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Hôtels Industriels

John A. Loomis

In considering Parisian architecture of the past decade, one tends to think of the *grands projets*, the highly published monuments to outgoing President François Mitterand's corporate welfare state. But there have been more modestly scaled public initiatives that have, perhaps, had a more profound collective effect on the well-being of the capital of France.

Some of these works have been in housing and are known among the international architectural public. But another type of project — *hôtels industriels*, or mixed-use, multitenant facilities that primarily house production activities — is relatively unknown. These works of architecture and urban design are a result of an enlightened public policy that recognizes the value

of small- to medium-scale manufacturing to the urban economy and that seeks to maintain and nurture it within the city proper. The *hôtel industriel* projects illustrate how sensible economic public policy can result in architecture and urban design of merit.

Paris, known as a center of government, commerce and culture, has long been a center of production as well. Ninety percent of the city's production enterprises employ fewer than twenty people each. These small- to medium-scale manufacturing and craft production operations have been accommodated in various quarters of the city. These neighborhoods traditionally contain a rich mix of functions that include commercial and residential along with the production activities. These activities include printing, textile and clothing production, furniture and cabinetry fabrication, metalworking, electronic assembly, and craft-oriented activities like antique and art restoration. Some of these activities have traditionally been associated with specific quarters — jewelry and leatherwork in the Marais, furniture in Faubourg Saint Antoine, clothing in Sentier and metalworking in the northeastern part of the city.

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*Hôtel industriel
Metropole. Design by
Jean-Paul Viguier and
Jean-François Jodry.*

Photos © John A. Loomis.





Hôtel Industriel Cité Beauharnais.
Design by Patrick Colombier and
Danièle Damon.

Paris has not escaped the forces of deindustrialization that have affected so many cities in Europe and North America since the 1960s. From 1962 to 1968 there was an average loss of 3,000 jobs a year in the production sector; from 1968 to 1975, 7,000; and from 1975 to 1978, the loss reached a shocking 20,000 jobs a year. These losses were not compensated by an equivalent gain in the service sector. By 1978, 180,000 production jobs remained in the city, representing ten percent of the work force. According to a 1987 census, 25,425 enterprises within the city were still engaged in some sort of production activity.

Instead of accepting this decline as a natural phenomenon of the post-industrial city as have so many other municipalities, Parisian authorities became alarmed at the situation and sought means to analyze and address

it. The city took the position that production activities were an important part of Paris' economic base and served a more diverse working population than just the service sector. "All sectors of the population have their place in Paris. Each must be able to find appropriate housing and work and they must be able to live and work in the capital," stated former mayor Jacques Chirac (now France's president) in a report on the subject in 1978. The same report also recognized that a speculative real estate market often threatened neighborhood diversity, so vital to Parisian tradition, and stressed that it was important that well-served, diversified neighborhoods be maintained.

In 1978, Paris launched a program to retain existing production enterprises within the city and encourage new ones. It centered around the promo-

tion of *hôtels industriels*, modern, flexible, multitenant, multiuse facilities to be located largely within Paris' working-class districts. By 1983 five *hôtels industriels* had been developed; today there are more than forty operating successfully in various parts of Paris.

The Bureau Municipal des Activités Economiques was largely responsible for developing the program and acted as organizer-facilitator, bringing together investors, developers and small producers. In many of the projects the city provided parcels of land that it owned for development. In these cases the developer had the use of the land lease free for seventy years, after which the land would revert to the city. In other cases, land taxes were structured so as to make development attractive to investors. The agency smoothed the way through permitting processes and other municipal regula-



Hôtel industriel le Dorian. Design by KLN Architecture.

tions to facilitate development, and it took an active role in helping developers secure tenants. While developers selected their own architects in early projects, later projects have most often been awarded to joint-venture teams through architectural competitions. This process has resulted in both architecture and urban design of high quality; some projects have been designed by internationally known architects like Renzo Piano, Paul Chemetov and Dominique Perrault.

Two projects of very different scales can be examined to indicate the variety of projects created by this program. The atelier-workshops of the Cité Beauharnais by architects Patrick Colombier and Danièle Damon, are part of a new mixed-use complex that

was inserted into the nineteenth-century fabric of the 11^{ième} arrondissement (a district in east-central Paris), which has large North African population. The new project also includes social housing (its largest component), a day-care center, offices and a park.

Six ateliers lining the small street rue Beauharnais accommodate printing, woodworking and graphics workshops and take up a total of 1,400 square meters. The metal-clad ateliers, with their raised, boxlike mezzanines face the housing and form a very active part of the street life of this well-defined neighborhood.

Quite the opposite in scale is the Valin project, by architects Paul Chemetov and Borja Huidobro. Located in the 25^{ième} arrondissement

and forming a strong urban edge to the six-lane boulevard Martial Valin, this is one of the largest *bôtels industriels*.

Providing flexible production spaces along its 300-meter length, this five-story building spans two long blocks and employs a modern architectural vocabulary; nevertheless, it makes a very Parisian and Haussmann-like edge to the busy and overscaled boulevard. Generous accommodations are made for pedestrians and bicycles along the tree-lined sidewalk. Stores share the ground floor with production concerns.

The rest of the complex is occupied by a variety of activities including woodworking, printing, video production, lithography, graphics studios, software developers, offices and a high school. Around the southeast corner of the project the tree lined sidewalk turns into a nineteenth-century residential neighborhood, making an easy translation from one fabric to another in a very Parisian, good-neighbor tradition.

The Valin and Cité Beauharnais projects demonstrate on very different scales how creative and innovative public policy can result in a socially responsible and well designed urban environment. These lessons are not inappropriate for our own cities.



Hôtel industriel Pantin, a similar project outside Paris. Design by Paul Chemetov and Borja Huidobro.