

Created in 2006 by Pascale Dalix and Frédéric Chartier, Chartier Dalix architectes has worked on several types of programmes and sites through its projects. These reveal a marked sensitivity to the complexity of uses and contexts: the projects are always relevant, innovative, and with generous solutions, in terms of both formal and programmatic consistency. The office has been widely reviewed and published in national and international magazines, and has received various awards, including the Europe 40 under 40 Award (2012).

A primary school and gymnasium with their own natural environment

The project has been designed as part of a particularly innovative programme, environmentally speaking. The concept of the building relies on the development of a primary landscape which would draw its textures and components from the wider landscape in which it is set. In this way it becomes an urban enclave which stands apart: an elevated landscape in which an indigenous environment grows freely, a sort of urban canopy, sheltered, but also protected by people. This project may well signal the start of a new trend: striving to return biodiversity to the heart of urban areas. More than any other project, building a school is an opportunity to re-think the fundamental conceptual connections between poetry, education and nature, drawing inspiration from new aesthetic impulses. Thus, the building takes up the challenge of recreating a fully functional ecosystem as a place of learning, a space where local children will go to fulfil their potential, but also a social hub for local residents.

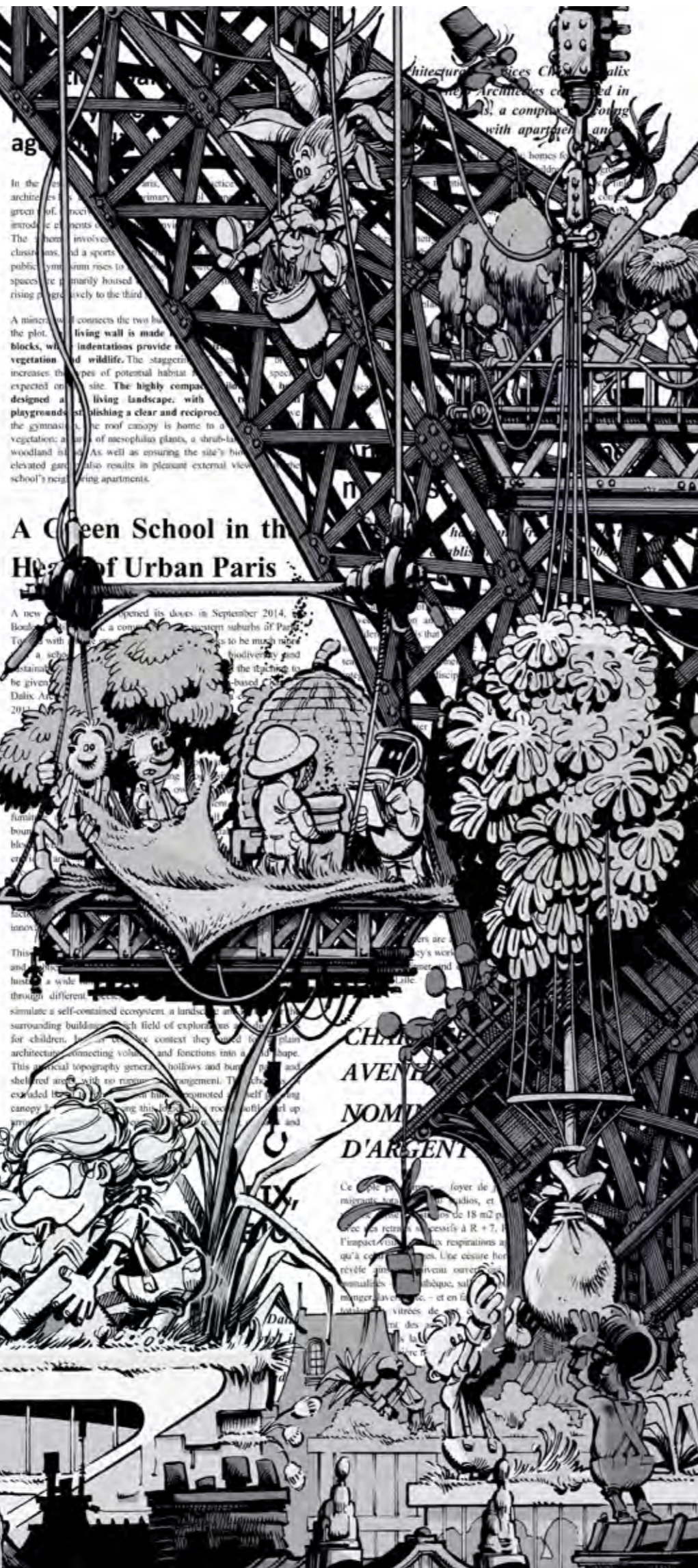
The Context: The project involves two structures: a school with eighteen classrooms (seven pre-school, eleven primary school) and a gymnasium which will be open to local residents. Located on the A4 Est site, in the "Segnan-Rives de Seine" ZAC (urban development zone) in Boulogne-Billancourt on the old Renault grounds, now a densely built area. The school project thus takes on particular significance: it will set the tone for the landscape within the wider site. The two structures are united in a single volume, bounded by a same skin: the mineral wall. We wanted this wall to extend around the entire project first to consolidate the entire edifice, but also because it represents a clear and definite gesture for the ZAC. This building, at the centre of the A4 Est site, is the "green heart" of the island. The school thus serves as a unifying element in a landscape where which flora and fauna play a vital part in guiding re-development for the rest of the area.

