

An aerial photograph of a dense urban landscape, likely San Francisco, showing a mix of modern high-rise buildings and older, lower-rise structures. The image is used as a background for the text.

Symposium

MODERN

ORDINARY

ARCHITECTURE

& URBAN

ENSEMBLES

Sustainability

Innovation

Heritage

Preservation

Philippe Prost, AAPP

Continuity from past, present and future



"It is now fundamental to reconnect with the art of transformation and its supporting financial system that have been the very essence of architectural practice for millennia and the secret to the longevity of our human societies."

1. How can 'preservation' be defined in the contexts of Singapore and France?

The idea and desire for architectural preservation generally arise in reaction to a historical situation, a specific moment when abandonment and demolition, followed by the disappearance of numerous buildings from a certain era or typology, predominate to the point where the risk of total extinction becomes possible.

In France, it was the French Revolution that, with its destruction and looting affecting religious, civil, and monumental heritage, led to a preservation reaction, including among certain revolutionaries, and resulted in the establishment of legislative measures to protect valuable buildings from such threats. The 1830s marked the beginning of a genuine heritage policy.

In Singapore, it seems to me that the rapid modernisation of the country following its independence led to an awareness of the possible erasure of vernacular or scholarly architectures built before 1965, which led to the desire to ensure their preservation. Today, it is the modern architectural heritage that is threatened due to seemingly inevitable demolitions for reconstruction, exacerbated by the limited territory of the city-state.

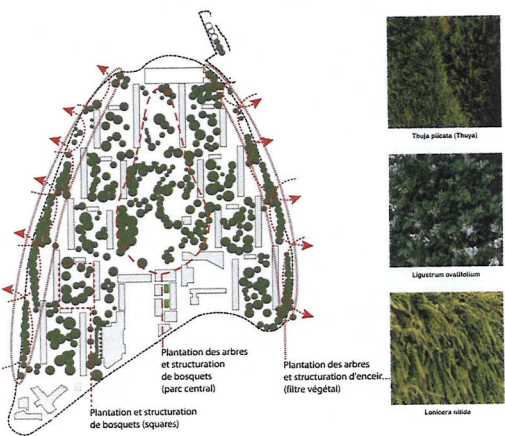


Figure 1. Gallice Port in Juan-les-Pins ©Aitor Ortiz-Proposed design by Philippe PROST architect (opposite)

Figure 2. Philippe speaking at the Conference

Figure 3. A German soldier walking through the ruins of Peronne, in northern France, November 1916

All images are from the author unless otherwise stated.



ESPACES EXTÉRIEURS / PUBLICS

Système de squares + parc
Sols fertiles
Masse arbustive + fleurs
Jardins appropriables

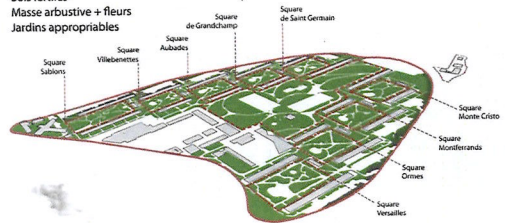


Figure 4. Overhead view of Les Grandes Terres by Marcel Lods & Jean-Jacques Honegger built during the 'Thirty Glorious Years' period in France

Figure 5. Landscaping strategies to create a hierarchy of differently-sized green spaces

Figure 6. A system of parks, gardens and public spaces

2. How is preservation a form of sustainable development to you?

While heritage was previously associated to the conservation of "old stones", heritage is nowadays connected to environmental concerns. Why so? Simply because heritage is what lasts, what generations have passed down over the centuries. There is nothing more enduring than a building that could stand till today, and sometimes for several centuries. This durability results from a choice of suitable materials, careful attention to its construction and maintenance. The said building has demonstrated its ability to evolve according to needs, usages and techniques, as well as to accommodate new programs. The longevity of these structures, which have withstood the test of time, is often the result of financial efforts combined with smart construction systems. The silver lining of the current environmental crisis, is the end of the planned obsolescence of architecture that is considered as a mere consumer product. It is now fundamental to reconnect with the art of transformation and its supporting financial system that have been the very essence of architectural practice for millennia and the secret to the longevity of our human societies.

