

1. IDENTITY OF BUILDING OR GROUP OF BUILDINGS

current name of building : Saint Merri School/swimming pool/gymnasium

variant or former name :

number and name of street : 11 rue Saint Merri / 16 rue du Renard

town : Paris **code** : 75004

country : France

CURRENT OWNER

name : The municipality of Paris

Head office for Education

address : 3 rue de l'Arsenal

75181 Paris cedex 04

For the swimming pool and gymnasium : Youth and Sports Head Office

telephone : 01 42 76 30 35 **fax** : 01 42 76 28 49

CONSERVATION PROTECTION

type :

date :

AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROTECTION

name :

address :

telephone : **fax** :

2. HISTORY OF BUILDING

commission brief : Originally related to the construction of the Centre Pompidou owing to the transfer of a school on the site of the IRCAM, and because the architects Renzo PIANO and Richard ROGERS wished to give more space to the East end of Saint Merri's Church (the current Stravinsky Square), the building houses several facilities with separate access from the public space : a gymnasium, a swimming pool and a 3-storey school complex composed of a nursery school and a primary school, including a terrace at each level. A ramp for cars overlaps onto the site, as well as a transformer for the RATP (the Parisian Underground Transport System), with access from the Rue du Renard.

architectural designer : Alain GAMARD, Daniel LOMBARD,
Edouard-Marc ROUX

other designer : Mr BOSDEVESY assistant

consulting engineers :

contractors : -

General Contractor : BOUYGUES

– Lighting :BET;

Heating and Plumbing : GREGORY-SPILLMANN, BUNEL , VILLAUME
Q.S:PANNETIER

CHRONOLOGY

competition date:

commission date : December 1971

design period : April 1972 – January 1973

duration of site work : started : October 1931- February 1973

Completed: February : 1974

Opened : March 1974

PRESENT STATE OF BUILDING

current use : Nursery and Primary School and restaurant, a
gymnasium, a swimming-pool, baths with showers, a transformer
RATP

current condition :

The overall building is remarkably well preserved : most materials are original and in good condition.

summary of restoration or other works carried out, with dates :

Interior improvements were achieved to provide the staff in charge of the cleaning with additional premises : dressing rooms and showers.

Additional space was created within the school to provide pedagogical needs : a computer room.

A lift has been replaced

3. DOCUMENTATION / ARCHIVES

written records, correspondance, etc :

drawings, photographs, etc :

The architect Edouard-Marc ROUX owns a complete set of graphic records : plans, sections, elevations and miscellaneous documents.

The architect Edith SCHREIBER-AUJAME, who took part in the programming within the A.E.P. (association for the pedagogical environment) bequeathed documents related to the programming of

the school to Catherine CLARISSE.

The following association « les aires ouvertes » collects informations about the school (www.les-aires-ouvertes.net)

other sources, film video, etc : a film is under way by Sophie DELOCHE

main publications (chronological order) :

GENERAL REFERENCES

Chatelet Anne-Marie, *Paris à l'école. Qui a eu cette idée folle*, Paris, coédition Pavillon de l'Arsenal / Picard Editeur, 1993, pp. 157-158

MONOGRAPH

"Ecole rue St-Merri, un équipement intégré de quartier" : album illustré présenté par le centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, Mundiprint éditeur, Paris 1973, 22 p., 17 ill.

ARTICLES / FRENCH MAGAZINES

Technique et architecture n° 298, architecture évolutive »

Technique et architecture n° 300, « façades », 1974

Toits de France revue des professionnels de la toiture, « En plein Paris, des cours de récréation suspendues », mars 1975 (anonyme).

Bulletin d'information sur la vie du groupe Bouygues, « Centre Beaubourg : école St-Merri », n° 149, 6 février 1973

Bulletins de l'AEP, Association pour l'environnement pédagogique

4. DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDING

Located on a site of 2,880 m², the total complex includes 6,220 m² of indoor area, and 2,500 m² of terraces and open air courtyards/playgrounds

The L-shaped building sits at the corner of the rue St Merri (to the North-East) and the rue du Renard (to the North-West). It neatly stands next to the older buildings facing the streets. It's cleverly inserted within the built environment at the heart of the block. This particular location, at the corner of the 2 streets allows shade, pollution and sound protection; a vast volume facing South where 5 levels of terraces are laid out enable plenty of sun for the solarium of the swimming pool at ground floor level. As it sits at the edge of the common ownership, the complex provides an enlarged courtyard to the nearby buildings

At street level are the separate entrances to the school -the nursery and primary schools have a common entrance- the other 3 entrances allow access to the swimming pool, the gymnasium and the municipal baths and showers. The latter are skilfully knitted and sit on top of each other at minus six meters and at ground level. An RATP transformer has also direct access to the street, and a bold cantilever to the rue du Renard leads to a car ramp which itself is linked to an underground car park for the Pompidou Center. In order to cover the underground access the sculptor Etienne MARTIN was entrusted with the creation of a fountain.