Chartier Dalix architectes builds green - roofed Rosalind School and dormitory

French practice chartier dalix architectes has recently completed the rosalind school complex and student dormitory located in a city currently undergoing a large scale urban development project to connect it to the city of Paris. The site sits on the edge of newly developed communities and an untouched natural landscape stretching out to the horizon, which led to a design that would attempt to find a symbiosis between these two worlds.

Angular wings wrap around two south-facing courtyards that contain playgrounds and ensure that each space enjoys an outdoor view and natural light. Above the building, green roofs create a landscape that seem to extend the adjacent meadow and are visible from the library's reading room. A garden terrace accessible from the 1st level public spaces is equipped to grow vegetables which the students have as a learning opportunity. The dormitory building is located as far north on the site as possible to give it a certain degree of independence and also ensures that it would not tower over the school itself ensuring a maximum amount of sunlight at all times.

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A Green School in the Heart of Urban Paris

A new school opened its doors in September 2014, in the heart of the city of Paris. The school is a green school, designed by Chartier Dalix architectes. The school is a green school, designed by Chartier Dalix architectes.

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Pascale Dalix and Frédéric Chartier started their office a decade ago. Coming from big firms like Herzog & de Meuron and Dominique Perrault, it is easy to recognize where they learned to play with surfaces and how to combine rationality and poetry. The shiny surfaces of the young workers' hostel, crèche, and studios in Paris are quite different from the edgy facades of the Primary School for Sciences and Biodiversity in Boulogne-Billancourt, but the reasoning behind both is the same: 'It's the first question to ask and the last to answer, because we keep researching better solutions during the process: How can we enrich the programme?', say Chartier Dalix.

Fluidity of spaces on all scales

FRANCE — TEXT: INDIRA VAN 'T KLOOSTER, ILLUSTRATION: KLAUSTOON

Since their start in 2006, they have finished more than ten projects with an office of no more than 31 people. It is enough to conclude that their oeuvre, as such, is not exactly homogenous in style. They like to experiment with different styles and materials, to explore different kinds of subjects and programmes. What connects their works is the fluidity of spaces: voids and floors interact in various functions and on various scales.

How can you enrich the programme?