3. What is your design philosophy and what drives your practice?

In my opinion, there is no creation without memory. My practice is motivated by the ambition to write a new page of a site or a building, supported by the humility of inscribing the project in the long term of history. In my work as an architect, the memory of places, spaces, sensations, as well as the lives of human beings and the traces left by their presence, plays a foundational role. My creation finds its source there; it redefines forms and materials, as well as traditional knowledge and skills. My goal is to resonate the future with the present and its past, to embed in each of my projects the history of the site with its geography, its space with its uses.

At all times, we shall develop and reinvent materials, structures, and implementation methods, so that construction and execution become the contemporary expression of the project while grounding it in a territory and contributing to the revitalisation of local industries in terms of materials supply.

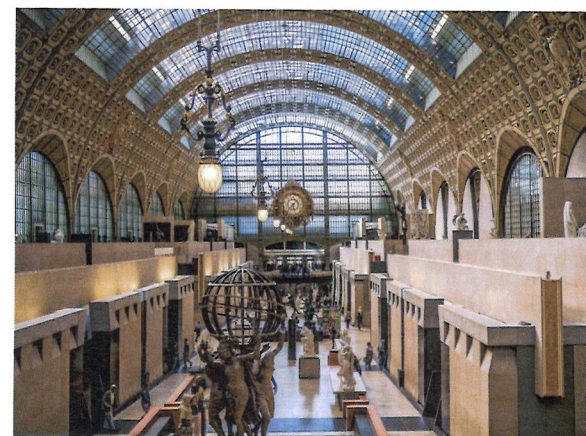


Figure 7. Dismantling of the Les Halles quarter, the subject of huge controversy from architects and citizens in 1971

Figure 8. This public outcry led to the conservation of Gare d'Orsay, a railway and hotel previously slated for similar demolition

Figure 9. Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura office adapted from a disused cement factory



Figure 10. Before condition of Vion Barrack, Toulouse, France - Pierre DEBEAUX architect



Figure 11. Proposed design by Philippe PROST architect for Vion Barrack

transfigured, inhabited and transformed by both usage and nature. As an architect, this notion allows me to define myself both as an interpreter and author of a situation as well as a building. The idea of using the term re-creation to describe this approach to architecture as an art of transforming reality has become self-evident to me.

4. What is your aspiration for each project that you take on?

Demolish as little as possible, preserve as much as possible, transform as best as possible, and in doing so, continue the act of creating.

Over the years, I have embraced the concept of the Open Work, as defined by Umberto Eco in his book published in 1962, when speaking about art and science: "Every work of art, even when it is a completed and self-contained form, precisely calibrated as a perfect organism, is open in that it can be interpreted in various ways, without altering its irreducible singularity." This concept allows for approaching territory, the city, and architecture as a work in progress, with a yellow, red and black colour code that I borrowed from military engineers of the "Old Regime" (and that is now back in favour) to serve as meaningful graphic composition. For instance, a body of work is always interpreted and complemented by many hands, i.e. the Open Work, that remains available to be revealed and

5. Can you share 3 insights from your project Gallice Port in Juan-les-Pins, France?

Our ambition for the Gallice port is both simple and strong: to conserve and renovate the buildings while redesigning the site by incorporating its inherent principles and objectives from its conception and construction by architect Guillaume Gillet in the late 1960s; namely, to develop a modern port dedicated to yachting on a human scale, resolutely contemporary in its architecture and perfectly integrated into its landscape. In a nutshell, our project aims to combine green with blue; natural space with maritime space, creating a port-landscape, a garden port on the Mediterranean Sea. While showcasing its beautiful modern architecture and providing sailors with today's technologies. Leveraging the initial architectural design to address environmental and energy challenges, completing the unfinished landscaping project by creating suspended gardens on the building terraces to ensure good thermal protection.

Gallice is well on its way to becoming the blue, white, and green port of the Riviera: blue for the quality of its water, white for the colour of its architecture, green for the omnipresence of vegetation.

The Gallice project was awarded the Rehab XX° prize on November 22, 2023, jointly awarded by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Ecological Transition and Territories to showcase exemplary rehabilitation projects for buildings dating from the second half of the 20th century that are not protected as historical monuments. These successful preservation projects are intended to serve as models.

Figure 12. Gallice Port in Juan-les-Pins, France ©Aitor Ortiz- Proposed design by Philippe PROST architect

