

# Reunification and densification



**Bordeaux has seen major urban changes on both sides of the Garonne river. Eric Troussicot takes us on a tour to ttle city's urban present and future, which is interwoven with both the periphery and new micro-centres.**

Most of the designs selected to be part of this architecture guide, which will focus on three geographically distinct suburbs and peri-urban areas, were developed by Bordeaux-based architecture firms. They represent outstanding examples of a fun yet rigorous approach to high quality architecture, which enables innovation to become part of everyday life through a clever blend of conviction, austerity and the conventional. An analysis of a cross-section of the architecture of the last five years reveals a range of attitudes that challenge the reunification and densification of the city. In Bordeaux, which has seen major changes on both sides of the river, there is still very limited room for manoeuvre. UNESCO's listing of the historic city centre as a World Heritage Site only helped to further dampen hopes of a return to architectural innovation within the protected area. While it would be absurd to ignore the city's past, it would also be senseless to turn its historic centre into a museum piece, causing it to lose its dynamic atmosphere and sense of life.

The selected projects form part of the second strand of the city's urban renewal strategy. They also demonstrate the two ways in which the city might reconstruct itself - by 'laying siege' to the city gates with a view to penetrating the city centre, and by creating peripheral micro-centres.

Here, one can talk quite literally of a Bordeaux school of social housing, both collective and individual, of

which Bernard Bühler is the leading light. Its style can be identified by the recurrence of certain leitmotifs: the double facade, which appears to be both protective and creative, concrete allied with stone, timber cladding, steel panels and polycarbonate, together with external circulations using sheet fittings, the purity of white rendering, narrow vertical openings and minimal touches of bright colours. Despite the well-established trend for introversion, the Bordeaux architects were able to respond in a variety of ways to the desire for a city which absorbs more and more individuals looking for a sense of community, the concepts of joint ownership, urban frictions and the sharing of common space, enabling people to live together but separately.

## Suburban renewal in the Chartrons

We start the tour in the northern part of the city centre, on the west side of the Garonne river.

[...]

Downstream, beyond the sus-



ended Pont d'Aquitaine bridge, we conclude the first part of our tour with the reception centre for travellers (6) designed by La Nouvelle Agence. It is a cross between urban planning, landscape and housing, providing an alternative living environment where the temporary and the permanent are juxtaposed.

## On the fringes of the historic centre

We return to the quays for the second part of the tour, but this time to the southernmost point of the historic centre and the Sainte Croix quarter. The

open-air sporting facilities (7) designed by La Nouvelle Agence bring together the simplicity of the programme and a metropolitan image of a succession of playgrounds with Brooklynesque charm, combining the practice (and spectacle) of sport with a contemplation of the quays and the Garonne.



[...]

At the moment when the Metropolis of Bordeaux is launching a wave of consultations for major future projects involving well known European urban designers - on the sites of the Euratlantique station, the 'Bassins à flots' wet docks (Agence Nicolas Michelin), the Bastide Niel (MVRDV) - the originality and creativity of local architecture is besieging the historic centre town, setting the tone and showing what developments are possible. Over the past few years, the architects of Bordeaux seem to have been responding to the question posed in 1838 by the Karlsruhe city architect, Heinrich Hübsch, 'In which style should we build?', without necessarily founding a 'school'. They have also demonstrated that the urban future is interwoven with the periphery, with the creation of micro-centres, unifying while diversifying the urban composition, so that Bordeaux becomes an example of a 'millionaire city'.

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A10 #34, juillet - août 2011*