The school spreads out round a ramp whose starting point is the continuation of the street and opens onto a large foyer giving access to all levels. The tuition spaces are gathered on 3 levels, according to age group: 2 to 5, 5 to 8 and 8 to 11 years old. Each space has direct link with a playground/terrace. This layout fits the pedagogical purposes of this type of school called 'école à aires ouvertes' (in other words : 'a school with an open air courtyard') inspired by the educationalist Freinet. The programming of the school was carefully thought through by the Pompidou Center, the contracting authority at the origin of the project (Jacques Lichnerowicz, assistant to François Lombard and A.E.P., Association for the Pedagogical Environment, where Edith Schreiber-Aujame -a graduate in architecture from Harvard University- was working before

architects were commissioned. Over the years the successive pedagogical teams have been carrying this project intended to value team work among teachers. More than anything else the library was given special attention within the programming. This building, conceived to 'enhance' what it could bring to the neighbourhood also offers Further Education to adults.

Constraints due to the ground, together with the required volumes needed for the sports facilities led the architects in charge to set up the school premises from an artificial slab 7m above the soil of the street, ensuring an improved protection to street noise and pollution. Thanks to the successive terraces, schoolchildren can benefit from plenty of sunshine, quiet surroundings and also enjoy the view in the distance, they can see the horizon and the parisian roofscape in the heart of this dense and lively neighbourhood. The cleverly designed interior spaces allow generous daylight in all premises, multi-functional spaces and an economy of built area.

A restaurant with large panoramic bay windows is on the first floor, not far from a spacious and functional kitchen with good ventilation and daylight, it's also linked to a playground/terrace

5. REASONS FOR SELECTION AS A BUILDING OF OUTSTANDING AND UNIVERSAL VALUE

one page only except for groups of buildings, continuous text, arranged according to the following criteria

1. technical appraisal :

The overall structure is rough reinforced concrete.

The bay windows facing the street are secured and well insulated (with polychlorophene joints to hold the window panes tightly onto the metallic structure). By contrast, on the other side where the 'terraces' are to be found, the sliding bay windows with wooden frame generously open up on to outside spaces.

The whole complex is well preserved, and the careful details are well thought-out although the construction was fast. The implemented innovative techniques, on the front elevation in particular, weather well. Numerous details -the quality of the parapets, the design of the planters, and the way the outside spaces, the terraces have been addressed- all participate to a high-standard building, making it an easy and pleasant place to appreciate everyday and very easy to maintain.

Most impressive of all is the consistency of the architectural language : this is a building that is both very carefully thought through and excellently built.

2. social appraisal :

This building as it stands is the result of an outstanding team work from a multiplicity of aspects :

-the programming itself involving the following : the Pompidou Centre (the removal of a school on the IRCAM site), the Head Office for Education (the school), the Head Office for Youth and Sports (the swimming pool and the gymnasium), the Social Services (baths and showers), the Highways department (the car ramp, and external works) all worked together to integrate their programmes into a one and sole building.

-the fact that many services were offered to the town, to the neighbourhood, thus reducing commuting , allowing proximity and therefore saving lots of time to the citizens (school children and relatives, athletes and school children from the area using the sports facilities)

-the project of the school is part of an acknowledged and praised movement, within an international network for experiments and references (England, the United States, Canada and Netherlands)

3. artistic and aesthetic appraisal :

Beyond the multiplicity of services proposed to the citizens and, although the facilities are wide open onto the neighbourhood at street level, its siting does not allow views from the street, thus producing an original building of outstanding character. Here the 'architectural stroll' favoured by Le Corbusier is remarkably implemented by this team of architects close to the one in Montrouge studio. One can also allude to the roof terrace of the Cité radieuse in Marseilles.

As to the interior spaces, the way they flow freely, one into another, bathed in the bright natural light, the architectural cleverness allowing no waste of space, they meet the pedagogical multi-faceted purposes. The beautiful round fountains for example near the toilets -with natural light flooding the whole area- encourage a playful approach to health education, affording this space to being turned into a bright space for painting sessions by simply sticking large sheets of paper on the partitions, at children's eyes level. The water will flow near the 'easel-on-the-wall' for brushes and dirty little hands.

The play on curves organising the layout of spaces at each level softens the strictness of the rough concrete structure and the linear street façade bearing the neat and regular frames of the openings.

In its interaction with its setting, the building scores highly.

4. evidence of canonic status (local, national, international) :

Such mixed-use and dense buildings are rare. However within today's context of urgent taking into account of the protection of our planet, they embody valuable examples of facilities being inserted into a dense city, affording time-saving on journeys, and shared economical maintenance and heating.

Further more this building represents a model for its ideal siting, as to its solar supply, as to the superimposed programmes, as to the clever layout and the interior arrangement allowing important surface saving .

5. evaluation as a reference point in architectural history and in relation to comparable buildings :

The area occupied by the building has been 'given back' thanks to the roof-terrace, -a theme cherished by Le Corbusier-, this has been respected and appreciated by all generations of schoolchildren familiar with the school.

In a similar way the architect Luigi Snozzi suggests to the mayor of Montecarrasso to locate the school in a former convent, an architectural gem in the heart of the city, so that each young child can benefit from this high architectural achievement during the early stage of their education; one can hope that this quiet and bright oasis in the city, particularly well adapted to children and the nearby dwellers, can continue to serve its purposes.

The exemplary nature of the clever layout of space for this very complex programme, useful to the city, stands as an example not dissimilar to the 'maison du peuple' (People's Palace) in Clichy, by Beaudoin and Lods, Prouvé, Bodiansky..

6. PHOTOGRAPHS AND VISUAL RECORDS

list of documents gathered in additional file

1. original visual records :

A. Aerial view of the school. Photo from the book: "Ecole rue St-Merri, un équipement intégré de quartier", op.cit.

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Rapporteur : Catherine CLARISSE

(Assessor)