We tend to treat our buildings as vertical micro-cities. French cities are so dense, we need to create valuable human living spaces in high quantities. This is only possible when we can also make a sort of recluse. A place that extends the city inside the building itself. To be able to do that within the strict budget limits, we have learned to play with structures and spaces.

What's the reason that you seldom use the ground floor for public amenities?

If all public functions are on the ground floor, the rest of the programme needs to come on top of that, which creates monocultures on the higher floors. And who invented putting amenities on the ground floor? In the case of the 240 studios, we had a library, restaurant, laundry, fitness centre for the young workers, and a kindergarten to accommodate, and we did not have enough space on the ground floor. By inserting extra programmes on the upper floors, we bring life to all levels. Thus, we have created public space that has more urban life than outside the building.

These topographical landscapes can also be created in schools. How do you manage that?

The limited available space in classrooms does not create proper learning environments. For example, for the Sciences and Biodiversity school, we maximized the programme to create space for a green roof. The green roof is not a technological tour de force, but it's also a pedagogic tool for the children. Did you know that 40 per cent of the birds have been lost in the last decades in Paris?

So we made an insect hotel and waterways for birds to hide, breed, or sleep. Thus, we add to the micro-climate of the whole building. It works like an ecosystem in itself.

Usually these type of interventions have a negative effect on the budget, yet you manage to stay within the limits.

We choose one material for its capacities to enhance the design and we adapt to the client's budget by using the right material. Then we draw a few but very accurate details, and we start pushing the envelope. How many different shapes can we make with this material? How many connections do we need? For the Boulogne school, we used concrete blocks, stacked one on the other, and it allowed us to create further different alcoves within the walls that welcome biodiversity: different types of birds, insects, and plants that will blossom over time and create a vertical garden. Furthermore, as the skin of the building turns over it, it creates a path children and teachers can take to access the roof garden. Thus, we give children and the teaching community a different way to learn and teach.

Is beauty an important concept?

Beauty is maybe too subjective a notion. We think architecture is more between poetry and public service. In order to meet the needs of the users and the possibilities of the material, we are looking for honesty in its use. A building material cannot be untrue to its form and its characteristics, but it can be moulded, shaped, and twisted to reveal what a building really is. It's all about forms, edges, surfaces, reflections, and repetitions.

How do you find the commissions in which you can realize your visions?

First, we really enjoy realizing a lot of different programmes: offices, hotels, housing, industrial buildings, because each programme enriches the next one. We can make architecture with different types and sizes of commissions. A lot of the competitions we have been working

on have been open competitions. At first, we just wanted to do as many as possible. In collaborations, it is possible to get the bigger assignments. Now we are more directly solicited by our clients.

Have you been trying to implement internationally?

To a certain extent, yes. A lot of our projects are now realized in France, but we do collaborate with European architects. We are now working on a competition with Kempe Thill from the Netherlands, and we have been around ourselves in Germany, Switzerland, and Spain, while the people in our office come from Poland, Japan, Germany, China, and Spain.

How can your working methods be applied to larger scales, like 'Reinventing Paris', for example?

We have recently been nominated laureates, as part of the Réinventer Paris competition, and alongside Jacques Ferrier Architectures studio for the realization of the 'Ville multi-strate' project in Paris. For this competition, we developed the project in a workshop with experts from various fields, such as sociology, philosophy, gardening... even cooks! All those people coming from different horizons bring their complexity and thus life into the project. The bigger the scale, the more elements we can fit into our concept of micro-cities.

What about future projects?

We are working on a few projects, such as the biggest wood structure office building in Europe – with more than 30,000 square meters on eight floors. And we're doing the planning of a Renault design hub, a building that will be visited by more than 12,000 persons. The project is about rethinking workspaces and how to make them more enjoyable. Thus, we try to reinforce the social connection and creativity within the working spaces. Then there is a new metro station for the Grand Paris metro line. And last but not least, we are working on very small and luxurious hotel in the centre of Paris. All the while, we keep searching for diversity and a mixture in programmes!