris then numerous public buildings, namely the Faculty of Science in Agen and the law courts in Narbonne. He sees the role of an architect as carrying out work that no computer can do as each project is a forward-looking personal interpretation requiring a highly global approach.