

BIRKHAÜSER

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Beauty Redeemed

RECYCLING POST-INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPES



Name: Île de Nantes
Location: Nantes, France
Design: Atelier de l'Île de Nantes by
 Alexandre Chemetoff
Project dates: 2000-2010
Size: 337 ha

Île de Nantes

Chemetoff's work is built on the basic principle of achieving as much as possible with a minimum of resources (Chemetoff 2009). This also applies to the transformation of the Île de Nantes, the largest transformation project in France so far. Chemetoff was in charge of the project from 2000 to 2010, and Belgian planner Marcel Smets and the uapS agency have been working on it since.

In incorporating the Île de Nantes in the city of Nantes as well as in a large hinterland its relations with the River Loire are important. The island's many waterfronts have consequently been re-profiled with inspiration from local expressions, materials and atmospheres. Strategically, they are intended to function as the new public domain on the island – from long promenades to small, intimate spaces or viewpoints and larger recreational areas like the park in front of the Alstom Warehouses and the Banana Warehouse.

Projects such as the public area mentioned above along the banks and the scaling down of a large, multi-lane road across the island have been supplemented with principles rather than strategies for the gradual transformation of the island. Investigations of material, social and financial possibilities for interventions in the existing urban fabric have been supplemented by improved spatial and visual connections. They range from residential blocks, which were otherwise scheduled for demolition, the trial conversion of an industrial building to a lawyer's office, opening up the façades of a large warehouse, establishing new residential blocks and a new law court, transformation of the old banana ripening shed for use as cafés and creative workshops and more.

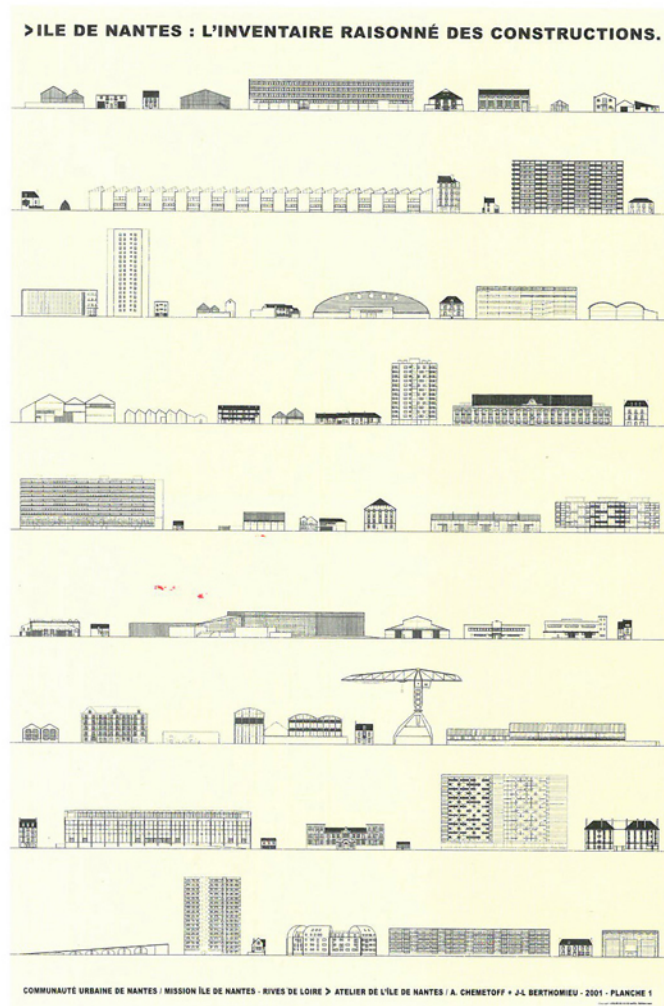
With the closure of the shipyard in 1987 and construction of a new harbour in Saint Nazaire the 337-hectare industrial island, Île de Nantes was included in the development of Nantes as a regional metropolis organised along the River Loire with Saint Nazaire and Nantes as centres. Île de Nantes therefore plays a central role in endeavours to create new links with the river.



The 'Plan & Guide Map' will be updated every three months throughout the project. It serves both as a reflection of the current stage and as a tool for developing the next. The 'Plan & Guide Map', Jan. 2003 (inventory map) and Oct. 2008.



Transformation is based on a detailed reading of the materials, building elements, atmospheres and spatial relations on the site. This poster shows some of the striking constructions on the island. The reasoned inventory of buildings, 2001.



These large residential blocks have been given new value to the visual and spatial connection with the river, which underlines the island's unifying character as an island. Boulevard Blancho, Sep. 2007.

With the continual addition of new buildings such as the Jean Nouvel courthouse, an aesthetic diversity is created with historic depth and the awareness that modern needs can be fulfilled.



An archaeology of the future. During excavations in the terrain, Chemetoff found a series of concrete girders, which now form the framework for a playground. The garden of travels, Parc des chantiers, May 2009.



Underpinning and developing local materials, structures and atmospheres is a central method in developing the island. By extending the existing structures, access is provided to an atmospheric spot by the river. The estuary garden, Parc des chantiers, May 2009.



The artistic decoration of the quay frames the views of Nantes from the area in front of the old banana ripening shed and underlines the new spatial and functional links in a cross view. Looking along the row of diagonally set rings, one's gaze is directed to the sea. Quai des Antilles, original site. Sep. 2005.



The originally unremarkable Alstom warehouses. The Naves, original site, June 2005.



The outer cladding of the warehouses has been removed, the iron structure adapted, and a glass roof added. This structure forms a setting for smaller buildings and public spaces.



The Machines de l'île company was housed in the former shipbuilding sheds, and thus their activity is retained on the island. The giant mobile animals are icons of the Île de Nantes and the transformation of the island.



A central tool in this complex transformation process is a 'Plan & Guide Map' developed by Chemetoff for the project. It consists of a plan drawing, where information about current situations, transformations in progress and planned actions are presented all together. Throughout the ten-year development process the Plan & Guide Map has been updated every three months, and it demonstrates the complexity of the project and the constant need to make decisions in response to specific and unpredictable developments. It is, in other words, the opposite of the Master Plan with details of final plans. However, it is only a representation of a particular stage and as such does not give any notable information about the qualitative aspects the project is operating with.

The transformation is to a large extent built on local qualities, especially qualities that can be seen and felt on the site here and now. Scale, structures, history and collective memories that are not perceivable through the senses are therefore not included as building materials for further development. The project thereby makes use of the continuity and cultivation paradigms. New buildings are added, but since the pre-existing building structures are already heterogeneous, they are not reduced to a distant past with the additions standing in contrast. On the contrary, the new buildings must be seen as elements in the continuity paradigm, which is played out all the more visibly in the transformation of the quay fronts and the Alstom and Banana warehouses. The approach therefore draws indirectly on the continuity paradigm: Preservation through transformation.